

EVIDENCE RECORDED

27 NOV 1922

BY THE

ASSAM LABOUR ENQUIRY COMMITTEE

1921-1922.



SHILLONG:

PRINTED AT THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT PRESS.

1922.

Price Rs. 3-6.

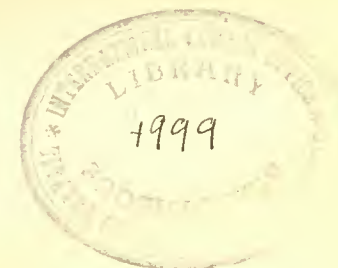
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EVIDENCE RECORDED

BY THE

ASSAM LABOUR ENQUIRY COMMITTEE.

TEZPUR, 17TH DECEMBER 1921.

[ALL MEMBERS PRESENT.]

No. 1.—Mr. W. NEWNHAM-DAVIS, *Manager, Majulighur Tea Estate :—*

Tezpur.

I have been in Tea for the past 28 years, of which 6 were spent in Nowgong. I have never worked in any other districts in Assam.

I am of opinion that (i) generally speaking, the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort, and (ii) that it is quite impossible to convert the above-mentioned concessions into an increase of money wages. I think the coolies are very well off at the present time and that everything possible is being done to ameliorate their condition. I consider that the type of coolie recruited at the present day is as good as that recruited ten years ago.

It is absolutely essential that the European staff should be conversant with the vernacular commonly spoken by the coolies. A bonus of Rs. 300 is generally given to new Assistants who become conversant with the language within a year.

I have not had much unrest amongst my labourers in the Bishnath district, but there has been unrest on the neighbouring tea estates. My garden *hât* was stopped for a month in June last due to the agitation of non-co-operators who picketed the roads and prevented supplies from coming into the gardens. The intention apparently was to cause trouble on the gardens and to prevent coolies from getting their supplies; and coolies naturally clamoured for their supplies.

Previous to the political agitation there was no feeling of unrest as far as I am aware. I am of opinion that but for the agitation of non-co-operators, there would have been no unrest so far as the Bishnath area was concerned. Looting was due to economic conditions during the war when prices had gone up. I consider that the coolies had no grievances, economic or personal, of which agitators could make capital. The sporadic nature of the unrest was due to the efforts of non-co-operators who held meetings at various centres inciting coolies to strike.

I have no system of fines.

I consider Rs. 9 for a man and Rs. 8 for a woman a decent living monthly wage based on the assumption that the coolie has no other means of subsistence. With all the advantages a coolie receives on the garden, I consider that if Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 for men and women respectively is earned monthly, it is sufficient to keep them in health and comfort and enable them to save a little. Roughly the extent of difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 would be about 50 % rise. It is less now because the prices have come down.

Earnings are not inadequate in the cold weather as compared with the rest of the year. Coolies could earn just as much in the cold weather as in the rains.

When prices were very high, cloth was bought by my estate and sold to the coolies at reduced rates; it was not supplied free of charge except in special cases.

I did not supply the coolies regularly with paddy; they obtained their own supplies from the villages. I have a lot of rice which is not supplied to the coolies regularly, but only during times of high prices. I have 450 acres of paddy land. Half Government rate of rent is charged. Government rate was Re. 1 a *bigha* and I charged 8 annas a *bigha*. Land newly opened is given free for cultivation during the first two years just to encourage the coolies. The actual cultivators of this land

Tezpur. are both coolies as well as members of their families. I am unable to give the percentage of residents living on the garden who are dependent on paddy cultivation alone. Most families have one or two dependents living with them on the garden.

I consider that my coolies are quite happy with the pay they receive, but at the same time a good deal depends on the size of the family; with a small family, a man can earn as much as he wants.

I work on the basis of the unit system. My experience is that increased wages do not encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours. Some coolies just earn a certain amount, say, 4 annas, and do not care to earn more though they could easily earn as much as they wish.

In my opinion 4 annas was not sufficient to cover the needs of the coolies, but they are actually managing on that sum. My main object was to induce them to earn more; they could easily earn 8 annas a day if they wanted.

I have no *ticca* system, nor are coolies forced against their will to earn more than they themselves want. It is during the rains that the coolies go out to do their cultivation and do not care to earn more. My own opinion is that the coolies can live comfortably on six to seven annas, but on less they would be lacking in clothes and little luxuries.

It is quite possible for coolies who earn just a bare living wage to deteriorate, in which case they are put on light work until they are strong enough to do ordinary work. They are given full pay even for light work. I consider that coolies could not be induced to do a certain given task within a specified time without coercion which practice of course had long since been abolished. The present system has been in force for the past 10 or 15 years.

I do not think a coolie is over-exhausted by the four annas work which he does in a day, nor is he required to perform such work hurriedly.

I am of opinion that Act XIII agreements are necessary. Coolies invariably take the contracts at their own option and if the Act were repealed, there would be a great many complaints on the garden, as may be evidenced from the fact that certain gardens, in order to economise, stopped giving advances and this caused a flutter among the coolies. Subsequently the advance system had to be resuscitated. I would certainly discontinue the present system of granting advances if the coolies were not put under contract, as in that case there would be no security for the return of the advances. Nor would I give the money as a bonus at the end of a year's work, because it would cause a feeling of discontent all over the garden if some coolies (*i.e.*, the deserving ones) were given the bonus and the lazy or undeserving ones were not. The agreement for lazy coolies was 313 days actual work. It would never do to give them a bonus at the end of the year, as some may have had 3 or 4 months' leave in the *interim*.

It is possible that the grant of an advance to a coolie at the beginning of the year would make an impression on the coolie's mind that he was entering into a new agreement.

I consider that a coolie would not be more content if he were not under contract.

If a coolie did not want a bonus he would not take the agreement.

Approximately the proportion of those with agreements and those without was half and half.

If I am asked whether I am of opinion that in any agricultural community in the world, the earnings of a man alone are quite enough to support a wife and family without the latter themselves being required to work, I would say that my knowledge is confined to tea-gardens only, and speaking from that point of view, I consider a man is able to earn sufficient to maintain a wife and one child, though it is not really necessary for him to do so, as his wife also works. In addition, it is the custom on tea-gardens to make a monthly allowance of rice or *dhan* to every non-working infant.

With regard to the statement made by a certain witness, Mr. Heron of Powai Tea Estate of the Lakhimpur district before the Labour Committee of 1906, *viz.*, that the policy to pursue was to spend money on the coolie up here and save money in the recruiting district; money alone would not keep a coolie, but if he received small privileges and if he was well-treated, he would never give any trouble—I do

not think that the coolie would ever give any trouble, but as soon as the coolie Tezpur. considers he is well off his idea is to be independent so as to "set up" for himself. In these circumstances recruiting becomes necessary.

I agree with the statement that the grant of leave tends to the healthiness of the labour force.

No. 2.—Mr. ALEX AITKEN, Resident Engineer, Bird and Company, Tezpur:—

I am interested in Messrs. Bird and Company, who have a Resident Engineer in Tezpur, and I do contract work here. I was in Tea for 9 years in Golaghat and Bishnath. I left Tea in 1909. My labourers are not imported but recruited locally; they work all the year round. The men are practically all *ex-tea-garden* coolies.

I did not ask my men why they gave up work on the gardens, nor did they tell me that the work of my firm is more attractive than tea-garden work. My work is partly connected with tea-gardens. I am not in a position to say what wages the tea-garden coolies receive at the present moment. My men do an 8-hour day's work. I do not employ lazy coolies.

I pay my labourers for unskilled labour 10 to 12 annas a day for a man, and 6 annas for a woman. I do not concern myself with the way a coolie lives. I do not provide my coolies with accommodation, medical attendance, clothes and the like. If the coolie becomes ill he simply goes away. My coolies rent houses for 8 annas or Re. 1 each month. No coolie who does not do 8 hours' work in a day is employed. Very few men have left my service; 75% have been working for several years. All my coolies reside in or near the municipal limits. My coolies are given contract work, and I have two rates, one for coolies going out to tea-gardens and one for those in town. There is no comparison between Nuanias engaged for seasonal work and tea-garden coolies.

No. 3.—Mr. E. J. NICHOLLS, Manager, Dikorai Division, Bishnath Tea Company:—

I have been 15 years in Tea—Jorhat 10 years; Dibrugarh 2 years; and Dikorai 3 years. I have never been in the Surma Valley or in the Dooars.

I consider the type of coolie recruited at the present day better than that recruited 10 years ago for the simple reason that we are enrolling a better class of sardars and the class of coolies recruited by them is superior.

I consider it essential that the European staff on the garden should be conversant with some vernacular. We generally give a bonus to the European staff if they qualify within a year. If they qualify in 6 months, they get Rs. 300; it is, I believe, the general practice throughout the district.

I do not think there has been a widespread feeling of unrest during the past few years. It has only lately manifested itself and this is due entirely to the propaganda of the non-co-operators. There have been no riots in our immediate vicinity, but some *hats* have been interfered with and coolies prevented from working on the gardens. I do not consider the coolies have had any particular grievances. I think they have been the unfortunate dupes of non-co-operators. My opinion is that the object of the agitators was to create a spirit of unrest which would develop into strikes. As far as I am able to recollect I think there were much fewer riots before the year 1917.

Coolies' wages have been raised this year. I do not know when the previous increase was made. I recommended to my Agents in 1920 an increase in wages and they intended granting it, but unfortunately the state of the industry did not permit. I recommended that a man should get 5 annas and a woman 4 annas as against 4 annas and 3 annas previously received by them. This increase was effected only in 1921 and the tasks have become considerably less. The wages they receive do not include *ticca*; it is based on the unit system. The majority of the coolies could earn up to 8 annas if they liked, but very few do so. They consider what they actually earn as sufficient for their needs. The rise in wages does increase the cost of production. My Company sustained a loss of approximately 4½ lakhs in 1920. The Banks, I understand, refused to advance money. The loss in 1920 was not particularly confined to the Bishnath Company alone; it was more or less general. We had a reserve fund in the Bishnath Tea Company, but as we had to meet a loss in 1919-20 it disappeared.

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This year a budget estimate of approximately 1½ lakhs has been set aside for payments to coolies. Coolies have been given leave in the ordinary course for cultivation purposes, and I have from time to time been taking contract work from Government with a view to afford extra wages to my coolies. Neither was the monthly wage reduced nor the *ticca* work restricted. They were allowed to earn as much as possible.

The outturn of tea in 1919 was 8,670 maunds, in 1920, 10,428 and in 1921, approximately 9,000; the reduction in 1919 was due to drought.

Economies in other directions were being effected where possible as a result of the increase in the cost of production. The European staff was reduced. The pay of the rest of the staff as also of the coolies was not reduced.

I do not know if there is any rule requiring a coolie who has left one garden to remain two years in the village before he is employed on another garden.

If a man in one garden wishes to marry a girl in another, an exchange is generally made and we pay Rs. 150 which covers the expenses of recruiting her even though the girl may not be under agreement. I do not consider it a restriction on the coolie's freedom; coolies are at liberty to go anywhere out of the gardens. I do not know the rule in other gardens, but speaking personally if a coolie absconds, his whereabouts are ascertained and he is generally brought back and the cause of his absconding enquired into and grievance, if any, remedied. There is no *chaukidari* system on our gardens to ensure that coolies do not run away.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it possible or desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages.

The extent of difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 would be 50 or 60% rise. It is possible for a coolie to maintain himself together with a wife and one child in health and reasonable comfort.

We do not give any allowance to non-working children.

Sick persons are fed in hospital and on being discharged are given a bonus of a week's pay, and suitable light work. Further increased wages would encourage labourers to work shorter hours, as coolies now earn sufficient and they can earn more if they want. The longest task is 8 hours. In their spare moments coolies go hunting, fishing, and do their own cultivation.

No. 4.—Mr. G. CAUSTON, Manager, Namgaon Tea Estate, Empire of India and Ceylon Tea Company:—

I have been in the Tezpur District for the past 23 years. I have never been in any other district; my experience is confined to Tezpur only.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it is possible or desirable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages and to make deductions for medicine supplied, etc., from the coolies' pay.

Speaking personally the type of coolie we are recruiting at present is as good as that recruited 10 years ago.

There has been unrest due to economic conditions since 1916. I think the coolies did have economic grievances of which agitators made capital. But for the incitement of agitators, I do not think there would have been any unrest. The real trouble began with the advent of Mr. Gandhi to Assam in August 1921. My garden, however, was free from any trouble.

We could work without Act XIII agreements, but I think it would be advantageous to both parties if the Act was not repealed.

Approximately 75 % of the adult coolies are under agreement. I certainly prefer to work with the Act.

I do not think a coolie would be more contented if he was not under contract, as it would really make no difference to him. Both free coolies and those under contract earn just the same amount of money, except that the former do not receive any bonus.

I am not in favour of retaining the bonus if the Act is abolished.

We give a bonus of Rs. 12 to men and Rs. 10 to women. We do not give it to children.

During the past 5 years a recommendation was made for an increase in the wages of the coolies and the Agents considered the proposals favourably: it was ultimately accepted by the Board at Home and given effect to in 1920. I was on leave in 1920, and the proposals were made during my absence.

Men getting a daily wage are not allowed to earn as much *ticca* as they like. Owing to our big labour force, it is unnecessary to give *ticca*.

We stock *dhan* which we sell at concession rates only when there is a scarcity and prices are high.

We get cloth for the coolies and sell it at cost price.

In my opinion the economic grievance was not so great as to produce a state of utter starvation or nakedness among the coolies.

Coolies have fewer days to work in the week now than they had 10 years ago. We give more leave, because they like it: they come up and ask for the leave.

No coolies were prevented from earning *ticca* last year owing to reduction in the wages' budget. Nor do I find that inability to earn extra money depletes our force, for the coolies remain on the gardens satisfied with the conditions in which they work. Women got the usual plucking *ticca*.

We now give coolies 4 and 5 annas, in other words an increase of between 50 to 60%. I think this increase is sufficient, because if it was not, they would want to earn more by working.

We have about 75 acres of paddy cultivation distributed among the coolies. We have also taken up some land in the neighbourhood of our gardens, which is given to our coolies free of rent.

In weighing leaf deduction is made for the basket only, but on wet days deduction is also made for wet leaf. I have never heard of deductions being made for "factory charges." About 4 pounds are deducted for the basket, and for wet leaf generally 2 pounds. The deduction for wet leaf is not made invariably; it is made only when the leaf is wet, with the sole object of obtaining the same proportion of *pucca* tea from the green leaf, on wet and fine days.

No. 5.—Mr. L. CHURCH, Acting Superintendent, Rupajuli Tea Company:—

I am Acting Superintendent of the Rupajuli Tea Company. I have a wide experience in tea covering 30 years. My experience is confined to the Darrang district only.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

I do not think it would be practicable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions in the shape of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., into an increase of money wages. I do not think the coolie would be as well off as he is at the present moment. He is very improvident and I think if we did not come to his assistance in cases of child-birth or sickness he would not be as well off as he now is, and I am certain that the death-rate would be very much higher. I also think that it would be undesirable to make such a conversion.

I do not think I am over-estimating the fact when I say that in old established gardens in Assam about 25% of the labour are at liberty to quit whenever they choose and the majority have got their own *bustees* and land to go to. It does not cause us the slightest bit of anxiety whether a coolie is under contract or not. The only advantage to us is that it undoubtedly has a settling effect on the labour. When a man takes a contract, it means that he has made up his mind that he is going to serve for another 12 months. With a man who is inclined to give trouble, the mere fact of his having taken the agreement has a settling influence on him.

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At any rate whether he takes the agreement or not we never ask him to enter into it. A number of them work for two years continuously without taking the agreement. We have never sued absconders in Court. My experience is that taking the *pros* and *cons*, we are very much better off to lose our men than we hope to be by going to Court. Of course in flagrant cases of fraud, for instance where a man comes and takes an agreement to-day and absconds to-morrow after having taken the bonus, we would sue him in Court. It is after all a clear case of fraud. But there is also the distinct advantage that numbers of them who know that we do not use the Court against them, return to us. Whereas if they know that we do not hesitate to sue them, they would give us a wide berth. If the Act XIII-Agreement was abolished I would not be in favour of giving the coolies a bonus. The only advantage we derive by giving agreements is that we can more accurately judge the amount of work of our labour. I have never had an Act XIII case in Court for 30 years.

With regard to unrest among tea-garden labour in the last few years, the economic factor cannot altogether be ignored. It is impossible to argue that the coolie has been as well off during the last two or three years as he was prior to the war. We were unable to increase wages owing to the peculiar circumstances we found ourselves in. In 1919 and 1920 we sustained a loss of £ 13,000 on a capital of £ 18,000; in 1919, it was £ 2,900 and in 1920 it was £ 10,400, and unless we could show from our estimates that we could carry on for another year with a reasonable prospect of making ends meet, no banker would have financed the Company. But as soon as we saw what the trend of the market was likely to be, and we could afford to launch out with more money, then we gave the coolies facilities to earn more. We have not reduced the wages' budget of the coolies. The old rates were never reduced within my own experience. We, however, increased the rates subsequently when we were able to frame more satisfactory estimates.

I consider that generally speaking a monthly wage of anything between Rs. 8 and Rs. 10 would be sufficient for a coolie who had no produce of his own, but had to buy everything from the bazaar. At the present moment, however, it would be a good deal less because *dhan* has come down enormously in the last few weeks.

The difference in the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 would be 60 to 75 per cent. rise.

We give the sick medicines and food in hospital. We also give them an allowance of Rs. 5 a month, if they are absolutely sick and unable to work; this applies to pregnant women as well. The doctor decides the period of leave for the latter; it may at first be fixed at three months and then it may run as far as seven months according as the doctor recommends.

A free allowance of *dhan* used to be given to large families for all children of a certain age, but we had to discontinue the allowance from the beginning of this year owing to the heavy loss of last year. The grant has been stopped for the time being only.

From 1st January 1921 to date there have been 47 births as against one infant death for the same period.

I am not aware of the custom of giving coolies in exchange or lump sums of money at the time of intermarrying from one garden into another.

No. 6.—Mr. R. JOHNSTONE, Manager, Nahorani Tea Estate :—

I have been on the Nahorani garden since 1907. I was there previously as an Assistant in 1899-1900. I have also been in Dibrugarh and Jorhat. I have been all my time in the Assam Valley.

My Company has three gardens in Assam and they also have gardens in other parts of the country.

I think the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It may be possible to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages, but I do not consider it desirable as the coolie would not look after himself in the way we do as regards his medical comforts and everything else.

The type of coolie recruited now is inferior to that recruited ten years ago in Tezpur. respect of physique. We are not now getting the agricultural class owing to the great demand for labour elsewhere.

It is essential that the European staff should be conversant with the vernacular commonly spoken by the coolies. We always give a bonus to Assistants for obtaining a working knowledge of the language after two or three years.

As far as I remember the unrest in Tezpur started with the arrival of Gandhi in August last. Coolies undoubtedly were hit by the rise in prices, but they showed no ill-feeling.

I consider Rs. 13 a decent living monthly wage for a man and his wife, sufficient to keep them in health and reasonable comfort with a possibility of saving a little.

The difference in the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 may be estimated at anything between 50 to 75%.

In the case of a coolie with his wife and children, I would not say that his total earnings are sufficient to maintain him and his family. Most families naturally have to work in addition. I do not think a man's wages are sufficient to maintain him, his wife and one child.

I do not think that increased wages would encourage the labourer to work substantially longer hours.

We are working with the Act XII one-year agreement.

I do not think it would be practicable to give the coolie the same advantages as now if he were not put under the contract. The coolie takes the agreement with the idea that he is going to work for a certain period. It is to the advantage of the coolie to take the contract as he would then be entitled to the bonus. We do not force a coolie to take the contract; in fact he comes and asks for it voluntarily.

We have not had any cases against absconding coolies under Act XIII Agreement for some years past.

It is difficult to answer the question whether a coolie on a tea-garden requires more medical attendance than a villager. The coolies on gardens get all the medical attendance that is necessary for them; it is to our own benefit to keep them in good health.

Sometimes in famine years coolies are in bad health when first they come to the gardens. Life in Assam does cause them to become more healthy; soon after their arrival they show signs of improvement.

There are a good many villages round about the gardens and the villagers go to the charitable dispensaries for medical treatment.

Women earn up to 8 annas a day and in some cases men earn as much as 9 annas a day. I consider these wages sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort. Children are getting 3 annas and can earn more.

We give the coolies land for cultivation, rent-free.

There was trouble on my garden, but just for half an hour when the coolies struck. I do not think they had any grievances; this demonstration is attributable to outside agencies. There was violence in one of the adjoining gardens; unfortunately there happened to be an acting Manager who was not naturally as well known to the coolies as the permanent Manager.

I have seen evidence of non-co-operation in villages and I have also been shouted at.

The agitators stopped one *hât* last week and I was informed by the Manager that he had notice that the Marwari traders were not to attend. The Tarajuli *hât* was closed by picketing; it belongs to the Imperial Tea Company.

Though the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 had gone up, the tendency at the moment is on the downward grade due to the good rice crops now being reaped in the district. The price of cloth also is showing a tendency to come down.

Nearly in all cases women are accustomed to work and they do work in addition to their husbands.

I consider the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort at present; I do not think it was sufficient last year, owing to bad harvests and the sustained high prices of all commodities. Rice was twice the price last year. Cloth also was expensive and is still very dear.

I am in charge of fifteen gardens in the Tezpur district. I visit the majority of them once a week.

I do not consider it possible or desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages. Even if it were possible I think it would be most inadvisable to do so.

It is part of my duty to make recommendations from time to time about improving the conditions of labour. I am in charge of housing, water-supply and hospital arrangements, in so far as my functions are wholly advisory.

I think the medical arrangements generally are quite satisfactory. There are always good supplies of medicines and medical comforts on the gardens, and there is no tendency to economise in that direction. Water-supply is, on the whole, good. The health of the labourers is of paramount importance to the gardens, and I take it that Tea Companies are not unmindful of this fact. The houses of the labourers are generally satisfactory. They supply their own *charpoy*s or usually make their own *machans* in their houses. Personally, I prefer thatched houses to those with iron roofs, as they are not so subject to climatic variations as iron roofs. Thatch is warm in winter and cool in summer, and therefore more comfortable. I think also that coolies prefer thatched houses, though the prejudice against tin houses has been very much less in recent years.

I have been fighting against hookworm, which is prevalent. Latrines have been built but have not as yet come into general use. I have latrines in the neighbourhood of certain hospitals, but no latrines for lines. It is both possible and desirable to have latrines if only we can educate the coolies to use them. I have found some lines in a very unhealthy state due to the habits of the coolies. It is possible to educate the people to more carefulness. In the case of certain castes this would be much easier than in the case of others.

Very often coolies bring disease with them from their country on arrival in Assam, *e.g.*, skin disease, hookworm and malaria; the last, however, not to any very great extent. They contract malaria in Tezpur which is an intensely malarious district.

Abortions are fairly frequent, and there is much venereal disease among the coolies. They cannot readily become infected with venereal disease on their journey up under present conditions of recruiting as they generally travel in family groups, and not as single men or women.

By the expression "reasonable comfort from the coolie point of view," I mean that he ought to have enough to fill his stomach with good, wholesome food; he should have enough to buy clothes for himself, and have a little over for luxuries. It may be desirable that a coolie should have some savings but that must depend on whether he is extravagant or not, or on his own personal ideas of comfort.

It is not easy to say whether the granting of liberal leave to a coolie has any good effect on his health. Some classes, or individuals, will take all the leave they can get, which means that earnings become insufficient to support them properly. I think overmuch leave is a bad thing for that reason. It is good for a coolie to have time to attend to his own affairs, cultivation, and so on. He should not, however, by the granting of excessive leave, be encouraged to relapse into idleness.

New gardens appear more unhealthy than old gardens for the first few years. It is extremely likely that this is due to the garden being worked by new unacclimatised coolies; also to the influence of newly cleared land, while it takes time to construct lines and hospitals and to make the necessary sanitary arrangements.

A good water-supply is general throughout the gardens.

I have no difficulty in getting money from Agents of the gardens for making improvements in the way of housing or water-supply. Being a medical man interested in public health I should like to see things a good deal better than they are, but I recognise there must be limits to the attainment of ideal conditions, perfect lines,

and perfect latrines. I can say that reasonable improvements suggested by me have always been carried out. As regards the use of latrines by coolies I would not coerce them in any way. In course of time they are themselves bound to see the advantages of latrines. I have always anticipated trouble as regards the children. There are difficulties in getting the right type of latrine, and difficulties where there are large numbers of houses together. Before introducing latrines on some gardens it would be necessary to re-model the lines.

I think the coolie often prefers to make his own house rather than live in lines provided for him. In the case of certain races or castes this could be left to their option. Others require supervision and should be housed in lines. In no case should *bustee* lines be placed at great distances as in the event of sickness supervision would become most difficult. *Bustee* lines are suitable for the more robust class of coolies who are seldom sick, and are more able to look after themselves.

I consider the wages of the coolie might be raised a little to meet existing high prices.

No. 8.—Dr. E. T. JAMESON, M.B., *Medical Officer, Empire of India and Ceylon Tea Company, Limited* :—

I look after 9 gardens in the Empire Tea Company. I have been in this district since 1913, except during the war. I have also been in Cachar and the Hailakandi Valley. There are no remarkably unhealthy gardens in my Division.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments, together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort. I would give the same answer for conditions which prevailed last year, as the wages were raised about this time last year.

I do not consider it desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages.

I consider Cachar in some respects healthier than Tezpur. This district is very malarious. The children's spleen index is very high, up to about 70 or 80% on some gardens. Recent counts show up to 40—50% only.

With regard to the prevention of hookworm, I have been doing my best to improve the latrine system. I have introduced latrines in some gardens and I have found coolies using them. There are about 120 latrines at the present moment. Since my return in 1919 I have been asking the Company to supply more latrines. Before 1919 there were no latrines. I found many cases of anaemia. I think it is a sound business proposition to spend money on latrines. The hookworm disease is mostly contracted while the coolie is on the garden. The coolies are satisfied with the water-supply. There is very little water-borne disease on the gardens. The gardens are all old ones. There are altogether about 120 latrines owned by the Company. They were started by me in 1919. The hospitals were fitted out first and then some coolie lines by the end of 1919. The result was that we had 90 cases of anaemia as compared with 500 cases previous to the introduction of the latrine system. The anaemia ratios have come down after the coolies were urged to use the latrines. I think the health of the district has greatly improved. The question of making improvements depends on the funds being available. It is more a matter of money than of co-operation of the Managers and the Directors. The proposals put forward by me have from time to time been recommended by the Managers.

No. 9.—Mr. STEPHEN THOMSON, *Manager, Dibru-Darrang Tea Estate* :—

The name of my garden is Dibru-Darrang. I have been on this garden since the commencement of the Company in 1916.

I have also worked in Dibrugarh and Ceylon.

I consider Rs. 10 for a man and Rs. 8 for a woman a decent monthly living wage, not merely a subsistence allowance, but a wage that would suffice to keep them in health and reasonable comfort, with a possibility of saving a little.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages.

I do not think that increased wages encourage labourers to work longer hours; on the contrary, where tasks have been reduced, I have found labourers inclined to work shorter hours on the same pay. There are certain classes who like to save money and these work longer hours and get extra pay; others are slackers and do not care to earn more.

The coolies on my garden hold about 65 acres of land for cultivation. About 10% of the adult coolie population hold land.

I do not think we would be able to work without Act XIII Agreements. I think the Act is necessary in order to put the coolie under contract. If there were no contracts I would be willing to make the present advances in particular cases only.

The sick coolies are fed in hospital during the period of their illness. They are not allowed any money until they are better as everything necessary for their comfort is given to them free. Those who have been seriously ill and therefore unable to do hard work are put on light work so as to enable them to earn adequate wages.

There was a slight disturbance on our garden about five or six weeks ago, which I attribute to the efforts of political agitators. There were no economic grievances whatever. The disturbance took the form of a strike which lasted for a day only. Wages have not been raised this year but it has been possible for coolies to earn more by making the tasks lighter.

We work on the unit system; it is a sliding scale from 1 anna to 8 annas per man. It is possible for an average coolie to make 8 annas in a 6-hour day. We pay the coolies weekly.

No. 10.—Mr. C. A. W. HUTCHINSON, *Manager, Tezpur Tea Company, Limited, Bahipukri Tea Estate, Orang :—*

I am three years on the garden. It is a new garden now three years in existence. Prior to this I was in Dibrugarh for eight years. Then I went up to the Margherita-Makum Tea Company, finally coming down to Darrang. I have never been in Cachar or Sylhet.

Whether the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient, depends on what system the garden is working on. If it is the unit system, the coolie can earn as much as he likes. The unit system was adopted when I came here three years ago. I do not think it is the general system.

Most of our coolies are under Act XIII-Agreement. The money given them as bonus is not recovered. I would give them a bonus even if they were free labourers. I would give the money as a sort of *bakshish* to the coolie. At present the coolies get a bonus at the beginning of the year. If the Act is repealed I would tell them that if they worked for a year I would give them a bonus of Rs. 12 at the end of the year. I have no objection to giving them Re. 1 a month, but I think they prefer receiving a lump sum to one rupee a month. I do not remember ever having had a single court case against any coolies in all my experience. Sometimes coolies work for 15 or 16 months before coming forward to ask for their bonus. I would give a man the bonus for working 12 months on the garden, provided I found him deserving of it. The thumb impression is taken at the time of paying the bonus. I do not think the coolie tends to sacrifice quality to quantity under the unit system. I think he wants to earn as much as he can and the work should not necessarily suffer. A coolie can earn just as much as he likes in the cold weather. There is a rate and he can easily earn 5 to 6 annas. A woman can earn 5 annas in the cold weather for pruning. A new coolie may take four days to learn to prune as well as the oldest coolie, but some coolies never learn though it is quite an easy thing.

In weighing leaf 15% is deducted for wet leaf; a deduction is also made for the basket.

We have no rice advances. The coolies are just starting to cultivate, and I am encouraging them in this direction. I did a certain amount of cultivation for them to start with in the new garden. In opening a new garden there is always plenty of work to be done for the garden all the year round.

No. 11.—Mr. W. J. GRAY, *Manager, Orang Tea Es'te :—*

Tezpur.

The name of my garden is Orang and I have been two years here. Before that I was in Sylhet. I have been 12 years in Sylhet district. Orang is a new garden opened only two years ago.

I consider the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it is possible or desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages. I am afraid the coolies would live like animals if we did not fend for them.

I think it is essential that the European staff should know the language spoken by the coolies thoroughly. Our coolies are Oraons and Kisans from Ranchi. We have not had any difficulty with this class of coolie. It is true that the new Oriya coolies cannot speak any but their own language, but I have been quite accustomed to them.

I have had no trouble on my garden. In the district there was one disturbance due to political agitation as far as I know. The infection has spread to certain gardens only. There has been no trouble in Mangaldai. But there has been agitation in the *bustees*, e.g., picketing of bazaars, but this has never affected the gardens in the least. *Bustees* were seething with agitation.

Coolies earn 8 annas a day. The coolies had no grievances either economic or personal of which agitators could make capital.

Most of my coolies are under Act XIII Agreement. I do not think the coolie would do without the agreement. He looks at it as a sort of perquisite especially when he wants to buy cloth. All new coolies are not put under the Act straightaway.

It is very difficult to say whether the coolies are better paid here than in Sylhet. At any rate the comparison is difficult. The class of coolie here is far better than in Sylhet. The climate also is much better here I think, and the garden death-rates are very low.

Our recruiting is done by means of sardars. If we sent down people to tell those who want to work in Assam, what Assam can do for them, it would be an attraction.

I have not seen any of the recruits in their own districts and I do not know who supervises them there. As a matter of fact I think coolies hardly have any supervision till they come up here, and they may have been living like animals before they came to our gardens.

No. 12.—Mr. K. H. WATTS, *Manager, Dhansiri Tea Estate :—*

The name of my garden is Dhansiri. I have been there for 2½ years now. Before that I was in Darrang for 6 years and 3 years in Sibsagar.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

With the rice concession I think the rate of wages was sufficient last year. Under Act VI rice had to be supplied at Rs. 3 a maund. Now rice and *dhan* are supplied at different rates. The rates vary from time to time. I think the coolie was able to live in reasonable comfort last year. Wages have not been raised on my estate since last year, but the coolies were getting concessions in rice when the price of rice in the bazaar was high last year. Last year rice was supplied at Rs. 5 a maund. At present there is no need as rice is cheap.

We work on the unit system and the coolie can earn as much as he likes. Most coolies earn 8 annas (for a man) and 6 annas (for a woman). The average earned by a man and woman is 6 annas and 5 annas. There is no limit; they can earn as much as they like.

I do not think under the unit system a coolie sacrifices quality to quantity; it is purely a question of supervision. I am of opinion that on most gardens the coolie can, in the cold weather, earn as much as he likes. The women can earn up to ten annas. My garden, however, is a new one.

My garden is very isolated and there has been no trouble.

My coolies are absolutely free. I do not use Act XIII and I think the result has been satisfactory. My neighbours increased the wages of their coolies and I gave my men a bonus. There have been one or two absconders only. I give a bonus of Rs. 12 for men and Rs. 10 for women.

I have 500 adult coolies—men and women. We have 500 acres of tea at the present moment.

No receipt or thumb impression is taken at the time the bonus is given; it is simply given as a *bakshish*.

We allow coolies land for cultivation. On the whole the garden is healthy, though there is a certain amount of malarial fever. Coolies very often come to us with spleen.

I have had no trouble in the garden. I have near me Cachari *bustees* only. Trouble has spread to the *bustees* here and I believe it has reached my Cacharis though not to any great extent.

TEZPUR, 18TH DECEMBER 1921.

[ALL MEMBERS PRESENT.]

No. 13.—Babu JOTINDRA CHANDRA MAITRA, *Pleader* :—

I am a Pleader at Tezpur and Managing Director of Panbari Tea Company which has a new garden, Panbari, started in 1919 which has just come to bearing. 180 acres have been planted out and 20 more are being planted out.

There are 200 working coolies, of whom 170 are male and female adults.

The labour force is inadequate. There has been no trouble on gardens on Borsola side. I have been connected with tea for long as a shareholder.

There has been some discontent among tea-garden labour during the past few years. This is mainly due to heavy recruiting in the last two or three years from famine-stricken districts. The coolies found their position in Assam no better than in their own country. For the last three years there has been a rise in the price of food-grains and for the last five years in the price of cloth. The less energetic coolies were allowed to go to the villages owing to the slump in tea where they could earn 6 to 8 annas daily as against 4 annas on the garden, and I think that new coolies infected old coolies. Possibly they also were harangued by the agitators in *hāts* and other places. Some of the coolies have relations in the villages who go freely to the *hāts* and have thus the opportunity of impressing their ideas on their relatives in the garden. I do not think agitators enter the gardens. Some of the coolies who thus went to villages came from Pertabgarh.

I used to pay coolies in my garden 6, 5 and 3 annas for men, women and children, respectively. In 1919 I raised the pay to 8 annas for men, 6 annas for women and 4 for children. A good coolie could do the task in five hours. In my opinion coolies had an economic grievance. There has been no unrest in Indian gardens. In some cases for two and three months in Indian gardens the coolies did not get full pay but the Manager gave advances in money, cloth and paddy. I think Tinkhoria which is the largest Indian garden in Tezpur borrowed in this way about Rs. 15,000. Such advances were recovered when feasible. My coolies have got about 160 *bighas* of rice land in the grant and also cultivate Government land. My coolies are all free. They are locally recruited from the villages.—Sonthals, Oriyas and others. I do not think any of them come from gardens. I do not recruit, but my coolies were probably originally recruited by some gardens. In my land in the village at harvest time I give the labourers food in addition to 8 annas daily. I could in my private work employ about 50 coolies constantly throughout the whole year. I pay the debts which the coolies whom I take from the village owe to the Marwaris or others. In a way I have a hold on a coolie because he is under obligation to me as I have paid his debts. I lose a certain sum every year by coolies absconding without repaying their debts. Agricultural labourers have sufficient work all the year round.

To enable a coolie man to live decently he requires about 8 annas a day for 24 or 25 days in a month, a woman 6 annas, a child 4 annas. The average coolie family

consists of a man, woman and 2 children. I think coolies prefer cash payments to payments in kind. I give free housing, medical attendance with a qualified doctor babu and paddy cultivation in addition to pay. I found that coolies preferred to buy paddy in the village. I do not supply cloth, but I advance money sometimes to buy it, which is recovered. Coolies are suspicious about the quality and the weight of the rice they get from gardens.

I do not think it should be left to the coolies to build their own houses which would not keep out the rain or be sanitary. They also could not be left to look after their medical comforts. Other concessions could be converted into cash. A house costs Rs. 15 and lasts for about two years. Medical comforts including the doctor babu's pay and medicines cost my garden about Rs. 1,000 yearly. Tezpur Municipality pays labourers 10 annas a day. My task rate for deep hoeing over 12 inches deep is 20 *nals* for 8 annas. The coolie gets 4 annas for a half task. If in one day he does 6 *nals*, he gets nothing that day, but if he does 34 *nals* next day he will be paid for 40 *nals* including 6 *nals* for the previous day. My rate for light hoeing is 35 *nals* for 8 annas. I give weak coolies a chance to earn 8 annas. The task varies according to the kind of soil. In most places in my garden the soil is light. In some cases my coolies save money and buy cattle. In 1920 I found about 100 coolies squatting in Tezpur station. They were short-term people from Ranchi. I cannot say if they were returning to their district. They were mostly Mundas. I cannot explain why coolies, who for two or three months did not get their full pay but who were only promised pay in future, should be more content than those who have been paid in full for the work done unless they husbanded and saved money when regularly paid before. I have heard that in some cases the babus who recorded the tasks done disappeared after the riots. I think unjust recording of work may be a cause of discontent. This would not happen if a Manager could supervise everything. Coolies are sometimes discontented because the Marwaris do not give full weight. I think the position would improve if there was better supervision by the Manager. One remedy might be to pay coolies weekly instead of monthly. In Darrang weekly payments are usual. I do not think daily payments would be feasible. In adjoining gardens content or discontent would depend on difference in wages. A coolie would be more content if he could do what he pleased, e.g., tend his own cultivation instead of earning money for his employer, but it would be bad for the employer. If I put pressure on a coolie to do work he will leave the garden. I must engage him to do what he can perform. I have no quarter *haziras*. Quarter work is added to the task of the following day. I record half *haziras*.

No. 14.—Babu KISSEN CHAND OSWAL, *Merchant* :—

Our firm has shops in fourteen or fifteen gardens and I am residing in Darrang for nearly 22 years. Coolies take goods from our shops as well as from the bazaar. I have a little money-lending business with coolies. Coolies buy as much from our shops as they did five years ago but prices of all sorts of things are now higher. The price of cloth is getting higher for the last six years, but it has now fallen a little. The price of rice rose 2½ years ago and nearly the same price is continuing now. The price of cloth is more than double what it was six years ago. Some cloths sell at three times the former price, some at one and a half times. *Dhotis* and *saris* are more than double the price. Formerly we sold a pair of ordinary *dhotis* for Rs. 2, Rs. 2-8 and Rs. 3, but now the price is Rs. 4 to Rs. 6 (it has now fallen a little). Before the war garden Managers did not import cloth.

No. 15.—Mr. A. J. LAINÉ, I.C.S., *Deputy Commissioner of Darrang* :—

I have been Deputy Commissioner of Darrang for the last 21 months. Before that I served in Golaghat, Garo Hills, Karimganj, Sylhet, and Goalpara in Assam.

There has been a widespread feeling of unrest among tea-garden labour in this district. The present political agitation in my district was intensified in the last six to eight months. There was a certain amount before especially in the west part of the district. The Monabari disturbance occurred during the Pujahs of 1920; the Halem disturbance was at Easter, 1921. The former in my opinion was almost entirely due to economic reasons. That was the first disturbance after I came to the district. As regards Halem I came to the conclusion that the Munda population had

Tezpur. been infected with the agrarian discontent which prevailed in their own country, from which some had recently returned. Many of the Mundas were Christians of various denominations—Roman Catholic, Church of England and Lutheran. I found no economic grievance of any consequence. The Manager and his wife were probably on more friendly terms with the coolies than was the case on any other garden in the district: perhaps too friendly, and perhaps there was too little discipline. At the time of the riot the Manager had just come back from leave. Perhaps in his absence the acting Manager was less in touch with his coolies. I believe that the Local Government accepted my conclusions.

Before the Sonajuli disturbance in October 1921 there had been a number of minor strikes on gardens in the Thakurbari area. Between March and October last there was no disturbance. In the end of September there was a temporary strike at Rupajuli for a few hours which spread to Dhulapadung, Bindukuri, Sessa, Rangapara, etc. In the latter case, *i.e.*, Rangapara, the strike lasted three days. These strikes were non-violent; no threats to the management were offered. In my opinion there was an economic basis for these strikes. There is no doubt that the coolies were affected by the propaganda of the agitators in villages and *hāts*, but I have no direct evidence that non-co-operators carried on their propaganda inside the gardens. I believe that sardars in some cases were got at in *hāts*, grog-shops and villages. In these strikes coolies wanted 8 annas for men and 6 annas for women in every case. These gardens all adjoin each other. The impression gained ground that the coolies who struck had got what they wanted. In Rupajuli the Assistant, in the absence of the Manager, did give a temporary increase for a day or two until the Manager's return. In these strikes the coolies also wanted reduction of tasks. For some time I have been of opinion that coolies' wages should be increased. I am referring mainly to conditions before the riots as on many gardens wages have since been raised. I do not think that managing Agents and Directors are sufficiently familiar with local conditions nor do they realise the extent to which the rise in the cost of living has affected the coolie. I should estimate that the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 rose about 75 % perhaps. I think that the rise of prices touches industrial more than agricultural labour as the latter have crops to sell. Some coolies get more land on the garden than they are entitled to and they make money out of it.

In October there were riots at Sonajuli, Kacharigaon and Dhendai. I believe that the ultimate cause in these cases was to a large extent economic. The coolies had too hard work, insufficient leave, and the Managers were not in such close touch with the coolies as they might have been. This applies especially to Kacharigaon and Dhendai which were in charge of acting Assistant Managers. Too much was left in the hands of garden babus and mohurrirs who squeezed the coolies unduly. There were also complaints of short measure given by *kayas*. The permanent Managers of those two gardens were on leave at home. At the same time the labour had become infected by the agitators. I do not think there was economic unrest in the neighbouring villages but only political. Mr. Gandhi visited Tezpur in August last. Many coolies from Thakurbari district where the riots occurred came in to the meetings. Sonajuli belongs to the Empire Company; the others are semi-private. Mr. Gandhi and his friends stayed two days and many *ex-tea-garden* coolies also attended the meetings. In Mangaldai there was then no labour trouble worth talking about. Many gardens in that district are new and higher wages are paid. In the Sadr some gardens were over-manned. There were programmes for opening out extensions and there was recruiting for that purpose. Then the slump in tea came. Some of the surplus labour was transferred to new gardens but a large number simply walked into the villages and took up land, sometimes on *adhi* terms. A few went home but not very many. As a rule the price of foodstuffs is lower in Mangaldai than in other parts of the district. This is partly because of difficulties in communications.

Coolies who leave gardens would not get 8 annas daily the whole year round in villages but only in the busy season. In the slack season there is a falling off in demand. Garden coolies also in the busy season find employment in the villages. I am not in a position to speak of the present condition of the coolies in Monabari after the rise in wages. There has been a slight reduction in food prices but there is no guarantee that this will continue. There are still a number of gardens where I think wages should be raised. I don't think it would do any harm to have gardens inspected once a year. I do not like to venture an opinion as to what should be a decent living wage for a coolie, but if you put a coolie in a position to earn 8 annas a day he would be comfortable. He can live on less than that. The difficulty is about those who are below *par*. Many of the new recruits were of an inferior stamp as they arrived with their vitality impaired, which affected their earnings. In one garden I calculated that it would take a good coolie one and half hours to earn one anna. An able-bodied

Tezpur. coolie could keep this up. This was under European management. I am of opinion that a coolie wants to do less work and to have more leave. The result of increased wages in many cases will be that he will just do enough to keep himself and his family and then have leisure to do what he likes. Coolies want leisure not only for cultivation but also for fishing, *shikar*, cock-fighting, and so on. I think a good deal could be done to equalize conditions on tea-gardens, *e.g.*, on adjoining gardens. I have heard from coolies that the babus who record the work are often not reliable. They were making money out of the coolies; not only the babus who measured the work but also the doctor babus. In one garden I was told that the coolies had to bribe the doctor babu to get leave. I believe that in all gardens babus make a little. When they overstep a certain limit there is discontent. There are many Managers who do not come to court to file Act XIII cases but who nevertheless give agreements. If the agreement was abolished and the advance or bonus was done away with the coolie might not like it.

In some cases letters from Calcutta Agents betrayed ignorance of conditions on the gardens. It was their duty to find this out. I would not say that this was the case generally. The attitude of the Managers was, I should say, sympathetic. The state of the tea market caused the Agents and Directors to be rather stringent and careful in expenditure. I think there has been a distinct improvement, and given favourable circumstances, this is likely to continue. I take it that the granting of increased pay to Monabari by the Agents was an admission that the coolies were underpaid before. Monthly payments are decreasing and I think that weekly payments are better. The ticket system, so far as I know, is not in force here. The advantage of a weekly payment is that a coolie can remember what he has earned in the previous week.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that they are quite sufficient to maintain him in health but not sufficient to keep him in a very high degree of comfort, especially as regards clothing. On all the gardens where the October riots took place, the coolies were well nourished but clothing was not as good as it might have been.

I do not consider that it is possible or desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions in the shape of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., should be converted into an increase of money wages. In some gardens there is no firewood. If the concessions were converted into cash, gardens would only employ able-bodied labour, while under the present system all coolies get some form of employment which would not be the case under a cut-and-dried system. Tea-gardens treat their coolies from a more humane point of view than ordinary industrial concerns. By preference, gardens recruit families of coolies as a nucleus for their future labour force.

KOWPATI GARDEN, MANGALDAI, 19TH DECEMBER 1921.

[MR. McMorran, KHAN SAHIB WALI MAHAMAD AND MR. DAWSON PRESENT.]

No. 16.—MR. GEORGE BRIDGE, M.L.A., *Proprietor, Bunglagor and Tongani Tea Estates, and Director of the Mangaldai Tea Company* :—

I have been 48 years in Tea, of which 32 have been spent in Mangaldai. I have also been in Jorhat and I was at Barduar in Kamrup for 10 years. I am of opinion that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by a coolie is sufficient to maintain him in health and reasonable comfort and I think that it would be impossible and undesirable to convert these concessions into an increase of money wages.

I have two gardens of my own in Mangaldai district, Bunglagor and Tongani and I am Superintendent of Kowpati garden of the Mangaldai Tea Company. I shall confine my remarks to my own gardens. I pay my men Rs. 8, Rs. 7, Rs. 6 a month, women Rs. 5 and Rs. 5-8, children Rs. 3 and Rs. 4. Rs. 8 is for tea-house men, Rs. 7 for good coolies and Rs. 6 for inferior. The monthly wages are calculated on a daily *hazira*. There is as much *ticca* work as the coolies like to do except in the cold weather, but men in the cold weather can earn their 4 annas a day. I have little rice land inside the garden and my coolies have not much outside. A few work for contractors. The acreage of both gardens is 360 acres and the working force is about 1½ coolies an acre. I think my coolies can earn enough to keep them in reasonable comfort. Mangaldai is a cheap district. A coolie can live on 2 *dols* of paddy a month which

Kowpati
Garden,
Mangaldai.

would be about 36 to 40 seers. A *dol* now costs Re. 1 as against Re. 1-8 two years ago. A *dol* would yield about 12 seers of rice. My coolies are quite content. When paddy was Re. 1-8, I used to sell at Re. 1-4 a *dol* and then they never asked for more pay. About two weeks ago one lot of my men came to me on *hat* day and said they wanted more pay. I said I could not afford more and that they were able to live on their present pay. I said I would have to close the garden. They said other coolies were getting more pay. I said they could go if they gave me back the advances. My coolies are under Act XIII Agreement. I live $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Mangaldai Court. I never had a coolie come to me for a *namkat* chit. A few coolies who are in debt or who have run off with another man's wife do occasionally leave, but I think I lose less than any other garden in Darrang. I am in the thick of the non-co-operation agitation. *Hats* have been closed by Gandhi-ites. People have been stopping my men getting rice. On my garden coolies have no economic grievance. I have been 26 years here and the coolies know me. I pay the coolies myself. I believe that in some gardens the Indian staff take advantage of the coolies. To keep the coolies content a great point is personal supervision. The Manager must know what is going on. If on pay-day a coolie says he worked on a day for which he has got no pay I ask the sardar. I also personally listen to all complaints of the coolies. The sardar tells the babu who have done work and the latter records the work in a book. I pay monthly and *ticca* weekly. When coolies ask for an advance for good reasons—they may be hard up or may want money for a marriage—I give advances but not to lazy coolies.

In plucking in the season my rate is 8 seers for 2 annas 9 pies and I pay *ticca* at the rate of one pice a seer. Last year my rate was 12 seers, but this year I pluck finer. My yield in Tongani with 220 acres is 10 maunds an acre and in Bungla-gor, a re-planted garden of 137 acres, it is 6 maunds an acre. In 1920 I made 2,400 maunds of tea, and this year about 2,000 maunds. My rate for light hoeing is 30 *nals* for 3 annas which can be done in 3 hours in a morning, and I pay 4 annas for the same work done in the afternoon. In this way a coolie can easily earn 7 annas. Children earn a good deal.

Increase in the cost of living has been felt by my coolies only in cloth as I gave them rice at Re. 1 a *dol*. Cloth may cost a coolie Re. 1 or Re. 1-8 more a year. I give Act XIII agreements for one year with advances Rs. 12 to Rs. 10 depending on the class of the coolie. I cut Re. 1 a month. There are very few non-agreement coolies. Coolies consider Act XIII agreements as binding both parties. If there was no agreement, I do not think things would go so well. I do not think I have more than one Act XIII case in a year. I think Act XIII is a good thing for both parties; otherwise we would not be so liberal in giving advances, and in that case coolies would go to the *mahajan* or *kaya* who charges interest at the rate of 2 annas per rupee per month in which case it would pay a coolie to take an advance from me and lend money out.

One rupee a *dol* of paddy was the rate in 1913, and is the rate now. This year we have had good crops. Rs. 1-8 was the rate in 1919. I tell my coolies that they are free to go to work or not as they choose, but if they are deliberately lazy, I call them to task. I have no musters. I have a few coolies from the village. My coolies live in groups of houses here and there. Each family has its own house and vegetable plot. The garden builds the houses. The coolies get one day of leave a week. When the tea crisis was on, hundreds of coolies passed through here on their way downwards. I have very healthy gardens. In 1920 my death-rate was $1\frac{1}{2}\%$ and my birth-rate considerably exceeds the death-rate. Pregnant women get half pay for about a month or so. After the child is born they are not forced out to work. The coolies drink *laopani* and sometimes sell it to other coolies and make a profit. The coolie nowadays has much more time to devote to his own pursuits because attendance at work is not compulsory. It will be no inducement to a coolie to hold out to him a hope of a pension for long and faithful service; he cannot look ahead. But the case is otherwise with the establishment. Coolies would not contribute to a provident fund. My coolies take *ganja*, even the little boys. The *ganja* grows wild. After 1913 I did not alter the rate of *hazira* but I gave one anna more for *ticca* in the last two years. For advances of rice I took cash payments. I do not know how much paddy I sold at cheap rates. I have recruited in recent years. The coolie of to-day is not so good as ten years ago. He is inferior in physique. Sometimes it pays me to repatriate weakly coolies though I have paid the recruiting agent for them. It is my experience that increased wages do not induce coolies to work substantially longer hours. The effect of *laopani* is not bad, but I cannot say the same about country spirit. The effect of *ganja* is worse. Opium is now too expensive for a coolie to buy.

[DR. WILLIAMS AND SRIJUT SIVA PRASAD BARUA ABSENT.]

No. 17.—MR. D. M. SOMERVILLE, Superintendent of the Hatigarh Division of the Consolidated Tea and Lands Company, Hatigarh :—

I have been 28 years in Tea. I have been in North and South Sylhet, Upper Assam and Nowgong. About half my time has been spent in Upper Assam.

I do not consider the type of coolie recruited at the present day as good as ten years ago; the present-day coolie is inferior in physique. Since the influenza epidemic coolies are not so good physically. The physique of *jungli* coolies is as good as ever.

Much labour is attracted by Indian industries which are expanding, especially Sonthali and Bengali labour. The sugar estates in Kamrup do not appreciably interfere with tea.

I consider it essential that the European staff should be acquainted with the vernacular. In my Company a language award of Rs. 200 at the end of two years is given to Assistants who make themselves proficient in the language.

I think there has been considerable unrest among labour for about the last 18 months; there was none before that. As regards economic unrest, I can only say that the times are hard and the coolies, like everybody else, have been suffering from economic pressure and from profiteering. I would fix the rise in prices from about the beginning of 1919, when cloth particularly rose. The price of cloth rose considerably during the war, but it is now coming down gradually.

I am of opinion that the recent disturbances amongst tea-garden labour have been caused by agitators. There has been no disturbance on the gardens in Mangaldai, though we had heard rumours from outside to that effect. I must say that as far as my old garden Salal (in Nowgong), from which I have recently come, is concerned, we knew of agitators in the *bustees* round about the garden but they made no visible impression on the total labour although the labour on adjoining gardens was affected.

I consider Rs. 8 for a man and about Rs. 6-8 for a woman as earnings on which they can live decently; of course this excludes concessions.

The difference in the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 would be about 60%. The price of *dhan* rose from Rs. 2-4 to Rs. 4-8. Of course, the price of cloth rose first and then that of foodstuffs.

Up to the present time improved communications have tended to raise prices in the cheap districts to the level of the prices of the dear districts. This is due to the fact that the *kaya* fixes the price of rice sold to gardens on the basis of the price at which common rice can be imported from Calcutta. The rice that is supplied by *kayas* is frequently bad; if 10 bags of rice are bought one bag would be bad and 9 bags good, but if one happens to be careless, one would find 9 bags bad and only one good.

As to whether a coolie gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort, taking into account all the earnings and concessions and with the present price of rice, I say 'yes.' The cold weather earnings in comparison with the earnings during the rains are barely adequate, while the rains' earnings are a good deal more than adequate. For instance, a woman may earn Rs. 20 a month in the rains as compared with Rs. 5 in the cold weather, though the average would come to more than that. A woman of this type is quite content with Rs. 5 for a month or two and the short hours required to earn it, and is well-to-do on these earnings.

Families of agricultural labourers all over the world work conjointly and the income that is derived from their labours is a joint income. I do not think a coolie living with his wife and children would, as a general rule, be able to maintain himself and his family in health and reasonable comfort on his own bare earnings. It is done but not frequently.

I don't think increased wages encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours. A proportion of all coolie labour is content with a bare existence.

I do not consider that it is possible or desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions in the shape of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., should be converted into an increase of money

Panerihat, Mangaldai. wages. Clothing is not generally supplied, except to the poor; even in the latter case it is not supplied as a rule. Advances are recovered only from those who are in a position to pay. Land is given out on a pepper-corn rent so as to retain possession. The charge is about 4 annas or 8 annas a *bigha*. I think it is necessary to charge at least a nominal rent because a man who may be exempt from paying rent for an indefinite period may turn round and say that as he had been holding the land for such a long time and had not to pay any rent for it, he would not part with it.

Generally speaking, I think it is necessary to put the coolie under contract. The existence of the Act enables us to look after the coolie better. It is certainly very desirable as far as health conditions are concerned, as, having a hold on the coolie, we can compel him to go into hospital during illness. All my labour is not under contract. As a matter of fact coolies come forward freely for the contract when they are pleased with themselves. About nine-tenths of the force in Salal Tea Estate in Nowgong are under contract. But this would vary in gardens. In some places the percentage not under agreement is very high and in some it is very low.

There is every possibility of the checking staff doing things which would make coolies discontented, but at the same time coolies and the clerks collaborate in cunning ways. For instance a coolie might come to the clerk and ask that the *paniwala* be allowed to carry water to his house, and the clerk would write up the *paniwala's* absence as *hazira*, the coolie being required to give the clerk something for it. I have also known *dusturi* being taken. I have known a garden where, when a child is born, the coolie takes Rs. 5 to the jemadar. The only remedy is the closest European supervision. These malpractices are less common now than they used to be, because there is more vigilant watch now.

I do not think the clerical staff are underpaid. If they were underpaid there would be temptation to illicit gains. I would not recommend an increase of pay to the clerical staff. As a matter of fact their pay was increased recently owing to the rise in prices. I do not think jemadars were well paid in past days, but I do think they are well off now in that respect.

In Hatigarh the daily wage system obtains; and the coolies are paid every morning in tickets. Tickets are cashed once a week. Metal discs are used for tickets, and the coolie knows the next day what he has received for the previous day's work. The *hazira* rate is 4 annas for a man and 3 annas for a woman in Hatigarh; *ticca* work is in addition to this. We work on the unit system as far as possible. Work given out as *hazira* takes about 3½ to 5 hours to complete in the case of a man, and about 3 hours in the case of a woman. At Salal I had no limit for coolies earning *ticca*. The average pay exceeds 4 annas; a fair proportion of the women earn 4 annas a day. They could earn more if they wanted by working a little longer. These wages, are, in my opinion, sufficient to keep the coolies in good health and comfort.

I do not think a man can maintain himself together with his wife and one child on Rs. 8, but I think he can maintain himself alone on less than that sum. This assumes wife and child as doing no work. As part of the family earnings it is fully adequate.

I have suggested measures for ameliorating the lot of the labour force and these measures were always sympathetically considered.

The prosperity of a garden may be indicated by dividends but may be best determined by the profit per acre. Dividends declared only show roughly how a garden is prospering or otherwise.

No. 18.—Mr. J. R. FRASER, Manager, Attareekhat Division, Attareekhat Tea Company, Limited:—

I have now been 11 years in Mangaldai and 3 years in Sylhet—total 14 years.

I consider that physically the type of coolie recruited at the present day is inferior to that recruited 10 years ago, owing to famine conditions and the influenza epidemic in recent years.

There has been no unrest of any sort in this district as far as I am aware. This is due perhaps principally to our isolation, while the pay compares favourably with other gardens. Living is also cheaper here than in Tezpur. We have not been employing local labour since 1919 in which year we imported about 2,000 coolies. We do not require Cachari labour now. The only local labour we are likely to take

are the Nunias. We have about 20 *ex-tea-garden* coolies. We pay outside labour the same as garden labour, except that they do not get medical attendance because they do not ask for it. Panerihat, Mangaldai.

I consider Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 6-8 for a woman a decent living monthly wage.

The difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 would be about 30%. The price of cloth went up considerably during the war. It is still higher than the pre-war rate. Rice and *dhan* are fairly cheap; rice sells at 8 seers per rupee. We stock *dhan* and sell it to the coolies when they require it. We have no occasion to sell it at present as it is cheap. We supply rice to the coolies during the rains when supplies from the bazaar are not obtainable.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities, provided of course he takes advantage of his opportunities to earn. The present system, which is based on the unit, was started in 1912.

Yes, it is the case that earnings are inadequate in the cold weather as compared with the rest of the year. I have this year increased the cold weather earnings. I have allowed men 6 annas and women 4 annas.

The percentage of working coolies is about 75. They have not got cultivation to any great extent, either inside or outside the gardens. We charge a nominal rent of 4 annas for land given out just to retain possession.

As a general rule the earnings of a coolie living with his wife and children would not be sufficient to maintain him and his family in health and reasonable comfort without some members of the family working. It would of course depend on the size of his family. A good working man with a wife and one child could support his family on his own earnings.

I do not think increased wages encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours.

Yes, we put coolies under Act XIII Agreement. I am in favour of retaining the Act, as it gives one a certain hold on the labour, otherwise we have none whatever. Remove the Act and the coolies can walk off the garden at their pleasure. We usually give the agreement to one in a family. Personally I am not in favour of the Act being abolished. If the Act were abolished, I would not give the coolies an advance or raise their pay, but I would give them a bonus at the end of the year. It would not be safe to give it at the beginning of the year except to selected coolies. I do not think a coolie would be more content if he was not under contract.

We have not had any Act XIII cases for some years now.

There was recruiting in 1919 soon after the influenza epidemic. We recruited very few coolies in 1920-21. I am not in a position to say how the 1920-21 coolies compared with those recruited before the influenza. Of course in 1918-19 before the influenza epidemic the coolies were much superior physically.

The coolies never asked for an increase in wages within the last five years.

There has been no rise in the pay of the coolies since 1913. Prices rose about 30% between 1913 and 1920. *Nirikhs* have been reduced. Coolies would not earn the increased wages; only a few would earn more than they had been doing before.

The task for deep hoeing is 3 *nals* per anna; it is based on the unit system. A coolie can complete the task of 15 *nals* in 5 hours. In 1912 the rate was 20 *nals* for 5 annas. In this case the hoe was 9 or 10 inches deep.

We pay no allowance for children under a certain age, but newly born children are maintained by the garden for some time after birth.

There has been a certain amount of unrest outside the gardens due, in my opinion, to the efforts of agitators; it has been in evidence to a less or greater extent during the last five years.

Rice and *dhan* are fairly cheap all the year round; Rs. 5 a maund is the normal price; it is the standard rate. I do not allow it to go over. Before the war the price of rice here was approximately 12 seers to the rupee. At the end of the war it was at any rate cheaper here than elsewhere owing to the fact of our isolation. The present price of *dhan* is Rs. 2-12-0 a maund. We have a rice mill on the garden. The coolies have had no difficulty in purchasing *dhan* from the villages. But during the last two weeks there has been some interference with the bazaar inasmuch as it was closed down. A very small percentage of the coolie's earnings is spent on cloth now

and I do not think coolies are more badly clothed now than they were a few years ago. A coolie would rather be badly clothed than hungry. As a matter of fact owing to the rise in the price of cloth, we were supplying it at concession rates up to the end of last year; we have not done so since the beginning of this year. We supplied blankets on several occasions last year to all necessitous cases, i.e., to deserving cases; the number thus supplied would be nearly 50% of the working labour force. I do not mean to imply that 50% of my force are in necessitous circumstances. As a matter of fact each house gets a blanket. We have given about 80 to 1,000 in a year. The total population on the garden is about 5,000, and the working number is 2,040.

No. 19.—Mr. F. COUTTS, *Manager, Panery Tea Estate* :—

I am Manager of Panery Tea Estate. I have been 15 years in Tea, and all my time has been spent in the Darrang district.

I have personally had no experience of unrest in this part of the district, not even as a result of the rise in prices. The gardens have so far been unaffected by the political agitation prevailing in the district.

I consider Rs. 8-2-0 for a man and Rs. 6-8-0 for a woman a decent living monthly wage.

The difference between the cost of living in the years 1914 and 1920 may be put at 25%. The cost of living was certainly higher last year than it is now; it still tends to decrease. There have been good harvests. At present a coolie can buy *dhan* at Rs. 2-12-0 a maund. This time last year *dhan* was selling at Rs. 3-2-0 to Rs. 3-4-0 a maund. We sell rice at 8 seers for the rupee. Coolies have cultivation of their own on the gardens. Roughly there are about 240 acres of garden land under cultivation. Rent is charged at 12 annas a *poorah* (four *bighas*), and about 230 men hold this land, or a proportion of 40 to 50%. An average holding consists of about one *poorah* of good rice land.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie together with the present price of necessities, I would say he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort. As to whether I would give the same answer for conditions which obtained last year, I must say that there is no very appreciable difference between this and last year and the coolie has sufficient this year. Last year probably things were a bit hard for the coolie. The pay has been raised this year and earnings also have been increased. The wages now are undoubtedly higher than seven years ago.

The difference in the cash earnings of coolies between 1913 and 1921 for the months of March and September is :—

		Men.			Women.			Children.		
		Rs.	a.	p.	Rs.	a.	p.	Rs.	a.	p.
March 1913	...	6	1	4	4	0	0	2	1	0
March 1921	...	7	6	8	6	8	9	4	9	4
September 1913	...	7	1	6	7	11	9	3	11	2
September 1921	...	10	1	3	11	9	0	6	14	0

The wages of carters are not included in the wage returns, even though they may be tea-garden coolies. Some of the carters' names are on the ordinary *hazira* books. Cart hire is a separate payment and does not come under wages.

My experience is that coolies are not so keen on earning a high wage during the cold weather even if opportunities are given them of doing so. Their working hours are much shorter, owing to the fact that they engage themselves a good deal on their own cultivation work.

The daily average strength of the working force on the garden is about 68 to 70%. It is not my experience that increased wages encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours.

I think it is neither possible nor desirable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions in the shape of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., into an increase of money wages. Of course rice could be converted, but it might be rather difficult to control the prices. We supply rice during probably five or six months in the year. Altogether we supply about 1,500 to 2,000 maunds in a year. The present rate is Rs. 5 a maund, as supplied by the garden; this year and last year the prices have been the same. This year we supplied rice at 7 and 8 seers per rupee and the same last year.

I think it is necessary to retain Act XIII and to put the coolies under agreement. The advantage of the Act is that its existence is the only means of controlling the coolie in the way of looking after him, seeing that he is well housed and attends hospital when he ought to. It would be exceedingly difficult to do that under the free labour system, especially if the coolies were living in the *bustees* rather than on the garden. Agreement advances are paid to coolies but never recovered. New coolies are never put under agreement immediately after their arrival.

I have had very few absconders from my garden. It is very difficult to recover the advances from absconders because we do not know their whereabouts.

I do not think a coolie would be more content if he was not placed under contract.

With regard to my answer to question No. 73, I said that it may be possible to convert the concession of rice into a money payment, but I would much prefer continuance of the present system of issuing rice as it would be very difficult for the coolies to procure rice during the rains.

There is one liquor shop in Panerihat about a mile and a half from my garden.

Coolies never asked for an increase in wages during the last five years. We increased the wages by extending the unit system during the past 18 months; for instance the task for deep hoeing was reduced from 3 to 2½ *nals* per anna.

About 200 or 300 coolies are not under agreement, but they have the same concessions as coolies under agreement, e.g., medical attendance and rice concessions. It frequently happens that a man and his wife do not take the agreement together. The man may take the agreement one year while the woman may take it the following year.

A bonus of Rs. 12 for a man and Rs. 10 for a woman is given only to those coolies who are under agreement; others are not given the bonus. It has not been the practice on my garden to recover any agreement advances paid to the coolies.

No. 20.—Mr. G. S. ROSS, *Manager, Dimakusi Tea Estate* :—

I am Manager of Dimakusi Tea Estate. I have been in this district since May 1917. Before that I was in Jorhat and Tingri in Upper Assam. I have been about 15 years in Tea.

I think there has been very little unrest in this district—in fact practically none amongst the coolies. Political agitation has not affected the gardens. We had a little agitation lately connected with bazaars, but it has not reached the gardens so far. There is, however, a tendency to induce people not to come into the bazaars. There is a Local Board bazaar about a mile south of my garden and so far there has been absolutely no trouble in it. I consider that the immunity from trouble on our garden is due to the distance from the seat of trouble, i.e., Mangaldai Town, as also to the cheapness of the district.

I consider Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 6-8 for a woman a decent living monthly wage. There has not been a very great rise in prices of foodstuffs during the time I have been here except in cloth. There has not been much rise in the cost of food-grains since 1916. 1920 was an expensive year but prices are dropping now. Rice was very cheap in the latter part of 1918.

Taking into consideration all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that a coolie gets sufficient to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities and on our present rates of working.

Considering what a coolie is earning now his earnings in my opinion are quite adequate even in the cold weather.

I have a certain amount of land inside the garden, but there is no great keenness to take it up. The coolies do not care to take up the land for cultivation owing to the low price at which *dhan* is sold in the villages. The land is a bit heavy to clear but I think it is quite all right for the cultivation of *dhan*. We charge no rent whatever for land given to coolies.

It is neither possible nor desirable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages. I supply very little rice. I have a certain amount of *dhan* which is supplied in case of emergency. At any rate a very small quantity is supplied during the year. As a matter of fact we commenced to supply rice and *dhan* only when the prices went up. In 1919-20 we lost Rs. 4,245-13 on rice. The price of rice varied from Rs. 6 to Rs. 8-3 a maund, and we

sold it at an average rate of Rs. 4-12. We have now discontinued the supply of rice, but there is plenty of *dhan*. There is no rice mill on the garden. In my opinion prices went up in 1919 when rice was being exported by the railway. The Marwaris come from outside and subsidise the ryots. But conditions have changed somewhat since the opening of the line to Tangla, and it is not difficult to get rice on my gardens as railway communications are good.

The majority of our coolies are under Act XIII Agreements. I should not prefer to do without the Act. It is more or less necessary to put the coolie under contract. It is advisable that he should be under some sort of restriction for the sake of discipline from the health and other points of view. There is no compulsion, however, in this respect.

I don't think the coolie would be more content if he was not under contract, because there is no obligation on his part to take an agreement and the majority of them do take it. The bonus undoubtedly influences them to take the agreement.

The acreage of tea under cultivation is 658, and the working population is about 1,111, while the total population is about 2,000.

All non-working children get about 3 seers of rice a week as free ration.

There has been an increase in wages during the last five years, and this was brought about by decreasing the task. Coolies never asked for an increase of wages. We pay them on the unit system. Wages exclude concessions, in other words, it is simply cash wages. The present rate does not include rice. It is cash paid for work done. All coolies have free medical attendance when required. Pregnant women have a special allowance of Rs. 3-8 per month for six months during which they do no work. Rice concessions are made only in hard times. We sell *dhan* occasionally when coolies are unable to obtain it from the bazaar. At any rate I do not sell more than about Rs. 20 worth in a week.

The usual custom with the '*junglis*' is to pay down a certain amount to the ryots before the crop is cut. Coolies have the same facilities of purchasing rice as they have of purchasing *dhan*. In Tingri the coolies were very keen on taking land for rice cultivation but here they are not. The reason for this is that *dhan* is not only cheaper but much more plentiful here. Some of the coolies advance money to the ryots and get *dhan* at cheaper than the ordinary rates; others purchase rice from the bazaar.

There are also coolies who are not under agreement and still enjoy all the facilities open to coolies under agreement, *e.g.*, medical attendance, etc., but we have not the same hold on them in the matter of sending them to hospital as we have on the coolies under agreement. We can exert more pressure on the coolie under agreement to go into hospital as also to go to work.

We have not had a single case under Act XIII. If a coolie should abscond I would ascertain his whereabouts and then try to induce him to return. Since January last I have had about 10 absconders, of whom 2 have since returned from their country.

Since the year 1915 wages have increased by about 50% only in certain kinds of work such as trenching, deep hoeing and forking.

The rate for deep hoeing is 2½ *nals* per anna; light hoeing 8 *nals*. The average earning of a coolie per day would be 5 annas for deep hoeing. If he earned 8 annas I do not think the work would be quite satisfactory. A strong man, however, might do 16 *nals* in a day. The depth of the cultivation is approximately nine inches.

No. 21.—Mr. A. SIMMONDS, *Manager, Orangajuli Tea Estate* :—

I am Manager of Orangajuli Tea Estate. I have been in Mangaldai 19 months now; I was in the Dooars for about 10 months, one year in Calcutta and 10 months in Upper Assam. I have also been in Sylhet for nine years.

I have not noticed any feeling of unrest on any of the gardens I have been connected with.

I do not think coolies have had any economic grievances which might have given scope for agitators.

In my opinion Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 6 for a woman is a sufficient wage for a coolie to enable him to live in comfort with a possibility of saving a little. In the year 1914 (I have not been able to find the figures for 1913) rice was selling at about 8 to 10 seers for the rupee in Orangajuli; in 1920 about 5 to 7 seers. The present rate is

about 7 to 8 seers per rupee. The price of cloth has risen almost cent. per cent. but that is a small percentage of the coolie's cost of living. Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

Earnings are not inadequate in the cold weather as compared with the rest of the year, because, being short of labour, we encourage the coolies to do extra work. The women probably are not able to earn as much, but men are.

We have 992 acres of tea under cultivation and an effective labour force of rather under one coolie an acre.

It is certainly not my experience that increased wages encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours.

I do not think a coolie, living with his wife and children, can by himself earn sufficient to maintain them in reasonable health and comfort.

I do not consider it advisable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

As many as ask for the agreement are put under it. About 30 to 40% approximately are under agreement. Advances are not recovered. If the Act was repealed it would make no difference except that we would not have quite the same discipline as we now maintain with the Act.

There have been a few absconders during the past two or three years. The coolies have been going into the *bustees* and taking up Government land, the reason being that they get the land for a nominal sum and they can very often dispose of it profitably. The Government rates are very low—about 3 to 4 rupees a *poorah* a year I believe.

Since 1915 the wages have risen. We now, for a single task with a Sunday off, pay annas 4 for a man and annas 3 for a woman. In 1918 the system was on a monthly basis of Rs. 6 for a man and Rs. 5 for a woman. We now work on a unit system—4 annas being the unit. Tasks have been reduced so as to enable coolies to earn higher wages than they did in 1914. The tasks for plucking have been the same all along.

The rate for *ticca* hoeing is 25 *nals*—same as pre-war rates. There is more opportunity for *ticca* now than there was before, as *ticca* rates above the *hazira* have been reduced.

Taking the wages and rates into consideration, the coolies' earnings on my garden have increased probably 33 %.

No. 22.—Mr. H. M. LEPAGE, *Manager, Bhutiachang Tea Estate* :—

I have been 12 years as Manager in this district. I think there has been a widespread feeling of unrest, but I do not know the actual cause of it. I have found a number of coolies wishing to leave the garden so as to become free people. For a long time past they have been absconding to the *bustee*.

I consider Rs. 8-2 for a man and Rs. 6-8 for a woman, in addition to the agreement bonus, a decent living monthly wage for coolies.

The difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 may be estimated at 20% to 25% rise. At the present moment rice sells at nine seers for the rupee as compared with 12 to 15 seers three or four years back. I remember rice being sold at 25 seers for the rupee.

The Tangla Branch railway was opened ten years ago.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities. I would say the same applies to last year though perhaps prices were a little higher.

There is very little paddy cultivation within the grant—perhaps not more than 10 acres. Land in Bhutiachang is suitable for rice cultivation, but the difficulty is the scarcity of water.

There is plenty of land for cultivation outside the grant on the other side of the river Nanoi, but it is usually unfordable during the rains.

We have had many absconders and occasionally we get them back. If their whereabouts are known we get warrants out for them.

I would not advise doing without the Act. I do not consider a coolie would be more content if he was not under contract. The system was tried but it proved a failure. Personally I think the coolie prefers the Act as he gets an advance or bonus. Most coolies like to live outside in the *bustee* as they appear to think they can live a freer life and can go where they please and do what they please. To such coolies no concessions are given though on a garden there are many attractions. Coolies object to hospital discipline and do not place much value on medical attention. With agreement coolies, it must be admitted, a little pressure can be put on them to attend hospital when sick. Agreement coolies are not pressed at all to go to work. About 55 % of my force turn out to work daily, and 4 % were sick, taking the figure of yesterday. The remainder are doing their own house work or looking after their cultivation, etc.

No. 23.—Mr. R. M. CLARKE, *Manager, Corramore Tea Estate* :—

I have been Manager of the Corramore Tea Estate for the past 8 months. I have been working in this district for 3½ years now. Before that I was in Burma working as an Engineer. I have had about 3½ years experience in Tea.

I consider that an average coolie gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort. We are isolated and things are very much cheaper here than in most other places; we are also surrounded by *bustees* and the tea-garden is practically self-supporting where *dhan* is concerned. The coolies have rice cultivation, aggregating 350 acres. Little rent is charged. No rent is charged during a particularly bad year with bad crops. There are about 1,200 coolies at Kerkeria and the acreage is about 1,000 acres including the two out-gardens.

We do not employ Cachari labour. We employ *bustee* labour in addition at Ghagrapara and pay them just the same as the coolies on the garden.

We stock *dhan* which we supply only during times of scarcity. About 300 maunds have been taken by the coolies this year. We buy *dhan* at the rate of Rs. 2-12 a maund, including carting charges, and sell it at the same rate. Only *dhan* is sold as the coolies do not prefer rice.

There has been a little disturbance in Ghagrapara *hât*. There has been no interference at Kerkeria *hât*.

It is optional for coolies to take agreements. More than half the coolies are under agreement. From the coolie point of view, I considered it necessary to put them under agreement and my reason for it is to enforce cleanliness. At any rate I do not think it would make much difference to my garden if there was no Act at all.

There have been no absconders during my time. There is plenty of cultivation on the garden, but we do not insist on coolies taking up the land. We assist them to buy bullocks. To coolies of two years' standing and those with large families who have not been able to save sufficient to buy themselves a pair of bullocks, we give an advance just to encourage them to take up land.

New coolies are also put under agreement as soon as they arrive with a view to giving them an advance to 'set up' for themselves. Agreement advances are never recovered.

I have seen village labourers in their houses and I consider that they compare just equally with our coolies.

No. 24.—Mr. R. BOWDER, *Assistant, Hatigarh Tea Estate* :—

I am Assistant in charge of the Hatigarh garden.

I have been 5½ years in Tea. I have been in Hatigarh since June 1913. For 6 months of that period, I was in the factory, and 3 years with the labour outside.

As far as I am aware there has been no unrest in Hatigarh. I have heard of agitators having come to Ghagrapara *hât* with the intention of preventing foodstuffs from entering the *hâts*. Their presence has had some sort of effect. First and

foremost there is a somewhat different feeling amongst the labour to what there was a few years ago. When a coolie, whether he is under agreement or not, wants to go into the *bustee*, he is required to ask me for permission. Panerihat,
Mangaldai.

I think a coolie does get enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort. I do think, however, that a new coolie, coming from his country, finds it hard to make ends meet if he is alone. We provide for him in several ways. We do not put any coolie under agreement unless he has been on the garden for 12 months with the object of giving him an opportunity to judge for himself. When a new coolie arrives, I generally start off by giving him some fuel. I give him a couple of rupees to buy himself some utensils, and I also give him a blanket. If he should come and complain that the two rupees were not enough, then I would give him another rupee which I treat as an advance or subsistence allowance according to my judgment.

We work on the unit system.

For light hoeing we gave last year 30 *nals* for four annas. For deep hoeing we gave a pice for each *nal*. The task has altered in recent years, it being smaller now. We give a full *hazira* for six months to a new man unable to complete the full task of light hoeing or deep hoeing or any other form of work. We give *ticca* as well which is considerably lower. A man would take from 3 to 3½ hours to complete 30 *nals*. *Nals* are measured by twelve-foot *nal* rod. This is the first year that coolies have been given land inside the garden grants; about 20 to 30 acres have been taken up by coolies; and about 150 to 200 acres have been taken up outside the garden. There is any amount of land inside the garden, but I do not know why it was not given out before. There is plenty of grazing ground as well.

The working population is about 52%; the rest, including children, are cutting *dhan* at the present time.

It is left entirely to the coolie to earn as much as he wants in any season. In the cold weather he has got his own work to attend to and therefore does not care to earn more on the garden. One great handicap with our coolies is that they have to go great distances to collect fuel from the surrounding jungles. A coolie just does his *hazira* of 4 annas and goes away to do work for himself; daily earnings of 6 annas and 5 annas for men are quite common, and for women 5 annas and 4 annas this cold weather. Firewood is got from the Government reserve as well. A man by himself may be required to collect his fuel every day. If he has a large family he may probably take in a stock for 6 months. In the cold weather they have greater facilities for collecting firewood.

No. 25.—Dr. J. LOUDON, *Medical Officer, Mangaldai Association* :—

I am Medical Officer of the Mangaldai Association which comprises the whole group of gardens in this district. I have about 9 gardens to look after. I have been 3 years in this district; before that I was in the Straits. The coolies intended for the rubber plantations passed through my hands before going to the estates. As far as I remember, when I left 7 years ago, there was no conservancy system in the Straits plantations. There is a complete latrine system in Bamanjuli Tea Estate. The system is a bucket latrine system. The lines are provided with latrines which have a raised platform under which is placed a bucket. The whole thing is covered in and divided into compartments. There are separate latrines for men and women. Buckets are removable from the back of the latrine and the soil is removed every day and fresh buckets are put in. The Bamanjuli garden was started about 2 years ago, i.e., 6 months after my arrival. The latrine system was introduced about 9 months after the garden was started immediately labour commenced to come into the garden. I think the system is undoubtedly a success.

At present there is a 40-bedded hospital. There are no sick in the hospital. At present there is a labour force of about 600 coolies, and the sick rate is about 3 per day while the anæmic rate when the coolies first came into the garden was about 25 % simply judging with the eye. The anæmic rate has now dropped to about 7 and 5 %.

As a rule the coolies come up to the gardens with *anchylostomiasis*. The usual form of anæmia is due to hookworm which lives in the intestines of an infected coolie. The coolie catches the infection by walking on the ground polluted with the *faeces*; it takes the form of coolie itch or what is otherwise known as ground itch. The embryos ultimately find their way into the intestines. If the ground is kept free from infection by the use of latrines and the *faeces* are disposed of, it is impossible for the coolies to become infected.

An attempt was made to institute latrines in the lines at Bhutiachang, but I am unable to say how far it has advanced. There is only one water latrine; it is a modification of the septic tank. The actual latrine is not satisfactory. The difficulty is that Bhutiachang has not got a sufficient water-supply. The genuine idea carried out faithfully would be very efficient but it would only be applied in gardens where storage tanks for water were not used. Water has got to be brought now from considerable distances, but generally speaking, arrangements for water-supply on the gardens are satisfactory. A coolie, however, is not a very intelligent individual and it is really essential to provide a fool-proof supply. We are gradually introducing the latrine system in practically every estate in Mangaldai. The system it is proposed to introduce is the pit system with a portable superstructure. I think it is very desirable to introduce a latrine system on tea-gardens. It would conduce to the general health of the coolie and prevent *anchylos'omiasis*.

Experiments were tried during the last rains and it was found particularly during the rains that the coolies used them, especially the women, as they were very much afraid of being bitten by leeches and other jungle insects.

I would like to make a suggestion, and that is, in order to arrive at some definite conclusion in the matter of a coolie's welfare, one ought to have an estimate of the actual amount of rice necessary for a coolie's diet, the cost of his clothes, the average size of his family, the earnings of his wife, and the average prices throughout the year at the local bazaar. As regards the quantity of rice necessary for an adult coolie, I would say that he would require three-quarters of a seer of rice per day.

SYLHET, 6TH JANUARY 1922.

[PRESIDENT AND MR. WITHERS ABSENT.]

Sylhet.

No. 26.—Rai Sahib DURGA CHARAN CHAKRAVARTI, B.A., *Jailor, Sylhet* :—

I have been Jailor of the Sylhet Jail since 1914.

The annual average expenditure on diet per convict, excluding garden crops derived from the jail garden, from 1913—1921 (as taken from the printed reports) was—

					Rs.	a.	p.
Pre-war rates	1913	...	...	...	35	13	0
	1914	...	...	...	48	10	0
	1915	...	...	...	50	10	0
	1916	...	...	...	48	7	0
	1917	...	...	...	47	15	0
	1918	...	...	...	35	12	0
	1919	...	...	...	39	11	0
	1920	...	...	...	55	5	0
	1921	...	...	...	54	1	0

These figures include the cost of coal. The rates for paddy for the same period were :—

					Rs.	a.	p.
Pre-war rates	1913	...	...	...	2	8	6
	1914	...	...	...	3	6	6
	1915	...	...	...	3	0	0
	1916	...	...	...	3	7	6
	1917	...	...	...	3	4	0
	1918	...	...	...	1	9	6
	1919	...	...	...	3	1	0
	1920	...	...	...	3	14	0
	1921	...	...	...	3	10	0

The daily diet of a convict consists of 12 *chattaks* of rice (or 3 *powas*), 2 *chattaks* of *dal* and 3 *chattaks* of vegetables *plus* condiments; this fare constitutes three meals a day; 2 *chattaks* being doled out in the morning, 5 at noon and 5 in the evening. A maund of ordinary coarse paddy in the jail equals 27 seers rice.

There has been no change in the dietary for the past seven or eight years. Previously 13 *chattaks* of rice and 3 *chattaks* of *dal* used to be given. The reduction was due to a good deal of wastage taking place. I do not consider that the quantity of food given to the prisoners is insufficient. Prisoners are weighed every fortnight and, as a rule, they are found to gain in weight. Of course some complain of insufficiency of food, they being voracious eaters. Fish is given generally twice a week and for this one *chattak* of *dal* is deducted.

The contract for the purchase of foodstuffs is generally made at the beginning of the year. Sometimes when prices are high we do not make the contract at the beginning of the year but wait till about April at the latest to see if prices come down. After April prices do not show a tendency to decrease.

The average cost (exclusive of labour and profit) of clothing per prisoner for the year :—

							Rs.	a.	p.
1913	was	...	...	...	...	...	5	14	0
1914	"	...	...	...	...	...	3	15	0
1915	"	...	...	...	...	...	5	0	0
1916	"	...	...	...	...	...	7	2	0
1917	"	...	...	...	...	...	6	0	0
1918	"	...	...	...	...	...	7	5	0
1919	"	...	...	...	...	...	9	13	0
1920	"	...	...	...	...	...	7	10	0
1921	"	...	...	...	...	...	7	10	0

Generally cotton yarn is purchased and woven in the jail. We do not purchase any cloth from the merchants.

On admission into jail a prisoner is given a pair of *jungias*, one *kurta*, one *gumcha* and one cap. This is generally supplemented by another *gumcha*, *jungia* and cap in the course of the year. The prisoner gets a blanket coat as well; also 3 blankets to last three years, besides a *tat* bed. Including the price of mattress made of cocoanut fibre or aloe fibre Rs. 7 is sufficient per head for clothing.

I have no experience of tea-garden coolies. There are a large number of *ex-tea-garden* coolie convicts from Dibrugarh. The health of such people has generally improved since admission into the jail. If a convict becomes ill, he is compelled to take medical treatment; he has no option in the matter.

No. 27.—Babu KALI NATH ROY, *Secretary, All-India Tea and Trading Co., Ltd.* :—

I am Secretary of the All-India Tea and Trading Company which comprises the following estates, *viz.*, Singrimari in Mangaldai, Jalalnagar, Sridharpur and Madanpur in Sylhet. I have been Secretary to the Company since 1917. Before that I was head clerk. I have been connected with the Company since 1913. I have never worked on a tea-garden; I have been doing office work all along. But I have inspected gardens.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It is neither possible nor desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages.

There has been no unrest in any of the gardens belonging to my Company.

The rates of wages have not been increased, but concessions have been extended.

The coolie population on the various gardens is :

Singrimari	{ 479 garden coolies. 111 bustee "
Sridharpur	...	...	...	...
Madanpur	...	...	...	...
Jalalnagar	...	...	...	...

All the coolies are not under agreement. We take an agreement simply because the coolie is liable to abscond once he has taken the advance. We encourage the agreement system. Old coolies voluntarily take agreements. We pay a bonus of anything between Rs. 10 and Rs. 16; it varies on different gardens. Agreements are taken by the Manager. During my incumbency no coolies have been taken to Court.

The rates for adults vary on different gardens. The monthly rates on the Sylhet gardens for a *hazira* consisting of 27 working days are Rs. 6, Rs. 5 and Rs. 3. In Assam they are Rs. 8, Rs. 6 and Rs. 4. The task of one *hazira* would take about 5 to 6 hours. Coolies generally go out at eight o'clock in the morning and return by one o'clock or two o'clock in the afternoon. A coolie is not satisfied with his *hazira* work but is given *ticca* in addition. I have no personal experience of the working of coolies. There has been a considerable decrease of coolies in Singrimari. I have no personal knowledge of the cause of this decrease.

No. 28.—Mr. NAGENDRANATH DATTA, B.L., *Pleader* :—

I am a Pleader, and the Managing Director of Bharat Samiti, Limited. I have only one tea-garden, Kalinagar, in the Chargola Valley.

The remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., up to the end of 1920, was sufficient to maintain the labourers in health only but not in reasonable comfort.

I have no experience of European gardens; my experience is confined to Indian gardens only.

Consequent on the exodus I started a *panchayat* in Kalinagar. I made the coolies elect their own members and directed them to represent their grievances to the *panchayat*. In this way I pacified the coolies who remained on the garden. I lost 330 coolies out of a total of 538. About 80 coolies have since returned and more are returning. Those who left for their country have not returned. Since the exodus I raised the rates. I now give a male adult 5 annas for a full task, a female 4 annas, and a working child 3 annas. These rates were fixed some 3 or 4 days after the exodus, immediately I arrived on the garden and found that they were demanding a rise. They wanted 6 annas for a man, 6 annas for a woman and 5 annas for a child. I told them that I had started a *panchayat* and they could represent their grievances to that *panchayat* when I would ultimately consider them. The former rates were 4, 3 and 2 annas. The present rate for plucking is one pice per pound. I have reduced the task and raised the wages. For hoeing we have two rates, one for hard soil and one for soft soil. I cannot say what the effect of my new system has been. I have not heard of any discontent on the garden since the wages were raised.

I consider it neither possible nor desirable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

There was a feeling of unrest before the exodus. When I met some coolies they were bitterly complaining against the Manager. I spoke to them and told them that it was certainly against Mahatma Gandhi's policy that they were leaving the gardens. They said that the Manager would not listen to their grievances. I sent a wire to my former Manager to come, and he came and he tried to pacify the coolies, but they in the beginning paid no heed. He subsequently succeeded in sending back some 66 coolies. My Manager attended the Ratabari meeting without my knowledge, and when I went to the garden after the exodus and obtained evidence of his extreme unpopularity, I dismissed him. If I had kept him on, I am afraid I would have lost all my coolies.

My impression is that this labour unrest is due partly to the all-India labour unrest and partly to political propaganda. The common people look upon Gandhi almost as a divine providence or deliverer; they actually adore him. Probably coolies, before coming to this country, have been led to believe that Assam was a land of plenty and that if they went there they could return after amassing some wealth, but when they did actually come they found their hopes were not realized, and that the only alternative then left to them was to resign themselves to their fate. But when they found somebody coming forward and holding out hopes of ameliorating their condition, they lost no time in grasping the opportunity, and the result may be evidenced in the recent troubles. My impression is that the root cause of this unrest is the general labour unrest, prevailing throughout the country. At Kalinagar the Bengali population are not very advanced and there is not much political agitation round about, so it is difficult to say who put the idea into their heads. The unrest among the masses would appear to be due more to economic causes than to political causes; but the economic unrest is now assuming a political form.

Even if there was no meeting at Ratabari, still I think the coolies would have left sooner or later. An up-country gentleman, who appeared to be a Pandit and presumably belonged to the Congress Committee, came to me and I advised him to speak to the coolies. He exhorted the coolies not to leave the garden but to remain and strike work if any occasion arises for the same. They did not listen to the Pandit, but left carrying all their property with them and selling their goods and cattle for little or nothing on their way. As far as I know there was no exodus in Maulvi Bazar. I don't think any political agitator in Karimganj recommended any exodus.

I have experience of agricultural labour, and I think there is a sort of unrest everywhere. The unrest has extended even to servants. I would say that there is unrest both amongst the classes and masses; this I consider is a part of the general unrest all the world over. The unrest, in my opinion, would appear to be due to many causes. As far as the classes are concerned, I think the unrest is more political than economic, and as regards the masses, economic rather than political.

I am a landlord and I know the agricultural wages. Before 1912 agriculturists were getting 6 annas; they would probably demand 8 annas now.

No. 29.—Babu RAJANIRANJAN DEV, B.A., *Proprietor, Madhabcherra Tea Estate, and Director, All-India Tea and Trading Company, Ltd.* :—

I am a Director of the All-India Tea and Trading Company. The Company has four gardens, *viz.*, Sridharpur, Jalalnagar, Singrimari and Madanpur. I am also Director of Baikunthapur garden in Habiganj. I have started a small tea-garden of my own near Dakshinbagh.

It is a fact that there has been a widespread feeling of unrest among tea-garden labour during the past few years. I attribute it (1) to the increased cost of living, (2) to the reduction in budgets since 1920, (3) to the reduction in earnings due to restricted outturn of crops, (4) to indiscriminate local recruiting (wages amounting to 8 annas per *hazira* being given on some new gardens), (5) to a feverish excitement for extensions of indifferent quality amongst certain Company Managers, particularly of bad financial position, who, with a view to enable themselves to advertise large acreages and to capture the imagination of the investing public thereby help to engender among the coolies a spirit of indifference for the quality of the tasks. The unrest was there, but visible manifestations might have been delayed had it not been for the spirit of the time; (6) to an idea prevalent of bettering oneself but without a full comprehensive idea of the situation. I speak of Indian-managed gardens only. Items (4) and (5) above have particular reference to Indian gardens. I have no personal experience of European gardens. As regards the Indian gardens, I go several times in the year to inspect the gardens and I always come across the coolies from whom it is a part of my duty to enquire about their health and comfort and other things. They put forward their grievances at that time. For instance they have been telling me that such and such a garden is paying 8 annas a day whereas we give them 4 and 5 annas only. During the last 4 or 5 years about 50% of the coolies on one of the gardens gradually but peacefully absconded to Tipperah, without causing any commotion.

I would attribute the recent disturbances among tea-garden labour less to the activities of the agitators than to those of local recruiters. The Chargola and Balisera Valleys are noted for their policy of stinginess and are in the grip of the planters. I have no personal knowledge of the actual condition of things there, but I personally know that these two valleys supply the bulk of the discontent in labour and these are typical examples of places where local recruiters reap substantial harvests. We benefit by receiving coolies from other gardens. Coolies prefer Indian gardens to European gardens, particularly the people at Balisera and Chargola. This refers to the period before the exodus for about ten years. They say that they are better treated on the Indian gardens. Some of the gardens have better *haziras* and besides the treatment generally is lenient. The coolie is, at places, let off with a lower standard of work; occasionally the standard of work is really poorer than on the European gardens or on normal Indian gardens. I know of an actual case of an Indian garden from which about 50% of the coolies absconded from 1916-1920 to Hill Tipperah due to inducements and allurements offered by estates under construction. As far as Indian gardens are concerned, I can say that agitation is practically non-existent; the Kalinagar trouble was a particular and not a general accident in Indian-managed gardens. I do not know anything about European gardens.

I inspected about four gardens last year. There are about 1,500 coolies on all the gardens, and the total acreage is nearly 1,200. Each garden pays a monthly wage of Rs. 6 to Rs. 7 for men, Rs. 5 for women, and Rs. 3-8-0 for children. There are medical arrangements on almost all the gardens.

Coolies are attracted to Tipperah because they say that they would get 8 annas for each *hazira* and also plenty of paddy fields. There are certain sections of the coolies who never take to the plough, e.g., the single man, the indolent and the diseased.

I know of one case where a recruiter was bound hand and foot and kept all night in the stable of an Indian garden. That man was caught while talking big things in darkness. At day-break when he was questioned he said that he was an ordinary passer-by, but ultimately we came to know that he was an Assistant on some Tipperah garden.

My impression is that the wages received by the coolies are sufficient to keep them free from hunger, but there is much room for the provision of clothing and accommodation. Poor houses and poor clothing are two complaints which should be remedied. Increased wages will not always help the situation. Bonuses should be given from time to time; they should be given not only in money but in kind as well. We limit improvements to financial conditions. There is a limit under the present conditions of tea growing. To some extent tea growers are the victims of extraneous circumstances. We recognise the need of improving matters when finances improve.

I do not think that it would be of much practical help to the coolie if the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions were converted into an increase of money wages. There should be an increase in the bonus, in periodical rewards and other concessions such as clothing. The price of cloth is very dear nowadays; more money might be spent on clothing and accommodation, and sanitary conditions should be improved. The necessity for borrowing should be removed, as, at the present moment, coolies borrow a certain amount of money. There should be a small increase in money wages. The reported indebtedness of the coolie is not generally borne out by facts as they do not represent the true conditions of things because the advances are occasionally recovered but not credited in the books, and whenever there is a discrepancy in the books the balance is shifted on to irrecoverable accounts.

About 10% of a coolie's earnings is spent on clothing.

We employ outside labour and pay them 2 pice or one anna more than we pay the coolies on the garden whose rates for *haziras* are 5 annas, 4 annas and 2 annas 6 pices for men, women and children. They have full *haziras* and they are able to complete the full tasks in the course of the day.

No. 30.—Mr. W. J. BALLANTINE, *Superintendent of Police* :—

I have been eight years in Sylhet.

Tea-garden disturbances in this district may be divided into two kinds :—(1) the general exodus in the Chargola Valley; and (2) the ordinary troubles on tea-gardens.

As regards the exodus from the Chargola Valley, I am definitely of opinion that it was due almost wholly to propaganda and superstitious and religious excitement and fear, and of this we have proof. Economic conditions affected it just as much as economic conditions have been responsible for the unrest, e.g., agrarian, industrial and political, the world over, no more or no less.

As regards the ordinary troubles on tea-gardens, we have had two phases of them : one early in the year from April, May, June 1921 in which the causes were also due to propaganda. They were all grouped in one place—the Lungla Valley. The trouble was due to propaganda; the coolies were told to stand out for the ordinary wage paid to *bustee* labourers. The coolies on the Lungla garden certainly tried the experiment for a few weeks and the effect has been that if any propagandist went to Lungla now he would most certainly receive his deserts.

The second phase was where the coolies began to ask questions about shortage of payment and there was trouble on gardens where in almost every case it was due to speculation or wrong accounting on the part of the subordinate Indian staff. This was specially evidenced at Kaliti and Jagcherra.

I think the European supervision should be closer and more efficient. I don't think in certain cases the supervision was all that it should have been, otherwise these cases should not have occurred. In order to be able to supervise one must have an empirical knowledge of the work. The measuring up of tasks of field work is almost wholly relegated to the Indian staff and the coolies have not always been satisfied that a particular measurement has been full and fair; in cases it would be found to be the contrary. Very often the Indian staff are recruited from people who live quite near the garden or who have friends and relatives in the surrounding *bustees*. Garden coolies are taken off the garden and put on to work on the *bustee* lines and paid *haziras*. I know of four or five gardens where this has been done. I am only talking of cases which have come under my notice professionally.

In the way of a co-operative credit society, I think a very great deal could be done. The purchasing value of what is given to the coolie could be increased by 25%. The garden has the money which might be put out and the coolie would derive the benefit. Incidentally the garden would be discharging a part of its obligations in regard to the ticket system.

Tea-gardens are self-contained units as they stand. Excepting the shops, they are something like compact villages. During the 14 years' experience I have had, I have found the *kayas* rising up by leaps and bounds and getting fat on none other than the coolie's money. The population of the *bustee* has not increased, but it is the coolie population that has, and it is the money of the coolies that has gone to fill the coffers of the *kaya*. If that money went to the coolie, it would be of very material advantage to him. The system should not be left to each garden to run. There should be a combination amongst the Agents, and a central distributing agency should be started in Calcutta with men of business training who would be capable of running it. Then centres may be created for the various valleys and shops opened on each garden, supplies being requisitioned from the various centres. Gardens have been importing and supplying things as a temporary and alleviating measure, but no proper system has been adopted.

The system advocated by me would remove chances of outside contamination and swindling. The ticket system could go on if the ticket was honoured for the full face value at the garden. From the policeman's point of view, I would say that there would be no handling of remittances because the money would be there in the garden for circulation. Managers now get it from the *mahajan*. Coolies have to pay something like 50% to 60% discount to get back their own money.

I am aware of one case in which the ticket system was abused. The ticket was not cashed by the garden but by the garden *mahajan*. He took a discount on the ticket, that is to say a man took a ticket worth 4 annas and he simply got 15 pice from the *mahajan*. In this case the *mahajan* received a discount from the garden for cashing tickets and was therefore guilty of swindling not only the coolie but the garden.

We must fight non-co-operation with co-operation. For instance, if the shops are closed down and the coolie is unable to buy his foodstuffs, the garden ought to come forward to his rescue. If for any reason the coolie cannot be given his food for three or four days, there is bound to be great trouble. A garden-run shop would make this form of coercion impossible.

There has been a rise in the prices of necessities. Police constables have received an increase in pay. I do not know what they were receiving in 1905, but in 1912 they were appointed on Rs. 10 (unarmed branch) and Rs. 11 (armed branch). Now they receive Rs. 16 and Rs. 18, respectively.

Written statement submitted by Mr. Ballantine on 17th April 1922.

In dealing with the question of labour rates one should not lose sight of the fact that this is a country run by *dustoor* and people of the coolie class are intensely conservative. As a policeman I am not concerned with the rates of wages paid by employers to their labourers, but in whatever way it may be decided to alter or add to the earnings of the coolie, it should be so devised as not to upset existing *dustoors*. Coolies are for the most part of mean intelligence and I know personally cases where they have not been able to appreciate pecuniary advantage by an alteration of existing methods.

Sylhet.

The second point is that this country is also run very largely on *bakshish*. The management of a garden always has been, and always should remain, patriarchal. The coolie recognises the Manager as his "*Ma-Bap*." He comes with his grievances and sorrows to him for redress or alleviation, and I know as a fact that the great majority of Managers spend no inconsiderable amounts from their own pockets in giving *bakshish* to deserving cases. While this was possible in the past, economic stringency has very largely curtailed it. The prestige of the Manager on which so much depends is being undermined by hard and fast decisions as regards wage rates by Calcutta Agencies. Very few Managers are given any latitude in making adjustments, however temporary, in rates. I have proof of this from the fact that in a great many cases of coolie trouble and discontent in gardens in this district, the Manager has found himself unable to make any concession by reason of strict orders to the contrary by his Calcutta Agent, and cases are increasingly frequent of coolies wiring direct to the Agency for relief. This is a practice unheard of formerly, and though it is probably the result of the necessity for very strict economy during the period of slump, it is also most subversive of discipline and that very necessary patriarchal control by the Manager.

On this point I venture a suggestion. A sum of money calculated on the basis of head of labour force—say one rupee per head per annum—should be included in the annual estimate and the lump sum placed at the disposal of the Manager for expenditure absolutely at his own discretion but only for the benefit of the coolie whether for individuals or communities or families or the labour force as a whole. Every Manager would know how best to spend this and it would go a long way towards keeping the labour force content and happy and binding them more closely to the management. In providing this sum it should be without prejudice to the Manager's commission.

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No. 31.—Mr. G. P. STEWARD, *Manager, Malnicherra Tea Estate* :—

I have been 26 years in Tea in Cachar, Sylhet and the Dooars. Since 1919 I have been Manager of Malnicherra. I should say that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort. I do not think it either possible or desirable to convert these concessions into money wages. I am not aware of a widespread feeling of unrest among my tea-garden labour. Any possible grievance that they may have had has been due to high prices. I consider a decent monthly wage Rs. 8-6-0 for men and Rs. 6-8-0 for women in addition to the agreement bonus. Where it cost a coolie 3 annas a day to live in 1913 it would have cost 4 annas 6 pies in 1920 and even now. I pay in tickets which can always be cashed by the garden; shop keepers also cash them, and give full value. Generally speaking, coolies' earnings are not inadequate in the cold weather at least if they are willing to work. To maintain a coolie and his wife and children, it is necessary for both the man and wife to work. Increased wages may sometimes encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours but not generally speaking. If a coolie knows that he can get 6 annas for 30 *nals* in place of 4 annas he would do no more than his task, but if he gets 24 *nals* for 4 annas and 30 *nals* for 6 annas, he would probably do the 30. I say so as a result of my recent experience. With fine plucking it takes a coolie as long to do a task as with coarse plucking. I make no deduction for factory charges in weighing leaf. I deduct 5 pounds for the basket but 8 pounds for a wet basket. We are supposed to get one maund of tea for four maunds of green leaf. For 25 pounds of perfectly dry leaf we pay for 20 or 22 pounds. This keeps the factory right. On the whole, things right themselves. It takes a coolie 5 hours to do a task at the beginning and end of a season when plucking without a definite task, and it takes about the same time to do a full task in season. We have to work up to our estimate per maund of manufactured tea. If no deduction is made the estimate would have to be raised, owing to the less quantity plucked at the beginning and end of a season. In Act XIII as amended I take a contract to mean one calendar year.

I was 9 years in Pathemara in Cachar where our *haziras* were 3 annas for men and women while neighbouring gardens gave 4 and 3 annas. I had a cheap bazaar. I decided to raise the rate on a line with my neighbours. The coolies liked the idea but it was found that bazaar prices went up in proportion to the pay. This was long before the war. The point I wish to bring out is that increase of pay might mean a rise in bazaar prices to the coolie.

No. 32.—Mr. P. WOODLANDS, *Manager, Lackatoorah Tea Estate* :—

I have been 17 years in Tea in the Assam Valley, Cachar, the Dooars and Sylhet. I have been 6 years Manager of Lackatoorah and previously I was Assistant there. I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by coolies is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort. I do not think it desirable (though perhaps possible) to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the concessions into an increase of money wages. In answer to question No. 24, I should say that Rs. 8-6 for a man and Rs. 6-8 for a woman, in addition to the agreement bonus would be a decent living monthly wage. As to the difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 I should say that 3 annas a day was sufficient in 1913 but 4 annas 6 pies would be necessary in 1920. 1920 might be called a famine year; rice is cheaper now, but I think that 4 annas 6 pies is still necessary.

Up to the end of 1921 there was no increase in *haziras* in Lackatoorah, but for 1922 we are giving the agreement bonus as *bakshish* instead of as an advance. We always recovered it before.

In weighing leaf we deduct 33% of the actual leaf. Our plucking rate is about 10 annas per maund of green leaf. On very wet days we cut as much as 50%. This 33% represents loss in manufacture, but it is made up to the coolie in the course of the season. It might be possible to raise the task and to pay for actual leaf, but the coolies might be suspicious of a new practice. 44% of the adult male coolies have cultivation. They also make much money by the sale of fire-wood, fodder and milk.

I am in favour of retaining Act XIII, because it acts as a moral binding on the coolie and he would not abscond. The agreement very often encourages the coolie to abscond; he may take the agreement to-day and go away to-morrow with the advance.

It is desirable that the wages should be raised so that coolies (men and women) may earn enough. The rates have been raised to allow the earning of Rs. 8-6-0 and Rs. 6-8-0 if they work full time. In some places the coolies have no facilities for doing outside work and the wages are not sufficient to keep them comfortable. But with us coolies have ample opportunities.

If the coolie does not do his allotted task, he would be paid proportionately.

If a coolie wanted to leave the garden, I would let him do so; I would not put any pressure on him to remain. In other words, we must allow the coolie to please himself. If he is satisfied by doing half the allotted task, he gets half the wage.

Ordinarily a man finishes hoeing in 3 hours; but a good man would do it in 2½ hours; a man would have to work 6 hours a day to earn Rs. 8-6-0. An average man could work 8 hours a day for 6 days in the week.

CHANDICHERRA (HABIGANJ), 7TH JANUARY 1922.

[PRESIDENT, DR. WILLIAMS AND MR. WITHERS ABSENT.]

No. 33.—Dr. J. STEWART, *Medical Officer, Luskerpur Tea Company, etc.* :—

I am in charge of all the European gardens in Habiganj. I have been in the Luskerpur Valley since 1919. I was not in Tea before that, but have been in India from the year 1912.

Except for the influenza epidemic which has been raging during the past two years, and for the presence of *anchylostomiasis*, I consider the health of the gardens quite good. Hookworm is one of the main diseases prevalent on the gardens. Coolies are averse to becoming indoor patients and the result is that it is difficult to make the treatment systematic. It is difficult to treat coolies in their houses. Single men with no relatives on the garden come into hospital freely, but in a case where a man has a family, he is loath to leave his family alone in the house and come into hospital, and this is the main reason for their aversion to become patients. There are many who do not like hospital treatment at all, and such people can only be induced to take treatment by pointing to cases that have been cured in hospital. Generally there are no indoor patients in the hospitals.

Chandi-
cherra,
Habiganj.

I am not in favour of compulsion being exercised on the coolies to make them use hospitals. As a matter of fact it is very difficult to get people to undergo treatment although it is for their own benefit, except, as I have already said, by pointing to cases that have been cured in hospital. The latrine system is one way of preventing hookworm. It would also be possible to have a parade occasionally of the coolies to see how many people are affected. The Manager may be unaware of cases and I would call his attention to them. The trouble is about re-infection. We have the trench system on one garden and on another of the gardens there is a proper latrine constructed, but it is never used. The trench latrine is used on a very small scale; it is not an expensive arrangement and would be effective if adopted. I would advocate, as far as possible, the introduction of the trench system with a view to bringing about conditions that would tend to prevent re-infection.

Pregnant leave is granted freely by Managers, and in doubtful cases, is referred to the Doctor. Abortion is not prevalent to any extent on my gardens. I do not think it is excessive, as far as I know. It is possible that every case may not be brought to my notice.

On some gardens the system is in vogue of giving a bonus on the birth of a child. I think it would be very sound to give the bonus after, say, 12 months when the child is produced and found to have been kept in good health.

My previous experience in India has been in the Gold Fields of Madras and Mysore among the coolie population there. The coolies there were of the Telegu, Tamil and Malayalam type; they were housed by the employers. The housing system is comparatively better here. There the population was limited and the ordinary size of a coolie hut was 9' x 9'.

Generally speaking the coolies under my charge on the various gardens are living in health and reasonable comfort.

No. 34.—Mr. J. E. AIRD, *Manager, Deundi Tea Estate* :—

I am Manager of Deundi Tea Estate. I have been in Tea for the last 33 years. I have been in Cachar 4 years and 28 years in Deundi.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort.

It is possible, though not desirable, to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages. If such a conversion was effected, the coolies would not understand it.

For the past 5 years we have not been putting coolies under agreement. We have not had any difficulty in keeping up our labour force. Losses by death are generally made up by the young generation springing up. We give no bonuses. The present system has worked very well. There are hardly any absconders from the garden. Nearly every coolie has some land for cultivation, the income from which supplements his earnings. We work on the unit system. The plucking rate varies throughout the year; it may be 5 pounds for an anna, or 6 pounds, and sometimes 4 pounds also. Four annas is the usual *hazira*. Even if a coolie were to pluck not more than 5 pounds on any single day, he would still get one anna. The unit system is more advantageous than the other system from the point of view of the garden, as one can always check the books by the amount of work done. It is also advantageous from the coolie's point of view in that he would know what he was going to get when he was told the weighment. We do not have the ticket system; we pay in cash. We have never tried the ticket system.

The difference between the cost of living in 1913 and at the present moment may be approximately 50% rise, considering the fact that the price of rice has gone down very much now as compared with 1920.

I consider Rs. 8 a decent living monthly wage for a coolie at present prices. This sum would cover his food, clothing, and various other things required by him.

In addition, we give certain concessions such as housing which is not included in that sum. I should think the coolie is now adequately remunerated to enable him to live in health and reasonable comfort.

I have never done any recruiting and I have experienced no difficulty in maintaining an adequate labour force so that I consider the present system has worked quite well. We get coolies from all over the country. The source of supply however is *ex-tea-garden* coolies. I entirely agree that there would not be sufficient labour to go round if every garden adopted this system. Only one or two gardens could possibly continue working on this system. We have not been working with the agreement of late. I do not think the coolie is unhappy by being placed under agreement. There is absolutely no difference between a coolie under agreement and one not under agreement. Our coolies never ask for agreements and we do not give them. If the coolies want an advance, I give it to them and take a personal security for the money.

Coolies' houses require annual repairs, but the type of houses with tin roofs do not require much repairing, and half the number of houses on my garden have tin roofs. Only thatched roofs are repaired annually. The cost of repairing a single hut would amount to about Rs. 10 to Rs. 12. This sum is spent on posts, some of which may require renewing every year, and also on walls and roofs.

In view of the fact that the cost of living in 1920 was almost double that of 1913, we enabled coolies to tide over the difficulty by giving them facilities to earn more money and to do increased work; for instance, in allowing them to do lighter hoeing by not insisting on the quality of the work; also with regard to plucking. The rates for plucking alter continually; there is no standard rate. We have lessened the task for plucking also. So that in 1920 by making it easier for the coolie to earn a certain amount of money, the coolie was able to meet the increased cost of living. The only difference was in the cost of clothing. In 1920 they did not get the same amount of clothing as they were accustomed to before, but this deficiency was common all over the country.

No. 35.—Mr. H. GILBERT, *Manager, Chandicherra Tea Estate* :—

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It might be possible to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages, but considering the class of coolie we have, I do not think it is desirable to make such a conversion.

I would put the money value on a house at about Rs. 24 per annum for a family consisting of a man, wife and two children. Our coolies have land for rice and sugarcane cultivation; also *baris* for vegetable growing. No rent is charged. The money value of the rice land and sugarcane cultivation may be put at Rs. 8 to Rs. 10 a month. This applies only to the best coolies. I have given coolies clothing occasionally. Benefits, however, do vary from year to year. If the conditions are hard on labour, we find it expedient to help them, say, with rice, etc. If rice is dear, we assist them by purchasing and selling it at concession rates.

About 160 acres of land are held by 320 coolies and about 65% of the male adults hold cultivation.

We have agreements and I think they are necessary from the coolie's point of view. If a coolie gets a lump sum of money in his hand, he always invests it in the purchase of cows or anything like that.

I do not think agreements nowadays give us any hold over labour in the way of making them turn out for work.

So far as I am aware there have been no disturbances in this district. There were attempts to close *hats* but I had no difficulty in my own bazaar. I do not know if agitators did anything underhand, as nothing came to my notice.

I have lost a certain number of coolies; they were attracted to Tipperah by being promised higher rates. Most of the absconding took place in 1919. Coolies on my garden are quite contented with their lot. They look on the garden as their home.

Chandi-cherra, Habiganj. The labour for the construction of a coolie's hut would cost about Rs. 35 to Rs. 40 excluding materials.

The average value of the produce on land is about Rs. 150 to Rs. 200 per acre, but it varies a great deal according to price of rice and sugarcane.

No. 36.—Mr. P. CRUICKSHANK, *Manager, Amoo Tea Estate* :—

I have been in Tea 25 years, and in this Valley since 1914.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not consider it desirable that the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages, though it might be possible to do so.

I have not noticed any widespread feeling of unrest among the garden labour during the past few years.

The difference between the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 would probably be double.

In 1913 coolies earned Rs. 4-15-0 and in 1921 Rs. 6-15-8. In addition to the cash earnings rice is sold 20% cheaper than bazaar rates during times of high prices.

We have the agreement system. Advances of Rs. 12 and Rs. 10 are given and never recovered.

We have not taken any Act-XIII cases to court, but there have been cases where coolies have absconded with the advance. The agreement is for one year.

No deductions whatsoever are made for factory charges except for the basket and for wet leaf. If a woman brings in 25 pounds of actual leaf in a basket weighing 5 pounds, the leaf being perfectly dry, she would get credit for 15 pounds. The system has been in force for a long time. The coolie understands what deduction has been made. The wastage in manufacture does not affect the coolies in any way.

The entire coolie population on the garden is 3,300, of which 1,890 are working coolies. I do not know how many houses there are for the coolies, but the average would be about four coolies to a house.

The total cost of constructing a coolie's house including labour and material is Rs. 60. The annual repairs cost about Rs. 15. These expenses are shown separately under "Building and repairs to coolie lines."

Sufficient pregnant leave to ensure the health of the coolie is given and during that time we give half to three-quarter *haziras*. A bonus of Rs. 2 is given when a child is born.

I consider Rs. 8 each a decent living monthly wage for a man and a woman and Rs. 3 for a child.

We pay in cash and not in tickets.

No. 37.—Mr. C. S. CRESSWELL, *Manager, Teliapara Tea Estate* :—

I have been 22 years in Tea. I started in Cachar where I put in nine months. I then went to Chittagong for three years and then to the Dooars for eight years. The rest of my time has been spent in Sylhet and Cachar. I have been on my present garden, Teliapara, since 1914.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages, even though it may be possible to do so.

Chandi-cherra, Habiganj. I have not noticed any widespread unrest for the past few years. The only difference is with Tipperah. I have had no trouble except for one day when the coolies asked for increased pay; they wanted 8 annas for *haziras*. I explained and said that they were at liberty to earn as much as 8 annas, but that I would not double their wages. The garden bazaar was stopped by the order of the Tipperah non-co-operators and my coolies had to go into Tipperah to get their food. I reported the matter and after six to eight weeks the garden bazaar was again opened. My coolies never went on strike. There was some agitation such as non-co-operators attempting to stop the *bustee* bazaars, but so far as my garden was concerned, there was no trouble when the bazaar opened again.

My rates are 4 annas, 3 annas and 2 annas, with opportunities of earning more. Such opportunities are taken advantage of by the good working coolie of the Chota Nagpur type, e.g., the Munda and Oraon castes.

It would take, say, 3½ hours to 4 hours for a good working coolie to complete a single task or *hazira* in the rains, and 4½ to 5½ hours in the cold weather.

KALIGHAT, SOUTH SYLHET, 10TH JANUARY 1922.

[THE PRESIDENT AND MR. WITHERS ABSENT.]

No. 38.—Mr. C. MACLEOD, *Superintendent of Deanston Division of the Consolidated Tea and Lands Company, Ltd., Balisera* :—

I have been now 23 years in Tea in Sylhet. I have recently joined the Deanston Division. Previous to this, I was 7 years at Amrailcherra.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it desirable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages, as coolies would not appreciate it.

We have spent about Rs. 1,80,000 on recruiting during the last five years without any corresponding increase in the labour force. The reason why the labour force has not increased is because coolies have been induced to go to Independent Tipperah, and the main attraction is land for cultivation. The conditions on the gardens in Tipperah are certainly inferior to those obtaining on our gardens. There is not much done in the way of sanitation, wells, and medicines, and no sick *haziras* are given in Tipperah; nor are there rice concessions. I am sure that coolies would not go to Tipperah for garden work alone if the land for cultivation was not the real inducement.

I consider it essential that the European staff should be acquainted with the vernacular of the coolies. My Company gives a bonus of about Rs. 200 or Rs. 300 if the Assistants qualify in a couple of years; sometimes it is given earlier if the man is proficient.

The ordinary *hazira* wages of the labour force have not been increased between 1913 and 1919. The European and Indian staffs have received a slight increase, excluding the Manager whose pay has not been increased. With regard to the labourers, in order to mitigate the hardship in the cost of living, blankets and other things have been given at cheap rates and free to poor coolies.

During times of high prices we were selling Burma rice at the rate of about Rs. 5-11-0 or Rs. 5-12-0 as against Rs. 8 in the local bazaars; country rice supplies were short and dear. I think the coolies prefer country rice to Burma rice. I would not say that Rs. 5-11-0 and Rs. 5-12-0 were dear rates to the coolie on an average, but these rates were perhaps slightly dearer than those of 1913. There was a system started before the war of giving a bonus to coolies who did 24 days' work in the month. To begin with, we insisted on a man earning a full *hazira* for 24 days. We went on that basis. Then we reduced it to earnings of three annas a day or if a woman earned two and a half annas, she would get the bonus. Also if a good man was 'seely' and did half *hazira*, we overlooked it and paid him the bonus. This was in addition to the agreement bonus.

Kallghat.

I never suggested any measures for ameliorating the lot of my labour force during the past five years for the simple reason that I considered the coolies were amply paid for what they did.

The rates are—men 3 annas 9 pies, women 3 annas, and children 2 annas 3 pies to 2 annas 6 pies. The rate for men has been raised to 4 annas recently in order to equalise the pay on gardens round about.

We have the ticket system.

I consider Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 6-8-0 for a woman a decent living monthly wage. This is inclusive of the agreement bonus, medical attendance and housing, but exclusive of rice concessions. This sum includes direct and indirect income from the garden as well as outside it.

In the case of those who have no cultivation 6 annas for men and 5 annas for women would have to be earned daily and this and more can always be earned if *ticca* work, which is always available, is done.

We do not recover the agreement bonus.

The task for plucking is 16 to 20 pounds. It has altered since 1913. In 1913 it is used to be 28 to 32 pounds. The reduction is due partly to finer plucking, but has been made mainly on account of altered conditions.

The standard deduction for wet leaf is 10 per cent. The yield per acre in Amrail-cherra is 6 maunds.

We estimate four maunds of green leaf for one maund of tea, and if good leaf was always plucked this would be sufficient, but a considerable amount of coarse, useless leaf is invariably plucked and this has to be picked out and thrown away; consequently we have to deduct a little more in weightment than would be the case if sound leaf was always plucked. The plucking rate for green leaf in Deanston is 13 annas per maund.

Pregnant women get three months' leave with half pay; it is always given. In addition they get Rs. 3 when a child is born and Rs. 2 at the end of a year. I think it is a sound system as it draws the mother's attention to the necessity of looking after her child.

We have agreements. An advance of Rs. 12 to men and Rs. 10 to women is given. I have had one or two cases against absconding coolies, but got no satisfaction.

I think the agreement is necessary. If you lend a coolie a sum of money he would not look upon it as an honourable obligation as the agreement bonus is looked upon. Cases of default are taken to the criminal court. I am inclined to have the coolies tried in the criminal courts and not in the civil courts. I have no idea of the coolie's mind as to whether he would prefer to go to the criminal court or to the civil court. There is no agreement system in Tipperah as far as I know. There are also coolies on my garden without agreements. The reason why they do not take the agreement is perhaps because they have their own cultivation or business to attend to. A coolie not under agreement is morally obliged to turn out to work whenever required owing to the fact that he resides on the garden. I would not refuse the monthly bonus to those coolies who have private interests, *e.g.*, cows, cultivation, etc., to attend to, but they would have to work in the same way as agreement coolies.

Many of the coolies who went to Tipperah have returned; and I am sure more would return, but for police and zamindars' interference.

No. 39.—Mr. J. W. HALLAN, Manager, Phulcherra Division, Consolidated Tea and Lands Company :—

I have been in Tea since the year 1902, and at Phulcherra from 5th May 1921.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It is not desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages, though to do so would not be impossible.

The total population of the Phulcherra Division is 1.88 working coolies per acre for Phulcherra garden, and 1.34 working coolies per acre for Kakiacherra garden.

Kallghat.

The outturn is approximately 6 maunds per acre. Owing to abundance of labour it is not possible to give *ticca* for major works; the coolies have to depend mainly on the *haziras*. Yet the garden is very popular and there are no absconders. The rate given to men has recently been increased from 3 annas 9 pies to 4 annas; for women the rate is 3 annas; children from this month will get a *hazira* of 2 annas 6 pies as against 2 annas 3 pies previously given.

There are 163 acres of rice land held by the coolies inside the grant and this amount is held by 264 tenants. I charge 8 and 9 annas a *kear*. I have this year allowed the coolies to open out sugarcane on the *tilas* and waste land, and am not charging any rent because they have jungle to cut. *Gur* is very expensive at present and coolies make it from sugarcane and sell it. There is plenty of work to be had for the garden coolies. Coolies like to serve on my garden because discipline is necessarily lax and they like to be free. I am in a position to let coolies remain idle in the lines. Owing to my large force, I can afford to be very lenient in the way of granting leave; the coolies in my garden have plenty of freedom, *i.e.*, time to follow their own pursuits.

There are certain other advantages, *e.g.*, plenty of land for cultivation, good drinking water, a running stream for washing purposes, and also the close proximity of a good bazaar (Srimangal); the granting of leave freely is a distinct attraction to the coolies. My garden is certainly a very healthy one. It has the advantage of a low death-rate, a good water-supply and comparative liberty to the coolies to do what they please. I should think that the Phulcherra labour force is the largest per acre in the Balisera Valley.

Every opportunity is afforded to my coolies of earning as much *ticca* as they like in neighbouring gardens belonging to this Company.

We have agreements. On the Phulcherra garden alone, we have 610 contracts. None of my coolies go to Independent Tipperah. On the contrary, I have regularly to refuse work to outsiders who are desirous of coming in to settle. I don't know from where they come.

I consider Rs. 7-8-0 for a man and Rs. 6-8-0 for a woman working on the garden a decent living monthly wage.

One *hazira* would take 4 or 5 hours to complete both in the case of a man as well as a woman. At present they usually go out about 9-15 A.M., and finish between 2 and 3 P.M. The rest of the day is their own to do what they please.

There has been trouble on account of agitators. There was one *hartal*. Except for that day the coolies never struck work. On the *hartal* day when they struck work, they made absurd demands. They wanted that no Europeans should speak to the women, that no *balus* should speak directly to them and that everything should be done through their own sardars. The agitators made them understand that it was more respectable to be treated in this manner. Srimangal was a hot-bed of agitation. A meeting was held at Srimangal and then the coolies came to me with their demands, which of course I had to refuse. There was no demand for higher pay. They are now perfectly quiet and perfectly satisfied as far as I know.

There are about 250 coolies on Phulcherra garden who are not under agreement, and I do not know the reason why they do not wish to enter into an agreement.

I charge for land 3 annas a *kear*. I am in favour of retaining the agreement system. For one thing it gives the coolie a handsome bonus once a year in actual cash, and for another it gives the garden a certain hold on the coolie, inasmuch as if he were to abscond he could be brought back. It is desirable but not necessary that we should have coolies under agreement. I would prefer taking cases under the Act to the criminal court and not to the civil court, but I do not like coolies to go to jail. Criminal proceedings have a greater deterrent effect and under Act XIII one can extradite from Tipperah.

If a woman were to bring in 25 pounds of actual leaf in a basket weighing 5 pounds, leaf being perfectly dry, I would pay her for 25 pounds. I deduct up to 10 % for wet leaf. All leaf is bulked and weighed and we count 90 lbs. for every 100 lbs. of leaf, 10 % being deducted for the factory.

Our estimate is 15 annas per maund of green leaf; and the actual cost in 1921 was 14 annas 6 pies. Three annas for 20 pounds was the maximum task last year. One woman was paid 5 *haziras*, *i.e.*, 15 annas one morning.

My coolies are at all times allowed to earn *ticca* on other gardens, but the offer is seldom taken advantage of.

No. 40.—Mr. R. T. FRASER, *Manager, Sathgaon Tea Estate, Looksan Tea Company* :—

I have now been 34 years in Tea and in Sathgaon all along.

As far as my garden is concerned, I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it is desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages, though it might be possible to do so.

In my opinion five annas a day for a man and four annas for a woman is sufficient to keep them in reasonable comfort, provided they work 24 days in the month; this is in addition to free housing, medical attendance and the agreement yearly bonus and assuming that rice is selling at Rs. 5 a maund; on this a man can maintain 2 non-working children.

We give an agreement bonus which is not refunded. As regards the rates of wages, Government laid down the rates of Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 a month when rice was selling at Rs. 3 a maund. The difference of wages between then and now meets the present day higher cost of living.

No reasonable Manager would, in my opinion, refuse to give a coolie leave to cultivate his rice land if he could possibly arrange to do so.

The incitement of agitators has created a stimulus to insubordination amongst the coolies. It would, however, be unfair to say that the agitators were answerable for all garden disturbances, but I would certainly say that they aggravated the conditions. As far as we are concerned, there have been no disturbances.

The proportion of adult coolies under agreement and those not under agreement would be half and half.

It is impossible to say why certain coolies do not take agreements. As a matter of fact they may take an agreement one year, and not do so the next year. I think they take agreements whenever they are in need of money.

No action is taken against absconding coolies in the criminal courts. Act XIII has been a dead letter on my estate. I would have no objection to doing away with the contract system, if something else were done to make the coolie understand that he was under a moral obligation to work. Either the Indian Contract Act or Act XIII would suit equally well.

The ordinary dimensions of a coolie's hut would be 18' x 12', and the labour for its construction would amount to about Rs. 9-8-0 exclusive of materials. The entire cost of a hut would come to Rs. 12. Huts are renewed every two years. Repairs effected in the second year would cost about Rs. 5 after which the hut is re-built. The average cost per hut may be estimated at about Rs. 12 *per annum* for two apartments accommodating two couples. There are about 90 superficial feet floor space per family; a large family would require the two apartments. The average cost per adult is about Rs. 3 *per annum* which represents the actual concession for the house.

No. 41.—Mr. JAMES A. MINTO, *Manager, Mazdehee Tea Estate, Naraincherra* :—

I have been 16 years in Tea, and at Naraincherra since December 1919.

About the end of May last year there was some trouble on my garden when the coolies were put up by agitators to demand extra pay and if it was not granted to go on strike. They struck work for two days and ultimately went back to work without obtaining their demands. Three agitators were convicted for trespass. The strike was the work of outside agitation entirely.

Between the years 1913 and 1920 there has been no increase in *haziras*. The rates are 3 annas 9 pies for men, 3 annas for women, and 2 annas 3 pies for children. When prices were high, we helped the coolies with cheap rice and increased the possibilities of earning more *ticca*. We always sold rice at Rs. 5 a maund to the coolies; we never sold it at a higher rate. The present bazaar rate is Rs. 4-8-0; this is due to the fact that there has been a bumper crop.

Assuming rice is sold at 8 seers for the rupee, I consider Rs. 7 for a man and Rs. 6 for a woman a decent monthly wage which would enable them to live comfortably. This is in addition to medical attendance and free housing.

A coolie bringing in 25 lbs. actual leaf is credited with 20 lbs. For factory charges 12% deduction is made, but this is not debited against the plucker. Kailghat.

The average yield per acre for the last five years was 3½ maunds of tea. The plucking *nirikh* is 20 pounds for 3 annas, but if the average on a day's plucking is, say, 16 lbs., we fix 16 lbs. as a *nirikh*.

No. 42.—Dr. HUGH S. SMITH, *Medical Officer, Balisera Valley Estates Consolidated Tea and Lands Company, Ltd.* :—

I am in charge of James Finlay and Company's gardens. I have been just one year in the Balisera Valley. I came out to India in 1894. I spent ten years in Bishnath, and was in Mangaldai and Golaghat for a time.

I consider the coolies of Assam are a better class as compared with coolies of these parts. I daresay a coolie going from here to Assam would be accepted, but he would not be considered a first-class worker compared with first-class labour there. Since my coming out to India conditions have improved a great deal in the way of accommodation, hospitals and supply of medicines, and more care is taken of the coolies now.

In my opinion the doctor babu here on Rs. 60, who has passed the Third Board examination, would do better than the highly skilled man brought up from the Calcutta Medical College, as he would be able to look after the coolies better being intimately acquainted with them. Hookworm is no worse here than in Assam. Generally, coolies bring the disease with them on their first arrival. As regards malaria, I think very few people escape it even in their own country. There is not a large proportion of spleen among the adult coolies on the gardens, but children are affected to a greater degree. There have been epidemics of cholera on the gardens and they have usually been traced to the *bustees*. Conditions are better now than they used to be. Latrines have been tried on some gardens, but the trouble has been that sweepers are scarce. For instance, when latrines are blown down, it is difficult to get the place repaired. In Bishnath we introduced the trench system some years ago, but the coolie did not like it. Coolies are always afraid to go out any distance in the night to ease themselves. There is thus danger of pollution of the *kutchu* wells round their huts. Coolies like these wells. To fill them in might be resented as an interference with the liberty of the subject.

A pregnant bonus of Rs. 5 is given and I think it is very sound. Abortion is very difficult to trace and Managers can do nothing with regard to its prevention.

LUNGLA, SOUTH SYLHET, 13TH JANUARY 1922.

Lungla.

[PRESIDENT AND MR. WITHERS ABSENT.]

No. 43.—Mr. L. W. WARNER, *Manager, Lungla Tea Estate* :—

I have been a little over 24 years in Tea, of which 16 years have been spent in the Lungla Tea Company.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort. At present good coolies earn about 4 annas a day and bad coolies from 2 annas 3 pies to 3 annas.

In my opinion it is not possible to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

During the last 5 years about Rs. 62,000 has been spent in recruiting. There has been no increase in the labour force during that period; on the contrary there has been a decrease to the extent of half what it was in 1918. I have lost approximately 1,000 working coolies. About 800 absconded into Independent Tipperah during 1919-20. I have been told by those who returned that the reason they absconded was that they had gone *pagal* (mad). I however understand that they were offered higher pay but I do not know if that is a fact. Coolies have a good deal of land for cultivation amounting to about 800 acres inside the grant and this is one of the main reasons they don't care to earn more. There is not much *khet* land outside the garden. We charge rent at the rate of Re. 1 for the first *kear* and 12 annas for each additional *kear*. The actual rent in 1920 was Rs. 628 only.

Lungla. My coolies went on strike for 3 weeks last April, after they had been preached to and incited to strike by non-co-operators in villages adjacent to the garden. They asked for the same rates as were given at Kajaldhara and Karimpur. The hoeing *hazira* was bigger than I was giving but this was because the tasks were heavier. I offered to pay the men the same rates as on other gardens, but when they came to know what the nature of the hoeing task was on those gardens, they refused the higher rates offered by me. I allowed them to remain on strike, but when they returned to work they got no concessions. They have been working quite satisfactorily since May last. The *haziras* have been raised from 1918.

In 1918 the cost per acre for hoeing was Rs. 2-4-0 and in 1920 it was Rs. 4.

The rates for daily *haziras* are 3 annas for a man, 2 annas 3 pies for a woman and 1 anna 6 pies for a working child.

I consider Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7 for a woman a decent living monthly wage.

Between 1913 and 1920 the difference in the cost of living might be put at 33%. In 1920 rice was certainly very dear; at the present moment it is cheaper. The rise in the cost of living at present is very slight.

In plucking, the actual weight of the basket is deducted *plus* 1 or 2 lbs. additional to make up for loss on plucking early and late in the year when leaf is scarce. A separate deduction is made for wet leaf, according to the amount of leaf in the basket and degree of moisture.

At the beginning of the season there is no plucking task, and at the end, the task is considerably reduced as the leaf becomes scarcer. When engaged on other works the coolies are allowed to do what they wish after finishing their tasks.

In the plucking season a good plucker can do her full task in two to three hours.

It is a fact that some gardens are more popular with labour than others. The reason for this is that they are more healthy and contain large tracts of rice land which is given to the coolies; fuel is easily obtainable, and there are good bazaars in the locality. My coolies are all free labourers and they can go whenever they like.

There are about 1,000 head of cattle and about 40 odd carts pulled by buffaloes. The value of a buffalo varies from Rs. 40 to 60. There are goats to be numbered by the hundred, and about 150 pigs. About 15 maunds of milk are sold partly in the *bustees* and partly on the garden. There is no lack of rice on my garden. I think the coolies sell rice if they know they can get a good price for it outside. We have about 1,000 maunds of Burma rice in stock and none of it has been sold. I have never sold rice at more than Rs. 5 a maund. I bought about Rs. 3,000 worth of cloth at the coolies' request and only about Rs. 1,000 worth has been taken by them, and the remainder left on my hands. The water-supply is quite satisfactory. There are approximately 200 *kutcha* wells. We have no latrines.

I give half pay during pregnant leave according to the advice of the Medical Officer. I also give a bonus of Rs. 2 when a child is born and Re. 1 periodically till the mother has had Rs. 12. As a matter of fact they seem to be so well off that they seldom come for the balance of the bonus. I think the system is sound, because it is an inducement for them to look after their children better.

No. 44.—Mr. R. MORTIMORE, Manager, Kajaldhara Tea Estate:—

I have been 21 years in Tea and all the time in Sylhet. I have been Manager for 10 years. I was in the Chargola Valley for about 16 years.

I consider the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it is possible to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages, and even if it was possible, I would not consider it desirable to do so.

I have had no trouble whatsoever on my garden.

There have been a few cases of absconding into Hill Tipperah.

The rates for daily *haziras* are 4 annas, 3 annas and 2 annas for men, women and children, respectively. Before my arrival the rates were 3 annas 6 pies, 3 annas, and 1 anna 6 pies.

In my opinion Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7 for a woman is a decent living monthly wage for the coolies, in addition to the agreement bonus.

The *ticca* rate for plucking is Re. 1-4-0 per maund of green leaf. The cost of plucking for the whole year round would come to about a pice a pound.

If a woman brought in 25 pounds of dry leaf she would be paid for the actual weight, i.e., 25 lbs., except the weight of the basket and of the scales, the former weighing roughly 7 to 8 lbs. and the latter anything between 16 and 20 pounds. At the beginning of the year the coolies go out without any plucking rate at all. We pay *hazira* up to 25 pounds and over that *ticca*. The rate never alters even in the height of the season. Some of the good pluckers earn from Rs. 20 to Rs. 24 a month, probably with 2 children to help each woman. For moisture 2 pounds are deducted, that is to say, if a woman brought in 20 pounds of wet leaf she would be paid for 18 pounds only.

There is a bazaar near the garden. Rice sells at Rs. 4-8-0 to Rs. 5 a maund, I think. Last year at this time I think it was selling at Rs. 7-8-0 or Rs. 8. The rates in the bazaar are reported to me by a *babu* and a record is kept.

Fine plucking has altered the task, and with a reduced task it is possible for a coolie to earn as much in a given time as was the case when coarser plucking was the practice.

There are numerous cattle. In fact every coolie has a cow and non-workers have cows as well. A lot of milk does leave the garden to be sold in the bazaar.

It is certainly not my experience that increased wages encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours. On the contrary if a coolie is paid 6 annas a day and he knows he can fill his stomach on 4 annas, he is apt to do no more than 4 annas work.

In 1920 I made a loss by selling rice at concession rates. I sold it at 7 and 8 seers to the rupee. There are about 700 coolies under agreement. The remaining coolies do not like to take agreements because they are well-to-do and do not need the bonus.

In 1921 the estimate of expenditure for labour was considerably reduced. I worked up to that provision more or less by cutting off certain items such as buildings and other things.

The birth-rate is 40 *per mille* and the death-rate 7 *per mille*.

I very occasionally employ outside labour.

No. 45.—Mr. J. ELDER, Manager, Chatlapore Tea Estate, Alinagar Tea Company:—

I have been 19½ years in Tea and all my time in Sylhet. I have been Manager of Chatlapore Tea Estate for 5 years now.

At the present time I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It is neither to the interests of the garden nor to the benefit of the coolies that the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages.

There has been no unrest whatever on my garden. There are no villages round about my garden.

I have been suffering a good deal by enticement of my coolies into Tipperah which is bounded on two sides by my garden. This was in 1920 and in the beginning of 1921 when about 80 coolies went into Tipperah to work on gardens newly opened out. The inducements are usually those which new gardens invariably give, i.e., a bonus and a high rate of pay. But a good many of those 80 coolies came back, because the gardens closed down and also because the coolies did not find things so promising as they were made to understand they would be.

For a fixed *hazira* I pay 3 annas both to men and women, and in addition they can earn as much *ticca* as they like.

I think Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7 for a woman is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort assuming that rice is selling at Rs. 5 a maund; this includes income from cultivation and *ticca*.

The difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 may be put at 33%. In view of the present price of rice, I would put the difference at the present moment at about 25% roughly.

Within the last 5 years I have not increased the rates, but I have reduced the task on some works, *e.g.*, plucking. It takes the same time to do fine plucking as it would coarse plucking. It would take a woman 4 to 6 hours to do a fixed task of 16 pounds. Some of the best women could do $2\frac{1}{2}$ and sometimes 3 tasks a day, *i.e.*, pluck 48 pounds on a 16-pound task.

In a normal year the average yield is 10 maunds per acre.

The deductions in leaf are 25% for dry leaf and $33\frac{1}{3}\%$ for wet leaf. If a woman brings in 25 lbs. of dry leaf she would be credited with 18 lbs.

In 1921 my actual cost of plucking was Rs. 3-13-0 per maund of manufactured tea, as against my estimate of Rs. 3. The shortage was slightly over 1,000 maunds. In that case the coolies got more because of finer plucking.

The task for hoeing has not been altered since 1913, except for deep hoeing, which was reduced from 15 *nals* to 12 *nals* per *hazira*. Deep hoeing is done once a year; light hoeing four or five times. In 1913 the *ticca* for light hoeing was 4 annas and so far it has not been altered. There has been no alteration with regard to *ticca* for deep hoeing.

We have 400 acres of rice land available for cultivation in the garden, of which 360 acres have been taken up by 742 coolies at an average rent of 8 annas 5 pies per *kear*. Roughly speaking, about 45% of my adult male coolies have land for cultivation. I did not realize any garden rent in 1921.

We give pregnant leave as circumstances require, and after birth from 3 to 6 months; 8 annas weekly is paid for 3 months to the mother, and if the mother is in poor health then she is paid 2 annas 3 pies daily. There is no separate bonus paid apart from this daily or weekly allowance.

It is the practice when rice is dear to sell it to the coolies at concession rates. We have been selling rice at an average price of Rs. 5 a maund.

We take agreements; we do not recover the bonus money that is paid to the coolies.

We have not had very many Act XIII cases. Taking into consideration the number of warrants and the number of people involved, I think we have lost by running cases. All this trouble has been due to coolies absconding into Tipperah. It might have a salutary influence on other coolies. I am in favour of retaining the agreement for disciplinary purposes, as if we do not have it, people may go anywhere and do anything they like. For the sake of keeping the peace and also retaining labour, I think it is necessary. If the Act was repealed I do not think the old coolies would go away; perhaps the new coolies might go.

A decrease in the consumption of liquor is noticeable since I came to Chatlapore. The average coolie looks after his family before venturing to spend any money on drink.

No. 46.—Mr. F. W. WILSON, *Manager, Phooltollah Tea Estate* :—

I consider the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It is neither possible nor desirable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

The type of coolie recruited at the present day is much better than ten years ago. In my opinion rather better types of coolies go to Assam as compared with Sylhet.

We gave 25% increase of wages to the labour force in the beginning of 1920.

We pay in tickets. The daily *hazira* for men and women now is 3 annas 9 pies; it used to be 3 annas before.

As regards a decent living monthly wage for a coolie, I have a babu clerk with 40 years' experience, and he tells me that Rs. 7 for both men and women is a decent wage, assuming that rice is selling at 10 or 11 seers to the rupee. But a man with a large family would require more. If the price of rice rose to Rs. 5 or Rs. 6 then Rs. 7 would not be enough.

The rate for plucking is 12 annas per maund. Our estimate is 12 annas a maund. The average yield in a normal year is 10 maunds per acre. I am satisfied if I can get one maund of tea out of 4 maunds of leaf plucked.

In 1920 the average coolie earned Rs. 5-7-9 a month.

It would take about 4 hours to complete the daily task; the rest of the day would be available for cultivation.

Eighty acres within the grant are cultivated by 200 coolies and 40 acres outside are cultivated by 100 coolies. Rent is charged at the rate of Re. 1 a *kear*.

A bonus of Rs. 5 is given one year after the child's birth. Some of the coolies are given to drinking and spend a good deal of their money on it.

At the present moment our wages here are the same as they were when I was in Assam 10 years ago.

If a higher wage is given on another garden, it might be assumed that the wages are higher there because rice is dearer, or that the Company could afford to pay higher rates, or that the tasks were bigger.

My garden is about a mile away from the Tipperah border and I have had a good deal of absconding, but since last cold weather it has not been so frequent. Coolies are simple, ignorant people and are very easily misled, and this is how they are induced to go into Independent Tipperah.

No. 47.—Mr. E. B. SHAW, I.C.S., *Subdivisional Officer, Maulvi Bazar* :—

I have been Subdivisional Officer of Maulvi Bazar for the last 9 months.

In April last year there was the Lungla strike; in early May there were strikes in the whole of the Dhalai Valley, save on Madhupur and Kantabheel gardens. There was a strike in Ghazipore for 2 days in April and towards the end of May and in the beginning of June there were strikes in Kalighat, Phulcheria, Jagcheria and several other gardens. On the Kaliti garden there was a strike on or about the 20th of September. There was a small strike at Patrakhola about a week ago. These were the only ones of any importance and in addition there have been small strikes in other places as well.

As to the reasons for these strikes, I may say that the Lungla strike was undoubtedly due to a big non-co-operation meeting held on 1st April at Tilagaon. On the 1st May there was a meeting at Adampur in the Dholai Valley followed by another about 3 or 4 days later. The result was that on the 2nd or 3rd May nearly all the gardens in that Valley went on strike, and the agitators would appear to have been responsible for this. The Ghazipore strike which took place on the 13th of April might have been the result of the political meeting. Mr. Ballantine and myself went there but we found nothing underhand going on. Somebody would appear to have put the idea into their heads of striking for more pay. At the time of the railway strike Srimangal had a gang of non-co-operators, so that it is significant that the only gardens who struck were those within 4 miles from Srimangal, *i.e.*, from Jagcheria down to Kalighat. Naraincheria also struck because there people went to the bazaar and told the *busteewalas* not to supply rice; I convicted those people under section 107, Criminal Procedure Code. As a result of their machinations the coolies were unable to get any food and therefore went on strike for about 3 or 4 days. The method adopted by these people towards the end of May was to get *busteewalas* to close down their bazaars in contrast to the previous method of holding a meeting and then getting coolies to strike. They had apparently given up the method of direct contact with the coolies by getting at them through the *busteewalas*. The Patrakhola strike was, I believe, due to 3 or 4 malcontents living on the garden. I did not go into the matter very much as the strike was over by the time I got there.

As regards the two strikes in Kaliti, I went to Kaliti on or about 21st September in response to a wire from the Manager. Mr. Ballantine was also there and we both talked to the coolies and certain sardars. I also saw Thakur Singh, the Government propaganda agent. I got the people together and with the Manager held a meeting with the help of Thakur Singh at 2 o'clock. I asked the coolies if they had any definite grievances to put forward; they said some things against the *kerani* babu, but I had nothing definite to go on. There was a *fakir*, one Mustan Shah, whose case it was my intention to try at the time, but I was advised not to hold the trial on the garden. Originally he had been run in for criminal trespass in Kaliti for going round in June or July and preaching a strike. There was a case against him but the coolies would not come forward with any evidence. He was ultimately convicted under section 110, Criminal Procedure Code.

Lungla.

I talked to coolies at several places but could not get anything definite out of them. Their complaint was that they were not getting enough to feed themselves. All the coolies I met looked quite well fed. There are a few grievances put up such as cattle pounds and distribution of land for cultivation on the gardens and things which a Manager is in a better position than myself to determine.

Reports were submitted to the Local Government regarding the strikes and I submitted my reports to the Deputy Commissioner.

The strikes at Lungla and in the Dholai Valley I would put down entirely to non-co-operation. In the Balisera strikes non-co-operators were not so very much in evidence and at Kaliti and Jagcherra they were not definitely to the fore. Steps have been taken by the Government to stop the activities of the non-co-operators, inasmuch as most of the fiery speakers had orders served on them under section 144, Criminal Procedure Code, and several of them are now in jail. At any rate it is up to the Managers to prevent volunteers from entering gardens.

It is my general opinion as the result of talks with planters that coolies might be better off. I have occasionally seen cases of new coolies who seem to be badly nourished but this is the exception. A Sub-Deputy Collector is responsible for reporting the current prices of rice, but I do not know how he sets about it. With reference to question 17, I can say nothing definite about gardens in general.

No. 48.—Mr. M. BATHER, Joint Manager, Rangicherra and Muraricherra Tea Estates :—

I have been 18 years in Tea—all the time in Sylhet. I have been 6½ years in Rangicherra.

I certainly prefer to increase the pay of my present force rather than resort to recruiting. I consider that the money now being spent on recruiting should be devoted towards increasing the wages of the labour force already on the gardens, and though for the start this method would not meet with any appreciable degree of success, yet I am certain it would pay in the long run when the labour force became free. I consider 8 annas a day for a man and 5 to 6 annas for a woman a wage sufficient to attract labour from the country to the tea-gardens. Recruiting, so far as free labour is concerned, is certainly necessary, but there should be no recruiting where the agreement system obtains. My policy is to pay high wages and keep everybody free so that there would be no necessity to pay coolies' fares in order to bring them from their own country. I am in favour of recruiting being stopped by introducing legislation.

My best coolies earn 6 annas a day. If recruiting is abolished I would make it up to 8 annas. None of my coolies are under agreement now. I stopped the agreement system since April because I had heard that agreements were going to be abolished. I have since had coolies coming up to me for agreements and I refused to give them; they did not leave the garden on that account.

The *hazira* rate is 4 annas, but I am paying 6 annas for 20 *nals* of light hoeing. For deep hoeing of 6 inches my maximum *hazira* is 6 annas and my minimum *hazira* is what they earn. If the coolie earns the maximum I give him a bonus of 1 anna 6 pies, i.e., 7 annas 6 pies a week; this is in lieu of the agreement bonus, and is an inducement for them to do the full task as I am short of labour. I give a bonus for each additional *hazira*. A first class coolie would earn as much as 3 *haziras* a day. He cannot do more than 20 *nals* in a day. I pass 6 inches as deep hoeing.

I consider Rs. 7 a month for a man, Rs. 6 for a woman and Rs. 4-2-0 for a child a decent living monthly wage sufficient to keep them in health and reasonable comfort. This is the minimum.

At first I found coolies earning just sufficient for their needs and going to their houses, and when I taught them how to earn more money they took the cue. Coolies need to be encouraged by the Managers occasionally to work.

The estimate for plucking this year is Re. 1-2-0 per maund of green leaf. The average *nirikh* nowadays is 18 pounds; the maximum 24.

I am in favour of dispensing with agreements entirely. I do not say that coolies who work under Act-XIII agreement are working under a sort of slavery; but I do think that they are not as free as they might be. For instance they should be allowed more leave, and they should not be coerced into working. Of course if a man refused to do work on a tea-garden and persistently behaved in such a manner, I would turn him off the garden.

I have started a Savings Bank Account. My coolies put in 4 annas a month; it is just to try and show them how to earn more and also how to save a little. I expect them to put in 25 % of their income. I have at the present moment started with the boys and the whole labour force want to join, but funds are very short and I shall have to pay a lot of interest. In the next year's estimate I expect to put down Rs. 2,000 or Rs. 1,500 as interest. The scheme has been in operation for 3 months now and I am making an experiment with it. I could not say that I would recommend it to others as it has only been recently started. At the present moment I keep the money. I would have no objection to the money being held by a bank composed of coolies. I have not yet made up my mind to put the money into any bank.

I have 327 coolies and there are about 350 acres of land cultivated by them, i.e., rather less than one coolie per acre. It is possible that all the circumstances that suit my garden might not suit other gardens, but I do think the banking account would suit other gardens equally well. I have to put a fair amount of pressure on my coolies to get the work done. I pay high rates because I am short of labour.

I made no profit in 1920 nor do I expect to make any in 1921.

My gardens are under the Court of Wards and I am responsible to Government.

No. 49.—Mr. A. BROWN, Manager, Rajnagar Tea Company :—

I have been 31 years in Tea and at Rajnagar all the time.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It is neither possible nor desirable to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

The sporadic nature of the troubles that have occurred are chiefly due to the agitator working on the ignorant mind of the coolie, through his religion, and through tempting him with promises of food without work and land now under tea to be given him to cultivate sugarcane on, and such things.

I have had no strikes on my gardens, but from February to June last there was a nasty feeling among the coolies. The people did not talk to me so freely as before.

Roughly speaking the difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920 would be about 33%.

The cash earnings of a coolie on my garden have increased since 1913. The average pay in 1913 was Rs. 5-7-9 and in 1919 Rs. 6-0-6, exclusive of *ticca*. The *ticca* in 1919 was Rs. 6,715; in 1920 Rs. 8,426. The rates of wages are 3 annas for men and women and 1 anna 6 pies for small children; and 2 annas 3 pies for big children; the only rise in wages being in the case of women who received 2 annas 3 pies in 1913.

Though the plucking task has been altered, fine plucking takes a bit longer to finish than coarse plucking.

The working population on the garden including children is 1,050.

Our budget allotment for labour was considerably reduced in 1921 but I had to spend more than the sum allotted.

I have not had many coolies absconding to Tipperah, as the majority are all settled coolies. I had a certain number of unsatisfactory coolies whom I repatriated during the end of 1920, by paying their fares back to their country. I did not want to keep such people and I also wanted to reduce expenditure.

There are about 450 acres of land for cultivation distributed among 640 coolies; of this area 200 acres are rice land and 250 acres sugarcane cultivation.

I charge rent at 4 annas a *bigha* inside the grant. I have charged more at times and the coolies willingly paid it.

I dropped the agreement system at the end of 1920 as I could not afford it but started it again in 1921. Of course I explained my reasons to the coolies and when things improved they asked me to start the agreements again. I do not think the coolies consider it *sharm* to take agreements. I have never run a case under Act XIII.

No. 50.—Dr. R. B. ABRAHAM, *Medical Officer, Lungla (Sylhet) Tea Company, Limited* :—

I am Medical Officer in charge of the gardens belonging to the Lungla Company and others. There are altogether 20 gardens under my charge. I have been in Lungla for 8 years. I was in the Happy Valley for 3 years; also in Tarapore one year. I think the gardens under my charge are very healthy. The diseases that are prevalent are malarial fever—not severe to any extent—and hookworm which is extensive. Coolies bring disease with them from their country. For instance, they come up with hookworm and with large spleens. The recruits of two years ago brought the infection with them from the famine-stricken areas and have been suffering from its effects. I think as a general rule coolies have markedly improved by coming here, as within 6 months of their advent I have found them improving in health. Once the coolies become acclimatised they settle down just like old coolies, say, within 18 months.

The birth-rate is very high, the average of this district being 8 births to one death.

The water-supply is being improved. There are no latrines at present but on my recommendation Directors have agreed to consider proposals to institute latrines.

I think the coolies are living in reasonable comfort and are well fed.

I do not think coolies suffered during the recent economic distress except that they received imported rice which is probably not so good for them.

There has been no beri-beri. We have no indoor wards in this valley except during times of epidemics. Dysentery cases are not segregated, as in this district dysentery is not epidemic. The coolie is rather loath to go into hospital as he has nobody to look after his property and family.

I do not think there would be a marked improvement in the health of the coolies if there was indoor accommodation. Our coolies are constitutionally strong and can resist disease. For instance, during the last 8 years we have pushed the prevention and treatment of hookworm to a great extent and have encouraged coolies to take to treatment, with the result that even without the existence of latrines, the treatment alone has brought about a great improvement. Generally a coolie first develops dysentery or some other serious disease and then *anchylostomiasis* predominates and he suffers.

No. 51.—Mr. R. PRINGLE, *Manager, Doloi Tea Company* :—

I have now been over 26 years in Tea. I have been on my present garden since 1913. I was 3 years in the Baroora Tea Company and nearly 15 years in the Patra-khola Tea Company.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort, provided they work regularly.

Though it would be possible to convert the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions into an increase of money wages, I do not think it would be advisable to do so.

I had trouble in May last year and I consider it was due to the efforts of political agitators. My coolies went on strike for 5 days and came back of their own accord. They demanded the dismissal of the *kerani* babu which was refused. The only concession I extended to the coolies was by way of paying them on the following day instead of on the third day.

The yield per acre is just under 11 maunds in a normal year.

The rates for *haziras* are 3 annas 9 pies for men and 3 annas for women; no change has been effected since 1913.

Assuming that rice is selling at Rs. 5 a maund, I consider Rs. 7 a decent living monthly wage, over and above a coolie's bonus and income from cultivation.

The rise in the cost of living at the present moment as compared with 1913 would be about 25 % to 30 %.

We pay in tickets which are cashed by the garden. Of course we pay the shop-keeper so much a month for cashing the tickets. I have had no complaints of shop-keepers taking a discount for cashing tickets.

It takes a woman about 3 hours to do a plucking task. With a reduced task for fine plucking it would take her from 3 to 4 hours, not more. The task for both light and deep hoeing has not altered since 1913, but the work now is much inferior. A coolie can earn more now because the work is easier and he also has the chance of making more *ticca* because the labour force is now depleted.

The coolies have about 150 acres of rice land inside the grant and 60 acres outside; I charge no rent. I never sold concession rice at over Rs. 5 a maund at any time.

Pregnant women get as much leave as they desire. Sick pay is also given to coolies. A bonus of one rupee is given when a child is born.

We have agreements; the agreement money is not recovered.

I would be willing to pay a coolie the bonus at the expiry of a year's work, but he prefers to have it in advance as at present.

Our coolies are now fairly temperate probably owing to the high price of liquor. As far as I am aware I do not think any rise in wages has tended to increase intemperance.

No. 52.—Mr. WM. SCOTT, *Manager, Champarai Tea Estate, Patra-khola Tea Company* :—

I have been about 16 years in Tea, and in Champarai 6 years now.

My *hazira* rate is 4 annas both to men and women; this rate is higher than the rates on the adjoining gardens. Owing to the distance from a good bazaar and also the high rates prevailing we have always given our coolies higher wages.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing and garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

It would not, in my opinion, be practicable to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages, save in regard to free labour in which case it would be preferable from my point of view but not so in the interests of the coolie as he would be apt to neglect his health for one thing.

CHANDKHIRA, KARIMGANJ, SYLHET, 18TH JANUARY 1922.

Chand-khira.

[MR. WITHERS AND SRIJUT SIYA PRASAD BARUA ABSENT.]

No. 53.—Mr. B. J. LAMB, *Manager, Bhubrihat Tea Estate* :—

I have been 12 years in Tea and all the time at Bhubrihat. I do not think it necessary to put the coolie under contract. I anticipate no difficulty if Act XIII be abolished. About two-thirds of my coolies are under contract. In 1913 rice cost much less than in 1920 and other commodities rose about 75 % but concessions by the garden bore about 60% of the higher cost of living.

I have taken the following measures to lighten the burden of the coolie. Rice is sold at 8 seers per rupee; since 1919 hot tea is provided at noon to all outside workers and also about 120 children get free meals at noon; serge tunics have been imported and sold below cost price; cloth has been bought for women and the cost recovered by small instalments; there has been an increased allowance to pregnant women (now 3 annas per day); lands have been given rent-free for cultivation; for a full week's work to men and women and big children a weekly bonus of one day's pay is given; and a monthly allowance of Re. 1 is given to widows for each small child. Coolies are allowed to earn a good deal more money now. There is no restriction as to the amount which a coolie may earn. My garden is undermanned. I now employ fewer Sylhetis. It was not necessary to sell rice in 1913 as it was plentiful; in 1920 we made a big loss in rice; in 1921 the loss was less. If there is a shortage of rice in the bazaar I sell rice. I do not know the present price of rice in the bazaar, but know it to be less than Rs. 5 per maund.

I consider that the remuneration at present received by the coolies along with the concessions is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort. If the contract was abolished I think I would give a bonus at the end of a year's work,

and I have told my coolies accordingly. Many of my coolies make their own rice beer. No safe inference as to a coolie's prosperity can be drawn from the amount spent in drink. A habitual drinker might spend money in drink even at the cost of the welfare of his family. I think a coolie earns enough to have a few luxuries. There is a margin of saving if he does not drink. I have not run Act XIII cases since 1913. It would be an advantage to a garden to abolish Act XIII as the bonus would be paid on expiry of a year's work. A coolie benefits by the agreement more than the garden. If my labour force was increased coolies would still be allowed to earn more. I consider a decent living monthly wage to be Rs. 7 for a man and Rs. 6 for a woman. I am assuming that rice would be Rs. 5 a maund. At this rate with a thrifty coolie there would be a margin of saving. I sell rice at 8 seers to the rupee. Seven seers a rupee would not be enough in my garden. It costs me 4 annas a day to brew 120 gallons of tea at noon. The idea is to prevent the coolies from drinking a large quantity of cold water on the top of parched gram. Cases of colic have gone down as a result of this. I believe it a paying proposition to feed children in the middle of the day. It enables the mothers to go out to work as their children are looked after. It costs me about Rs. 57 a month to feed 120 children. I have done so for 2 or 3 years. By experienced medical treatment hookworm has much diminished in the last 5 years. I have no latrines. A man and his wife would not use the same latrine. I have no indoor ward. Serious cases are treated in the lines. I pay 3 annas a day for 2 months to pregnant women irrespective of the condition of the family. I do not see why thrifty people should be penalised by not getting the pregnant bonus. To sick coolies I never pay less than 12 annas a week. In certain cases full pay would be given if there was no bread earner. At present coolies go out to work about 8 o'clock with an average three-quarter mile walk to work; the average coolie would finish his 4-anna task by midday. Some earn 6 annas in 6 hours at hoeing. These are my best coolies. I fine coolies for drinking ditch water as I supply good water by water-carriers during working hours.

The majority of the United Provinces people are satisfactory. In recent years I have recruited from Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Fyzabad, Sultanpur and Ghazipur. Many of my coolies have connections by marriage in the Chargola Valley. In 1919 I got many famine-stricken people; they have been looked after and are fit now, and some are my best workers. There has been no unrest apart from agitators and none in my Estate. My Directors have acquiesced in any concessions suggested. Round about there are agitators. At the time of the Chargola exodus I lost no coolies.

No. 54.—Mr. W. K. ALLIES, *Manager, Sephenjuri Tea Estate* :—

I have been about 20 years in Tea and have had experience in Darjeeling, the Dooars, Sylhet. I have been 13 years in the Sephenjuri Company. It would make no difference to me if Act XIII was abolished. I would give a bonus all the same. Where coolies are under contract it would be difficult all at once to abolish contracts but ultimately it is desirable to have free labour. The ideal is to remove Act XIII and all the Emigration sections of Act VI, but there is a danger of the *arcutli* system coming in. Hill Tipperah can recruit free labour. I cannot. I think that Hill Tipperah recruits mainly from British tea-gardens on the border.

Taking a family as consisting of a man, wife, one working child and two non-working children I consider that the present earnings are sufficient to keep them in health and reasonable comfort. As a rule, though there are exceptions, a man's earnings do not suffice to maintain his wife and family. The system of weighing leaf varies considerably. The real important thing is the provision made for coolies' wages. It does not matter what deductions are made. If 33% is deducted the task is 33% less than it would be if there was no deduction. In April and November 4 maunds of leaf would make one maund of tea; in the monsoon season 4 maunds would not work out to this. In normal times my provision is Rs. 3 per maund of tea for plucking, that is 12 annas a maund for green leaf. This enables a coolie of average efficiency from May to November to earn 6 to 8 annas a day and in many cases much more and very few earn less than 4 annas at that season.

I consider that an adult coolie's budget, i.e., his cost of living, would be Rs. 4-12-0 a month. This figure was worked out by three babus on my garden. I am assuming that rice does not rise above 7 seers to the rupee at any time during the year. The average for the year will be Rs. 4 a maund. At present rice is 10 seers to the rupee

and tends to go up. When rice was dear I sold at 7 seers to the rupee. I am buying paddy at Rs. 2-8-0 a maund and selling at that price. In framing the Rs. 4-12-0 estimate my doctor babu used the jail scale of rations. In that estimate I do not think provision was made for marriage ceremonies. I do not remember the details of the estimate but a man got 2 *dhotis* and a woman 2 *saris* a year. Rs. 4-12-0 is really the minimum required. I consider the remuneration in money together with the concessions is sufficient to maintain a coolie in health and reasonable comfort. I give no bonus at child-birth but pregnant women get a sick *hazira* if they come up for it. The three months' leave for pregnancy counts towards the agreement. It is impossible to calculate the concessions mentioned in terms of money, particularly as regards rice and clothing which constantly fluctuate. It is therefore my view that the suggestion indicated would neither benefit the coolie nor the garden.

Since 1913 I have not increased the *haziras* but tasks have been slightly altered at times when *ticca* was not common (e.g., in the cold weather). Increased facilities for earning *ticca* were given. In giving agreements the name of the coolie and father, amount of advance, and period of contract, are entered in the register. I do not remember if the monthly wage is mentioned in the register. It is not in my register. I use a standard form. No stamp is used. Thumb impression is taken. The verbal agreement is that a coolie will work for one calendar year. The wage returns for September 1920 are incorrect. I was then at Home. The reason why the wages in the return of September 1921 are lower than in September 1920 is that in 1921 my best coolies spent more time in paddy cultivation. The average wages of children in September 1920 are high. In column 6 I have included subsistence allowance paid to orphan children.

No. 55.—Mr. C. TOWNSEND, *Superintendent, Longai Tea Company* :—

I am the Superintendent of the Longai Tea Company and since 1903 I have been at Chandkhira. I have been 47 years in Tea; in the Dooars, Darjeeling, Cachar and Sylhet. I like Act XIII. I know it is not very binding but the coolie seems to have an idea that by touching the pen he has to carry out his part of the agreement when he takes the money. Act XIII is a light Act. In weighing leaf we turn seers into pounds. A woman bringing in 30 seers is paid for 30 pounds. Under Act XIII a coolie gets as much leave as we can give. A coolie values the bonus. I consider that the remuneration in money payments along with the concessions is sufficient to maintain a coolie in health and reasonable comfort. I think a coolie does not spend more than Rs. 3-8-0 or Rs. 4 a month on himself. The bulk of his expenditure is in rice. We sold rice at 7 seers a rupee when the market rate was above that. When I say Rs. 3-8-0 or Rs. 4 a month, that does not include expenditure on children. Most of my coolies have cultivation. A coolie would probably not enter into an agreement except for the bonus. I have never run a coolie in under Act XIII. If I had to go to court I would prefer to go to the civil court, but I prefer best to go to neither. I do not think the abolition of Act XIII would make much difference in the number of coolies absconding. I would not give the bonus if there was no agreement. I think that giving a bonus at the end of a year would come to practically the same thing but at first a coolie might be suspicious of a new practice. I use no stamps in taking my agreements.

I consider the remuneration in money payments along with the concessions is sufficient to maintain a coolie in health and reasonable comfort. I think it impossible and undesirable to convert the concessions into an increase of money wages. More than half my coolies come from the United Provinces. On the whole they are good but I prefer Sonthalis. At the time of the Chargola exodus my out-gardens lost a certain number of coolies. Those who went said they had got orders to go along with their *bhailog*. They were all Bilaspuris. I lost no North-westerns. Including men, women and children, I lost from Lalkhira 229, from Adamtala 100 and from Longai 200. Those who went were all new coolies recruited in 1919. The three gardens I have named are in my Company. None of the coolies who left complained of any economic grievances. Hearing that Longai coolies were about to leave I went to see them. They said "*Gandhi-ka-hukum*". The coolies went out to work for an hour and then left the garden salaaming me. Very few of those had cultivation. I was not aware of any agitators having actually been in the lines. I met agitators going along the public road towards Longai. It was after this that

the coolies left. I had no reports from my Managers that any agitators had entered the lines. I do not think any of the babus in the gardens did anything to propagate the Gandhi doctrine or were mixed up with them. The coolies go to Chandkhira bazaar and may have come into contact with agitators there, but I cannot say positively that agitators went to that bazaar. There has been no trouble in the bazaar. The villagers round about have always been quite friendly with me and there is no noticeable change in their attitude towards me. I consider Rs. 7 for men and Rs. 6 for women is adequate to meet the cost of living.

No. 56.—Mr. V. G. EVERY, *Superintendent of the Pathini Tea Company* :—

I have been 14 years in Tea—all the time in the Pathini Tea Company. I am in favour of retaining Act XIII. I am not sure of its advantages, but I think it desirable from a coolie's standpoint as he gets an advance. I do not think it would be satisfactory, from the garden point of view, to give a bonus at the end of a year's work. It does not matter much whether the coolie gets his bonus at the end of a year's work or at the beginning. I lost no coolies at the time of the Chargola exodus. From time to time I have lost a good many coolies who have gone into Hill Tipperah. Some were under agreement, others not. We have got some back from Hill Tipperah. In my answers to the printed questions I said that the cash earnings of coolies had not increased since 1913, but I have not at any time examined the wages actually earned. As a matter of fact wages have increased. Coolies owe to the gardens in my Company Rs. 20,708 which I do not consider excessive. A large portion of this is probably due from sardars who have gone recruiting and brought back nobody. Advances are given to sardars recruiting. We keep in our books for some time advances made to coolies in the hope that we will be able to recover them. Our system of payment is monthly. Part of the Rs. 20,708 is for rice advanced to coolies but not paid for in cash at the time of taking it. We sell rice for cash, but if a coolie has not enough to pay in full, we give it on credit. An adult man would require a minimum of Rs. 5 or perhaps less to live on in a month, but coolies may be doing their own cultivation, so one has to discriminate. The coolies have lots of cultivation. I grant no bonus at child-birth and I pay no allowance to pregnant women though sometimes I use my own discretion. I would say that 7 seers to the rupee is a moderate price for rice. In the last 4 years about 400 of my coolies absconded to Hill Tipperah. Rice was sold to the coolies solely because there was a scarcity in the local bazaars. In 1920 I was importing rice at Rs. 7 a maund and sold it at 7 seers to the rupee. I sold about 500 maunds a month at this rate which had been fixed at a meeting of Longai district planters. The present price of paddy is Rs. 2 a maund. I regard Longai district as a cheap district because we are near Tipperah. I consider the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort and I believe the coolie thinks so too. It is impracticable and undesirable to convert the concessions into an increase of money wages.

No. 57.—Mr. J. C. DAWSON, *Manager, Isa Bheel Tea Estate* :—

I have been 24 years in Tea in Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Sylhet, and since 1908 have been at Isa Bheel. I think I could get on without Act XIII. provided some equivalent of the present bonus is given. Lately I have had a few absconders, but not many—65 in 2 years. I lost none at the time of the Chargola exodus. I consider that the remuneration in money along with the concessions is sufficient to maintain the coolies in health and reasonable comfort. At any rate this is the case as regards the average coolie willing to work, but perhaps it is not true in the case of an elderly coolie. I think it nearly impossible to convert the concessions into an increase of money wages. Tea districts differ in cheapness of living, and to convert the concessions into money wages might give a wrong impression in comparing different gardens. I am rather favourably situated as regards rice. The present price of paddy is 24 seers to the rupee, i.e., about Rs. 1-13-0 a maund. Among my coolies I have had no unrest, but

agitators who tried to tamper with the bazaar were turned out by me. At Nilam's Bazaar it has been given out by beat of drum that no boats are to be taken to my garden for carrying tea or stores. I have also been threatened on the public road. The reason for this is that I have helped Government by reporting about agitators. The name of one of the Chargola agitators who was arrested was given by me and because of that the non-co-operators offered Rs. 1,000 to any one who would kill me.

My *haziras* are 4 annas for men, 3 annas for women in the case of *tila* workers, and 5 annas for men and 4 annas for women in the case of servants. In 1920 I think, Dr. McLaughlin proposed the idea of a bonus monthly to coolies who did 24 days' work in a month. It was not carried into effect. Perhaps other Directors did not approve of it. I think a coolie at the present time is better off than in the days of Act VI when he got rice at Rs. 3 a maund. I work practically on the unit system. Many women do considerably more than their task, e.g., at present, in pruning, forking and sugarcane cutting, they are earning extra pay. In draining, the unit system is in force and for that work yesterday 9 annas 6 pies was the highest earned. The great difficulty is a weak coolie. The average coolie earns enough but in the case of a weak coolie not up to a full task work, though willing, his average earnings are less. Most of my coolies come from Basti and a few from Bilaspur. They do me well and most of them have been a good many years in the garden. I have a big percentage of Chamars. I lost none at the time of the Chargola exodus. From Isa Bheel there is a pathway through the jungle to Magura in the Chargola Valley, and I believe that after the Chargola exodus the intention was to start at Isa Bheel and have an exodus from the Longai Valley. One day I came across coolies who were leaving Kalinagar garden in the Chargola Valley. They said they had no complaints but that they were going because it was *Gandhi-ka-hookum*.

No. 58.—Dr. C. G. TERRELL, *Medical Officer, Longai Valley Medical Association* :—

All the gardens in the Longai Valley are in my charge; about 14 in all. I have been just over a year here. During my war service I had some experience of tropical diseases. I think that the medical arrangements in this Valley are as good as can be expected. In some gardens coolies will not go to hospitals. I think in some cases an improvement in the water-supply is possible, but on the whole the water is good. We are trying to keep down hookworm as far as possible. I do not think latrines are feasible. As far as possible cases are treated in hospital, but where this does not exist or for any other reason, they are treated in their houses in the lines. I inspect the lines from a sanitary point of view. Coolies have a great objection to going to hospital as in-patients. It largely depends on the kind of coolie whether you can overcome this prejudice. I would say that the average coolie at present is well clothed and well nourished. Pneumonia is largely due to coolies lying about and getting a chill. Coolies I think generally sleep on the ground. Perhaps a *machan* would occupy too large a space in the house. A large number of coolies have blankets which cost a coolie about Rs. 2 from the garden as against Rs. 3 in the bazaar. I would not say that the Longai Valley is a particularly healthy one: it is distinctly malarious. Dysentery is uncommon, so is cholera. Most of the wells are open and uncovered and they are mostly unfenced. From a sanitary point of view, it is ideal that a well should be protected with wire-netting but open to the sun. Wells are fortnightly inspected and cleaned where necessary. In certain gardens a system of tanks well fenced reduces dysentery. This tank system is not necessary if there is no particular epidemic in gardens where there are wells. In these tanks water is drawn off by pumps through pipes. In several gardens we have a pump system in connection with wells. In one case river water is pumped into filters. Sometimes coolies drink water which is taken straight from the river or *nullahs*. I have traced three cases of cholera to this. With a latrine system, unless there were sweepers and good organization, it would be a source of more infection than the present system. I have heard of coolies breaking pumps and throwing them into the well. Generally Managers respond willingly to requests for improvement so far as funds permit. I do not recommend any uniform system of sanitation.

DULLABCHERRA, KARIMGANJ, SYLHET, 21ST JANUARY 1922.

[Mr. WITHERS AND SRIJUT SIVA PROSAD BARUA ABSENT.]

No. 59.—Mr. R. HUNTER, *Manager, Bidyanagar Tea Estate*:—

I have been in Tea since 1895 in Sylhet and Cachar with 3 months in the Assam Valley. I came to Bidyanagar in 1911, left it, went back in May 1920 after an absence of about 3 years. I do not use Act XIII now. I have used it before. Last year I ceased giving agreements. Before that as a general rule I did not give agreements and have now stopped this since the increase of pay from 4 to 6 annas for men and from 3 to 4 annas for women. I cannot say if it is necessary to put new coolies under contract. For myself I do not think so. I have not recruited for years. Rs. 100 per coolie is about the cheapest cost of recruiting nowadays. In the old *arcutti* days of recruiting in this district, the cost was about Rs. 20 to Rs. 25 a head. The difference in cost may be said to be the premium to avoid the abuses of *arcutti* recruiting. I myself have had no coolies under the new system of sardari recruiting.

There were no signs of disturbance in my garden until political agitators came, that is until the Ratabari meetings of May 1921. The exodus started next morning from Anipur Tea Estate followed I think by Damcherra. I lost no coolies myself. Coolies had no economic grievances so far as I was concerned. They were glad to see me back after the treatment they had received at the hands of the Indian proprietor of the garden. Before the exodus I consider that coolies who earned a full *hazira* were just getting sufficient, but those who were not doing a full *hazira* did not have enough. By full task I mean full 4-anna and 3-anna *haziras* for men and women which were the rates at the time of the exodus. I consider that a decent living wage is Rs. 8 and Rs. 6 for a man and woman respectively. They require this in wages if they have no other source of income. Between 1913 and 1920 the cost of living has increased from 30 to 40%. I have a certain amount of land for paddy cultivation in my garden. All the coolies have not got land and the area possessed by each coolie varies. There are 750 to 800 working coolies. Roughly there are 400 acres in the garden held by about 400 coolies. I charge rent at Rs. 6 an acre. About another 100 acres are held outside the garden. Wages were raised after the exodus. Managers in the Valley agreed of their own free will to raise wages. We thought it would save more coolies from leaving the gardens; in some cases it did, in others it did not. I have nothing outstanding against the coolies in the way of unrecovered advances. When I took over first in 1911 I found about Rs. 11,000 outstanding and I wrote this off. I issue little rice or paddy to the coolies. I do stock it as I find it helps to keep down bazaar prices. As a rule payment for rice taken is deducted on pay-day from the pay, but the rice concessions with me are small. My coolies buy rice largely from one another. When I used to give contracts the advance was Rs. 10 and Rs. 8. The coolie now is better off with a 6-anna *hazira*. As a rule coolies do not work more than 24 days a month.

When I came back in May 1920 the coolies were happy to see me but I could not describe them as prosperous. Their clothing was not of the best. I saw no serious discontent and this appeared only after the Ratabari meeting. Up to the end of 1920 there was no suggestion in my garden that the coolies wanted more. I was not warned by Government officials that agitation was afoot nor did I know of any meeting in Sylhet town in September 1920. I had no reports from my coolies of the Ratabari meeting but I had reports from my private servants. Up to May I think the condition of the coolies had improved since I came. I should not take the half-yearly wage returns as a test of the coolie's prosperity. There are other ways of earning money, e.g., cultivation is a factor. I gave a few agreements in May 1920. I gave those because the coolies asked for them. The number of agreements in a garden might be a rough indication of the number of those who are in need of money. Rice was not particularly dear in May 1921. Probably in 1921 rice was Rs. 2 a maund cheaper than in 1920.

On the 6th of May 1921 there was a meeting at Dullabcherra Club of Government officials and planters. In the minutes of the meeting it is recorded that there was a consensus of opinion that wages were too low. The rates of 6 and 4 annas were proposed by Mr. Bather of Dullabcherra Tea Estate and there was no pressure by officials. There was no protest by anyone against these rates. The reason for the increase was partly to keep the coolies from going and partly because the old rates were not economically sound. We thought the rise might stop the exodus and this was the case as far as my coolies were concerned. My Agents, Messrs. Martin and Co., approved of the action taken in raising wages. Under the new system I have some

fractional *haziras*. There is no guarantee that a coolie will earn these rates unless he is prepared to do the work. This is only natural. In most gardens there are coolies who are not fit to do a fair day's work. For coolies who are not able to earn a fair wage I think it commercially sound to repatriate them. I think the exodus was a blessing in disguise. After the exodus 35 coolies came to me and asked leave to go home. I satisfied myself that they had money to go and I allowed them to leave. I never recover agreement advances. I give the advances to help coolies in need of money. In the meantime I think I am a loser to some extent by increasing wages; the coolies are not working well. I consider that there is more unrest in my garden now than was the case 6 months ago. I refer to the efforts of non-co-operators to interfere with bazaars. Dullabcherra bazaar has been stopped for about a month. The coolies say my garden is Gandhi's garden. I do not believe in compelling coolies to undergo any particular form of medical treatment. It would be a disturbing factor. Why spend money on medicines which coolies will not take? A coolie has enough with 6 and 4 annas and is satisfied. I sell cloth at cost price. At the meeting of 6th of May there was some difference of opinion as to whether a male coolie should get 6 annas or 5 annas, but it was decided to give 6 annas and no agreement. The economic side was considered, but the important factor was to stop the exodus. There was a feeling among us that a coolie getting 4 annas or 3 annas did not get enough. No coolies have absconded from my garden since I stopped giving agreements. I do not know why no coolies left my garden. I believe that if a new coolie marries into another garden a certain sum is sometimes paid to compensate the cost of recruiting. Before the exodus I had in my garden weedy individuals who never did a whole day's work. If a coolie in my garden does not work he need not. A coolie can always get leave if I think he is able to live without working. I am quite satisfied that the increase in wages was not due to official pressure. I should not think that the presence of officials would have that effect on planters of practical experience.

No. 60.—Mr. H. A. WRAY, *Manager, Singlacherra Tea Estate*:—

I have been 15 years in Tea and have just recently come to Singlacherra. At the time of the exodus I had just taken charge of Maguracherra. I lost about 521 workers and 120 dependents out of a population of 1,019. They left as a result of the meetings at Ratabari. The coolies in Magura had no economic grievance so far as I know. I had been there for 2 months. In previous years the garden had lost a fair number of coolies who absconded to Cheragi village. They were enticed by offers of land there; they got land in the villages. I was at the meeting at Dullabcherra on 6th May.

Q.—[Paragraph 6 of the minutes of the meeting at Dullabcherra Club of 6th May 1921 having been read to witness.] Would you say that this is substantially correct?

A.—I was against the increase in wages. Some wanted 5 annas for men and 4 annas for women. I personally did not agree to 6 annas and 4 annas. I said if my Agents agreed I would pay it.

Mr. Crawford of Messrs. James Finlay and Co. sanctioned the rates when he came up after the coolies had gone. Perhaps for the time being Mr. Crawford thought the increase was necessary. I think some increase was necessary in view of the rise in prices but I do not think it was advisable to grant it at that time. There were about 150 working coolies left on the garden. If the coolies get 6 and 4 annas without agreements they are better off. They still get perquisites. The rates of work have not been reduced or increased. Agreements have been withdrawn. Coolies do not now come and ask for them. I am not in favour of giving agreements unless there is security for the advance. If required, rice is still sold to coolies at concession rate. Since the exodus I have sold no rice. So far as I remember the new rates of pay were given from the time of the exodus. The former rates were 4 and 3 annas and coolies of average efficiency could earn this. These were not the standard maxima. Between January and May 1921 they could earn *ticca*. Facilities were given to earn more. An economic wage is Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 6 for a woman. I make my garden estimates. An adult coolie probably spends Rs. 3-12-0 a month. I cannot say what was the original estimated allotment for coolie labour for 1921. A coolie's pay is never reduced nor is he discouraged to work, even if the allotment is reduced; he is granted more leave to do his cultivation. Almost all my coolies have lands for rice and sugar. There are "line leave coolies" who have been 8 or 10 years on the garden, live in the lines, but work in the *bustees* where they have land.

In 1918-19 most of my recruits came from Basti district. I could not say that they were all satisfactory. Many had to be fed up. Many of those who left in the exodus had been in the garden for 6 or 7 years and one had been 27 years. About 10 or 14 have returned, some from Basti, some from Chandpur and some from Allahabad. Sardars had gone up to their home districts to interview them. The men who came back said that all the coolies had got "*Gandhi-Baba-ka-hookum*" to go. In my opinion the exodus was primarily political. One man who returned said he had come back because he could not fill his belly in his country where he had gone. Between 1913 and the exodus there was no increase in the rate of *hazira*. Between 1913 and 1920 the cost of living had risen 25%. The same concessions were given in 1913 as in 1920, but I daresay rice was cheaper in 1913. Hence the loss to the garden was more in 1920. Hospital expenses increased in 1920, as there was more sickness. If a new recruit goes to a different garden there is a settlement made between the Managers of the gardens concerned. Those who are not under agreement with me are not absconding.

The figure Rs. 3-12-0 for a coolie's expenditure per month is guess work; I made no calculations.

Before the Ratabari meeting there was no unrest in my garden. Two of my coolies attended the meeting. They gave me no report. A male coolie who has since returned said to me at the time of the exodus that he would not stay for a rupee a day. I saw many of my coolies on the road on the way to Karimganj. They said they were going because it was *Gandhi ka-hookum* and their *bhailog* were going. I stopped some of them for a little but they continued on their way. The man whom I referred to had two cows that came back to the garden. He said they had more sense than he had. In the case of this particular man with the two cows economic pressure could not have been severe. It was the idea that an increase of wages would stop the exodus, but it did not stop my coolies who deserted on the 8th of May. I myself was opposed to an increase until sanctioned by the Agents. When Mr. Crawford sanctioned it I gave it at once. I wired to my Agents asking for sanction. I would say that the exodus in my garden was entirely due to the efforts of non-co-operators. I did not previously see a copy of the minutes of the Dullabcherra meeting of 6th May 1921. I told my coolies that they would get whatever increase Singlacherra, the next-door garden in the same Company, might give. I told them so on the muster ground on the day they left. The Magura coolies had left before the arrival of Mr. Crawford who sanctioned the increase. On the 8th May when they appeared on the muster ground they had their things packed up ready to go.

I hold sick muster and if any one wants leave or is sick he gets leave or is sent to the hospital then. If a coolie wants leave he comes to muster and asks for it, and I decide whether he is to get it. All coolies come to sick muster. Leave is invariably given if asked for. I do not have children put under agreement.

No. 61.—Mr. E. TODD NAYLOR, *Managing Director, Chargola Tea Association*:—

I am Managing Director of the Chargola Tea Association. I came out to Coffee in Ceylon in 1879 and to Sylhet in Tea in 1883. I retired in 1911 but I come out in the cold weather of every year. I was out here the whole of 1917 and 1918. I do not think Act XIII contracts are any good. The coolies get money and touch the pen. Since the exodus we are not giving agreements. I did not approve of the rise of wages; 6 and 4 annas is absurd, but I would not have objected to a slight rise. I would have raised men to 4 annas 6 pies and women to 3 annas 6 pies. Wages in the Longai Valley were not raised. I do not think that owing to the increased cost of living wages should have been raised. The North-westerns are a lazy lot who do not want to do *ticca*. If coolies want to earn more they can earn more. The North-westerns are an inheritance from the past. They were on the garden when I first joined and since then I have got up Central Provinces coolies. In recent years we have got coolies from famine districts. They are cheaper to recruit. In the old days we used to bring boat-loads of them at Rs. 14 a head. Many of them died on the way. At that time we paid *haziras* 3 annas 9 pies to men and 3 annas to women, i.e., Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 a month. I had a few Act VI coolies at Oliviacherra. We had to give rice at Rs. 3 a maund if the bazaar rate exceeded that. A coolie in those days could live on one anna a day and save. With rice at Rs. 4 a maund a coolie could now live on Rs. 4-8-0 a month including clothes. North-westerns do not buy many clothes. In March 1921. I left Chargola. With reference

to the minutes of the meeting of 6th May to the effect that there was a consensus of opinion that coolies' wages should be raised, I did not see that there was any economic distress that pointed to that. Coolies who have come back have told me that they were forced to leave the garden by threats of what would happen to them and of divine displeasure.

No. 62.—Mr. W. R. P. GUNNERY, *Manager, Chargola Division*:—

I have been 26 years in Tea in the same Company in Sylhet.

In the exodus I lost 900 to 950 working coolies, of whom about 750 left the garden on the morning of May 3rd—the morning after the second non-co-operation meeting held at Ratabari close to my garden. These meetings were held on May 1st and 2nd, 1921. On the morning of May 3rd a number of coolies demanded an increase of wages, i.e., 8 annas and 6 annas for men and women. Previous to this an increase of wages had not been asked for. I told them it was impossible for me to give them the wages demanded and urged them to go out to work which a number did. The remainder were hesitating when some one amongst them shouted *Gandhi Maharaj ki jai*. They left the muster ground in a body and in half an hour were leaving the garden. This move was previously arranged as is proved by the fact that all their belongings were packed up, and cattle tied up ready for the exit. The coolies left the muster ground in an orderly manner and no insult was offered to myself or my Assistant. A great number of them salaamed as they passed us.

The exodus of coolies was the direct result of the non-co-operation meeting held the night before. The coolies had been told that if their demand for 8 and 6 annas was refused to leave the garden. One speaker who addressed the meeting in Hindustani made the most inflammatory speech. It was he who appealed to the coolies and instructed them to demand 8 and 6 annas, and if they did not get it, to leave the garden. He said that Gandhi had sent a steamer to Karimganj to take them to their country where they would be given land free. They were told that the British *Raj* was at an end. This was a new and big move on the part of the non-co-operation agitators, ordinary strikes on other gardens having failed. The coolies, I have been told, were made to take an oath over a bowl of holy water not to disobey Gandhi's orders. I was warned by the Police Sub-Inspector of Ratabari of the impending meeting. I told him I should not try, except by persuasion, to stop the coolies from attending. In the first place it would be impossible to do so with the meeting-place so close to the garden, and secondly by forbidding them to go it would only arouse suspicion. I took no steps to move the authorities to prevent the meeting being held. Nearly all the coolies who left on the first day were the newer imported coolies, mostly from Basti district. During the next 2 or 3 days more coolies left including some Central Provinces coolies some of whom have returned.

I motored the Deputy Commissioner and Subdivisional Officer to Patharkandi and Karimganj and met and interviewed many coolies. We were repeatedly told that it was by Gandhi's orders they were leaving. We tried to reason with the coolies on the road, and in Karimganj, and persuade them to return, but without avail. It was decided to issue warrants on certain of the ringleaders under agreement. A few were served on coolies from Mookham. The coolies were bailed out and garlanded by the non-co-operators in Karimganj. In accordance with advice from officials no more warrants were executed.

Act XIII is of no use in organised strikes. The only case where I personally have found the Act of use is where defaulting sardars have taken advances and refused to return from their country. On May 6th a meeting was held at Dullabcherra at which the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police were present. I was ill and unable to attend. Next morning the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner accompanied by the Manager of Dullabcherra visited me and I was informed that the Managers had agreed to raise the wages of the remaining coolies to 6 and 4 annas with the object of stopping a further exodus and settling the coolies. I was told Mr. Wray of Maguracherra had "jibbed" a bit at the meeting and Mr. Dunlop of Goombira being a "canny Scot," had wired to the Agents in Calcutta for instructions. Minutes of this meeting were drawn up, but these I never knew of until to-day. It was a slippery way of getting out of it and I think it was most unfair that minutes should be drawn up and fixed without reference to all Managers in the Valley.

I sent a wire to my Agents in Calcutta, Messrs. James Finlay and Co., to the effect that in conjunction with other Managers I proposed to raise the wages to 6 and 4 annas. I received a reply that on no account could wages be raised and that Mr. Crawford was coming up from Calcutta. On the afternoon of Saturday, May 7th, I assembled all the remaining men coolies at the bungalow and talked to them at great length and explained I was not in a position to raise their wages without the sanction of my Company and that they knew as well as I did that I got a monthly remittance to pay them with and that I could not get rupees from the earth or sky. I told them my *Burra Sahib* was coming up from Calcutta and that I would do my best for them as I had done in the past. The assembly closed with hands up for the *Sahib* to which every coolie to a man responded. All the remaining coolies had worked regularly throughout the week at the old rate of wages. Sunday, 8th, was our pay day, and pay was proceeding as usual when word came that three neighbouring gardens had raised the wages to 6 and 4 annas. From this moment the coolies went absolutely mad and for three days the garden was in an uproar. It was stated that Gandhi had raised the wages. A *Bhor* boy (of about 18 years of age), upon whom the "Spirit of Gandhi" was supposed to have descended, was placed on the Hindu shrine in the lines and worshipped by the coolies for two days. The third day he made a fatal mistake by stating that it was Gandhi's order that in the future the women were to do all the work and the men squat. This caused a break up, and was the starting point of the coolies becoming more reasonable. After Mr. Crawford's visit it was decided to increase the wage to 6 and 4 annas as other gardens had already done so. Since the increase of wages no agreements have been given. I think the increase of wages is working well though it is only in the experimental stage. But I consider it was wrong that this should have been given under pressure. I consider that Government should have taken firmer action at the time of the exodus and not allowed or encouraged an increase of wage under the pressure of a strike. It was on this account the coolies thought it was through Gandhi's orders that the wages had been raised.

Coolies who have returned to the garden have acknowledged, they were deluded. I do not consider that if a coolie worked well, and with other benefits received on the garden, the old rate of wage was inadequate, though owing to the increased cost of living many of the new coolies were hard hit and not as well off as they were previously. If I had been at the meeting I should not have agreed to raising the wages without first consulting the Agents. I think it was wrong any garden raising wages unless all the gardens in the Valley did so simultaneously.

I should say some 400 to 500 out of about 800 newer coolies were a poor type and many not good workers. Some of these coolies were useless and had no intention of working, and by getting rid of these, the garden has benefited. We were hard up for labour and recruited largely from famine districts. Some of the coolies should never have been allowed to come up, as they were physically unfit for work. Had these been repatriated we would have got into bad odour with the recruiting agents.

During the season of 1921, 602 acres had to be semi-abandoned, of which 179 acres will be abandoned altogether and not reclaimed. In place of a normal yield of 12,000 maunds the yield of 1921 will be 6,000 maunds. By reducing the estimate for coolie labour, we did not, so far as my garden was concerned, reduce the coolies' earnings. The reason for reducing the allotment for coolie labour in the 1921 budget was to curtail expenses as much as possible, but, if necessary, we are not restricted to budget figures. No coolie was discouraged from working though leave was given freely to those desiring it.

The provision for the labour force in the budget of 1919 was Rs. 99,010-8-0, in 1920 Rs. 1,00,326-12-0 and in 1921 Rs. 89,645-8-3. These figures were based on the existing labour force at the time the estimates were made out.

The amount spent on recruiting was :—

1917.	1918.	1919.	1920.	1921.
Rs. 17,266-14-9.	Rs. 5,493-0-3.	Rs. 20,265-5-9.	Rs. 10,562-2-9.	Rs. 1,945-2-0.

In 1917 the labour force was 2,501. In 1918 there was a decrease of 154; in 1919 a decrease of 110; in 1920 an increase of 5; and in 1921 after the exodus a decrease of 1,028. In 1919 we lost a large number of coolies owing to a very severe epidemic of influenza. We have also suffered heavy losses owing to coolies being enticed away to Indian-owned estates in the district which has largely counterbalanced the

increase by recruiting. I hear that recruits and exodus coolies who wish to come back are being tampered with in their country. We have got 10 of the exodus coolies back to date. Coolies are also being tampered with on the road from Karimganj, for example, at Nilam's Bazaar.

Between the 1st of January and the 1st of May 1921 there was little *ticca* work. In 1921 there was no *ticca* hoeing till the cold weather when the semi-abandoned tea was being reclaimed. On Sundays in 1921 there was *ticca* plucking both before and after the rise of wages. In 1919 men could earn by *haziras* and *ticca* 6 annas or more.

In 1920 I was away on furlough. I had no reason to believe that before the exodus there was any interference with the coolies. I have heard that before the exodus coolies got letters from their country referring to Gandhi, but I never got proof of it.

The coolies we have now on the garden are better coolies and do harder work than the majority of those who left. I know nothing about resolutions passed at the Sylhet meeting in September 1920 that workers should leave European service. At present agitators are busy boycotting Dullabcherra bazaar. Things on my garden are at present all right.

No. 63.—Babu JNANENDRA KISHORE DUTT RAY, *Kalinagar Tea Estate* :—

I have been in Kalinagar garden from 1910. I was a clerk and am now Manager since the coolie exodus. The former Manager resigned just after the exodus when we lost 335 coolies, of whom about 100 have returned. Sixty or 70 came back from Karimganj, 15 or 20 days after the exodus; others came back from villages and to-day 3 coolies have returned from their country. The coolies left the garden owing to economic causes and there were also complaints of ill-treatment at the hands of the Manager of Kalinagar. Our coolies left on the 15th May. After the Ratabari meeting the coolies asked for higher *haziras*—5 and 6 annas. On the 13th May we informed the coolies that wages would be increased to 5 and 4 annas for men and women as against 4 and 3 annas, but after telling them this the coolies left.

In 1920 my coolies found living hard owing to the high price of food and clothing. We sold rice at one *kathi* (i.e., $3\frac{1}{2}$ seers) for 9 annas 6 pies to 10 annas when the market rate was higher. The present price is $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 annas a *kathi* but is getting dearer. I have about 500 maunds of paddy in stock which I bought last year. In 1919 I spent Rs. 7,491 in recruiting, mostly Chamars. The people who left in the exodus were mainly new coolies. In 1919 the men's *haziras* were increased from $3\frac{1}{2}$ annas to 4 annas. I was then a clerk and I cannot say why this was done. My agreement bonuses are Rs. 6 and 5 to men and women yearly. I do not think it necessary to put the coolie under contract. I prefer free labour. My agreement and non-agreement coolies get the same pay. Possibly if I doubled the advances, agreements might be more popular. Since last June I have put no coolie under agreement. It is not the case that men and women get 6 and 5 annas as stated by the Managing Director in his evidence at Sylhet. We have a panchayat system. Coolies obey the panchayat. Grievances come before the panchayat and through them to the Manager. These are mainly disputes between coolies. Complaints about tasks and wages would come direct to me. The panchayat system is not general in gardens, but I cannot give details. In my garden the panchayat consists of 2 sardars appointed by coolies, one chowkidar, one *tila* babu and a doctor babu. The coolies select all the members of the panchayat. The complaints against the former Manager were about his ill-treatment towards coolies and about wages. In the last 2 years we have not supplied blankets or clothing to coolies. I know nothing about the resolutions of the Sylhet meeting of September 1920. Agitators have not come to my garden.

No. 64.—Dr. J. DUNLOP, *Medical Officer, Chargola Valley* :—

Since February 1917 I am Medical Officer in the Chargola Valley. Before that I was Medical Officer to the North Cachar Medical Syndicate for 9 years. On the whole, the Chargola Valley is healthy. There is a fair amount of malaria. Water-supply

is very good, all *pucca* wells with pipes leading to pumps away from the wells; I know of no better supply anywhere. There has been a good deal of dysentery, especially among new coolies who often bring it with them. I think that coolies, if they are physically fit for importation, improve when they are in this Valley. I consider that at present there is no proper medical inspection in the recruiting depôts and this would apply to many of the recruits in 1918, 1919 and 1920. The coolies who left in the exodus were mainly new coolies and a percentage of them were physically unfit. The gardens did their best to feed them up. It takes a coolie one year at least to get acclimatized. The coolies here are much inferior in all respects to those in North Cachar. Basti and Gorakhpur coolies in the Chargola Valley were of poor physique and some of those imported must have been the scum of the bazaars. Of the people who went in the exodus 80% were reasonably fit but others were not fit. It was part of the Gandhi propaganda that coolies should have nothing to do with hospitals and Western medicines. Intravenous injection for cholera was not looked on by the non-co-operators—not the coolies—with favour. I should say that 80% of those who left were physically fit to do a day's full task.

No. 65.—Mr. G. E. RAYNER, *Divisional Manager, Goombhira Division* :—

I have been 28 years in Tea, all the time in Sylhet district and 18 years at Goombhira. At the time of the exodus I was in England. I think it was a mistake to put up the rates at the time of the exodus, but it was done with the object of saving the situation; the Managers at the time thought it might perhaps have some influence to keep the coolies. It is a mistake to put up wages when you are dictated to. It did not prevent our coolies from leaving. The coolies of Goombhira Division left on the 10th May after the Club meeting of the 6th of May. On the 8th of May Mr. Dunlop, the then Manager, gave out that the coolies would get 6 and 4 annas. He wired to the Agents who told him not to grant this. From 1915 to 1920 we recruited heavily. In a way the coolies were satisfactory, but had not the same physique as coolies from Chota Nagpur and *junglis*. This valley recruits from the north-west because it has a connection with that part. It is only in a few valleys, such as Chargola, Longai and Hailakandi, that the north-west coolie can live. I left for Home on 14th December 1920. There was then nothing which pointed to the need for higher wages. The *hazira* had not been altered since I came to Goombhira 18 years ago, but there were some reductions in tasks and the opportunities of earning money increased. Hoeing tasks were reduced by 25%; coolies could earn *haziras* quicker. We did a lot to help in the way of rice concessions. I have never suggested to my Agents to increase coolies' wages. If the price of rice is about Rs. 4 a maund a good coolie would spend Rs. 5 in food and clothing. Up to the time of the exodus a coolie of average efficiency could earn that. Anyone who wants to take up land for cultivation can have one or two *hears* perhaps to each family. 1920 was a bad economic year. Up to the end of 1920 I do not think that my coolies had any economic grievance. The coolies with the present *haziras* of 6 and 4 annas are getting a very liberal wage. We have no agreements now. I would say that 5 and 4 anna *haziras* would be preferable. Concessions which we gave with the former *haziras* in the form of agreement bonus, cheaper rice, midday meals, clothing and blankets, will gradually have to be eliminated. We used to give these concessions; now we give none. Our garden lost £ 19,000 sterling in one year. In abnormal circumstances we might have to sell rice at cost price. I do not think it possible or desirable that the concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages. I think the concessions are necessary in the interests of the coolie. Before I went on leave I heard of meetings at Sylhet and Karimganj towards the end of 1920. This was about 2 or 3 months before I went Home. There was a resolution to remove all clerks from tea-gardens, and in the Karimganj meeting it is said that it was intended to denude tea-gardens of labour. The Karimganj meeting was subsequent to the Sylhet meeting. In August 1920 my pluckers were divided into 4 *daffas* and an examination of the books by the Deputy Commissioner revealed the fact that women in a *daffa* of inferior workers were earning very low pay compared with the better workers in the first *daffa*. I was not aware that there was so much difference until my attention was called to it by him. We have only 50 or 60 Basti coolies left. At present rice concessions are not required as rice is cheap. Coolies who realized the advantages of living on a tea-garden did not leave in the exodus. In 1920 men got no *ticca* except on Sundays. If they did a full task they were not

fed at garden expense. In 1920 rice was sold at Rs. 5 8-0 a maund to the coolie; I do not know the price of rice in 1913. We lost Rs. 17,000 on rice in 1920. When we sold rice coolies could buy as much as they wanted. In 1920 the task for light hoeing was 30 *nals* for 4 annas and the coolies were not allowed to do more than that. The budget for 1921 was reduced in everything except where coolies' wages were concerned in spite of the fact that we made a loss in 1920.

No. 66.—Mr. N. H. MACLEOD, *Manager, Mukamcherra Tea Estate* :—

I have been 15 years in Tea—all in the same Company, and have been at Mukamcherra since June 1919. At the time of the exodus I lost 740 coolies from Mukamcherra and the out-garden Damcherra. I am of opinion that this was the result of the Ratabari meeting. I do not think that coolies had grievances. At the Club meeting of the 6th May I was present and I agreed to raise *haziras* to 6 and 4 annas, but I did so merely in agreement with Mr. Bather (my Superintendent) and other Valley Managers, as Mr. Bather stated that his coolies were 'wobbling' and he intended giving out that night the news of the increase in the hope of stopping his force from stampeding. I do not think that paragraph 6 of the minutes of that meeting is a fair statement. Mr. Webster, Commissioner, was strongly in favour of increasing wages. He suggested that wages should be raised to stop the coolies leaving. The Government could not help us. I did not say at the meeting that coolies' wages were too low. We were left to help ourselves; several said "Raise wages a little"; some said "No, don't raise them." Mr. Webster pressed the 6 and 4 anna rates. I do not think it was a matter of coolies' wages at all. The rates, 6 and 4 annas, might be called an inducement to help to keep the remaining coolies in the gardens. I cannot say now whether it was a good move or not. I think it is too soon to say whether it will be beneficial. I am not now giving agreements. I do not think I am getting my money's worth at the 6 and 4 anna rates. The quality of work is inferior. At present I have 540 coolies as against about 1,175 before the exodus. The rates 6 and 4 annas were the highest that were suggested at the meeting. Since May last I pay at these rates. Since May I have had 2 or 3 strikes. On the last occasion the coolies had a row among themselves and 16, including the ringleaders, were run in. In December last they were released on bail and returned to the garden and shouted "*Gandhi-ki-jai*" and continued to create general disturbances on the garden. I wired to the Deputy Commissioner after consulting my neighbours on both sides who agreed with me that the situation justified a telegram asking for prompt Government action. The Deputy Commissioner came out with a large body of police and arrested the offenders. Nine of the 16 were convicted and the ringleaders have been turned out of the garden. The ringleader is now in the bazaar at Dullabcherra. It was a display of firmness that restored order. Before the Ratabari meeting I had heard of a strike at Lungla Tea Estate but not of the September Sylhet meeting.

KARIMGANJ, SYLHET, 23RD JANUARY 1922.

Karimganj.

[MR. WITHERS AND SRIJUT SIVA PRASAD BARUA ABSENT.]

No. 67.—Rai Bahadur PANCHU GOPAL MUKERJEE, *Extra Assistant Commissioner, Subdivisional Officer, Karimganj* :—

I have been Subdivisional Officer, Karimganj, since August 1918 except for a period of about 11 months when I went on leave.

I was here at the time of the Chargola exodus. I am of opinion that it was mainly the result of the efforts of political agitators. I believe that for some time before this event happened there was some sort of propaganda work in the neighbourhood of the tea-gardens carried on by political agitators in the villages, and matters came to a head when the meeting at Ratabari was held. I think the coolies had been told beforehand that the management of European-owned gardens was in the hands of "*Shaitans*," that the condition of the garden coolies was miserable inasmuch as they could not get even a living wage. When this meeting at Ratabari took place hundreds of coolies from the neighbouring gardens attended and were addressed in

Karimganj. Hindustani by a man called Radha Krishna Pande of Slichar who tried to impress on them that they should refuse to serve for anything less than 8 annas a *hazira* for men and 6 annas for women and that the Government was satanic. It was sought to be impressed on them—at least that was the impression they had when they attended the meeting—that it was Gandhi Maharaj's *hookum* that no *hazira* less than 8 annas and 6 annas should be accepted. This happened on 2nd May 1921. The meeting sat for two days, viz., 1st and 2nd May. On the 3rd May 1921 the coolies of Anipur tea-garden mustered on the ground in probably unusual numbers and gave an ultimatum to Mr. Gunnery, the Manager, to the effect that they would not work unless 8 and 6 annas were given them forthwith. The Manager explained that it was beyond his power to do so, but that he would represent matters to the Directors of the Company, and that he would be quite willing to increase their wages if the Directors so permitted. He then asked the coolies to go and resume work as usual, but they did not do so. Eventually, the same afternoon, they left the garden in large numbers. About one-third of the labour force of Chargola and Anipur left the gardens for Karimganj shouting on their way "Gandhi Maharaj ki jai". I was not present at the time this happened, but was informed of all that took place. I think there had been propaganda work on one garden from before as the Head Clerk told me after the exodus that letters had been received by certain coolies from the United Provinces to say that Mr. Gandhi would arrange for the free conveyance of coolies to their homes. I asked the clerk if he had communicated the news to the Manager of the garden and he said he had not because no such question was asked him. This happened about 2 or 3 months before the exodus commenced. On certain gardens the coolies on being told that they could leave if they did not agree to work on the present *haziras*, said they were not willing to leave the gardens. Some said that they had cut the jungle and made all the tea bushes and also seemed to think that tea would be abandoned so that they could then cut out the tea and plant paddy and sugarcane instead. During the exodus the villagers of the neighbouring villages, as was reported to me, encouraged the coolies to leave. Their intention was to buy up the cattle, paddy and *gur* of the coolies as cheaply as possible, and I think they also expected that when the labour force left, the gardens would be abandoned and they could then have the lands for their own cultivation. The coolies who left the gardens came into Karimganj and were in the hands of the non-co-operators for several weeks. Attempts were made to induce them to return to the gardens, in certain cases by tea-garden sardars and by planters who came from the gardens to take them, by the Deputy Commissioner and also by myself; we spoke to many of them, but they were heedless. Some of the coolies told me that they were experiencing great hardships in Karimganj, but they were unwilling to return for three reasons: viz., (1) that the coolies who were still on the gardens would taunt and jeer at them, (2) that the lands which they had on the gardens and which they left behind would in all probability not be given back to them, and (3) that the Managers would not treat them so kindly as they would other coolies who had stayed on. About a third of the 300 coolies who had cleared out of Kalinagar tea-garden, which is an Indian-owned garden, returned to that garden. The majority of the coolies who left their gardens during the exodus and came to Karimganj were provided with short journey tickets by the townspeople of Karimganj—mainly non-co-operators—by rail as well as by steamer, and it was not until the 3rd week in July, so far as I am able to recollect, that the final batch of coolies left Karimganj by steamer. They could not leave earlier owing to the railway strike. There had been a measure of discontent among the coolies. A very large number of coolies had been recruited during the season 1918-19. I think the number was roughly about 10,000 for the whole subdivision, according to my recollection; and 1,800 sardars' certificates were issued during that period. In 1920 the number recruited was about 5,000. Many coolies came up in indifferent health, carrying the influenza infection with them. Influenza was epidemic in this subdivision in 1919-20 and a large number of coolies were reduced to a bad state of health, as a result of which many of them were not able to work hard and earn a decent wage. Prices were ruling high and this affected their economic condition to a great extent. During the exodus I found a lot of coolies, mostly dependents, in rags and many appeared to be ill-nourished, though the majority of those who left were in a good state of health and fairly well clad. On the 3rd of May I met the very first batch of 300 coolies who left Anipur at a place called Nilam's Bazar 10 miles from here, and held them up there till the following morning. I reasoned with them and told them that I had come out for the purpose of listening to whatever grievances they had and, if possible, to bring about some amicable settlement between the management of the garden and themselves. I believe they had half a mind to return and on the morning of the 4th were actually preparing to

return, when another batch of about 250 coolies who had halted overnight at a place not far from Nilam's Bazar, came marching up and met the first batch persuading them to move on to Karimganj. The second batch which also belonged to the same management were determined not to go back to the gardens. The two parties thus combined and proceeded to Karimganj. At Nilam's Bazar I conversed with the coolies and some of them complained against the ill-treatment received at the hands of the Jamadar of the Anipur garden. During the following week I again spoke to these coolies as also to other batches whom I met in different places. They said nothing against Mr. Gunnery, the Manager, but some of them were displeased with the treatment accorded to them by the Jamadar, while others said the reason why they left the gardens was—"Pet nahi bharta." I pointed out to them that many were under agreements and that it was illegal to leave, but that they could come into Karimganj and apply for their discharge in the usual way. They admitted that that was the procedure adopted in the past but as all the coolies were willing to leave in a body at the moment they were not prepared to observe the usual procedure, the more so as it was Gandhi Maharaj's *hookum* that they should not serve for less than 8 annas and 6 annas. As the Managers would not give them the rates of *haziras* stipulated for, they felt compelled to leave. Some of the coolies also said that the Managers had asked them to go if they did not want to serve on the old rates of *haziras* which were generally 4 annas and 3 annas for men and women respectively. During the exodus the Deputy Commissioner, Commissioner and myself, together with other officials, tried to explain to the coolies that their action meant misery to themselves, but nothing would stop them.

Propaganda work, I was informed by the Managers, had been going on even before the Ratabari meeting took place and of course previous to the exodus. I had heard of meetings having taken place outside tea-gardens in the neighbouring subdivisions before the meeting at Ratabari. It was stated at the Ratabari meeting by Radha Kisan Pande that the coolies had left certain gardens within the jurisdiction of Lakhipur police station in Cachar; this was cited as an example which was held up to the coolies. The Ratabari meeting was reported to me by the Sub-Inspector of Police in charge of the police station. I think many of the Managers were not aware of any propaganda work having been carried out before the exodus, while some did have knowledge of it. Some of the coolies told me that a notice was circulated proclaiming the holding of the Ratabari meeting, but I could not say how long before the meeting the notice was so circulated. The coolies told me that it had been given out that there would be a big meeting and that "*dharam ka bat ho ga: sah kahi ah ke suno*." (Speeches will be delivered about religious matters; all are invited to attend and listen.) At the meeting of 1st May about 400 coolies were present. From the Chargola Valley 8,000 to 9,000 coolies left and of this number one-third were dependents or non-workers and two-thirds workers; the majority were new coolies who had not been on the garden for more than 5 years.

For this subdivision the market rates are ascertained in the Karimganj bazaar and reported to the Local Government who publish them in the Provincial Gazette. Since the year 1913 there has been a considerable rise in prices. In 1919-1920 prices reached the maximum and thereafter showed a tendency to fall, and at the present moment prices are on the downward grade. The price of cloth now is double (if not more than) that of pre-war figures. Before going on leave in 1920 I visited most of the gardens. It is very difficult to say whether the wages that were being earned then were sufficient to feed and clothe the labourers, as that must naturally depend on the working capacity of each individual. Those who were able to earn well, looked quite healthy and well off, but others who did not appear to be in good condition would probably have been unable to earn enough by reason of their poor health or through laziness so that the difference is obvious. Of course, I would not say that the wages that were being paid in 1913 were enough for 1920. The *haziras* no doubt might with advantage have been raised a bit in 1920. The pay of Government chaprasis in 1913 was Rs. 7 and Rs. 8 and now it is has been raised to Rs. 11— $\frac{1}{2}$ —15. This does not represent their sole earnings; they have incomes from other sources, e.g., cultivation which is carried on by their families in their villages. But before this scale was adopted they were receiving a grain compensation allowance, to alleviate the increased cost of living. I think the non-co-operators had a large field among the discontented portion of tea-garden labour in the Chargola Valley. I think there were coolies receiving smaller wages on other gardens and yet did not leave perhaps because they were more sensible people whom the non-co-operators could not move. There are coolies who certainly want to be under agreement simply for the sake of the advance. But that does not spell insolvency. The average coolie needs

Karimganj. money to buy cattle or for a marriage ceremony and the like, and instead of borrowing, he prefers to take the agreement especially in view of the fact that such money is not in many gardens recouped. It would be difficult to say whether a coolie would be more contented with a rise in wages instead of the agreement bonus.

I think Act XIII is not being used much at present and may be abolished without any serious inconvenience to the tea industry. Many cases are from time to time amicably settled. The planters are generally not very keen in coming up with Act XIII cases; it is only in very rare cases that they do so.

I consider Rs. 10 for a man and Rs. 8 for a woman a decent living monthly wage in addition to concessions, agreement bonus excluded. For a man to feed himself it would cost not less than Rs. 5 a month, probably Rs. 5-8-0. I suggest he should have something for clothes and something to put by, say Re. 1 or Rs. 2 a month. In the case of a family, if the husband and wife are working and they have two non-working children under 8 years of age, they could in my opinion manage with Rs. 18 between them with concessions but without the agreement bonus. A tea-garden labourer may possibly be able to put by 15% to 20% of his income. I do not think that rent of lands for cultivation should exceed Rs. 3 an acre; Rs. 6 an acre is the regular rate here for a tenant under a *mirasdar*. Outside labour is paid 6 to 7 annas a day, but with them there is the disadvantage that they may not find work throughout the whole year as regular coolies on tea-gardens do. But there are certain seasons during which they may be able to find work every day. Such outside coolies do not I think work more than 6 hours a day. Working on roads is considered derogatory. This is because *butee* people are well off. I think that as a rule a day labourer can if he likes put by 10% to 20% of his earnings. There is indebtedness among villagers but I do not know to what extent. If a coolie in good health were to work diligently he could finish a *hazira* in about 5 hours. In some cases coolies find time to do *ticca* work; in fact the *hazira* is a sort of convenience to them. It would certainly not be fair to regard the remuneration of a tea-garden labourer from the *hazira* point of view alone, as a certain percentage go out to work in addition to the *hazira* nor would I look upon the Government wage returns as a true index of the prosperity of the tea-garden coolie. At all events as the contentment of the labour force is an asset to the garden, I think they should be paid liberally, so that I consider Rs. 10 as a fair monthly wage.

We pay our *punkhawalas* Rs. 6; they are mere boys. A villager can live somehow in the village on Rs. 6 or Rs. 7 without cultivation. A chaprasi's wife and small children do not go out to earn money but they work in their own home and fields. During the time of the exodus I found a boy in one of the gardens proclaiming that the spirit of Gandhi had come upon him and he asked all the people to gather round him and listen to what he had to say. He told them that he had seen Gandhi in a vision and that he was inspired to give them an exhortation. This happened at Anipur; similarly another man did the same thing at Singlacherra. It was more or less a hoax. Generally, the people who came to Karimganj did not talk much about religion.

Under the advice and personal guidance of the Deputy Sanitary Commissioner, special sheds were put up here for the treatment of cholera and influenza cases among coolies during the exodus and coolies also attended the dispensary and were treated there.

As regards the provision of food, the Commissioner passed orders that those among the coolies who appeared to be needy should be given rice and salt at Government expense. I obtained a stock of rice and salt and arranged to supply the coolies. About 200 coolies came up to me on the 7th or 8th May as far as I remember and the first question they put me was whether this rice was being supplied by Government or by tea-gardens; they said they would not touch it if it was supplied by the gardens. I said that Government was supplying it, but some of them seemed to doubt whether it was really so; I naturally felt annoyed. I told them that if they did not want to take the rice and salt that was offered them, they might go. Nobody took anything and they all went away. On the following day about 300 coolies, mostly from Mukamcherra, came up and asked for rations. I gave this and told them that if any more coolies wanted rations, they might come in the afternoon. My information was that the coolies who had been in the grip of the non-co-operators were dissuaded from accepting any Government rice, and as a result nobody turned up that afternoon. Later in the evening of the same day I found coolies being supplied with doles of rice by the non-co-operators in the bazaar, and from that day onward handfuls of rice were distributed to the coolies for several weeks by the non-

co-operators. The ration was certainly less than a quarter seer and many of the coolies Karimganj. complained that the quantity given was not enough. These rations were taken mostly by women and children.

Wages have been raised on several gardens in the Chargola Valley without any corresponding increase in tasks. I do not know if the concessions have been taken away. But I heard complaints from several Managers that even with those increased wages the coolies were doing just as they liked and were not working satisfactorily. They often went on strike for one or two days even after the wages had been increased. On one or two gardens they wanted a reduction of the *nirikk* or *nal* and put forward flimsy excuses. I have no information as to whether or not pressure was put on the garden management to increase the wages. Perhaps they were actuated to do so in view of the rise in the cost of living.

I heard there was a proposal months before the exodus took place to raise the wages of the coolies. I do not remember to have asked Managers the question whether they considered their coolies well-paid or ill-paid.

No. 68.—Babu LALIT MOHAN CHAUDHURI, *Pleader*:—

I am a pleader practising at Karimganj. I am interested in tea, being a Director of the India Tea and Commerce, Limited, which owns the Chhotalekha garden. I have submitted my answers to the questions. The only particular point I would like to emphasize at the moment is the relationship existing between the European staff, Indian staff and the coolies. My suggestion is that there is a feeling that the European Manager is not easily accessible to the coolies and the Indian staff, in the same manner as the Indian Manager of an Indian-owned garden is. I was informed by certain European Managers that some of the Indian staff in their gardens had something to do with the recent strikes. They complained to me that some persons of the Indian staff on some gardens appeared to be disloyal to them. I told them that they should find out the causes. On the other hand, the Indian staff complained that they could not approach the Managers, that the Managers themselves always kept aloof, and that the Managers do not generally treat them courteously. In my opinion I consider that if more friendly relations were established between the Managers, the Indian staff and the coolies, and if the Managers manifested greater sympathy in hearing their grievances, the coolies as well as the Indian staff would be on the side of the Manager. For one thing, if the European staff was well conversant with the common coolie vernacular, it would help to establish and strengthen the relationship between the Manager and his management. Of course during the recent strike I heard coolies complaining of the harassment which they had received at the hands of the babus and jamadars on the gardens, whereas on the other hand they had all praise for the European Manager. In cases where the babus and jamadars were ill-treating them, the Manager, it was said, was in the grip of the babus. Some coolies complained that after doing their *hazira* work, the jamadar compelled them to cut grass for his cattle and for this sort of things they liked to approach the Manager. The coolies labour under the delusion that if notice of their grievances is taken, this would only result in their earning the rigorous displeasure of the sardar who would ill-treat them all the more. My suggestion is that the Managers should be well acquainted with the customs and habits of the coolies.

No. 69.—Babu UMESH CHANDRA ADITYA, B.L., *Pleader*:—

I have a suggestion to make. My idea is that Government might employ an officer, preferably an Indian (Hindu) who is in touch with the recruiting districts, to visit tea-gardens at intervals. The object of his visit would be to mix with the coolies and hear their grievances, and to submit reports of the prevailing conditions to the Government as well as to the garden authorities. My object in making this suggestion is to prevent a recurrence of the unrest which manifested itself a few months ago in this subdivision, so that the activities of outsiders sowing the seeds of dissension and discord amongst the coolies may be detected at once, thus preventing to recrudescence of events such as the exodus. Sometimes false rumours are spread among the garden coolies causing a mischievous alarm among them, and the presence of such an officer as I have suggested would check the spread of such canards. In my opinion if the suggestion made by me is carried out, it would be to the interest of the coolies as well of the garden authorities.

SILCHAR, CACHAR, 27TH JANUARY 1922.

[(MR. WITHERS AND SRIJUT SIVA PRASAD BARUA ABSENT.)]

No. 70.—Dr. G. C. RAMSAY, M.D., of Scottpur and Tarrapore Tea Companies, Majagram Tea Estates, Cossipore Tea Estate and Lakhipur Saw-Mills:—

I joined this practice before the war about the beginning of 1914 and left just after the war broke out. I was demobilised in August 1919 and came back to the Tarrapore Tea Company on the 3rd October 1919.

President:—Q.—Is it your experience that the coolie objects to being treated as an indoor patient?

A.—I do not think so. As far as my practice is concerned I have found the coolies quite willing to be treated as indoor patients. I have been particularly fortunate in having succeeded a most excellent European doctor who was very popular with the coolies.

There is a Central Hospital at Labac where coolies from the 14 tea-gardens and the Saw-mills are treated. It is mainly for surgical cases, but serious medical cases are also treated at the Labac Central Hospital. The Tarrapore Company has 9 gardens, Scottpore 3, Majagram 1, Cossipore 1, and all these gardens with the addition of the Lakhipur Saw-mills contribute to the up-keep of the Central Hospital. I have an inspecting doctor babu, a most capable man, who is well liked both by the European as well as by the Indian establishments and labour forces. His duties are to visit garden hospitals periodically, inspect the various garden hospitals and report to me on any serious cases. He advises the local doctor babus as to the special line of treatment to be adopted for the sick under their charge; he also inspects the sanitary condition of the lines, the wells, and the garden medical arrangements generally.

My own duties are chiefly concerned with the treatment of serious medical and surgical cases at the Labac Central Hospital, but I, as a rule, inspect all the garden hospitals in my practice at least once monthly and further give weekly lectures to the doctor babus in my practice. There are 15 hospitals in my practice. I consider the local arrangements are satisfactory in the hospitals under my supervision. The Agents give me the necessary executive powers as Doctor to run the Medical Department which I do in much the same status as a Superintendent of a Division. I took over charge of this practice on the above understanding.

Very few serious cases are treated on the gardens with the exception of pneumonia, as I consider the undue strain caused by transportation of pneumonia cases to the Central Hospital would militate against the patient's chance of recovery in an acute serious disease of this type where complete rest is the principal line of treatment. There is no difficulty in getting patients either to the subordinate hospitals or Central Hospital. I have always instructed the doctor babus to go round the lines and make themselves friendly with the coolies in order that the coolies may get to know them well and look up to them as their adviser and friend in illness.

As regards latrines my own opinion is that the coolie is a non-co-operator in this respect. We have *pucca* latrines at Labac Central Hospital; there are many objectors, but some coolies do use them. However the coolie prefers to go to the jungle rather than use the latrine. As regards the question of hookworm I made an analysis last year when I cultured the stools of 300 healthy coolies and babus and found that 93% of these apparently healthy people were infected but showed no outside signs of infection. So I say hookworm is more or less omnipresent throughout the labour force. Every well in my practice is chlorinated daily so that the chances of water-borne diseases are greatly minimised. As regards malarial fever I have never met a coolie who has not suffered from it. I do a fair amount of operative surgery,—over 1,000 operations during the past two years. Many of the above coolies would have died but for surgical treatment. I also operate a good deal on cataract cases. In my practice there have been over 100 coolies who, but for the operation, would have remained blind for ever and now they can work and earn their own living. We supply them with spectacles at the Company's cost after the operation. Speaking of Scottpore I must say that the death-rate has been fairly high for the last 3 years. The reason for this is that the type of coolie there is a North-Wester and as we know North-Westers are wheat-eaters and when they come to a garden where the coolies live on rice, a

physiological change takes place in a North-Wester's system owing to the change in diet and I think he is a bad type of coolie to recruit. The close proximity of undrained jungle also partly accounts for the high death-rate. The spleen index is fairly high. There are many *Balantidium* dysentery cases as well due to the existence of pigs, the pig being the carrier of the above type of dysentery. There is also a fair number of phthisis cases as a *sequela* of the influenza epidemic and the mortality is fairly high owing to a number of such cases still remaining behind on the garden. I am certainly not satisfied with the medical examination which takes place in the recruiting districts through depôts. The newly recruited coolies are very unsatisfactory. Of such coolies more than a quarter die and another quarter live on the hospitality of the Tea Companies in this practice. I believe that it is a useless investment to spend money on recruiting coolies of the above type from outside; I believe that money spent locally is money well spent.

In one of the divisions in my practice coolies are given mosquito nets and various other amenities; also putties for their legs, and generally in my practice the concessions to the sick are excellent.

In my opinion hookworm reduces the efficiency of the coolie by about 50%. Hookworm can be tackled by sanitation, latrines, or by the supply of boots to coolies. I have frequently noticed in the case of babus that they take off their boots in wet weather to keep their boots clean. As is well-known it is during the wet season that hookworm infection is liable to take place through the feet. But in my opinion sanitation is the first thing to tackle. My own impression is to impart to the coolies some knowledge of the disease through the medium of a bioscope. I would have an interpreter such as my inspecting doctor babu to explain the seriousness of the disease to the coolies.

I am in favour of opening a medical school at Silchar for the training of doctor babus for the tea-gardens. The Berry-White and Calcutta Colleges do not turn out enough doctor babus for tea-gardens. The Berry-White and Dacca schools turn out doctor babus of the Sub-Assistant Surgeon type who, owing to their limited number, demand high rates of pay. In my opinion, I train doctor babus at the Labac Central Hospital to be as efficient as the Berry-White or Dacca trained man and under the present auspices with the shortage of efficiently trained babus I consider it is much better to train one's own men and put them in charge of the garden hospitals in one's own practice. It is rather a pity that Government abolished the Local Board examination. I have a number of men trained locally and I consider that they should be allowed to sit at the Dibrugarh and Dacca examinations.

The cost *per diem* of maintaining a patient in hospital is about 2 annas 9 pies; in some of my hospitals it is a little more, say, 3 annas. My Agents have always considered any proposals put forward by me most sympathetically.

I believe in centralisation of serious medical cases (with exceptions such as pneumonia and surgical cases) but the administrative difficulties would be great in practices where the gardens composing the practice were controlled by different Agency Houses.

This Central Hospital was started in 1900 by Dr. Glover.

Where the doctor is a whole-time Medical Officer, that is where he is responsible for the medical arrangements in his practice to his Agents or employers direct, there are rarely complications but in practices where the doctor deals only through the individual Managers in his practice there are endless complications as "dual control" is at all times an impossibility and is neither to the advantage of the employers nor employees.

No. 71.—Mr. W. K. GREEN, Manager, Daloo Tea Estate:—

I have been 34 years in Tea, 6 years in Assam (North Lakhimpur), and the rest of my time in Cachar. I have been in Daloo since 1910.

Roughly half the number of my coolies are under agreement. Personally I do not think it would make any difference if the Act was abolished. My people seem to take it as a moral obligation and whether the Act was abolished or not, they would continue as heretofore.

Assuming that the price of rice is Rs. 4 a maund, I think an average coolie who has been on the garden for 5 or 6 years and has no cultivation would need about Rs. 7-8 to Rs. 8 in the case of a man and Rs. 6 in the case of a woman, as an ordinary

Silchar. living wage which would constitute the average for a year. This is liberal with rice at Rs. 4 per maund, but it is very seldom down to such a low figure. A limited amount of land for cultivation is held by my coolies, but everybody has cattle. The lower castes keep pigs, goats, etc.; I do not object to their keeping pigs, but some of the other coolies do. There are, however, few good caste coolies here and very few Muhammadans. For a family consisting of a man and wife and 2 children I would say that Rs. 14-8 a month would suffice.

There was a strike for one day only on one of the out-gardens—the other divisions were not affected—on the 26th May, *i.e.*, the day after the Railway strike, but the coolies went to work the next day without obtaining any concessions. In my opinion the strike was due to some outside political influence and not to any economic distress. I have not had any trouble since. The rates of pay on my garden are 4 annas 3 pies, and 2 annas 8 pies a *hazira* for men and women, respectively; for pruning or any other heavy work a woman is given 3 annas 2 pies. The rate for women has been in force from time immemorial. As regards the rates for men, there has been no change since 1906, and although tasks have practically not altered, work is much easier now than say eight years ago owing to the increased labour force and better cultivation.

As regards rise in coolies' earnings between 1913 and 1921 I may quote my answer to question 23 :—

Year.	Average daily muster for July to September inclusive.	Total earnings.	Average for the three months.
1	2	3	4
		Rs.	Rs. a. p.
1913	1,332	23,053	17 4 10
1919	2,107	47,409	22 8 0
1920	2,242	43,719	19 8 0
1921	1,772	29,789	16 12 11

In 1920, tea cost me about 13 *d.* to manufacture and the price realised was 6-18 *d.* The coolie did not get so much *ticca*. He is, however, getting it now. Only for a few months in 1921 did coolies' earnings decrease somewhat. We allowed *ticca* in 1921. The Agents have never refused any recommendations submitted by me for ameliorating the lot of the coolies.

The maximum price at which rice was sold in 1921 for cash was Rs. 5 a maund. I am not aware of any proposals having been made in 1921 for a general increase in the coolies' wages. I am not in favour of giving coolies a bonus. Rice is mostly sold for cash at or below cost price. The taking of rice in advance is not encouraged. If the coolie pays cash he knows exactly where he stands. Free grazing land is available in the garden and coolies pay a nominal sum—one anna per head of cattle per month—for cowherds. My agreement advances are Rs. 12 and Rs. 7 for men and women, respectively. To give coolies a bonus at the end of the year would pay the garden, but not the coolie. For instance, an agreement might be given on January 1st and the coolie might die or abscond on February 1st. If the bonus were given at the end of the year the coolie would have worked for the money. I do not consider that the reason why coolies ask for the agreement money is because their wages are inadequate. They want a lump sum of money for a marriage or to buy a cow. Presuming a man earns Rs. 10 per month, including his agreement bonus, he practically gets 10% of his annual income paid in advance without interest. Personally I should be very glad to have this privilege for myself. All coolies could easily pay back such small advances. But there are others who do not want the money to be deducted from their pay and therefore take the agreement. In spite of the fact that the price of foodstuffs had increased during recent years, coolies never came and asked for increased wages and this was due I think to the fact that they

realized that we were hard up just as much as they were. Payment is invariably made either by me or by my Assistants; it is never made through the sardars. On the average a working child earns Rs. 2-11-7 a month. Pregnant women get Rs. 4 a month for two months and Rs. 2 on the birth of the child. With regard to orphans my usual plan is to make them over to people of their own caste and I give the latter a monthly allowance to look after the children.

No. 72.—Mr. H. D. MARSHALL, O.B.E., Superintendent, Scottpur and Bhubandhar Tea Companies :—

I have been connected with Tea since the year 1890. I was four years in Sylhet—in the Longai district—and then I came to Cachar in the beginning of 1895. I have been at Polarbund since April 1919. I am Superintendent of Scottpur Tea Company and Bhubandhar Tea Company.

I think it would be quite possible to work without Act XIII, but at the same time I think the coolies like it as it affords them a source of income. I do not think coolies would be any better off without the Act. In my opinion it would be rather the reverse, for a coolie would lose the bonus if the Act was repealed.

No general proposal was made to raise the wages of coolies in 1918, but my predecessor, Mr. Mason, suggested to the Agents the advisability of raising the rates in the near future. The actual *hazira* figure has remained the same. We pay a man 4 annas and a woman 3 annas. There has been no increase in the wages, but all the tasks have been gradually lowered. I pay higher wages on the new garden—Bhubandhar—5 annas for men and 3 annas 6 pies for women, but we paid 6 annas and 4 annas for about 2½ years and only reduced the rates to 5 annas and 3 annas 6 pies in August 1917. The reason why we pay higher wages on a new garden is to open out the garden as quickly as possible and to attract as much labour as possible. We pay *bustee* labour the same rate. There is a lot of rice cultivation at Bhubandhar. When this garden was first started in 1915 (January), there was a small area already under rice cultivation. The area now under rice, cultivated by the coolies, is probably quite fifteen times as much. The coolies are thoroughly settled, prosperous and well off in every respect, with the estate rapidly maturing, and minus the drawbacks which are at first inseparable, from a new clearing in virgin forest; we reduced rates in August 1917 to annas 5 and 3 annas 6 pies.

Rice is selling at about Rs. 4-8-0 per maund. Just now we supply rice to about 12 or 15% of the coolies. New coolies are supplied with rice at Rs. 4 a maund. The unit system is in force on our gardens. In 1921, a man was not allowed to earn more than 5 annas, but a woman was allowed to earn as she liked. Coolies did not earn as much in a given time as when coarser plucking was in practice. When I lowered the plucking *nirikh* at the beginning of last year, I did so with the intention that coolies would be able to earn as much at plucking as in former years. But in practice it did not work out and earnings were less.

Leaf is weighed on an iron frame after being turned out of the basket and we find no trouble with the system. The task for hoeing has been reduced 12% since 1913.

We recruited a good many coolies in 1918-1919, but very few since. These coolies have remained on, except the Ooriyas, a lot of whom absconded in 1921.

They were badly famine-stricken when they arrived and a good many died on the gardens. I am not at all satisfied with the medical inspections in recruiting districts. A good number of coolies are affected with various maladies when they come up to the gardens. In a great many cases they come up with some disease and die on the gardens.

If we did away with Act XIII we would have to give coolies something else so as to make it up. In my opinion, it would be just the same if the wages were increased instead of giving the coolies an agreement bonus. If merely a bonus were to be given, I would much prefer that it be given at the beginning rather than at the end of the year. A coolie does not consider himself very greatly bound to the garden by taking Rs. 12 as an agreement bonus, but there is certainly a moral effect produced on the coolie. We have never run in coolies under the Act. I consider that the present rates of Rs. 1-8-0 for a man and Re. 1-2-0 for a woman per week for an ordinary *hazira* are quite sufficient to keep them in good health and in comfort,

Silchar. exclusive of *ticca*, assuming that rice is selling at not less than 9 seers to the rupee. If rice is expensive as it was in 1920 and also last year, we sell it to the coolies at not more than Rs. 5 a maund. There is a restriction on the amount sold, e.g., 6 seers and 5 seers a week are allowed to men and women, respectively.

There are advances outstanding against the coolies on account of rice supplied to them. There are some coolies at present who get their rice from the godown weekly, and it is put into the rice advance account against their names. These coolies, however, are the riff-raff of the garden.

A family consisting of 3 or 4 children would generally be given a concession of 3 or 4 seers of rice per week.

No. 73.—Mr. E. HOBSON, *Superintendent of the Burtoll Division of the Tarapore Tea Company* :—

I have been connected with Tea since 1896 and have been all the time in the Tarapore Tea Company. My opinion of Act XIII is that it has no great value one way or another. If the Act is abolished I still hope to give the coolies the bonus. I have never had a single case under the Act in all my experience. New coolies are treated just like old coolies except that the former are given a less task. If a coolie wishes to go he is at liberty to do so. I do not consider that the Act in any way restricts the coolie's freedom. The coolie once he takes the agreement simply knows that he is under a moral obligation to fulfil his contract. I do not think he considers himself legally bound. We have a labour force of 2,271 coolies, of which 1,655 constitute an effective force, the remainder being non-effective. There is no difference between these coolies as regards rates of pay.

I think coolies do get enough to keep them in health and comfort considering the concessions given them. If the standard of living could be raised, the facilities for earning should also be raised. As regards actual money wages I think they get enough. In my opinion they are extremely well paid and the result is that there is a good deal of drunkenness. Even if the Act were repealed and the bonus discontinued I think the strong coolie would be less affected than the weak coolie. Agreements are given for one year at a time. If the various concessions, viz., cheap rice, land for cultivation at reduced rents, medical attendance and food when ill, full pay for women on pregnant leave, housing, cheap clothing, etc., were converted into money wages, I think the result would be simply chaos. Drunkenness would be rampant for one thing. I think it would almost be criminal to make any drastic alterations in this respect. We recruited a few coolies in 1917, 1918 and 1919 and practically none in 1920. The wages of the men on my gardens have not been raised for years, their *hazira* being 4 annas; women's wages were raised about twelve months ago from 3 annas 6 pies to 4 annas, as I thought, taking into consideration the children, it costs the women as much to live as the men. I do not think the women have a much harder time on the garden than the men. They no doubt work slightly longer during the plucking season. I had a little trouble last May between the coolies and the babus. The coolies said that they could not stand the sight of a certain babu and wanted him to be removed. The babu went away eventually when he heard the coolies shouting after him.

In my opinion I consider the garden coolies better off than the coolies living in the *bustees* round about the gardens.

The agreement contract is for 313 days. I give it to weak coolies also; it is not my practice to give it only to the best coolies. I am not in favour of abolishing Act XIII agreements. In hard times concessions such as cheap *dhan* and cheap cloth are given. The loss on cloth in 1920 was about Rs. 7,000. In 1921 it was very much less. We always supply cloth at slightly less than the cost price. For instance if we purchase at about Rs. 2-1-6 we might sell it at Rs. 2.

In my opinion I think a family consisting of a man, wife and 3 children, should be given facilities for earning Rs. 2-4 a week to allow of their living in comfort. With increased wages the tasks have not been raised. The work on a garden is not quite as good as it was twenty years ago.

In 1920 about Rs. 25,000 was lost on rice in the Burtoll Division only in addition to about Rs. 7,000 which was given away in clothing.

No. 74.—Mr. E. G. PETERS, *Manager of Ruttonpore Division, Bengal United Silchar Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been in Cachar for 25 years and in Ruttonpore for 10 years.

If Act XIII was repealed it would be the coolie alone who would feel it as then he would not get the agreement money.

I did a considerable amount of recruiting until two years ago but not since then. I have had to rely very largely on the United Provinces type of coolie. A number of such coolies become acclimatised and settle down, others do not. These coolies when given rice here preferred it to wheat which was the staple food of the United Provinces. The reduction in the labour force was due to a certain number of coolies, about 70 in number, who took their names off the books but still reside on the garden. Of course they were given the option of having their names taken off. The reason was that we were not anxious to supply work to people who were not themselves anxious to work. We increased the *haziras* of men from 3 annas to 3 annas 6 pies in 1915, because prices showed a tendency to rise and also because some of the neighbouring gardens had raised their rates.

The maximum rate at which rice was sold to the coolies in 1920 was 6 or 7 seers to the rupee. In 1920 we lost Rs. 922-0-0. I gave my people more facilities for earning *ticca* so that they could buy rice. In 1920 there was no loss on cloth but a considerable sum went towards the hospital.

I consider Re. 1-8-0 a week for a man and Re. 1-2-0 for a woman, excluding dependents, a decent living wage, assuming that rice is selling at Rs. 4-8-0 to Rs. 4-12-0 a maund. At present we are supplying rice to hospital cases, to widows and to people who are hard up.

A great majority of those 70 coolies, who wanted their names cut off the books, remained on the gardens. Some of them still had a certain period of the unexpired agreement to work off. No coolies have so far been prosecuted under Act XIII.

There are 850 acres under tea which is sufficient to keep all the coolies working. Pregnant women get a full *hazira* for 3 months. They are also given Rs. 3 at childbirth and Rs. 2 after two years.

A man is not able to support his wife and children on his earnings alone.

No. 75.—H. L. BIGGE, *Manager of Lallacherra Division, Bengal United Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been 24 years now in Cachar. I was at Barakoi, Chundowa and Silcuri before coming to Lallacherra where I have been just one year now.

Personally I do not mind whether Act XIII is abolished or retained. I have many coolies under the Act.

In 1916 the *haziras* for men were raised from 3 to 3½ annas before I came to Lallacherra.

There has been no political unrest in Lallacherra garden itself, but outside there has been a considerable amount. My bazaar was stopped for 2 months in May and June last and I got no supplies, and now since the past month unrest has started again. Vendors are being told not to come and sell their stuffs, but so far no heed has been paid. At the present moment my garden bazaar is going on very well.

If the Act were abolished and my coolies came and asked me for the bonus I would certainly give it. I do not think there would be a tendency to abscond if the Act were abolished. I consider that the bonus is very much valued by the coolie.

I do not think a coolie would like to take an increase of Re. 1 a month in lieu of the agreement bonus. I think he would much prefer to have a lump sum in his hand so that he could buy cattle or some valuable article. The bonus tends to increase the number of cattle on the garden. Coolies sell a good deal of milk among themselves and also to the *bustee-walas*.

The total population on the garden is 1,800. The working population is: men 438, women 538 and children 161.

I was at Silcuri for 7 years up to April 1920. Later I acted on another garden for 8 months and finally came to my present appointment. Up to 1920 the *hazira* in Silcuri was 3 annas for men and women and 1 anna 6 pies to 2 annas for children. From the time I left there has been no change so far as I am aware. There is a very large amount of paddy land attached to Silcuri—about 1,000 acres. The majority of the coolies there have rice lands, and all who want land get it. Some coolies do not care for such work, but the majority certainly do. We charge Re. 1 a *kear*. I am not in

Silchar. favour of renting out the land for a period of years on Government terms. The practice obtains in some gardens of giving out a certain amount of *ticca* work to the sardar's *daffa* and when that work is completed the money is paid to the sardar who distributes it. On most gardens wages are paid by the Manager or his Assistants. The wages at Lallacherra are paid entirely by the European staff. But coolies have never complained against the giving of wages by sardars because if they had any grievance they would complain to the Managers at once. We did this at Silcurei sometimes and never had any complaints.

I certainly think a man and woman can live in comfort on Rs. 6 each a month with 2 or 3 non-working children; they would be able to save a little from it. Of course I am assuming that rice is not over Rs. 5 a maund. For the past year I have sold no rice. In 1920 I was at Aenekhal and we sold rice at 7 and 8 seers to the rupee making a loss of Rs. 10,000. We pay in cash. The *nirikhs* have never been altered since 1916. The task for light hoeing is 30 *nals*; previously it was the same. Coolies' earnings are never restricted but it is possible to do so. If the *haziras* were increased from three to six annas, the coolies, in my opinion, would only do less work.

No. 76.—Mr. G. D. WALKER, M.B.E., I.C.S., Deputy Commissioner :—

I have been about 2 years and 8 months Deputy Commissioner in Cachar. I was in Gauhati for my first year; I was Subdivisional Officer of Golaghat for 4 years; in Dibrugarh for two periods of a month each; in Tezpur as Assistant Commissioner at headquarters for 6 months. I was Subdivisional Officer at Mangaldai for 1½ years and I acted as Deputy Commissioner at Tezpur for about 6 weeks. Most of my service has been spent in tea districts, except for a period of 1½ years in the Indian Army Reserve of Officers. I have little more than 13 years' service.

During the time I have been here I have had a considerable number of strikes. The present disturbances have been due partly to a change in management, e.g., a stranger acting for the Manager away at Home. But more recently we have had political agitation in the neighbourhood of Lakhipur which produced strikes on the gardens in that locality and similarly in other parts of the district.

Q.—Do you think that economic causes had anything to do with the strikes?

A.—It is difficult to say that economic causes had anything to do with strikes in some cases. Probably the strikes would not have occurred if there was not some undercurrent other than economic working on the gardens.

But I would say that economic causes had something to do with the strikes, though some strikes had no economic aspect at all. Political agitation started in March or April 1921. About the middle of April there was trouble. The outstanding strikes at the beginning of April were on the Burtoll Division of the Tarapore Tea Company. The strikes were general on the two gardens, Burtoll and Lydiacherra and on both the coolies drove out some of the babus. Mr. Bartley, Superintendent of Police, and I got there to find that the place was in a state of strike. The grievance was that a particular babu was cheating them in payments and they demanded that he should be turned out. The babu having left, the coolies went back to work and I did not go into the matter any further. In the Dewan Division the coolies made a demand for 8-anna *haziras* and the Superintendent fearing that they would all leave the garden, gave them *bakshish* to stay on. Later on when the Superintendent went away, the coolies tried to give trouble again and the new Superintendent simply let them go. These coolies were recently recruited and of poor physique. About 10 or 20 coolies from Rampur came into Silchar and remained here for about a week. Their grievance was that they were not adequately paid. I went into their case by examining the figures of that garden and found that they had no intrinsic grievance; on the other hand I found that Rampur paid their coolies exceedingly well. I sent the coolies back to the garden and they remained there until the Manager went Home on leave when they finally left the place. By this time their demand for an increase had reached the figure of 12 annas a *hazira*. They have not yet returned. There have been no serious riots, but mostly strikes. There was a small riot in which I was myself a party, but it bore no political significance. Strikes have been mostly for demands of increased wages. There was violence shown to certain babus on 2 or 3 gardens of the Tarapore Company. On the Burtoll garden the coolies said that they would get rid of the babus first and then deal with the Manager. I have reported every strike that has come to my knowledge to the Government.

The total number of persons proceeded against under Act XIII of 1859 in—

1917 was by planters 10, by others 41, total 51.

1918 „ by planters 11, by others 88, total 99.

1919 „ by planters 9, by others 124, total 133.

1920 „ by planters 8, by others 167, total 175.

1921 „ by planters 19, by others 89, total 108.

By “others” is meant timber traders, paddy cultivators, etc.

Yes, I think if an absconded coolie was willing to refund the agreement money, the complainant would be satisfied.

I would say that the average coolie looks as fit and well-clothed as the cultivators of the district. In some cases, however, the coolies do not look so satisfactory, but that may be due to the fact that they were not keen on earning enough. I agree that money wages are no indication whatever of the prosperity of a coolie; the lowest paid are often the most contented. The non-co-operation movement in some places has prevented coolies from buying rice in their accustomed bazaar. Coolies have been prevented from buying rice in the bazaar with the object of forcing them to take what was called *Swadeshi* rice, and in that way to entice them away from the garden.

In a great many places these non-co-operators started opposition bazaars outside the gardens in order to be able to get at the coolie. But most of these bazaars have now ceased to exist.

The movement of enrolling tea-garden coolies as volunteers is a recent development and I am not in a position to say what it would lead to in time to come. At Bundoo, the Manager told the coolies not to go out with Gandhi caps and badges and the coolies left their work. The Superintendent went up to them and tried to explain that their action was illegal, and he got 15 or 20 of them to give up their caps and ultimately succeeded in persuading half the coolies to go back to work. The trouble is that these volunteers have taken some sort of oath not to obey the Manager and it is possible that at some future date they might be given orders which would be entirely against the interests of the garden. If we were empowered to look upon the Gandhi uniform as illegal and to take steps in that direction, I think the resources at my command would be sufficient for any one garden at a time.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—I have heard that the coolies have been organized by a headman and have been told to wait for some “hookum”. This organized force is waiting for orders from somebody. Is your force sufficient to see that the liberty and security of the individual is not interfered with by these non-co-operators?

A.—I don't think the force at my command is sufficient to secure that the liberty of the individual is not interfered with.

Q.—Do you know the reason why these volunteers parade about the streets?

A.—They do so simply to show the people their numerical strength and to encourage others to join them. They have not interfered with any excise sales.

Q.—Judging from all this political agitation that is going on at present in the district of Cachar, it seems reasonable to infer, I take it, that the troubles on tea-gardens are due to political agitation?

A.—I don't think I can answer that ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. From a purely superficial view people might be inclined to that inference but I would not support it at all.

The earnings have been increased since 1913.

I am not in favour of the abolition of Act XIII.

No. 77.—Babu MOHIM CHANDRA BISWAS, Pleader :—

I am a Pleader practising at Silchar. I am employed by the Indian Tea Association. Formerly I belonged to the non-co-operation party for about 6 months. I have since changed my views and am now employed by the Assam Valley Branch of the Indian Tea Association. I have had coolies coming up to me with grievances which were mainly about inadequate wages. When Mr. Gandhi visited these parts some coolies were produced before him and he told them that they had no complaints to make and that they had better go back. I have been able to find out the conditions on some gardens. For instance, I examined two budgets, one at Rampore and one at Thailu.

Silchar. As regards the complaint at Rampore I satisfied myself that there was no cause for complaint, but in the case of Thailu, I was of opinion that the wages were not quite adequate.

I voluntarily offered my services to the Tea Association because I thought that I could do them some good and also incidentally be of some patriotic service to the country. When I was in the non-co-operation movement I was deadly against the coolie exodus. In my opinion I consider that the present unrest was due to political agitation though at some future date economic causes would have led to such unrest. I would say that the political agitation precipitated the unrest; it may be looked upon as being the dominating factor in the creation of this unrest.

I would put the difference in the cost of living between 1913 and now at 150% increase. The prices at present are about the same as in 1920. The price of rice varies from Rs. 5 to Rs. 7-8-0; in 1920 it was about the same.

I did not attend the September Conference held at Sylhet owing to illness. I became aware of the resolutions passed at that Conference later on. I have been holding meetings and on one occasion I addressed an audience of about 12,000, of whom 300 were tea-garden coolies. In some of the meetings I was asked by coolies whether it was high time for them to leave the gardens and I prevented them from doing so. This was at Lakhipore in the month of March 1921. The coolies were presumably influenced by non-co-operators before I addressed them. I was invited to the Ratabari meeting but did not go. Mr. Pandey spoke to the coolies: he did not however directly make any suggestion that they should go, but his speeches did infuse a spirit of independence and free will into the minds of the coolies. I do not think Mr. Pandey had any personal grievances against tea planters; nor could I say so of the other agitators.

I have been in Silchar for the last 25 years. I have been practising as a Pleader for the past 16 years. I was also a Mukhtear for a time. I have been conducting many tea-garden cases, largely on behalf of the coolies.

I consider Rs. 10 a month for a coolie a living wage exclusive of concessions.

I left the non-co-operation movement because I considered the programme entirely destructive and far from constructive.

No. 78.—Mr. W. E. D. COOPER, *Manager of Binnakandi Tea Estate, Eastern Cachar Tea Company*:—

I have been connected with Tea for 21 years now, and most of my time has been spent in Cachar in the same agency. I am now exactly a year in charge of the Eastern Cachar Tea Company.

I don't think it would make any difference whether Act XIII were repealed or retained. If it is repealed we would still go on giving the coolie a bonus on the understanding that he would work for one year.

Taking the average I would say that Rs. 7 for a man and Rs. 6 for a woman or a total of Rs. 13 *per mensem* would be ample for a small family to live comfortably under existing conditions on this garden.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by a coolie is sufficient to maintain him in health and reasonable comfort.

I have now increased the *hazira*. I give 4 annas to a man and 3 annas to a woman, but that is only a nominal wage. They are often able to earn up to annas 6 for a full day's work. The *hazira* is no guide to what a coolie earns.

I consider it undesirable that the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages. It is difficult to give a definite answer to question No. 25 as to the rise in the cost of living, as in the case of coolies the cost of living varies with the changing price of rice. The year 1920 was a famine year and rice was given at concession rates as an alleviating measure. My Company made a loss of Rs. 11,000 in 1920 on rice supplied to coolies. Cloth has perhaps gone up 50% to 75% but this represents a very small percentage of the coolies' expenditure. Wages are paid by the Manager or Assistant into the hands of the coolies. No money is paid by sardars. Coolies certainly have access to the Manager at a certain hour every day to put forward grievances of any kind, and every opportunity is afforded them of doing so.

As regards the conversion of the concessions into cash, I think the coolie would not be able to convert cash into the actual concessions he gets now, and the unsatisfactory results would only reflect unfavourably on the management. It is the duty of the management to see to the coolies' health and comfort, and from that point of view I think it is essential that the question of concessions should be left solely in the hands of the management. Bonuses are paid at the end of 313 days' work. These are frequently given at the time of engagement for special reasons.

Men's *haziras* were raised on the 1st of January last. Before that coolies were getting 3 annas, both men and women. The number of coolies working on my garden is 1,670. The total population would be probably 3,000 or 4,000 in 5 gardens. The acreage under tea is 1,000 and the total acreage in the grant is 8,000. I consider that there are a sufficient number of coolies for the acreage under tea. I consider Rs. 7 for a man and Rs. 6 for a woman a living wage including medical attendance and housing. I would also include one or two non-working children. I spend about Rs. 150 per month on feeding orphan children. Some gardens give rice concessions to non-working children, but I don't think it is necessary with us because there is ample rice land.

I am not at all in favour of giving the coolies a share in the profits of the tea industry. It was tried by Mr. Chalmers on his garden and proved a failure. Coolies would not understand it, *e.g.*, in one year the Company may make a profit and the coolie may receive a good bonus; the next year may result in a loss, and if the coolie was not given a bonus in this year, he would fail to understand the reason why, being unacquainted with the vagaries of the tea market.

I consider the chief reason coolies prefer life on a tea-garden, with, to them, its unnatural discipline, is that they are protected from the results of their own improvidence in bad times as well as good.

No. 79.—Mr. H. M. CROZIER, *Manager, Doodpulee Tea Company, Hatticherra Tea Estate*:—

I have been 33 years in tea, of which period I have spent 27 years in my present billet. I was 2 years in Kurkorie garden.

I am in favour of retaining Act XIII as it has a good moral effect on the coolie. The majority of my coolies are under the Act. Instead of an increase of pay I would much prefer to give the coolies an equivalent at the end of the month. Of course in that case I would have to reduce the agreement bonus. I would give a coolie so much bonus for so many full worked *haziras*. I have not tried the system, but I should like to do so. To those who have not done full *haziras* I would give on a much reduced scale. New coolies are not put under agreement for the simple reason that they consider that they are bound down to the garden for a certain period. We generally give agreements after 3 years; in some cases where good working coolies themselves come up and ask for it, I give them the agreement after two years. I do not think coolies are so liable to abscond if placed under agreement. Coolies have a natural antipathy to becoming indoor patients; they think that if they go into hospital it is only to die; this notion has been formed by the coolies owing to the fact that serious cases or neglected cases are taken into hospital as a last resort and in many of these cases the patients succumb. But the Central Hospital is less objected to by the coolie, because it is a big institution and more care and attention can be paid to patients.

I have not had any unrest on my garden. There has been unrest in the neighbourhood but so far it has not affected us.

I consider Rs. 7-8-0 for men and Rs. 6 for women a decent living monthly wage assuming that rice is not selling above Rs. 5 a maund. These amounts would cover the upkeep of one or two small children. I made enquiries yesterday about the daily fare of a family consisting of a man, wife, one working child and 4 non-working children, and was told that half a maund of rice is consumed in a week by the lot of them. Coolies are indebted to the garden to the extent of Rs. 12,765. The number of coolies so indebted is 1,946. About a third of that sum may be accounted for by rice advances. Most of the debt was incurred during the last two years.

Q.—Is it correct to say that the coolies were not able to pay for the rice they took at the time?

A.—Yes.

The average monthly pay in 1913 was Rs. 5-11-5 and in 1920 Rs. 5-15-3. I agree that it is a pretty small rise, and that the coolie was not able to pay for the concession rice because the pay was small during that period.

Silchar.

The budget estimate on coolies for 1921 was not cut down; on the other hand we spent over and above the estimate. My coolies have a good deal of land. Fine plucking invariably results in less earnings, more especially during a bad growing season, no matter what the rates are. The ordinary *hazira* rates are 4 and 3 annas. It took an average man 5 hours to complete his task; at present it takes less.

Wages are paid into the hands of the coolies by the babus in the presence of the Manager or Assistant. The Assistant calls out the name and puts his initials in the book, but the actual payment is made by the babu in the presence of the Assistant.

Coolies are given every facility of approaching the Manager in his office in the evening every day. If there were any urgent cases, they would come to the Manager's house. The Manager is always accessible to them. Of latter years I have not noticed or heard of cases where the Indian staff have been oppressing the coolies.

On one occasion volunteers entered Doodputlee garden on the banks of the river near Silchar during the Sunday bazaar. They entered the bazaar by marching through the lines and told shopkeepers not to sell anything that was imported. I am not aware of any attempts being made to enlist tea-garden coolies as volunteers. All the bazaars are situated on the garden land.

We pay fortnightly, but to a certain number of lazy coolies we pay weekly. They are paid in cash at the week end. When rice is dear it is purchased and supplied in advance between one pay day and another, and the money is deducted from their pay. For the last 10 years the coolies have been buying their own rice, except on one or two occasions.

We have had to write off large sums as irrecoverable advances paid in cash or in rice concessions in the case of coolies who are poor workers. Coolies are allowed to earn as much as they like over and above the *hazira*; no restriction is placed on their earnings.

I am informed that a man and his wife can live comfortably on Rs. 11-10-0 a month taking food into consideration only, and that clothing would cost a rupee more for each adult, but this sum does not appear to be spent by them. A non-working child of 7 or 8 would cost another Rs. 3 a month. These figures were taken from their statement of requirements. Coolies have ample facilities on my garden for earning over and above the *hazira*: the *hazira* alone would not cover the coolie's expenses. In my opinion the coolie is sufficiently remunerated taking into consideration the concessions received by him. I should prefer to continue the concessions as it encourages the coolies.

Haziras have not been altered for a long time: they have been in force all the time I have been here—i.e., 27 years.

No. 80.—Mr. A. F. STUART, Manager, Koomber Tea Estate:—

I have been connected with Tea for 26 years, and all the time in the district of Cachar. I have been Manager of Koomber for the last 8 years; previous to that, 12 years, Manager at Larsingah, and as Assistant for six years previous to that at Koomber.

I am in favour of retaining Act XIII simply because it has a moral effect on the coolie from the point of view of the management. It is also desirable from the coolie's point of view because if he were deprived of his bonus he would raise a hue and cry. We put new coolies under agreement. We recruited new coolies in 1919-20; they were mostly from Gangpur and the Central Provinces. A good many of them came up infected with hookworm. These coolies should not, in my opinion, have been passed by the medical authorities of the recruiting district. In so far as they were unsatisfactory, I agree that it was a loss to the garden to some extent.

The pay of the staff has been raised in recent years; in addition the staff received a war bonus.

Haziras have not been raised within recent years but coolies have received an equivalent in concessions. For instance, they were supplied with rice at below cost price, also clothing such as blankets, *dhotis* and *saris* in some cases free of charge, in others below cost price.

The estimated expenditure on coolies has slightly increased since the year 1917. We have never sold concession rice over Rs. 5 a maund.

I have only recently introduced the unit system. A man gets a pice a *nal* up to 16 *nals*, thereafter 2 pice for each additional *nal*. So far this system has been satisfactory. Of course it is subject to alteration twice a year. In the cold weather the coolie was not allowed to do more than his task, but now he can do as much as he likes. There is a natural tendency to sacrifice quality for quantity. But so far the system has not proved unsatisfactory.

A good coolie can earn 6 annas for 8 hours' work of light hoeing. No deduction is made from the coolie's wages for the payment of cowherds.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort. I do not think it is possible, nor do I consider it desirable, to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages. Before the unit system was introduced the *hazira* was 4 and 3 annas and the coolies were allowed to earn more than that. I quite agree that the *hazira* is no guide as to what the coolies actually earn in a month; a coolie might earn considerably more than his *hazira*.

I would put down the difference in the cost of living between 1913 and the present moment, taking a conservative estimate, at 50%. A very heavy loss was made on rice in 1920. A coolie who is getting his concession of rice is better off than the coolie living in the village, so that the rise in the cost of living would not affect the coolie in the garden as much as it would those living in the villages.

Q.—Would you say that the average *bustewala* was a man with some land?

A.—Yes.

Q.—If rice is dear does he not benefit with a high market?

A.—Yes.

The system adopted in the treatment of hookworm cases is briefly this: on arrival the coolies are examined by the medical officer and those found to be suffering with hookworm are put on the sick list and given a course of treatment. Every Wednesday the coolies afflicted with the disease are taken to hospital and there treated with medicine; the treatment is continued for approximately 3 months when they are examined once again. If they are found to be cured, they are discharged, otherwise the treatment is continued.

Q.—Do you offer any inducements to people to undergo this treatment?

A.—They get full *haziras* for the days they are in hospital.

Coolies take to the treatment quite freely. But I must say that this treatment has been made possible by the fact that I have got a good doctor babu who takes an interest in the treatment.

Wages are always paid by the Manager or his Assistant. Coolies have no difficulty in finding access to the Manager whenever they have any grievances to put forward. I agree that there is a tendency on the part of the coolies to refrain from coming forward with any complaint against the Indian staff, for fear of reprisals, but there is no difficulty in the way of coolies approaching the Manager or Assistant whenever they wish to do so.

I approve of the agreement system because it is an old established custom which the coolie thoroughly understands and recognises. I have never found the Act doing any good from the legal point of view, nor do I think the coolie recognises the legal aspect. I consider it purely a moral contract. Coolies know that if they were prosecuted they could simply pay back the advance and thus escape scot-free. I have had a few defaulters but the Act has done me no good because they paid up the advance. I have practically no land for cultivation by the coolies. The reason why the cash earnings in September and February of 1921 were less than those of 1920 is because there was no *ticca* work and less cultivation was done. No extra work was allowed them; they simply did the ordinary work. We give a bonus at childbirth. Up to the time the child is on the books, the bonus is given. Concessions are also allowed in money as well as in rice. Coolies have gardens on which to grow vegetables. The produce from these gardens is part of their income.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—Would you regard the earnings for March 1921, viz., Rs. 8-6-8 on the average sufficient to meet the cost of living in the case of a single individual?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that the mere fact that your wage for some part of 1921 was less does not necessarily mean that your coolies were not getting sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort?

A.—That is so.

Coolies hold practically no land outside the garden.

No. 81.—Mr. B. GUPTA, *Manager of Vernerpur Tea Estate* :—

I am Manager of Vernerpur Tea Estate. I have been connected with Tea for over 25 years and have been Manager of Vernerpur for over 15 years now.

I am in favour of retaining Act XIII. I have given agreements for not more than 2 years or 623 days. The reason why I am in favour of its retention is that it would afford a little protection to the employers. New coolies are never put under agreement immediately on arrival. They are generally put under agreement after one year when they have settled down. I consider that if the new coolie was put under agreement immediately on his arrival and given the advance, he would in all probability feel tempted to abscond with the money. I think it is a mistake to give new coolies an advance immediately on their arrival. I had very few absconders last year; before that there were many. In one year I think I lost about 60 coolies, some having gone to the Burma Oil Company, some to the Surma Valley Saw-mills and to some other gardens. In 1916-19 we imported a lot of wretched famine-stricken coolies many of whom were physically unfit. We recruited these men through the Labour Supply Association. It is my opinion that many of these recruits ought to have been rejected in the recruiting districts and not allowed to come up.

The Manager is the only person who imposes fines. If a coolie absents himself a fine of 2 annas is imposed for that day's absence. The fine is not imposed for continued absence; it may be imposed for one or two days only, the object being to maintain discipline. In a whole year the amount of fines would not exceed about Rs. 2. There has been a widespread feeling of unrest among tea-garden labourers recently owing, in my opinion, mainly to the dearness in the cost of living and not much to any political causes. There were many political meetings held close to my garden, but my coolies never attended those meetings. There has been agitation round about the *bustees* and the agitators tried to stop my bazaar as well. I would say generally that political agitation has very slightly affected the coolies; I think the real reason for this unrest must be ascribed to economic reasons.

We increased the rates for *haziras* in 1913 from 3 annas and 2 annas 6 pies to 3 annas 6 pies and 3 annas, and in 1921 to 4 annas 6 pies and 4 annas for men and women, respectively. I raised the rates in 1913 with a view to equalizing the wages which were given on the adjoining gardens. I raised the wages in 1921 owing to the high cost of living. The cost of living between 1913 and 1921 has risen by at least 50 %.

My coolies are indebted to the garden to the extent of about Rs. 5,000. This sum is accountable for cash advances taken by the coolies, and also includes sums outstanding for a certain number of years. We are required to write off a good amount as irrecoverable. It is difficult to say for how many years we keep advances outstanding against coolies before we write them off, but generally I should say the period may extend to three years.

I am in favour of giving coolies a bonus proportionate to the prosperity of the garden year by year but only under certain conditions, *viz.*, according to the quantity of work and attendance. I made proposals to the Tea Association suggesting that for at least 75 % of the working days those coolies who earned 75 % of the full *haziras* over the whole year should be given a bonus of so much according to the profits made by the garden. I have not tried it myself so far.

Q.—But supposing the garden made a loss and the coolie got no bonus in a particular year, would the coolie understand it?

A.—The intelligent coolies would certainly understand it: it is possible that all might not understand it.

As a rule I do not give rice except when prices are ruling high when I allow the coolies rice and clothes at concession rates. In 1920 I sold rice at the maximum rate of Rs. 5 a maund. I made a loss of about Rs. 2,500 in that year.

The coolies have a good deal of paddy land and we charge rent at the rate of Rs. 2 to Rs. 2-8-0 per *kear* for paddy land and Rs. 3 a *kear* for sugarcane land against the *bustee* rate of Rs. 4 and Rs. 5 per *kear*. About 90 % of my coolies have got land.

I would be prepared to give the agreement bonus after a year's work instead of at the beginning. There have been many absconders during the last few years, but not a single case was taken to Court.

Q.—If the agreement were not taken from the coolies, the coolies, I take it, would abscond, so that the agreement is necessary?

A.—Yes, but these who do not want to stay may clear out; no compulsion is imposed on the coolies.

The political agitation in my opinion has been directed against the Government, also against European as well as Indian gardens. The agitators as I have already said tried to interfere with my own bazaar by attempting to stop it. People go about saying that garden coolies are very badly paid and that they should not obey the garden authorities. I do not allow *swadeshi* preachers to come into my garden bazaars; my *chaukidars* are there to see that these people are kept at a distance. I have had no *hartals* on my garden.

The Rs. 5,000 which has been outstanding against the coolies as cash advances was taken for ceremonies, marriages and sometimes for *khoraiki*, the latter accounting for about Rs. 1,000 or Rs. 1,500.

As regards a share in the profits of the garden I would give commission only to those coolies who worked steadily during the year. If there were no profits made by the garden, the coolies would not get anything. The intelligent coolies would certainly understand the principle. I grant that the unintelligent ones would not.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—You mention that you keep advances on your books for about 3 years. On what principle it is done?

A.—Advances are not written off as long as the coolies against whom such advances are outstanding are residing on the garden. When I do write off the advance after three years I would not tell the coolie that I had done so.

Q.—So that he may still think he is indebted to the garden for the full amount?

A.—I do not think he would because no advance would be cut from his pay so that he knows that he is not owing anything to the garden. We charge no interest at all on this account.

If a poor coolie, indebted to the garden, left the garden I would not take any steps against him as I consider that it would be throwing away good money after bad money, unless of course I knew that it was done with the intention of defrauding the garden, when I would, if I knew the coolie's whereabouts, take action against him.

Q.—Have you discussed the matter of giving a special profits' bonus to coolies with your Directors?

A.—No, but I intend doing so at to-morrow's meeting. I have made a proposal to give coolies a bonus, but unless my Directors agree I cannot give effect to it.

Q.—Are you aware that the programme of the non-co-operator is to interfere with the European-managed gardens?

A.—I am not aware of that.

Q.—Might I draw your attention to a resolution published in the *Assam Gazette* which stated that at a Conference it was decided that service under European planters and residents should be refused, and from this may it not be inferred that the programme of the non-co-operators was directed against European gardens rather than against Indian gardens?

A.—Previously it was directed against all; for instance, Kalinagar, an Indian garden in the Chorgola Valley, suffered.

Q.—You know that in the Chorgola exodus, Bidyanagar which belongs to an Indian firm was exempt from trouble?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that it is quite possible that your own security was due to the fact that you are an Indian and not a European?

A.—Possibly so.

Q.—The fact that it was directed against Europeans might explain why you have not been attacked?

A.—On our side agitation is very scarce and many European gardens have also escaped.

Q.—As regards rent, you charge an economic rent on your rice and sugarcane lands which generally amounts to 2 *kears* per working man, *i.e.*, Rs. 2-8 per *kear* or Rs. 5 annually. When you recover the rent, do you admit that so far as that rent is

Silchar. concerned you are recovering in the rent something equivalent to the extra wage that you are paying to the coolie?

A.—Yes.

Q.—About the loss on rice, could you tell me how much was so lost in 1919-1920?

A.—Rupees 2,500 in 1920; the rest in 1919. Prices went up in the latter part of 1919. For cloth in 1919 and 1920 I lost a good deal. I gave away winter clothing amounting to Rs. 700 or 800 besides *dhotis* and *saris* worth about Rs. 200 or 300. No portion of these sums is recovered from the advances.

Under the agreement I give a bonus of from 7 to 10 rupees in the case of a man and from 6 to 8 in the case of a woman according to the stamp of worker. When an agreement is renewed and a man is indebted to the Company to the extent of Rs. 3 at that time, I always recover the amount from the bonus. I give the agreement partly with a view to reducing the indebtedness of the coolies to the garden.

The rent which a coolie would pay for his land forms a very small proportion of his profit from the land.

No. 82.—Col. R. ST. JOHN HICKMAN, *Manager of Boro Jalinga Tea Estate* :—

I have been about 38 years in Tea—in Cachar about 27 years, Sylhet 10 years and Boro Jalinga about 11 years now.

I am in favour of putting the coolie under contract, speaking from the coolie's own point of view.

We put new coolies under agreement on arrival, and I do not think they abscond with the advance.

I have done a lot of recruiting during the last 10 years. I have recruited about 800 or 900 coolies and have been very lucky in getting a good class of men.

Rice was sold at concession rates in 1920 only and the maximum rate was Rs. 5 to the maund.

A certain amount of rice was sold to people in the garden who are not coolies working on the garden at the higher rate.

Rice was supplied to new and poor coolies at a uniform rate of Rs. 5.

You say in answer to question 72 that you purchased rice at Rs. 7-10-0 a maund and sold it at Rs. 6-8-10. Would you call that rate dear from the coolie's point of view?

A.—Yes, as the normal rate is cheaper than that.

As to whether it is possible and desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages, I can only say that from the garden point of view it is almost impossible to do so, while it would be most undesirable from the coolie's point of view.

We pay a bonus of Rs. 8 to men and Rs. 6 to women under the agreement. These sums are lower than the advances paid in the neighbouring gardens. It has been a custom more or less with us and has been based on the popularity of the garden. The bonus is never recovered. Coolies have other advantages also.

Six hundred and thirty-two acres of land are cultivated by 538 coolies. We give one *kear* of land free of rent to all working coolies. Ninety-five per cent. of the men have got cultivation.

My system of payment is weekly. I supplied rice only once during 1920 when prices were very high. My *haziras* are 3 annas for both men and women. I have a labour force of very nearly 2 coolies to the acre. Coolies are at liberty to earn as much as they like. More *ticca* is given now and the work is easier. The *nirikh* tasks have also been reduced considerably.

Q.—Is it fair to assume that a coolie finds it easier now than 10 years ago to earn his pay and has facilities for earning more now?

A.—Certainly.

Q.—Financially he is better off and yet the *hazira* remains the same, so that the *hazira* is no indication of what a coolie earns?

A.—Yes. The coolie earns far more now than he used to 10 years ago and in a much shorter time. To earn 4 annas a day it would take a coolie 4 to 5 hours.

A coolie's expenditure varies entirely according to the price of rice. Taking a high figure for the rate at which rice is sold I would say that Rs. 7 to Rs. 8 would be ample for a coolie to live in comfort with 2 non-working children. This sum would include clothing and I think they could live luxuriously.

Wages are paid under European supervision. I have never heard of any complaints from coolies against exactions by the Indian staff. Complaints are made to the Manager or Assistant and coolies have easy access to them.

The coolies recruited by me were quite healthy and strong and as far as I know the medical examination testified to this. Coolies are examined in the recruiting district as well as by the medical officer on the garden and results are reported to Calcutta.

I am of opinion that the agreement has a moral influence on the coolie. As far as I can recollect I had only one or two cases under Act XIII during my experience of 35 years. Nearly all my coolies are under agreement. Agreements are taken both by poor coolies as well as by rich coolies, that is to say, those who are well off as well as those who are not quite so well off.

No. 83.—Mr. C. W. SLOCOCK, *Manager of Borakai Tea Company* :—

I came out to Tea in 1904 and have been in Cachar all the time. I was at Silchar for some time. I have been at Borakai for the past 7½ years. We put coolies under agreement. I do not think it would make any difference whether the Act was abolished or not. I think we could work without the Act, but the coolies would certainly miss the bonus as if the Act was repealed we need not give the bonus.

We recruited a bad lot of coolies in 1920—they were Nuniyas, quite fit physically but too lazy to work, and with the exception of about 10 or 15 all of them left, as they were not willing to work.

The increase in the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 may be estimated at 100%.

The rate of *hazira* for both men and women is 3 annas; they are paid weekly. *Haziras* have not been altered in recent years. The hoeing task has not been altered either. It takes a coolie 4 hours to do his task, or in other words to earn 3 annas. There are 460 acres of paddy land distributed among 440 men. We charge rent at Re. 1 or annas 8 a *kear*. We give no sick pay in the case of pregnant women, but we give them as much leave as they require. Rice has always been issued at concession rates, that is to say, one or two seers in the rupee below the bazaar rates.

We do not give agreements to women. The reason why we made a difference between men and women in regard to the granting of the agreement bonus was that there were so many women already and we did not want to employ any more. The practice observed with regard to putting coolies under agreement is to give the agreement to the husband and not to the wife, or at any rate to one member of the family.

There was agitation on my garden when a big meeting was held in the *bustees* on or about the 10th December and on the 12th the coolies came up demanding 8-annas *haziras*. I said I would not give it. They went to work till later when they came again and demanded that they did not want the sardars and babus on the garden. They attempted to strike but I told them that if they did so, they would not get any wages.

I consider that the money wages of the coolie together with the concessions are quite sufficient to maintain him in health and reasonable comfort. I consider it impossible to convert the concessions into an increase of money wages, and even if it was possible, I would consider it most undesirable. We intend increasing the rate of our *haziras* from 3 annas in the case of men and women to 4 annas, and 3 annas 6 pies respectively, and in the case of children from 1 anna 6 pies to 2 annas, the reason for doing so is because tea is improving.

Mr. Dawson.—Q.—Would it be correct to say that the increase has been suggested because of the economic necessity of the coolie?

A.—I do not think so; other gardens have put up their *haziras* for some years now and I think we must follow suit, especially as we can afford it now that tea is improving. I have never before applied to my Agents to put up the *haziras*.

Wages as also *ticca* are always paid by the European staff. At Silcurei, however, *ticca* is paid by the sardars; not at Borakai. The sardars take the contract for the *ticca* and pay the coolies themselves. Some of these coolies are under Act XIII.

Major Fox.—Q.—Why do the people like to take agreements?

A.—Because they are in need of a lump sum of money which they want to invest in the purchase of cattle.

Q.—Is it the case that the man who is under agreement has a less amount of freedom than the man not under agreement?

A.—To some extent it is so.

Q.—Is there any distinguishing line?

A.—No; they are equal. The men generally come and ask for the agreement of their own accord.

Q.—But the increase to 3 annas 6 pies in the woman's wage practically makes up for the difference in the agreement, since she does not now take the agreement?

A.—Yes. Although I do not consider the economic condition of the coolie bad, I am prepared to give him an increase in view of the more promising outlook in tea. The Company made no profit in 1920.

Coolies are afforded every facility of approaching me whenever they wish to put forward any grievances.

I do not know whether the coolies would want an increase if the agreement was abolished, but I should certainly say that the men would be discontented.

Q.—When a coolie is under agreement, you can compel him to go to work?

A.—I think you can tell him that he should. The loss on rice as noted from the books on my return from leave in 1921 was Rs. 1,153. I do not know at what rate rice was sold, but I can only say that it was sold below the market rate.

No. 84.—Mr. J. E. WEBSTER, C.S.I., C.I.E., I.C.S., Commissioner :—

President. You are Commissioner of the Surma Valley?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How long have you been Commissioner?

A.—Since December 1920.

Q.—Before that?

A.—I was Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet in 1914 to the beginning of 1917.

Q.—Have you served in any other tea districts?

A.—No.

Q.—Can you give us an account of the Chargola exodus which took place in May 1921?

A.—The position when I first came to this Division was that the tea industry was passing through a serious crisis owing to the low price of tea and inability to get rid of stocks in hand. Several gardens were in financial difficulties. It was apprehended that coolies would be unable to obtain the usual amount of employment and that there would be a serious drop in their earnings and consequently unrest. However gardens were doing their very best to keep work going and to prevent the coolies from sharing in the general depression. They went on all right till February 1921 when Khilafat and Congress meetings started both in Sylhet and in Cachar. There was also, I noticed, an article in the *Surma* about that time headed "My brother the coolie," which showed pretty well the line that was going to be taken by the agitator. I drew the attention of local planters to that and I think they took measures. In March again Mr. C. R. Das visited this Valley and there were more meetings both in Sylhet and Cachar. Then on the 31st of March and on the 2nd of April there were meetings at Brahman Bazar and Tilagaon, at which coolies were present. It was obvious that this was likely to lead to trouble, and I communicated with Major Fox on the subject and took steps to have the garrison of the Division strengthened in anticipation of trouble. On the 11th of April there was another meeting at Rajnagar which did not produce any immediate result that I know of, but on the 12th the coolies on the Lungla tea-garden went on strike and on the following day a number of coolies at Ghazipur went on strike. The Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, Sylhet, went to the locality and, I think, they were able to settle the Ghazipur affair. There was further trouble in the north of the district which was not directly connected with tea and in the

meantime there were strikes in various parts of Cachar chiefly out in the Labac and Dewan direction, and towards the end of the month I went down to the Lungla Division and visited Lungla garden and the coolies, after having the conditions explained to them, went back to work with, I think, no immediate concessions.

Q.—Did you explain the position to the coolies yourself?

A.—Yes. The party came to me at Prithimpassa and I pointed out to them that they could not expect a rise in wages while the gardens were working at a loss and that they must wait for better times. They were quite reasonable at the moment and actually went back to work on the following morning. There was also during this time a meeting at Shamshernagar which is right in the tea district, but comparatively few coolies attended it and the only immediate result seems to have been a very brief strike of a few hours on the Alinagar garden, which was settled without official intervention. While I was down there I had discussed with the Deputy Commissioner and with certain planters the question whether it was necessary to stop all meetings in the neighbourhood of gardens and we came to the conclusion that no immediate action in this direction was necessary, but that we should carefully watch all such meetings and take notes of what was said there.

Then came this intimation of the Chargola gardens and the Deputy Commissioner's request for my approval to his action in forbidding all further meetings within seven miles of tea-gardens, which I gave. I got as far as Karimganj on my way back to Silchar and I met the Deputy Commissioner, and Mr. Ballantine, Superintendent of Police, and drove out with them to Dullabcherra garden. We had a little preliminary talk with planters in the course of which I gathered that the general impression there was that this strike was in some degree at least the outcome of the refusal of the Calcutta Agents to sanction the increased wages which had been recommended by local Managers. Mr. Dawson, Mr. Ballantine and I were at the meeting of the 6th May held late in the evening from about 8 p.m. to 10-30 p.m. which was attended by representatives of most of the gardens, except Mr. Gunnery, the only important Manager who was not there and who was detained by illness. Well, the general impression seemed to be that the coolies should have a rise in wages, that it must be a substantial rise or it would have no effect, and that it must be given at once or the exodus would continue and the Valley be depleted. As to what this rise should be, each member present at the meeting was asked in turn what, in his opinion, would be a reasonable figure, and different members had different ideas on the subject. The opinion of the majority was in favour of the rates which were finally adopted at the meeting, and it was decided that these concessions should be announced immediately without waiting for sanction from Calcutta as that sanction might arrive too late. The Managers present asked if they could put it on record that they acted with the full approval of the officials present and I said that they could do so and that I would record a note of which they could make use for this purpose. I recorded this note on the following morning and handed copies to Mr. Bather.

Q.—Did you suggest any rates yourself?

A.—Not at the meeting, as far as I know.

I had an informal discussion and mentioned certain rates to certain individuals, but in the meeting I carefully abstained from giving any advice, that being a matter which was one for tea-garden Managers and not for Government officials to decide. I may say that I would not have suggested such high rates as were offered because I did not think that such high rates could be paid. Actually one Manager informed his coolies through his chowkidars of the concession immediately after the meeting, others did not do so till later, and one Manager at least declined to announce any concessions holding that it was not fair to his employers to do that without approval. On the following day we went over to Chargola garden where we saw Mr. Gunnery and informed him of what had happened. He quite approved and wired to Calcutta. I think he said he proposed to announce the same concessions. Of course, I did not see the telegram but I know that before he had announced them he heard that his Calcutta Agents would not sanction them. Later in the day, at the instance of the Manager of Singlacherra, Mr. Dawson and I went to his garden, and on his behalf explained to the coolies the decision that had been come to with the result that they agreed to work on the terms announced. That evening some at least of the gardens received telegrams telling them that these concessions could not be sanctioned. That evening it was reported from Dullabcherra that there was some unrest and that the coolies wanted to see the Manager, and the following morning he went down to the tea house where he interviewed a number of coolies. He heard their grievances and explained what had been done. I may say

Silchar. that the chief grievance put forward was the extent to which the coolie was cheated by his sardar, that is to say, the sardar was employing an excessive number of coolies on his private work. One of the sardars admitted this and was fined on the spot. The coolies also put forward their fear that these concessions, though granted temporarily by the Manager, would not be continued, and Mr. Bather gave his solemn assurance that his word would not be broken. Not more than half an hour after the coolies had dispersed, apparently satisfied, news was brought to the bungalow that the men and women were leaving the lines. Mr. Dawson and I went down to see what we could do and found a stream of coolies going across country. We tried to intercept them first at one spot and then further down on the main road. We stopped several and spoke to them but they would not listen to us, those who had anything at all to say declaring that these concessions would not be confirmed and that they were only temporary.

Q.—Do you think that the coolies had come to know the decision of the Calcutta Agents?

A.—That was my inference at the time. In fact I inferred that the value of the concessions was discounted by the knowledge that Calcutta refused to confirm them. Of course I could not prove that, but that was my inference from the demeanour of the coolies.

That is really all I saw of the exodus in the Chargola Valley. Later I saw some of the coolies in Karimganj. Some of the coolies as they left Dullabcherra garden were shouting "*Gandhi Maharaj ki jai*," and a day later, when I passed a number of them in Karimganj town, I heard them exclaiming "*Hindu-Mussalman on ki jai*"; that was the main cry.

Q.—Then the coolies would appear to have known about the telegram before that?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Are the Agents the same for all these different gardens?

A.—No, there are different Agents. The Agents for Bidyanagar are Messrs. Martin and Company.

Q.—Was there no trouble on Bidyanagar garden?

A.—There was no trouble. Concessions were announced probably, as I understand, by the Manager, just in time to prevent trouble. I believe he has been supported all through by his Agents. Messrs. James Finlay and Co. are the Managing Agents in respect of some gardens, and I believe they are forwarding Agents only in respect of others. The Agents of Dullabcherra are Macleod and Company who are forwarding Agents and not Managing Agents.

Q.—Did they send the telegram to Dullabcherra?

A.—I think so. I should add that in Karimganj we met Mr. Crawford of Messrs. James Finlay and Co. and Mr. Trevor of Messrs. Macleod and Co. and Major Fox, on the morning of the 8th I think.

Q.—Did Mr. Crawford and Mr. Trevor approve the concessions?

A.—I would not say they did, but I understand that they subsequently recognised that they could not be withdrawn. I told them myself that I did not think it would be safe to withdraw them. Their recognition of this was too late to stop the exodus.

Q.—Do you consider the action of the Agents mainly responsible for that exodus?

A.—It is rather difficult to say, but I think the concessions would have been more likely to have been effective in stopping any further exodus if they had been confirmed by the Agents. My impression on the 7th was that the coolies were prepared to accept these concessions, and I think if they had been assured that these were permanent concessions which would not be taken away from them, they might have gone on working.

Q.—Is that all you have got to say about the Chargola exodus?

A.—I think that is all.

Q.—That brings it up to the 8th of May. There was a repetition of the exodus later on?

A.—Yes. In June there were further strikes brought about owing to a change in the Managers. That, however, was on one garden, but a number of coolies continued, for several days after the 8th, to leave the different gardens. They kept coming in in big batches to Karimganj. I think the largest exodus was from the Maguracherra garden which declined to announce any concessions at all.

Q.—Did the Chargola exodus have any effect on the gardens in Hailakandi or Cachar? Was there any trouble or were any meetings held?

A.—There was not much trouble in May. The trouble began first of all in Cachar in March when there were strikes on several gardens, in some cases resulting in the dismissal of garden babus who were objectionable for some reason to the coolies. Most of these strikes collapsed after a few days, and in some cases undesirable coolies were expelled from the garden, which action had a deterrent effect on the remainder.

I found some of these coolies afterwards down the line and made enquiries as to whether gardens were willing to take them back. A few were willing, but most of them were not. I would not say that the Chargola exodus itself directly affected either Hailakandi or Cachar; I have no information to prove that. I did not myself visit any of the gardens in Cachar on which there were strikes, so my information regarding the Cachar gardens is only second-hand. A number of small strikes, I believe, went on up till May.

Q.—And in Sylhet there was trouble on gardens after the Chargola exodus throughout the year?

A.—Yes, throughout the year off and on. There were strikes at Dholoi; that apparently was a special case, because the coolies objected to the Manager having called in the Police on a matter which they thought should have been settled by the garden. It collapsed after the Deputy Commissioner went. There was a certain amount of unrest at Patrakhola. The September strike at Kaliti was connected with objections to the head clerk who was said to have got too much power and to take excessive *disturi*. In the end of May and beginning of June there were strikes in the Ita and Karimpur divisions in the Lungla district. These seemed to have been due to no definite economic grievance but to be the outcome of political unrest. Then there has been trouble again at Baroora, and later at Jagcherra in the Balisera direction,—not very serious, but all the outcome of the general unrest.

Q.—What would you call the trouble at Jagcherra?

A.—I believe it was ostensibly a grievance against the head clerk. I do not quite know what was at the bottom of it.

Q.—In Cachar there have been no serious riots during the past year?

A.—No serious tea-garden riots, but there was one case in which the Deputy Commissioner and the Manager of Uranaband garden were assaulted; this was in the beginning of November. There was some trouble before that on Uranaband garden. The Assistant, I understand, struck a woman, and there was a row. The Manager held an enquiry and dismissed the Assistant and head clerk who were responsible for the trouble. Later on the Manager himself committed some petty assault and the coolies got out of hand. He asked the Deputy Commissioner to come down; the latter came and heard what the coolies had to say and passing no definite orders went off with the Manager through the tea house coming out against a crowd of coolies who came up to them in a threatening manner and asked what was the charge. They were not satisfied with the answer and seized *lathis* and attacked the Manager. The Deputy Commissioner, intervening to protect the Manager, was hammered himself.

Q.—In the other cases the disturbances took the form of a strike?

A.—Yes. There had been a few cases where the coolies had come into Silchar in the old fashion to present their grievances and had gone back again. In a few cases the people deserted altogether.

Q.—I understand that volunteers have been enlisted from among the coolies on the gardens in Cachar?

A.—This is the very latest development. In fact the enlistment of volunteers in the villages is rather a recent development in Cachar. In the early part of the year there were comparatively few volunteers; just in the towns you found a few volunteers keeping order at meetings, but since September very large numbers of volunteers have been enrolled in the villages especially in Hailakandi and towards Borkhola and Lakhipur in the Sadr subdivision. They are mostly Muhammadans of the lower classes as well as school boys. It is only within this month that I have heard any word of coolies being enlisted as volunteers.

Q.—Have you any estimate of the number of volunteers in Cachar at the present moment?

A.—I have no reliable figures, but I imagine it to be something like 20,000 from the various reports that have been made.

Q.—Any extension of this volunteer movement to tea-garden coolies would be very dangerous I take it?

A.—I think it is most dangerous because once a coolie gets to recognise another authority than his Manager, it will be impossible to maintain discipline on the gardens.

Q.—Are there any further points on which you would like to make a statement?

A.—I do not think so.

Major Fox:—Q.—Would it be fair to assume that the rise in wages was given very largely for the purpose of stopping the exodus of coolies from the gardens?

A.—Yes, it would be fair to assume that the rise was given very largely for that purpose, but not solely.

Q.—That is to say, the general consensus of opinion was that the coolies had some economic grievances?

A.—Yes, and I was informed that this matter had been represented by at least some of the gardens to their Calcutta Agents some time previously.

Q.—There was a difference of opinion as to whether six annas and four annas should be given, and I take it from what you have said that some of the Managers were not in favour of giving such a large increase?

A.—Yes, some Managers thought five and three and a half annas would be sufficient. I have kept no note, but there was a good deal of difference of opinion.

Q.—Would it be fair to assume that the higher rate was given with the idea of stopping the exodus and the lower rate for the purpose of remedying the economic grievance?

A.—I would not say that; I would say that those who proposed the higher rate thought that that was a fair rate to give the coolie, though, but for the immediate necessity, they might have tried to temporise by giving a lower rate in the first instance.

Q.—At this meeting when wages were considered was anything said with regard to concessions?

A.—Yes, it was considered that probably the concessions would have to be withdrawn and that a higher standard of labour would have to be insisted on, that for the time being tasks should not be changed, but that possibly in the long run it might be possible to increase the tasks slightly owing to the general rise in the efficiency of the labour.

Q.—Then at this meeting the officials took no active part in suggesting to the Managers that there might be a rise in the wages?

A.—Not an active part, but in the preliminary discussion some of the officials expressed the opinion that garden coolies should have better pay.

Q.—What then was the general drift of their advice?

A.—The general drift was that if the coolie really required an increase in wages it would be a mistake to withhold it.

Q.—There was no figure, I take it, arrived at as constituting a fair wage?

A.—Not beyond six and four annas put down in the note. I may say that I mentioned to one of the Managers present that my own idea would have been five and three and a half or four annas, but they were very definite—those who proposed the higher figures—that no lower figure would be of any use.

Q.—Did the discussion take place between two or three Managers or between many of them?

A.—We met in the Club beforehand and we talked to various people in groups and I also talked more particularly to Mr. Bather, and to his Assistant who drove us out. Mr. Gunnery was not there. I cannot remember whether I talked to Mr. Simpson or not.

Q.—From the evidence we had at Dullabcherra I gathered that the Managers themselves felt at this meeting that this discussion about wages was more to stop the exodus than to remedy the economic grievances?

A.—I should not say that. I came away with a strong impression that the Managers thought that they were very badly treated by the Calcutta Agents who had placed them in this difficult position by withholding concessions, and that this trouble had brought matters to a head and compelled them to act on their own initiative without waiting for sanction. It was certainly my impression that this was what they would have done themselves before the exodus if they had had a free hand. I mean that they would have raised the coolies' wages, though to what figure I cannot say.

Mr. McMorran.—Q.—You said quite rightly that tea was passing through a very difficult time. I suppose these Managers were aware of this just as much as yourself?

A.—Yes, or better, as they knew the conditions of their individual gardens?

Q.—I suppose it would not be an exaggeration to say that not one of these Companies had shown a profit for the year 1920?

A.—I could not say that for all the gardens. My general impression was that they were working at a loss, but I had no definite information.

Q.—Can it not be said of every garden in Cachar?

A.—I know certain gardens which made a profit in 1920. As a general rule, however, gardens were not making profits.

Q.—I want to know how Managers in these circumstances made proposals to pay increased wages when the funds were not available. I may say if one is going to be fair with the coolie, he must be prepared to carry out what is promised. There was not the wherewithal to make those increased payments at the time or even prior to the exodus?

A.—I understood from the Managers that the position was that there were no profits from which to pay the existing wage bills. That might have to come out of reserves in any case. If they did not give this increase they would lose their coolies and the gardens would be ruined. If they gave the increase they might save the garden. They hoped that with the improved efficiency of labour, with better pay, and by economies in special concessions, they would work at only a slightly increased cost of production, and they thought that they were justified in the circumstances in taking upon themselves the responsibility of saving their gardens from utter ruin by incurring a temporarily slightly increased expenditure. That, I take it, was the guiding feeling in the minds of Managers.

Q.—So that the intention was that the cost of production should not be increased?

A.—I am sure they all hoped that it would not be increased.

Q.—Can you say, approximately, how many coolies went out of the Chargola district?

A.—I believe the number was something like 6,000 or more—perhaps 8,000. I am afraid I do not remember the exact figure.

Q.—You spoke to some coolies as they were going away from the district. How many do you think you might have spoken to?

A.—It is difficult to say. I tried to speak to a good many. I may have actually stopped and spoken to eight or ten.

Q.—Which gardens were these people from?

A.—This particular lot was from Dullabcherra.

Q.—Were these people doubtful as to whether the promise made by their Manager would be implemented?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Was it not the case that Mr. Bather was the leading man who proposed this advance?

A.—He certainly was one of about three Managers who were very much in favour of it; I think two others were more so than he was. He no doubt took a leading part.

Q.—You got no indication as to why they doubted the word of the Manager?

A.—No.

Q.—It is extraordinarily difficult to see how the management can prevent coolies going out if a promise that has been made to them is not accepted. There is no other way in which you can deal with labour. The Manager has made a promise of increased wages to the coolies, and in spite of that fact, they go out and offer you an explanation which indicates that they do not expect that the offer made to them would be implemented? Is that the impression they conveyed to you?

A.—That is so.

Q.—You cannot say whether that impression was a general one?

A.—Of course I cannot say what was in the minds of all the coolies of whom there were about 400, but coolies act rather in a mass in this respect, and it is not likely that only particular individuals would hold one opinion against the majority.

Q.—If the Manager had made a promise to the coolies, do you think that the refusal on the part of the Agents to increase the wages was conveyed to the coolies indirectly?

A.—Yes.

Silchar. Q.—The Agents wired back to say that they were not prepared to make the advance?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Was that qualified in any way?

A.—I believe not.

Q.—Was there a similar refusal on the part of other Agents?

A.—Yes, except in the case of Martin and Co., the lessors of Bilyanagar. Messrs. Finlay and Co. ultimately agreed to pay these rates. I have no official knowledge on the point.

Q.—Coolies have left the Valley since the rates were conceded?

A.—Many have.

Q.—So that the rates in their instance had not prevented an exodus?

A.—No.

Q.—Does not that point to some kind of political agitation which was influencing labour?

A.—I have no doubt that there is a political movement influencing coolies.

Q.—So that even if there may have been some economic justification in this instance, it does not follow they were getting rid of the political influence on tea-garden labour by making concessions in wages?

A.—No concessions in wages would altogether exclude political influence, but when there is economic trouble political influence has a better soil in which to work.

Q.—In connection with the movement, that is taking place just now in enrolling tea-garden labourers as volunteers, can anything be done by Government to limit such activities?

A.—Government have declared that certain volunteer associations are unlawful associations, and to be a member of such associations is in itself an offence and punishable. You have, of course, in proceeding under this law, to prove that a man is a member of an association that comes within this definition of 'unlawful association', which is, in some cases rather difficult, but if it be found that tea-garden coolies are joining unlawful associations, Government can give the assistance of the law to any Manager who wishes action taken.

Q.—Is it unlawful to wear the distinctive badges of the association?

A.—It is not unlawful to wear a badge except as a sign of your being a member of an unlawful association. It is in some sense a proof of your being a member. The wearing of a badge in itself is not an offence.

Q.—Some Managers seem to be in doubt as to whether they can take legal measures?

A.—A Manager of his own accord can take no action beyond dismissing a man, and, having dismissed him, expelling him from the garden in the same way as he would deal with any unsatisfactory coolie. He can, however, make a complaint before the Deputy Commissioner charging this man with being a member of an unlawful association, and it would then be for the Deputy Commissioner to enquire into the matter in the ordinary legal course.

Q.—So far these associations are not taking any definite action, but are apparently waiting for an order?

A.—They are taking certain definite action. There are picketing shops, especially shops that sell English salt, English piece-goods, and country liquor, and they are trying to prevent people from buying those articles. In other words they are trying to interfere with the normal course of trade and business.

Q.—What we were informed when visiting gardens the other day was that these people are being organized in batches, one being in charge of say ten volunteers with instructions to do nothing until they get the 'hookum'. Would you regard that as a movement that requires some active intervention on the part of the Government?

A.—I am doubtful whether more active intervention is practicable; it is a very difficult question. One realises the danger of the situation, but it may easily be accentuated by active measures. On the one hand, it is very difficult to say whether repressive measures will not stimulate the movement instead of squashing it. On the other hand, there is the possibility that if nothing is done, everybody will get tired of the movement; they will quarrel among themselves, and the whole thing will fizzle out.

That is the line taken by the apostles of *laissez faire*, and it is very difficult to know whether that or repression is the wiser policy. We had a little time ago, about a month back, started taking active measures, and the results are not so very satisfactory as to encourage us in going on. We arrested a good many leaders and sent them to jail, but we found other men coming up in their place, and I am a little doubtful myself whether it is much use going on with these prosecutions.

Q.—The fear is that as we get away from the time of economic pressure of coolies, many of whom are quite well treated now, the movement may continue and we will not escape the possibility of a similar experience to Chargola? Is Government in a position to take any action with a view to preventing that?

A.—I do not know that we can stop an exodus once people have set their minds on it. I do not know of any way in which it might be done effectively. I don't think there is any.

Q.—I just wanted to know what you thought, as I myself think that there is no way. Is the force at hand sufficient to stop an outbreak?

A.—Yes, under present conditions. We have a very effective force here which we can send to any place to deal with trouble.

Dr. Williams:—Q.—With regard to the rise of wages in the Chargola Valley, are you aware that the agreement bonus has disappeared?

A.—I was not aware, but I anticipated it.

Q.—Do you regard the agreement bonus as a concession?

A.—I regard the bonus as a concession, not the agreement.

Q.—What is your opinion about agreements under Act XIII? Would you continue them or would you transmute them into higher wages?

A.—My personal opinion is to continue agreements with a slight modification in the Act. I think it is a benefit to the coolie to have once a year a little lump sum coming in.

Q.—In what way would you modify Act XIII?

A.—I would transfer to the labourer the option of repaying the advance rather than completing his contract.

Q.—With regard to the Chargola exodus I would like your opinion on the condition of the coolies?

A.—I would say that the coolies, on the whole, were a little below the average of tea-garden coolies. Generally I saw no signs of emaciation or starvation, but they were very badly clothed. Perhaps I may explain that the majority of the coolies who were leaving were the remnants of large batches of *Chamars* and low-caste men from the Central Provinces and Gorakhpur, who had been imported in famine years, had suffered severely in the beginning of the influenza epidemic, and had never quite got over that. Also they had a very poor time on the gardens, because the old, indigenous coolies of Chargola are good caste Hindus who utterly despised those people who had been brought in among them, and, I gather, rather bullied them; so they had special reasons for being unhappy.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—Do you think that a similar rise in wages as was accorded in Chargola, was or is necessary in other parts of the Division under your charge?

A.—I could not generalise. I would not be inclined to say that six or four annas were generally necessary rates. I have in fact made certain suggestions to Government in which I put down a lower scale of wages as being sufficient.

Q.—But some rise in wages was necessary I take it?

A.—Yes, I think it was certainly necessary. On a good many other gardens it would be desirable, but I find it very difficult to generalise. It depends on a great many things. On some gardens even with low rates coolies could earn quite good pay owing to the facilities for *ticca*. There are some coolies who would only do a minimum amount of work and earn merely the *hazira*; other coolies make as much money as they can. I think, however, that a great many gardens ought to have increased the wages on the ground that the rise in wages has not been proportional to the rise in the cost of living. I find from the reports that as long ago as in 1889, a coolie family

Silchar. consisting of a man, his wife and one or two children, earned, on an average, about Rs. 10. The cost of living for a coolie was then estimated to be Rs. 9 or Rs. 10 a month for the family, so that income and expenditure about balanced. Now I find that a coolie family, as far as I am able to judge from statistics, makes about Rs. 13 to Rs. 18 and the cost of living has gone up to about Rs. 20 on the same scale as that of 1889, so that relatively the labourer is worse off and that is perhaps due partly to the fact that he does less work.

Q.—How have the prices of foodstuffs and cloth changed during the last ten years?

A.—I think foodstuffs have gone up about 50% and cloth twice to three times the former price.

Mr. Das :—Q.—What would you recommend for an individual to live in comfort?

A.—The total earnings of a man should be Rs. 10 a month; a woman would probably make less on the average throughout the year, say, about Rs. 7 or Rs. 8, and a child about Rs. 4; these rates include all the concessions. You may give concessions and decrease the wages by a corresponding amount. In my opinion a family would be quite well off with these earnings with three or four non-working children if they had a little land; not otherwise.

Q.—Would you recommend that a coolie should be given a share in the profits?

A.—I doubt whether he has got to that stage of education where he could be made to understand the principle of profit sharing. Experienced planters have told me that if a coolie were to get a share in a prosperous year and nothing the next year, which may be a bad year, he would not understand it.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—Agricultural land, I take it, is held by a good many coolies, while some do not hold land?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Does this not cause some heart-burning?

A.—On a few gardens it has caused heart-burning. I remember one garden in South Sylhet, where the Manager, on taking over, found great dissatisfaction owing to the unequal distribution of land between old and new coolies, and he endeavoured to put this right by a fresh distribution with the result that there was a serious riot. The new coolies were dissatisfied with the old state of affairs, and the old coolies resented any attempt to rectify it.

Q.—Would it not be good for coolies holding land to pay rent to the Tea Company?

A.—On most gardens coolies do pay rent. Some gardens give the land free, some charge a small rent, while others charge an economic rent.

Q.—To remove this heart-burning would it not be wise to charge all the coolies an economic rent and do away with this concession?

A.—I think that even if rent were charged the possession of land would be a concession.

Major Fox :—Q.—With regard to the rise in the cost of living during the last ten years you said foodstuffs had gone up 50% and cloth two or three times the price. Is it not the case that on many gardens foodstuffs are sold at concession rates?

A.—On most gardens I understand.

Q.—And that cloth is also sold?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Then would it be fair to say that coolies have not felt this rise to the extent of 50%?

A.—Yes.

Mr. Das :—Q.—Do you know whether Managers are of opinion that the coolie should have some right of possession on the land?

A.—I cannot say what the general opinion is on the subject. I have known a few men who said they would certainly be opposed to it. I cannot speak for the industry as a whole.

Q.—What do you consider is the reason for this?

A.—Firstly, I think some Managers like to reserve to themselves the power of rectifying any unusual distribution; secondly, if a coolie ceased to work for the garden, he should have no right to retain the land which has been given him as a coolie.

President :—Q.—Do you think that the half-yearly return which Government has prescribed as regards wages is satisfactory, or would you suggest any alterations?

A.—I have no alterations to suggest in this return.

Q.—Do you think these returns are checked by the garden Manager?

A.—I have no knowledge how the checking is done, but I know that there are many inaccuracies discovered in them.

Q.—So that the presumption would be that they are not checked by the Manager?

A.—I suppose the actual arithmetic is left to a clerk.

Q.—Is it reliable?

A.—Not entirely.

Q.—Would you say, in general, that it is a reasonable return as regards wages on a garden?

A.—I believe so. I imagine that under the usual law of averages these mistakes cancel each other by the time one gets to the figures of the whole province.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Do you think it would be a reasonable thing to ask the Manager to check the arithmetic of a return like that?

A.—I should not like to do that. Managers might occasionally notice any extraordinary figures and make enquiries before forwarding the returns, otherwise I would not expect the Manager to add up his columns.

PANITOLA, LAKHIMPUR, 4TH FEBRUARY 1922.

Panitola.

[MR. WITHERS AND MR. FOX ABSENT.]

No. 85.—Dr. F. C. McCOMBIE, Medical Officer :—

I have been in this district altogether 14 years. I was here first for 3 years from 1904 to 1907, then I went to Bishnath (Darrang district) for 3 years and finally came back here in 1911.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Would you say that this is a healthy district on the whole as far as the coolie is concerned?

A.—Conditions in the district rather differ. The upper end towards Limbuguri is very malarious, and from Panitola downwards the incidence of malaria is less.

There are about 20 gardens under my charge. Hookworm is not bad in the gardens looked after by me. I always muster the coolies regularly and examine them from time to time with a view to keeping down the incidence. Those whom I find suffering from anaemia are separated and placed under treatment. We have no latrine system in the lines. We have started the septic tank system at one or two hospitals as an experimental measure just to see how the coolies would take to it.

Q.—Do you find any difficulty in getting coolies to go in for indoor treatment?

A.—On some gardens where discipline has been maintained from time immemorial, there is no trouble in this respect. It has been rather difficult on other gardens where there has been labour unrest.

Q.—As regards the taking of indoor treatment, do you find that anything depends on the quality of the Indian staff?

A.—I think the personality of the doctor babu has got a lot to do with getting coolies into hospital. It is essential to have a good doctor babu who is good with labour and well-backed by the Manager.

Q.—Would you say at the present moment that a coolie is well-nourished and well clothed on the gardens on the whole?

A.—Yes, that is so on the whole.

Q.—But would you say that in some cases there is room for improvement?

A.—Yes, on some gardens there is room for improvement. Of course it depends entirely on the class of labour that the garden has. There are certain castes of coolies who are unemployable and much depends on whether the management looks after such coolies and nurses them, at the same time seeing that they get full pay and rice. New coolies on first arrival are segregated for a week or 10 days.

Panitola. Q.—In your experience of over 10 years would you say that the physique of the present-day recruit is as good as 10 years ago?

A.—There is a larger percentage of inferior castes recruited at the present time and less of the aboriginal type who are a superior lot. I can say that this physical disability affects the capability of earning good wages.

President :—Q.—Is this district only suitable for certain classes of coolies?

A.—I would not say that exactly, but certain coolies do better up here. We get very few coolies from the United Provinces and my opinion is that they certainly do not get on well, owing partly to climatic conditions and partly to the change in diet. I do not think a United Provinces coolie can feed himself properly here with the high price of flour. I have not had very much experience of United Provinces coolies. In Baliyan there were about 200 of them and we got a supply of flour to feed them with, but most of the coolies died. I considered such coolies quite unsuitable.

Q.—What does it cost at present to feed a coolie in hospital?

A.—It would cost about Rs. 5, not including clothing, in a big hospital. During the last few years it might have gone considerably higher. We supply bedding and clothing in the hospital.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Would you say that the hospital diet is a slightly specialised diet, that is to say, better than they get in their own houses?

A.—Probably they get more fowl and fish; it may not necessarily represent what a coolie takes in his own house.

Q.—With regard to the cost of food in hospital, one has to bear in mind that that is for a special purpose?

A.—Yes.

No. 83.—Lieut.-Col. H. C. GARBETT, *Superintendent of Budla Beta Tea Company* :—

I have been nearly 26 years in Tea and in my present billet since the year 1915. I am in charge of four divisions. I have been all my time in the Lakhimpur district.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—When did you give a rise in wages in Budla Beta?

A.—On 1st December 1920. In 1913, men got Rs. 7 to Rs. 6 a month and women Rs. 6 to Rs. 5. The rates have been raised for men 5 annas 6 pies to 4 annas daily and women 5 annas to 3 annas 6 pies daily.

Q.—You say in 1913 the wages were for men Rs. 7 to Rs. 6 a month. Would that have been the case in 1919?

A.—Yes, and women and children were receiving Rs. 6 to Rs. 5 and Rs. 4-8-0 to Rs. 3, respectively. The difference between the seven-rupee coolies and the six-rupee coolies is this: those who take their rice get Rs. 6 and those who do not take it get an extra rupee. Rice is sold at the fixed rate of Rs. 3 a maund in the garden. So also under the new rates, the coolies on the lower rate of pay get rice at Rs. 3 a maund.

Q.—Is it the policy to discourage coolies from taking rice?

A.—We would rather they were free of the factory so that they could arrange for themselves.

Q.—You say in 1920 the loss on rice was Rs. 44,000 on Budla Beta Division alone. Would you say that you lost so much on rice and at the same time you gained by paying those coolies less pay?

A.—In the case of those who take rice, it really costs the garden more. The people who do not take rice are usually the coolies who have a little rice land of their own.

The cost of plucking and manufacturing a maund of tea is estimated at Rs. 6 which is the rate more or less over all the Divisions. We work nearly up to this estimate.

Q.—With regard to question 47, you say the task has not been altered in recent years. If you look at the answer as regards Kanjikoah, you say the light hoe task has been increased by five *nals* since 1913. Is that correct?

A.—Yes, only in the case of light hoeing.

Q.—In Kanjikoah you say in *ticca* hoeing a coolie can only earn one *ticca* and in the other Divisions apparently there is no limit as to what a coolie may earn?

A.—That is wrong; it should have been "a coolie earns as much as he likes in Kanjikoah also."

At Budla Beta there are 1,000 *bighas* of land held by 300 coolies, that is to say, Panitola. 18 per cent. of the adult coolies have got land for cultivation in the garden. Rent is charged at four annas per *bigha*.

As regards irrecoverable loans, about Rs. 40 per annum is written off. This only represents cash which has been borrowed by the coolies for ceremonies, etc.; it does not include money for rice advances. There is not much outstanding in the way of rice advances.

Pregnant women are given leave three months before and three months after birth and are also allowed full pay for the whole period, but no bonus is given on the birth of a child. A pregnant woman may get pay for a longer period according to the advice of the doctor. I think it is a sound policy to give full *haziras* for six months, because it acts as an encouragement to increased progeny.

Agreement advances are recovered by a book entry transaction.

Q.—Is the advance a bonus?

A.—It is not a bonus, and yet it is a bonus. For instance, a man shown as getting Rs. 6 a month in our pay sheets is given an extra rupee so that he is shown as getting Rs. 7 a month and according to the work he does, say, for full work, every month one rupee is deducted for the recovery of the advance, but his pay is made out at the full Rs. 6 rate.

Q.—In practice would you say that the coolie gets that Rs. 12 into his pocket?

A.—Yes, he does not really pay it back. We put coolies under agreement. Children of 15 and upwards are put under agreement.

Q.—Supposing Act XIII was abolished, would it make much difference to your garden in the way of coolies absconding or doing less work?

A.—I certainly think that if Act XIII is abolished we should probably have a few more absconders.

Q.—Supposing the Government of India did abolish the Act, which is not improbable, would you still continue to give the bonus?

A.—The whole question would have to be reconsidered. I should think that the Company and Directors would require some protection.

President :—Q.—Is the birth-rate higher than the death-rate on your gardens?

A.—I have four gardens, on three of these the birth-rate is higher than the death-rate.

	1921.				Births.	Deaths.
Kharjan	123	70
Kanjikoah	46	36
Budla Beta	106	107
Bokpara	94	59

Generally speaking the birth-rate is higher.

I think it is possible for a coolie to earn as much in a given time with a reduced task for fine plucking, as was the case when coarser plucking was the practice, provided the reduction is in proportion.

I think the coolie can earn as much by plucking now as during the war boom in tea.

Q.—Do you think the coolie is as well off now as compared with his condition before the war?

A.—I consider he is better off now in spite of the great rise in prices including cloth. The price of cloth has gone down a good deal during the last two months; I should say the cost of living is now about 60 per cent. above pre-war rates.

Q.—Do you think the coolies are better clothed now?

A.—I think they are about the same.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—What is the method of giving agreements on your gardens?

A.—We have the Agreement Form XIII. There is a separate paper for each coolie and his name and other details are filled in and his thumb impression taken, with a stamp affixed. The monthly wage is entered, and we promise the coolie whatever his monthly wages are. Men Rs. 7 and women Rs. 6 is the present rate; it used to be Rs. 6; this is in addition to the bonus.

Q.—Does he actually get Rs. 7?

A.—Yes, if he works the full number of working days in the month which varies from 24 to 27 days. An average working month is 26 days.

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Q.—If a coolie is sick what happens?

A.—It depends on his sickness a great deal. If seriously ill, he is taken to hospital, but if he is merely seedy and unable to work for a day or so, he is given leave and not paid unless he goes into the main hospital, where he is fed at garden cost. Individual sick allowance is also given.

Q.—The agreement provides that if a coolie is sick, he is still paid so much a month?

A.—(Witness was shown a specimen form by Dr. Williams.) That is not the agreement form used in my Company.

I prefer scattered lines as they make for health and happiness.

Land for rice here is generally not difficult to cultivate.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—Do you mean to say that the coolies are better off now because the wages have been raised?

A.—Yes.

About 60 to 70 per cent. of our coolies are under agreement.

Q.—The remainder who are not under agreement are not given to absconding?

A.—Some of them do go away.

Q.—Does it mean that 60 per cent. of the coolies stay on because they are under agreement but for which fact they would go away?

A.—If they are determined to go, they would please themselves, but I think, being under agreement, they feel that they owe an obligation to the garden.

In the case of non-working children we give free rice to large families consisting of four or five children. For instance, if there was a family consisting of five or six children and only two of them were working, we would supply free rice to the others to help the family through.

About Rs. 4,000 worth of blankets have been supplied in one year.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—You were asked a question which amounted to this: "Do they want to abscond because they are under agreement"? Does it follow that coolies want to abscond necessarily?

A.—No.

Q.—If people abscond there may be reasons which might have nothing to do with the treatment on the gardens I take it?

A.—Yes; in fact I think nearly all the cases of absconding are due to troubles among the coolies themselves.

Q.—The suggestion is always made that the planter is responsible for the treatment of the coolies whereas such troubles arise more often than not out of their own disputes?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Is it not in the interests of the employer to be considerate in the treatment of his labour?

A.—Yes.

As a general rule, a man's total earnings are sufficient to maintain himself and his family in health and reasonable comfort, but that must depend a great deal on various conditions such as how long he has been in Assam, whether he has other means of support such as rice land of his own in which case his pay might cover the expenditure of the whole family.

Q.—But as a general rule an agricultural labourer would be assisted by his wife and family in his earnings, I take it?

A.—That is so.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort. I do not think it desirable from the coolie's point of view that these concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages.

Q.—Occasionally rice cheapens and the price comes down below the average and there is no suggestion made in these circumstances that the coolie should accept a lower rate of remuneration?

A.—No.

Q.—Supposing rice is fluctuating from year to year and that in one year it has been abnormally cheap and in an other it has been abnormally dear, may it not be said that the one cancels out the other?

A.—Yes.

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Q.—In many other employments wages remain unchanged but prices go up?

A.—That is so.

Q.—So long as it is temporary there is no change necessary in wages. The prices of foodstuffs at present, for example, are quite reasonably low; are they not?

A.—Yes.

Q.—They did compare unfavourably with pre-war prices?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that while we are making this Enquiry the cost of the market for food prices is such as to make the position of the coolie quite a favourable one?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Can you say, or have you any idea as to what percentage of a coolie's outlay in a year is represented by the purchase of cloth?

A.—I cannot say, but it would be a very small proportion I should say.

Q.—It has been suggested that the agreement should be withdrawn, but that the payment made on account of the agreement should be continued. Do you think that a reasonable suggestion?

A.—No, I do not agree with it altogether.

Q.—Would it be reasonable to regard the advances made by a garden to a coolie under agreement as some premium paid for getting his services throughout the year?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So long as it is a two-edged agreement and not one-sided?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You do not necessarily put new coolies under agreement?

A.—Never.

Q.—So that a coolie coming up to the garden is not bound down from the day of arrival, but is free to find his feet in a new district and he does it absolutely of his own free will without any compulsion being put on him to remain?

A.—Yes.

I have had no strikes whatever on my gardens.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—As regards question No. 24 you have given the same answer as the Sub-Committee, i.e., Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7 for a woman for a decent living wage. Supposing a man and wife, both workers, have two children of five and six years of age, would this wage cover the cost of the whole family?

A.—I think so.

The present rate of rice in the bazaar is Rs. 6-4-0 for *kazla* rice.

Q.—Would you not say that rice in the bazaar was cheap at the present moment?

A.—No.

Q.—What was the price in the bazaar before the war?

A.—Between Rs. 4 and Rs. 4-8-0 as far as I remember.

Q.—Is this three-rupee rate a survival of Act VI?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you remember what was the wage for a coolie under Act VI?

A.—Rupees 5 for the first year for men and Rs. 4 for women, and Rs. 5 and Rs. 6 for the second and third year, respectively, for men, while Rs. 4-8-0 and Rs. 5 for the second and third year for women.

Q.—Did they have opportunities for earning *ticca* in those days in addition to the fixed wages?

A.—Not to any great extent. They could earn *ticca* on plucking and hoeing and that was about all. Nowadays they can earn *ticca* on any work. Women would not make very much in the cold weather, but they can and do earn *ticca* in pruning.

Q.—It is possible that in some cases coolies are absent cutting their crops in the cold weather, but in the Doom-Dooma district there is not much of that, so that there, at any rate, to a large extent coolies are dependent more or less entirely on what they can make on the garden. Would that be correct?

A.—No. A coolie has a hundred and one ways of adding to his salary. He makes baskets and sells them in the bazaar; he grows vegetables which is also another means of adding to his income.

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Q.—Would you say that the coolies on the Doom-Dooma side, where there is no cultivation, get opportunities of earning more?

A.—Generally speaking, coolies in the Panitola district, having more rice land, can add more to their income than the coolies living in Doom-Dooma.

I am in favour of retaining Act XIII or some other Act on similar lines.

The concessions which are given to a coolie over and above his wages would work out monthly to about Rs. 2-6-0 on the average at Kharjan; that is excluding medicine and housing which, if added, would mean another Rs. 5, i.e., Rs. 3 for housing and Rs. 2 for medicine. If all these concessions were added to the wages of a coolie, his income would amount to something like Rs. 15 to Rs. 16 a month. Rupees 3 for housing covers the cost per adult working coolie or a total of Rs. 36 a year.

No. 87.—Mr. G. E. MOORE, *Manager, Panitola Tea Estate, Jokai Tea Company, Limited*:—

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

From the executive point of view and from the garden point of view if the concessions were converted into an increase of money wages, it would make the working of the garden very much easier, but from the coolie's point of view it would not be at all suitable.

We work on the unit system which was started in the beginning of 1920. We were the first garden in this district to start the system. My example was followed by some other gardens in the Panitola district. I have found the unit system quite satisfactory even from the garden point of view as regards quality of work and the amount of work done.

I had trouble in one coolie line where the coolies complained they would prefer to have their pay monthly and not fortnightly and that they should not be required to pay cash for their concession rice. When I started the unit system I arranged to pay the coolies fortnightly instead of monthly, thinking that it would be to the benefit of the coolies, but they evidently did not like it. They wanted to receive their pay for the ordinary garden task monthly; anything that was earned over the ordinary task was to be given them weekly or fortnightly with a view to enable them to buy their oil, *dal* and other things. They preferred to have their pay proper in a lump sum. The reason they gave was that if they received their pay in small amounts they would never have large sums to buy, say, a blanket or a piece of cloth for ready cash. In other words anything earned over 4 annas for women and 5 annas for men was to be paid to them weekly or fortnightly.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—Do you think the coolie himself has benefited by the unit system?

A.—Certainly.

Q.—Can you give us a case illustrating that?

A.—In the out-garden of this division we had a strike and the Assistant Manager reported it to me. I went over and met the labourers. The unit system was instituted there about the same time as it was here. After two months' work under the unit system the labour force of the out-garden petitioned to go back to the old form of pay. I tried to explain to them that they were losers by it but they seemed to be suspicious and I was requested to revert to the old system. When I met the coolies at the time of the strike, their grievance was that Panitola was under the unit system and they also wanted to have it. My conclusions were that they realized that the Panitola had garden coolies were earning more under the unit system than the coolies of the out-garden under the *hazira* system.

Q.—At what rate do you sell concession rice?

A.—At Rs. 4-8-0 a maund and sometimes Rs. 5; it is never sold over Rs. 5.

My coolies have approximately 3,062 *bighas* of land for cultivation within the grant and approximately 3,182 *bighas* outside. Approximately 90 per cent. of the adult population have got land for cultivation. The coolies to a large extent are housed in garden *bustees* and prefer this system.

We introduced the latrine system in our lines three years ago as an experimental measure.

Panitola

Q.—Would you please describe the latrine briefly?

A.—The latrine is a septic tank. A water-tight tank is built in the ground. In this case it is a 2-seated latrine which will do approximately for 35 people. The size of the tank is 6 feet long by 3 feet broad by 3 feet deep. Fitted to this tank is an overflow pipe with a drowned outlet. For the benefit of the Committee I would explain that a drowned outlet means that the overflow is taken not from the surface of the water tank but half-way down the tank. A latrine of that size with a house over it costs approximately Rs. 85.

Q.—Do the coolies use it?

A.—Undoubtedly. When I was building it even before I finished the work I had trouble in preventing coolies from going there. In my opinion as far as latrines are concerned, coolies will use them provided that they are always kept clean. That is absolutely essential. As long as the latrine is kept clean I have no difficulty in getting the coolies to use it. I maintain sweepers and the latrine is under the direct supervision of the doctor babu.

Q.—Do you think that the health of the coolies has improved by using this latrine?

A.—I certainly think so. For instance we had a good deal of anaemia and *anchylostomiasis* in the lines where the latrine is; there is very little now.

I am of opinion that Act XIII is most essential from the labourer's point of view as well as from the point of view of the Company. From the point of view of the employer, I may say that he makes the advance to a labourer and he naturally wants some form of security for it. The money is advanced free of interest and I think you will agree that it is a universal policy that the employer must require some form of security for the money advanced by him, and if Act XIII was repealed, it is my opinion that many employers would be disinclined to make advances and the result can only mean discontent among the labour force.

There is no doubt but that the labourer appreciates the advance which he usually takes from the garden. Of course I do not make a practice of giving the advance to anybody who asks for it. I always go into a man's case and satisfy myself that he wants the money for a beneficial purpose and then I give it to him. My advances are recovered; they are not bonuses.

Q.—Supposing Act XIII were abolished, would you continue the advance?

A.—Personally I would continue to advance the money, but I would not like to answer for others.

We have a very large number of cattle, but very few pigs.

As regards the Act, I should not mind making the advances under any other Act, provided it replaces Act XIII. Personally I would be satisfied with the Indian Contract Act which is a civil transaction. Even if the penal sections in Act XIII are repealed, it would not affect me personally.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—What does a new *kutchra* coolie-house cost?

A.—About Rs. 2-12-0 to Rs. 3 per cubit and the whole hut containing 4 rooms would cost about Rs. 80 to Rs. 90. This would accommodate roughly about 12 coolies; in other words, 4 families of 3 persons (2 adults and one child) in each apartment. The huts are repaired every year and the cost would amount to approximately Rs. 30, or in 2 years such a house would cost between Rs. 110 to Rs. 120; in other words, 10 annas per adult head per month. We used to give coolies quinine very frequently, but we have discontinued the practice now as a general practice.

Under the unit system the daily earnings of the coolie have increased by 25 per cent. in the case of a man and 33 per cent. in the case of a woman. For instance, under the old system 4 annas was paid to a man for 15 *nals* of deep hoeing, whereas under the unit system, the unit is 3 *nals* for an anna so that it constitutes an increase of one anna or 25 per cent. for the same amount of work.

There has been agitation and in my opinion coolies were disturbed by agitators. As an example I might quote an instance of what happened on the out-garden. The coolies had lost a day's work by going on strike. I satisfactorily settled the dispute and they all went back to work. About 2 or 3 coolies for the whole labour force came up to me and asked if the labour could work on the coming Sunday so as to make up the loss. I simply told them that as they had been listening to the babus in the Tinsukia bazaar and carried out their orders, they should go and ask the babus for that day's pay. They left without a word to say. I think it is more or less conclusive that they had been listening to the agitators.

Panitola.

Q.—You do not regard any disputes you have had with regard to coolies as a result of economic conditions?

A.—No, I might say that any reason for economic disputes had already been settled in 1920 when the coolies received their increased wages in the beginning of that year.

Q.—What is your plucking rate per maund of tea or green leaf?

A.—I have no rate. I pluck to a unit. The unit weighs approximately 2 seers. Last year the rate was Rs. 5-10-0 to Rs. 5-12-0 per maund of manufactured tea.

Q.—Do you know anything about short-term coolies said to be brought up from Chota Nagpur?

A.—My experience is second-hand. A considerable number came up about 4 years ago but not many to this district. They came for 6 months or a year only.

I should like to make a few suggestions to the Committee. It would appear that the whole of the 85 questions asked by the Committee may be considered leading questions to the following 4 general questions:—

- (1) Are the tea-garden coolies paid sufficient in wages and concessions to keep them in health and reasonable comfort with a possibility of saving a little?
- (2) Is it possible to fix a universal standard wage?
- (3) Is it possible to place a cash value on concessions?
- (4) The repeal of Act XIII.

Question (1), about a labourer being adequately paid and being able to maintain himself in health and comfort, I have already answered and do not now propose to go further into the question.

Question (2), is it possible to fix a universal standard wage? Standardising of wages, in my opinion, is impracticable over the whole province, but I make a suggestion that there is a possibility of standardising wages in the form of a minimum living wage for an ordinary garden task in groups of gardens or in districts where the local conditions are approximately the same. This minimum living wage to be a minimum living wage on which the labourer could keep himself in health and clothe himself decently but no more, and to be absolutely irrespective of all concessions, not as the Committee's question No. 24 is put. All concessions will then be to the coolie's benefit for either saving, living more luxuriously or in any way he may prefer to utilise his concessions. This minimum living wage might possibly be fixed in groups of gardens or in districts by forming sub-committees with, say, the Deputy Commissioner or some other Government official in consultation. The rates would naturally vary considerably in different districts because one has to take into consideration the fact that the cost of living and local conditions vary very considerably in different districts of the Province.

Question (3), is it possible to place a cash value on concessions? The placing of a monetary value on concessions and paying the garden coolies wholly in cash, giving no concessions, is, in my opinion, quite all right from the executive point of view; it is, however, not favourable from the coolie's point of view. In connection with this it appears to me that a great deal of misunderstanding as to the actual pay of a garden coolie is caused by these concessions when comparing the tea-garden labourer's pay with the pay of his brethren in other industries. For instance, I am given to understand that in the Jute Mills of Calcutta a labourer's pay is Rs. 15 per month. If the labourer lives outside the Mill compound he is paid the Rs. 15, but if he lives within the Mill compound Rs. 3 is deducted for his accommodation and medical attendance, etc. Still the Mill returns his wages at Rs. 15. If this is correct and the wages of the coolies of the tea industry are to be compared with the wages earned by the coolies of other Indian industries who show and return the amounts deducted for housing, etc., as part of the coolies' wages, I say that the tea industry is entitled to the same privilege. The general public know nothing about the working of the tea-gardens and know nothing of the concessions granted. The actual cash pay is all that is taken into account. If the cash value of all concessions were added to the actual cash pay paid to the garden coolie, the total would be found to compare very favourably with wages paid to coolie labour in towns and elsewhere where labourers do not live under such congenial conditions and probably work longer hours.

As regards the return of wages my suggestion is this:—There might be a separate column in the Government return of wages for each of the following, viz., (a) cash earnings of the coolie, (b) cash value of concessions, (c) total amount,

and (d) either below the form or on the back thereof, a table showing what these concessions are. This would show exactly what the coolie earns in pay and concessions. Panitola.

I am putting forward these suggestions for what they are worth.

I consider a garden coolie in this district would be very comfortably off if he earns throughout the year Rs. 8 to Rs. 9, excluding housing and medical attendance but including cheap rice and other such like concessions.

No. 88.—Mr. L. A. ROFFEY, *Manager, Sealkote Tea Estate*:—

I have been 21 years in Tea. With the exception of 3 years in Tezpur, I have been all my time in the Lakhimpur district.

President:—Q.—How do you think conditions here compare with Tezpur?

A.—I left Tezpur many years ago and cannot say.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it possible or desirable to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—You say that the custom on your garden is to give the subordinate Indian staff a commission in the same manner as is given to sardars. Would you please describe the system briefly?

A.—Sardars are given a commission on the plucking, the rate being one anna in the rupee on all plucking over what used to be the old *hazira* and the junior mohurrirs also get that now.

Q.—What is the idea?

A.—I considered the junior mohurrirs were not sufficiently well paid and were not getting a living wage, and to guard against any corruption or bribery, I gave this commission. I think the system is sound and it has worked well so far.

As regards the unit system, I can only say that from the garden point of view it is satisfactory, and the individual coolie has distinctly benefited by the unit system.

The system of payment is weekly. Previous to January 1920 the rates were Rs. 6 for men, Rs. 5 for women and Rs. 4 and Rs. 3 for children. Under the unit system the rate of pay is considerably higher.

Q.—With regard to question No. 35 you say "There is a limit to the minimum amount of units of work a coolie may do." What do you mean by that?

A.—For each task there must be a minimum amount. In the case of a gang sent out for deep hoeing their minimum is 12 *nals* for 4 annas unless for some reason or other they are not capable of doing that. They can earn over and above that as much as they like. The coolie is paid for what he actually does. The task for light hoeing has been reduced. Formerly the task was 35 and 30 *nals* for *hazira* and *ticca* respectively. The *hazira* rate was Rs. 6 a month. Now coolies have got to do 7 *nals* for one anna and 23 *nals* for 4 annas, so that for the same task the coolie gets more money.

Q.—Supposing a layman said to you "What do you mean by a *hazira*," how would you define it?

A.—A daily wage, if it is question of monthly pay. The *hazira* in its ordinary meaning would signify a daily task or what a coolie earns daily, excluding *ticca*.

Under the old Act VI the coolie could do *ticca* in addition to his *hazira*, and rice was sold at Rs. 3 a maund. A new coolie does not earn as much *ticca* as he would when he becomes acclimatised.

Our agreement advance is really a bonus, and under the unit system we still continue it as a bonus. If Act XIII was abolished by the Government of India, in order to enable us to continue the bonus we should certainly want a guarantee of some form or other. The money is considered as a bonus though legally it is an advance, and I do not think we should be justified in continuing it without having some hold on the coolie. All contracts are made on the principle of *quid pro quo*.

We have never supplied rice above Rs. 4 a maund.

No. 89.—Mr. J. H. BUNDOCK, *Manager, Limbuguri Tea Estate, Limbuguri Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been 23 years in Tea and all my time in the Lakhimpur district.

Out of the working coolies living on the estate, roughly speaking, I have about 1,000 under agreement and 100 not under agreement. I certainly value the agreement system.

President :—Q.—Can you say what would happen if Act XIII was repealed?

A.—As long as the coolie gets his money advance it would not perhaps very much matter. The Act is of help in cases where coolies abscond from the garden. There have been only about 10 cases taken to court by the Limbuguri Tea Company during the past 10 years. In past years there was a good deal of loss sustained by coolies absconding, but of late years it has not been so great. The coolies who left the garden in 1916, 1917, 1918 and 1919 were coolies who had finished their agreements and most of them settled on land near the garden. The reason why they left was because there is a lot of jungle land near our estate and they took up this Government land. The people who absconded went away to other gardens through enticement, in particular to gardens where there was rice land suitable for opening out. Coolies who have finished their agreements are quite at liberty to go and no restriction is placed on them. I encourage them to remain on my land. In 1921 as many came on to garden land as went out of the garden. As long as there is no boom in the industry and other gardens are not opened out, these coolies are likely to remain with me. I have recently had a number of coolies coming back to garden land after selling their lands to the estate. I have had more offers of this kind than I could actually pay for. The reason why they have returned to the garden is because of the bigger wage offered them; another reason is that very few new gardens were in a position to employ many coolies during 1921.

We gave an increase in wages when we changed from the monthly wage to the daily wage in the beginning of 1921. Then subsequently we gave them a bigger monthly wage. They did not understand the change, from the monthly to weekly wage. I sent for the leading men on the garden and explained the position to them. They asked for a monthly wage which I gave them at increased rates after which they went back to work and seemed quite contented. Those who take rice are paid monthly Rs. 7-8-0 for men and Rs. 6-8-0 for women. Those who do not take rice from the factory are paid Rs. 9 for men and Rs. 8 for women. Formerly the rates were Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 for men and women irrespective of whether they took rice or not. This increase partly accounts for the fact that the coolies are returning to my garden. My coolies do not like the unit system; they prefer the monthly rate. If the unit system were worked so that a coolie could be given a monthly rate, they would not understand it; they might possibly understand it if they were paid weekly. Coolies get *ticca* in addition to the monthly wage. I pay 2 pice a seer for leaf which is customary in the Panitola district. My garden is singularly free from dysentery. I do not keep pigs.

Q.—Of the hundred coolies who are not under agreement, how many are solvent?

A.—I think they are all solvent as far as I know.

Q.—Am I to understand that only those who require money enter into agreements?

A.—No, nearly all the coolies ask for an agreement. I have no objection to the Act being repealed provided it is replaced by some other Act whereby the garden would have a hold on the coolies. I would not care to go to the Civil Court for the recovery of any advances outstanding against absconders if that procedure was going to involve an inordinate delay in its recovery, in which case the effect of the Act would be lost. I think Act XII is very convenient as it is.

Q.—Was the rise in wages given owing to the high cost of living?

A.—Yes.

Coolies like the agreement simply because they get the money. Yes, a coolie is just as contented under an agreement as he is without one; by taking an agreement he is financially better off.

Q.—Do you know what the coolies have been earning in their own country?

A.—Yes; some coolies said they worked the whole day and earned only 2 or 3 annas. They told me that they are better off by coming here. Of course I am only speaking of my own garden.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions is sufficient to maintain the coolies in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not think it desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages. There was a certain amount of unrest in the spring of 1921 when agitators were in evidence at Tinsukia.

Q.—Do you think that coolies are in any way influenced by the political situation?

A.—There has been a change in the demeanour of the coolie of late; I think the political situation is the cause of the same.

Coolies are allowed free access to the Manager or Assistant whenever they have any grievances to put forward.

The concession rate of rice is Rs. 4 a maund. We have never sold rice above that. There is a certain limit to *ticca* hoeing, 4 annas a day being the limit. About 90 per cent. of my adult coolies possess land in the garden grants.

We have not recruited very many coolies within the last two or three years. I am sending down to recruit this year. This year 15 sardars who were sent down recruiting have accounted for only 10 coolies. I am now sending off another 70 sardars. We recruit a few coolies from Purulia, and Chaibassa and a good many from Ranchi, and a few from Sambalpur. The *Porja* caste of coolies from Madras predominates on my garden. A few sardars have come back; they have not complained about agitators interfering with them. We do not recruit short-term coolies.

New gardens are an attraction to the coolie because they have more jungle land to open out; also they offer higher wages than an old garden does so as to attract labour to the garden.

No. 90.—Mr. J. MACAULAY, *Manager, Chabwa Tea Estate, Chabwa Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been in Tea since 1903, and in the Chabwa Company all the time.

The type of coolie recruited at the present day does not compare favourably with 10 years ago. Some of the Madras Agency Tracts have been closed to recruitment and we cannot now import the Kalahandi type of coolie. This type of coolie I consider was the best we used to get. We do not get labour from Sambalpur presumably because they receive higher wages in their own place. They are perhaps getting 12 to 14 annas a day nearer home.

The only trouble I have had with my coolies so far is when one morning all the coolies had gone out to work, some subsequently filtered back into the lines. When asked the reason for doing so they said they had simply followed the other gardens. They all went back to work the following day.

In 1920 I suggested to my Company a rise in pay all round and it was sanctioned. Coolies used to get Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 a month and now they get Rs. 8-2-0 and Rs. 6-8-0 for a month of 26 working days. In 1913 the rates of pay for men and women were Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. Now they are on a daily wage of 5 annas for men and 4 annas for women. Rice is sold at Rs. 5 a maund which is the maximum. In 1913 rice was supplied at Rs. 4-8-0 a maund.

We have the unit system which was started in 1921. I have found it a success from the garden point of view. I think I get more work done now than I used to get. My hoeing shows that to be the case. The task has come down. A man gets now 5 annas for 40 *nals* where he used to get 4 annas previously. I think more hoeing is done under the unit system and the coolie also gets more. In other words, it means that for doing the same amount of work they get higher pay. Men can earn up to 13 annas a day and women 9 annas for hoeing.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—How would you define a *hazira* to a layman?

A.—I would call it a daily task.

The cost per maund of green leaf last year was Re. 1-8-0. Coolies have got 1,200 acres of rice land in the garden. We charge Rs. 3 for 4 *bighas*. Coolies also have land outside the garden. I am reducing the rent this year to Rs. 2 for 4 *bighas*.

Q.—In answer to question No. 64 you say "Very few advances are irrecoverable and the amount written off each year is very small." Would it be fair to take that as an index of the prosperity of the garden?

A.—Yes, I think it shows that the coolies are quite well off.

We used to experience difficulty in getting coolies to go into hospital as indoor patients, but we now have a very good doctor babu who is popular with the labour force and he gets the coolies to go into hospital. As a matter of fact, we also make a point of asking the coolies to go into hospital as indoor patients. Coolies very seldom refuse to go. Our hospital is not of the best but arrangements are being made to build a new one during the next 2 years.

I do not recover advances under Act XIII. If the Act were abolished I do not think it would make much difference. Nor do I think coolies would abscond if they were not under agreement. We usually do not have much absconding. Personally I would be inclined to give the coolies a bonus even if the Act was abolished.

There is no co-operative store but we run a store for selling cloth at cost price. I started the system in November last. The idea is to get cloth as cheaply as I can for the coolies because they have to pay exorbitant prices to the *kayas* and the bazaars. If I charge Rs. 2 for a piece of cloth the bazaar would charge Rs. 2-8-0 or Rs. 3. My supplies are obtained from Calcutta. I have sold nearly Rs. 4,000 worth of cloth. I think the coolies appreciate it very much. I make no profit on the sales; I sell at cost price.

Q.—You say that the class of coolie imported now is inferior. Is that due to extensions of industries and a greater demand for labour?

A.—I do not think so. The more healthy coolies have usually got *bustees* and cultivation in their own country and the class of coolie that comes up is more of the kind unable to keep themselves going in their own country with cultivation and other things.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort; in fact I think they can save on it.

I do not think it is possible to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages, for the simple reason that the coolie would not understand it.

All coolies are given a rice concession of 7 seers for men and 6 seers for women per week.

We never repatriate coolies. Coolies usually settle here; very few go back to their country. That is probably because they like the life here.

Coolies are addicted to drink but not to any great extent. Government provides a liquor shop. They have plenty of money to spend on liquor and I cannot say whether it affects their families.

All destitute children and orphans and those families who have more than 2 children and are unable to feed the lot, are fed in the hospital. There is no latrine system on my garden and I consider that it would be very difficult to introduce it on an old established garden. It might however be possible to introduce it on a new garden.

Q.—Why is the feeding of children necessary?

A.—A man might have a very large family or his wife might fall ill in which case their children cannot be fed properly and we provide them with food; also orphans.

Q.—You have raised the wages of the coolies. Do they do more work now than they used to?

A.—I cannot say that they do more work; I think they do slightly less work, because the tasks are less for more money.

I am rather short of labour now. Coolies are working less now because they get more money for less work.

All our new coolies are medically examined in the recruiting district before they come up. The recruits whom we have been getting seemed physically fit when they first came. I have no complaints to make against the medical examination.

Q.—I suppose the medical examination is optional and not compulsory?

A.—Yes.

[MR. WITHERS ABSENT.]

No. 91.—Mr. W. REID, *Superintendent of the Upper Assam Tea Company* :—

I have been 23 years in Tea. I served first in Sylhet and Cachar and then came to Assam. I have been 12 years in Assam, and as Superintendent at Maijan for the last 18 months.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions is sufficient to maintain the coolies in health and reasonable comfort. The concessions consist of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land at cheap rates, and many other concessions which cannot very well be specified.

The rate for paddy is Rs. 4 a maund. This year, however, it has been reduced to Rs. 3-8. Paddy is sold to anybody who wants it. On 1st May 1921 the rates of pay were raised from Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 to Rs. 7 and Rs. 6, men and women, respectively. There was trouble in Doom-Doona and the infection spread through the whole district. Limbuguri raised its rates and we simply followed suit. The trouble was accelerated by the Railway strike.

In connection with medical attendance we have a hospital for housing cases that require treatment in hospital.

At the moment we are clothing and feeding 36 orphans; in fact they are looked after completely by the estate. These children are the aftermath of the influenza epidemic.

We are very badly off for rice land in Maijan. Land is all taken up by Government. There is some difficulty about getting firewood for the coolies, but we meet that difficulty by giving them a firewood allowance of 2 pice a *hazira*. Children who are ill and widows with large families also get an allowance right through, but I have made no mention of it in my answers.

I do not think it would be sound to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages. The coolie is an improvident person and if you give him a lot of money he will misuse it. It is in the interests of the coolies themselves that they should continue to receive these concessions or else they would be at the mercy of the *kaya*.

As regards the water-supply we are undertaking an elaborate scheme which is going to be very expensive. It consists of sinking 2 wells 50 yards apart with a central distributing station. We will do away with *kutcha* wells on all our gardens. The new system would be more under control in times of epidemics. The water-supply for each set of lines would cost, I think, about £ 900.

In addition to the *hazira* work coolies are afforded opportunities of doing as much *ticca* as they like, and this is particularly the case on my gardens as I employ outside labour in addition.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—So that the fact of your employing outside labour indicates that you have plenty of work to give your own people resident on the estate?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Then the well-being of the coolies, I suppose, might be indicated roughly by their possession in the matter of cattle?

A.—Yes. We have a large number of cattle and in certain parts we have had to abandon tea in order to allow for grazing lands.

During the last 4 years we have spent more money on our labour than was budgeted for.

Q.—Do you think the pay was insufficient before May 1921?

A.—I don't think so, for the reason that all this extra rise in the cost of living was covered by the relief which the coolie received in the way of cheap prices in the garden. There is only one little matter which is the cost of clothing, but I must say that a very small percentage of the coolies' earnings has been spent on clothing. I don't think he spends 10 or 12 per cent. of his earnings on clothing.

We certainly give the coolie a lump sum in the shape of a bonus, and I do not agree that he spends this money improvidently. He comes up to ask for the bonus for a particular object, e.g., to buy a cow, and I consider that the bonus is converted by the coolie into an investment and not merely spent by him at random.

We never deduct rice advances from the bonus money. We give coolies a bonus of Rs. 12.

Dibrugarh. When I spoke of the labour budget I meant all works excepting the European establishment and factory buildings. We employ outside labour to repair houses through the contractor who brings Sylheti labour. I do not know what he pays his labour.

The annual cost for repairing a house would average Rs. 12. A new house 12' x 10' containing 2 rooms would cost about Rs. 30 to Rs. 35.

The tea land which I said was converted into grazing land was certainly valuable land; it consisted of China tea cultivation. We have now about 60 acres roughly of China tea. A woman cannot earn as much in China tea as in indigenous tea, but she gets a reduction of task.

The coolies recruited formerly were of better stamina or physique as compared with the present type of coolie. I don't think higher wages would attract better labour. We have got to take what we can get. We have no choice of labour in the recruiting districts.

There was no unrest until this year. I would say that the unrest has been due to a combination of economic causes and agitation. We had the war first and then the agitators came along and found the people discontented. Then again so many Labour Corps were started in the districts giving high rates of pay. I think all that tended to make the coolie think his position undesirable. There were economic grievances to a certain extent, but I should think they were very slight on tea-gardens.

I do not know at what rates we sold rice in 1913.

There has been a general increase of 30 per cent. in the cost of living, taking everything all round. I am not in a position to say whether the coolie paid more for his concession rice in 1913 than he did in 1920.

Q.—Would you say that wages in 1920 were considerably lower than in 1913?

A.—No, you have got to consider the earnings of March. This year we had a very small labour force and wages are low because the coolies have been out cutting *dhan*. In the winter months the wages would be affected by paddy cutting. They cut other people's paddy as well.

I don't believe in the unit system because I consider that the coolie does not understand it; it is very confusing and leads to a lot of complications. When these strikes were on I spoke to many coolies on different gardens where the unit system prevailed and found that they did not understand the system. They always expected more than they actually got. The unit system might be advantageous in the case of a small labour force.

Q.—It is just possible that in a large labour force you have to impose certain restrictions?

A.—Yes, because the work is very inferior and the coolies rush it through in order to make a big sum. On the unit system I believe coolies have done as much as 3 and 4 *haziras* which it is impossible to do if the work is done properly.

I think an average coolie working 9 hours a day can do one task of hoeing, say, at Maijan and another in the afternoon on another garden which is short of labour. About 17 per cent. of the coolies inside the garden grant at Maijan have land for cultivation.

With regard to fuel, we spent in 1921 about Rs. 10,000 at 2 pice a *hazira*.

We give 3 months' pregnant leave before and 3 months' after childbirth, together with a half *hazira* for that time.

Coolies have never yet come up and asked for an increase of pay even though prices have increased in recent years. I simply raised my rates in conjunction with the other planters in the district. I thought it was necessary to increase the wages so as to check any possibilities of unrest and to keep a contented labour force. It was certainly not necessary for us to increase our wages, but seeing the trouble that had occurred in the Doom-Dooma area we thought it best to increase our wages as was done in that locality.

As regards the firewood concession, it is looked upon as pay, as even if the coolie was not fit to work, he would still be given the concession.

Not very many coolies are indebted to the garden yearly. Nearly every one has got cattle and poultry. They have been able to purchase these out of their cash earnings on the garden.

Q.—Would you be satisfied with the ordinary Indian Contract Act which governs the ordinary agriculturist?

A.—You may take away Act XIII, but you must give us some other guarantee to ensure that the coolie who takes the agreement would work his full term. Dibrugarh.

As regards the 10 per cent. which I consider the coolie spends on clothing, I asked many coolies about the matter and that is how I calculated the percentage.

In a year a coolie would require 3 *dhotis*, one coat and one blanket. Then again he steals *Hessian* cloth; he also takes rice sacks which he forgets to return to the garden.

At Maijan there are about 157 outside coolies employed; at Nagaghooli about 50. I could not say off-hand how many of these are under agreement. We give agreements to people living outside the garden as well. Their working days in the year vary. They might absent themselves for 3 months at a time in the rice planting season which might not be regarded as a breach of the agreement. We do not expect the coolie to work 313 days in a calendar year. In our agreement the unexpired portion of the year constituting 313 days has never been carried on to the following year.

With regard to the settlement of disputes the system that is generally followed is for coolies to come up to the Manager in minor cases for the redress of their grievances. In important cases involving caste issues or infidelity on the part of the husband or wife, I order a panchayat which is generally presided over by the head clerk or the head jamadar. The panchayat decide the case by inflicting a fine which has got to be paid by the offending party. Sometimes the fines may extend to Rs. 200 or Rs. 300 and the caste men pay it I believe. Very often they may come up and say the fine is very heavy when I order a second panchayat and more often than not the fine is reduced. I do not think the coolies pay the fine individually; it is obvious that they could not afford to pay a big fine of Rs. 300; the caste men make the collection and pay the fine.

Roughly speaking, last year we sold about Rs. 1,200 to Rs. 1,400 worth of paddy per month. It was sold throughout the year at the rate of Rs. 4 a maund. There would be 26 to 27 seers of rice in a maund of paddy.

In Nagaghooli we spent Rs. 13,415 for recruiting during 1919. The expenditure on coolies has increased. There has been no reduction in the budget estimates.

Wages were raised to Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 in 1921 but the *ticca* was exactly the same. The coolie himself decides the amount of *ticca* he is going to earn. We give him every facility of earning as much as he chooses.

Q.—In the Government return for September 1921, taking the total number on the books, you show a man as having received Rs. 10-0-11, and taking the average daily working strength his earnings are Rs. 12-4-5. It is possible for a man under these circumstances to earn up to the latter sum?

A.—Yes.

Q.—In the case of women the corresponding figures are Rs. 9-5-5 and Rs. 10-15-3. In the case of children they are Rs. 4-2-9 and Rs. 5-0-10, respectively. It is your experience I take it that some people do not show particular zeal to earn more?

A.—That is so. They would rather go out fishing or do something else instead of working extra.

Q.—The coolies coming to work on your garden from the *bustees* don't cost you as much as the coolies living on the garden?

A.—No.

I consider Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 a decent living wage sufficient to keep a coolie in health and reasonable comfort together with 2 non-working children and with the possibility of saving a little.

The estimate for a maund of manufactured tea would work out approximately to Rs. 4-8 or Rs. 5.

No. 92.—Mr. J. G. Rose, Manager, Sessa Division of the British Indian Tea Company:—

I have been 23 years in Tea and all my time in Assam. I have been nearly 10 years with the present Company and previous to that I was in the Upper Assam Tea Company.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort.

Dibrugarh. I do not consider it possible or desirable to convert the various concessions received by the coolies into an increase of money wages.

We supply rice to new coolies at Rs. 3 a maund for the first year. We charge old coolies Rs. 5-8 a maund except for the 3 months—August, September and October when the price varies with the market but never exceeds Rs. 5 a maund. The loss on rice in 1921 was Rs. 8,459 in the Sessa Division alone on a working force of about 800 coolies.

There have been no strikes on my gardens. Nor has there been any unrest until last year 1921. I consider that this unrest was due to economic conditions brought about by the war as also by the activities of agitators.

Q.—Do you think it was more due to economic conditions or more to agitation?

A.—In the first instance I think we were inclined to think that it was due to economic conditions owing to the situation on the garden as there was no evidence of agitators getting into the garden. I think it really was the economic condition which created a demand for more money.

We pay wages once a month and *ticca* weekly and enter it up in a separate book. The rate of pay was increased by Re. 1 from May 1921 as the result of a meeting held at Dibrugarh.

The increase in the cost of living since the war has perhaps been 30 per cent. but coolies have not been affected to a great extent. Perhaps cloth is dearer, but a coolie's expenditure on cloth annually would constitute a very small percentage of his earnings. A coolie would buy a new cloth once in 4 months and I think he would use 3 such cloths in a year.

There are 510 *bighas* of land for cultivation divided among 445 coolies. Land is let out rent-free for the first three years and thereafter a rent of Re. 1 a *bigha* is charged. We, however, make a concession in bad years. For instance in one year owing to heavy floods no rent was charged. Generally, coolies take up land within the second year of their arrival on the garden.

The average cost of a *kutchra* house is Rs. 35. Houses with corrugated iron roofs are more expensive. The annual repairs on a *kutchra* house of 20' x 8' providing accommodation for 2 families would amount to Rs. 10 or Rs. 12.

We have a large area of grazing land. No charge is made for cow-herds. Rice is supplied at concession rates. We supply men, women and children 7, 6, and 4 seers of rice respectively per week.

As regards contracts, we give a bonus of Rs. 10 both for men and women which is not recovered. New coolies are not put under contract for the first year because there is always the fear of such coolies absconding with the money. In my opinion I consider the agreement advantageous both to the coolie as well as to the garden.

We do not work under the unit system.

Q.—Do you think the unit system is more suitable in the case of a small labour force?

A.—Yes; also where labour is insufficient on a garden.

Q.—Do you think this is an extravagant system?

A.—I should not say so, but where we have got settled coolies with a large amount of cultivation they are more or less inclined to spend a good deal of their spare time in their own work.

We wrote off about Rs. 300 on account of rice advances last year.

We had slightly finer plucking in 1920. It takes a coolie slightly longer to do a task of fine plucking. The cost per maund of green leaf last year was Re. 1-3.

The average loss on rice per adult per month would work out to Re. 1.

Q.—How did the necessity for raising wages arise?

A.—In the spring of 1921 rice and cloth were high and altogether looking at the situation from the point of view of the coolie's welfare, I was inclined to think that he required more money. I believe I was the first one who suggested this rise and it was agreed upon by other members of the Committee. Blankets are supplied free of cost to weak coolies, but the average coolie pays for them. A coolie requires one coat and three *dhotis* in a year; not necessarily, any head-dress. About 60 per cent. of my coolies are under agreement. A good number of the people cultivating land are not inclined to take agreements.

Q.—Am I to understand that those who do not take agreements are solvent and better off?

A.—Yes, the old established coolie can often dispense with the agreement; Dibrugarh. those who take the agreement naturally require the money.

We have got a very large labour force and at certain times of the year *ticca* work is limited but no limit is placed in the case of plucking leaf. The coolies who went out fishing did so presumably because they had no *ticca* work.

I consider Rs. 7 and 6 in addition to the bonus together with rice concessions sufficient to keep the coolies in comfort. We have not had cholera for many years. The water-supply is pumped into a closed tank. There is little malarial fever about.

No recruiting was done at all in 1921 but there was recruiting in 1919 when very good coolies were imported. Not many coolies were found to be affected with malarial fever and spleen; they were a good type of coolie hailing from the Ganjam district. There is a certain amount of dysentery. Some coolies keep pigs.

Q.—Could you get on without agreements?

A.—I think the coolie would object to do without them as he wants his Rs. 10 bonus. In my opinion he is inclined to think that he forms part and parcel of the garden at the very moment he affixes his thumb impression to the agreement form. A coolie works from 250 to 260 days in the year. Coolies have felt the economic stress only since last year because before that they were making a good amount of *ticca*. Managers in this district felt it necessary to forestall any trouble by giving an increase in wages. The economic conditions have been fully met by the concessions.

Q.—The economic conditions having been satisfactorily dealt with, do you think that your coolies would respond to the attempt of the agitator who has come on your border now?

A.—I don't think they would; they were particularly anxious to get hold of such men and to give them a hammering. I don't think there is an adequate force in the district to protect gardens from an outbreak due to political agitation.

I have always found my Agents sympathetic with any proposals submitted by me for improving the lot of the coolie.

No. 93.—Mr. C. E. LEADER, Manager, Bokel Division, Jokai Tea Company :—

I have been 17 years in Tea and all my time in the Jokai Company. I have served in North Lakhimpur as well as in Dibrugarh. I have been only 3 months as Manager on my present garden, but I have been nearly two years Manager of Muttuck Division and acting Manager of various other gardens in the Company, before I became Manager at Bokel.

I consider the remuneration in money payments together with the various concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not consider it either possible or desirable to convert the various concessions received by the coolies into an increase of money wages.

The wages of the average working strength for the months of March and September in the years 1913, 1920 and 1921 are :—

				Men.	Women.	Children.
1				2	3	4
				Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
March 1913	...	...	...	6 12 2	4 11 7	3 15 10
September 1913	...	...	...	6 10 6	7 7 10	4 12 11
March 1920	...	...	...	10 12 1	6 4 10	4 6 7
September 1920	...	...	...	12 13 6	9 13 4	5 6 7
March 1921	...	...	...	8 2 6	5 1 9	2 15 4
September 1921	...	...	...	13 12 7	13 0 6	5 9 0

The increase in the cost of living has been about 30 per cent.

Up to April 1921 wages were Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 for men and women. As a result of a planters' meeting those rates were raised in April 1921 to Rs. 7 and Rs. 6. In addition to that there was a reduction of ke. 1 a maund on the price charged for rice. Formerly rice cost Rs. 5 a maund, except in the case of new coolies who received it at Rs. 4 a maund. The present rate in the bazaar is Rs. 5-12-0 a maund. The cheapest bazaar rate for rice was Rs. 4-8-0 a maund. I allow a man 30 seers a month, a woman 25 seers and a working child 15 or 20 seers.

I consider that Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 *plus* what the coolies can earn during the busy season, is a sufficient remuneration, assuming that rice is being sold at Rs. 4 a maund, or assuming that coolies have cultivation. Rupees 7 and Rs. 6 without some *ticca* might be barely sufficient. With *ticca* Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 would be sufficient to maintain a family consisting of 2 non-working children.

The task for plucking is 7 seers and the rate is 1 pice per pound. My coolies have about 400 or 500 acres of land. We charge the same rate as Government. If a coolie does 250 days of work he would get a remission of the whole amount of rent save 8 annas. The distribution of land is not quite even and I am thinking of trying to rectify it as far as possible. In recent years coolie recruiting has been more unsatisfactory than before in some respects. We get very few *junglis* now. It might be that the attraction of the coal fields and of work nearer home on higher pay has something to do with the difficulty of recruiting.

No sick allowance is given to pregnant women except milk. But a month before and 2 months after birth, a free rice allowance is given to the mother while she is on leave and Rs. 2 as bonus; midwife and barber are given free.

I have about 72 per cent. of my coolies under agreement. It is not our custom to put new coolies under agreement for the first 4 years. We give an agreement bonus of Rs. 10 which is not recovered. If Act XIII was abolished we would want a *quid pro quo*. In the case of a settled coolie he is not likely to abscond. As a rule we do not supply clothing, except blankets which are sold at reduced prices. We disposed of about 700 blankets this cold weather. Our practice is to send round samples of blankets at the beginning of the cold season to ascertain how many coolies require them and accordingly I get in the requisite amount. The cost for plucking per maund of leaf last year was Re. 1-7-6. There has been no unrest of any description whatever. Coolies have free access to the Manager when they have any complaints to make. Payment of wages is made entirely by the European staff. The earnings of my coolies at the present time are more than sufficient to meet the cost of living.

In the case of disputes, coolies come to the Manager for settlement. If it is a caste question, the Manager orders a panchayat which is composed of the senior people in the caste who settle the dispute, usually by a fine, which in some cases may be out of all proportion to the paying capacity of the individual.

A very large number of the coolies have cattle. With some coolies there is a tendency to save. Others, however, never save.

None of the new coolies have ever absconded, but perhaps during the course of the last 5 or 6 years one or two might have absconded.

Mr. McMorran:—*Q.*—Am I right in understanding that you regard the agreement bonus as a premium which you pay to the coolie in consideration of his undertaking to work for such portion of a year as you are satisfied with?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You are prepared to pay that extra amount in order to show that you are willing to employ the man throughout the year?

A.—Yes.

No. 94.—*Mr. W. A. COSGRAVE, I.C.S., Deputy Commissioner, Dibrugarh*:—

President:—*Q.*—How long have you been in this district?

A.—I took over charge in the middle of November 1920.

Q.—You have also been in other Tea districts?

A.—I have been in charge of the Sylhet district for 18 months or 2 years. I have been in charge of the Nowgong district for a year; the Jorhat district for 6 months; and I am here for 15 months now.

Q.—Can you give us an account of the labour troubles in this district?

A.—I have written a note on the labour conditions in this district and am willing to place it on the record.

NOTE ON LABOUR CONDITIONS IN LAKHIMPUR DISTRICT.

Labour Disturbances.

1. I understand from the Secretary, Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, that my evidence will be mainly required by the Committee as to the causes of any strikes or disturbances which have taken place in this district while I have been Deputy Commissioner. As I took charge of the district in the middle of November 1920 I would point out that I was not in charge, or indeed in India, when the serious Doom-Dooma riots took place in September 1920. As, however, the Doom-Dooma riots and the increase in pay given on the Doom-Dooma gardens after 30th September 1920, have influenced considerably labour conditions in other parts of this district, I consider that a reference to these riots is necessary. The general view among planters is that the Doom-Dooma disturbances were connected with the successful strike on the Dibru-Sadiya Railway which occurred in July 1920 and that the strikes were engineered by agitators. No evidence as to the working of outside influences has been obtained although careful enquiries were made by a Criminal Investigation Department Officer. I agree with this officer's opinion that the disturbances were mainly due to economic causes. The first serious trouble broke out on the Hansara Tea Estate where the coolies complained of the bad quality of the rice supplied to them. It is admitted by the Doom-Dooma Tea Company that a large amount of the rice supplied by a contractor, Joynarain Phulchand, was unfit for food and as the Company refused to pay for some consignments of bad rice a civil suit for Rs. 17,000 has been brought by the rice contractor against the Company in the Sub-Judge's court. At Dhoedaam Tea Estate where the most serious riot took place, the coolies complained that there was no approach road by which their cattle could be taken from the lines to the garden grazing ground and that their cattle were impounded and had to be released on payment of fines if they wandered into the tea. The coolies on other gardens complained as to their pay being too low as Doom-Dooma is a notoriously expensive place. It is significant that, although the gardens of the Assam Frontier Tea Company are scattered about near the other Doom-Dooma gardens, no disturbances took place on the gardens of this Company which had increased, early in 1919, its rates of pay for coolies who did not take garden rice. I know that Mr. Wood, Superintendent of the Doom-Dooma Tea Company, wanted to raise the pay of his Company's coolies at the same time, but I understand that his proposals were negatived by the London Board. If Mr. Wood's proposals had been accepted, possibly the Doom-Dooma disturbances would have been avoided. Further, he was on leave in England at the time of the disturbances. This was most unfortunate as if he had been at Doom-Dooma the coolie's grievances about the bad quality of rice supplied to them would probably have received more attention. The extensive disturbances round Doom-Dooma compelled the Doom-Dooma planters to review the economic position of the coolies and at a sub-committee of the Assam Branch, Indian Tea Association, held at Doom-Dooma on 30th September 1920, the following resolution was unanimously passed:—

"Resolved that an increase of Rs. 3 extra *per mensem*, i.e., Rs. 9 and Rs. 8 in lieu of the present Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 should be given to all labourers who were willing to purchase their own rice and that an increase of only Re. 1, i.e., Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 in lieu of Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 should be given to those who still desire to take their rice from the factory godowns."

Thus, although a large number of persons were imprisoned in connection with the Doom-Dooma riots, the labour force round Doom-Dooma generally benefited as a result of the riots owing to the rise in pay being granted after the riots, instead of two years previously when the Frontier Company had increased their pay and when Mr. Wood, Superintendent, Doom-Dooma Tea Company, had also proposed an increase in pay.

2. For the next few months, probably owing to the severe sentences imposed in the Doom-Dooma riot cases, there were no more labour disturbances in the Dibrugarh subdivision, but at the end of March 1921, strikes started again. The first strike on

Dibrugarh. a tea-garden after I took over charge of the district occurred at Kachujan Tea Estate near Tinsukia. The Manager, Mr. Chambers, wired me on 26th March to go there, and to prevent any breach of the peace I sent armed police to the garden. When I visited the garden I found the coolies complained of their pay being insufficient. I consider that the coolies had some cause for complaint as the Hukanpukri out-garden of Kachujan adjoins the Frontier Company's garden of Chota Hapjan and these coolies were bound to know that the Doom-Dooma garden coolies had recently received an increase in their pay. I understand that Messrs. Balmer Lawrie and Company, Agents of the Jokai Tea Company, which owns Kachujan Tea Estate and Tipphuk Tea Estate in Doom-Dooma Circle, refused to come into line when the other gardens in the Doom-Dooma circle increased their pay in September 1920. I advised the Manager to recommend to his Agents that the coolies' pay should be raised. While at Tinsukia I received information that the Assamese head mohurrir of Kachujan Tea Estate was instigating the strike in consultation with some Congress leaders at Tinsukia, and at my suggestion the Manager dismissed this head mohurrir. Possibly the latter took this action against his master hoping that he would also get a rise in pay if the strike was successful. The Kachujan strike, which lasted for a week, was the first of a long series of strikes on the tea-gardens between Tinsukia and Dibrugarh. In April 1921 strikes took place on the following gardens:—

Kachujan	Woodbine	Nahartoli
Borbari	Dinjan	Muttack
Greenwood	Mokalbari	Singlijan
Rangagora	Nadua	Rangliting
Gellapukri	Hatiali	Limbuguri
Nakhroy	Hazelbank	—

It was remarkable that no violence was used in any of these strikes. A technical riot occurred on the Nahartoli Tea Estate owing to the injudicious conduct of an Assamese garden jemadar who beat a coolie woman just when the coolies were returning to work. I was not asked to intervene in any of these strikes but sent armed police to Hazelbank and Nahartoli at the Managers' requests. In one case at any rate, i.e., Greenwood Tea Estate, the acting Manager, Mr. Boyle, told me that he was convinced that the coolies had substantial grievances especially as regards the distribution of rice by the Indian staff who did the work after dark. The only one of these gardens in which I think the strike was due in some measure to agitators was Nahartoli Tea Estate which adjoins the Dikom *hāt* and Dikom railway station to which agitators sometimes went on Sundays. I issued a warning notice against one agitator, Devendra Nath Das, who was reported to have made an objectionable speech at Dikom *hāt*. In the case of Nahartoli Tea Estate however a non-co-operation agitator had a fertile field for making trouble as I noticed at the time of my inspection on 28th April 1921, that the wages earned by the coolies were very low. I am convinced that the real cause of trouble at Nahartoli (where I had to send police on three occasions) was economic, not political.

3. Some of the leading members of the Dibrugarh sub-committee of the Assam Branch, Indian Tea Association, realising that a rise in pay was inevitable and that it was better to raise a coolie's pay *before* the planters' hands were forced by strikes, called a general meeting of the Dibrugarh Circle. At a meeting held on 27th April 1921, at the Dibrugarh Club at which I was present by invitation, the members passed, by a very large majority, a resolution in favour of increasing the monthly wages of coolies by Re. 1 from 1st May 1921. In the first half of May there were strikes on the following gardens:—

Romai.
Lankhasi.
Sealkoti.
Mathola.

At Romai, on the first day of the strike, the Manager raised the pay by Re. 1 while in the case of Mathola the Manager, Mr. Pengree, told me that he had promised a rise in pay some time ago, but had not yet received sanction from his Calcutta Agents. Although the Managers of the gardens in the Dibrugarh Circle (with the exception of the Managers of three small unimportant gardens) had voted on 27th April 1921, in favour of an increase in pay, some of the Calcutta Agents declined to sanction their local Managers' proposals. There was a second strike on Hazelbank Tea Estate which came to an end when the Calcutta Agents wired increasing the coolies' monthly pay by one rupee. In the case of the Nahartoli Tea Estate the Agents, Messrs.

James Finlay and Company, objected to give a rise in pay apparently on the ground that any concession given now would be due to the previous strike. On three separate occasions I sent (1) the armed reserved police, (2) Assam Rifles, (3) Civil police to Nahartoli Tea Estate, because the Manager was apprehensive of trouble, and I finally informed the Manager, Mr. Stevenson, that I could not keep police indefinitely on his garden because his Agents refused to fall into line with other Agents. I reported this confidentially to the Chief Secretary in my confidential demi-official No. 96C., dated the 25th May 1921, when I recorded my opinion that James Finlay and Company were asking for trouble if they did not raise the coolies' wages at Nahartoli Tea Estate.

4. The sensible action which the Dibrugarh sub-circle of the Assam Branch, Indian Tea Association, took at the end of April prevented further trouble round Dibrugarh and since May 1921 there have only been a few isolated strikes at Naharkhatiya and Tingkhong and Borbam, all in the Jaipur mauza. I found that the wages earned on the first two named gardens are on the low side.

In September there were petty strikes on three gardens, Singlijan, Bordubi (near Doom-Dooma) and Gillapukri. The strike at Gillapukri, which is close to Tinsukia, was probably due to the excitement caused by the visit of Mr. Gandhi, but the acting Manager, Mr. Hopkinson, showed a want of responsibility in sending me a letter in the morning by special messenger saying that the coolies were determined to set up a Bolshevik Government and wiring later in the day that they had returned to work. In the second half of October there was a petty strike on Kumsong Tea Estate (in Doom-Dooma circle) which I investigated shortly afterwards when inspecting the garden. At the request of the Manager I repatriated, at the cost of the garden, one turbulent ringleader.

It will be seen from these details that in the year 1921 there were numerous garden strikes in the Dibrugarh subdivision but that there was no rioting or violence used to the garden staff, European or Indian, and that there is little or no evidence to show that the strikes were due to the influence of Congress agitators. In my opinion the strikes were mainly due to economic causes, i.e., the high cost of living. When a strike was successful on one garden coolies naturally heard about this and thought that they would see what their luck would be about getting a rise in pay. I believe that in a good many cases the Assamese clerks and mohurrirs induced the coolies to go on strike thinking that they also would get a rise in pay. It is a great pity that the Tea industry did not increase the rates of pay before their Managers' hands were forced by strikes.

5. I cannot express an opinion as to the rise in prices in Lakhimpur between 1913 and the present day and have already explained my inability to do this in paragraph 3 of my letter No. 27, dated the 21st April 1921, to the Commissioner, Assam Valley Division. I attach a copy of this letter as it gives my considered opinion on tea-garden wages in this district and I would like this letter to be read as part of this note.

6. To sum up briefly, my views on the subject of Government interference in the management of tea-gardens are as follows:—

- It is impossible for Government to fix a standard wage and I do not think that Government should interfere with tea-garden wages. If rich Tea Companies do not pay a living wage they must expect their labour to use the weapon of strikes in India as is done in England.
- The ordinary able-bodied tea-garden labourer on the majority of tea-gardens in the Dibrugarh subdivision is able to earn a living wage and to live fairly comfortably. Possibly wages on some of the gardens in the Naharkhatiya and Khowang side require to be raised, but rice is cheap in those two localities and I realise that it is impossible and unnecessary for isolated and second class gardens surrounded by rice fields to pay the same high wages as are paid round Doom-Dooma.
- Act XIII of 1859 as amended by Act XII of 1920 should not be repealed as although little use is made of it in the courts it has a moral influence and without some such remedy against absconding coolies it would be impossible for gardens to pay out advances or to spend large amounts on hospitals and lines.
- Generally speaking I consider that the treatment of coolies by employers in the Dibrugarh subdivision is excellent and better than I have seen in any other district of the Province.

Dibrugarh.

7. I have not made any remarks as regards North Lakhimpur as I have no personal knowledge of the labour conditions there and I think that the sub-committee, who I understand will visit North Lakhimpur from Jorhat, should examine my Sub-divisional Officer, Mr. Pritchard, at North Lakhimpur.

Dated Dibrugarh, the 19th April 1921.

From—W. A. COSGRAVE, Esq., I.C.S., Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur,
To—The Commissioner, Assam Valley Division.

Report on tea-garden wages.

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter No. 948-53F., forwarding copy of Second Secretary's letter No. 1922 23G., dated the 3rd March 1921, asking that I should submit a considered report on the whole question of tea-garden wages in this division.

2 On receipt of your letter I called demi-officially for information on the points raised in your letter from nine leading tea planters of this district who I thought would be able to give me reliable information. These nine gentlemen include Mr. Grayburn, M.L.C., Superintendent, Assam Frontier Company, and Chairman, Assam Branch, Indian Tea Association, Messrs. Wood, Chambers, and Tweedie, all three Honorary Magistrates, and senior planters of position, Mr. Reid, Superintendent, Upper Assam Tea Company, Mr. Garbett, Superintendent Budlabeta Tea Company. The last named three gentlemen are all Chairmen of sub-circles of the Tea Association. I also consulted Mr. Rose, Superintendent, British India Tea Company, and Mr. Howie, Dejoon Tea Company, who, at present, is acting as Chairman of the North Lakhimpur Branch of the Tea Association. I did not consider it necessary or desirable to consult every individual planter in the district as I believe has been done in the Jorhat district. Although I picked out nine of the most influential tea planters, the Committee of the Tea Association requested them not to supply information to me without their letters being first laid before the sub-circles of the Indian Tea Association of which they are Chairmen or members.

3. I find it impossible to make enquiries on the lines suggested in your letter under reference as I do not see how I can say what the coolies' expenditure was in 1913. All that might be done from the information at my disposal is to compare (a) wholesale prices in 1913 with wholesale prices in 1920, (b) wages paid in 1913 with wages paid in 1920. In this connection I would note that as the wages' returns received up to the year 1915 in my immigration office have been destroyed, I have had to call for the garden copies of the returns in 1913 which in some cases are not now forthcoming. Further that the records for prices current maintained in my Revenue office give only wholesale rates.

4. A reference to the Provincial Immigration Labour reports for 1913-14 and 1919-20 will show that average wages in Lakhimpur Sadr for the two years were as follows, average calculated on the figures of monthly cash wages including *ticca*, diet rations, subsistence allowances and bonus per head:—

	Total number on books.		Average daily working strength.	
	Men.	Women.	Men.	Women.
1	2	3	4	5
	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
1913-14 ...	7 7 5	5 12 7	9 8 2	7 5 4
1919-20 ...	7 12 7	7 1 9	11 14 1	9 9 1

It will be noticed that although the average wages earned by men calculated on total number on books showed a very slight increase, there is a great increase in wages (both in the case of men and women) calculated on the average daily working strength. As Mr. Grayburn, M.L.C., has pointed out to me, figures showing wages earned as calculated on the total labour force are misleading and he argues that such figures were quoted against the miners in England to show that they were loafing and did not endeavour to earn the money.

As the difference between average wages calculated on total number on books and on average daily working strength is mostly due to coolies being absent on leave for purposes of cultivation or otherwise, the figures calculated on the average daily working strength are the figures which really matter.

5. As regards the question whether the coolie's wage, with present prices, is a living one, I consider that on most gardens in the Lakhimpur Sadr or Dibrugarh subdivision it is certainly a living wage. There are only some twelve tea-gardens in the North Lakhimpur subdivision and I enclose a copy of a letter dated 5th April, 1921, from Mr. Howie, Manager, Dejoon Tea Estate, North Lakhimpur, and acting Chairman, North Lakhimpur, Indian Tea Association. It will be noted that he says that the system of payment on some tea-gardens in North Lakhimpur is different to that on Dejoon Tea Estate but on the whole I think that conditions on Dejoon resemble other gardens in North Lakhimpur where prices of foodstuffs are lower and more land is available for cultivation and grazing than in the Dibrugarh subdivision. The great majority of tea-gardens in this district, however, are situated in the Dibrugarh subdivision and it will be noticed from the annual immigration labour reports that the wages for this subdivision are much the highest in this Province. It is, of course, not possible for all gardens in the Dibrugarh subdivision to pay the same high rate of pay as is paid by the Doom-Dooma group of gardens who make the highest grade tea in Assam.

6. The general opinion of planters in this district is that the actual amount paid, or given to coolies as concessions, should be all taken into the calculation of the coolies' pay. It is difficult to estimate how much the coolies of each Company have benefited by the provision of cheap rice, but I may mention that in 1920 the Assam Frontier Company, with its twelve gardens, lost Rs. 2,42,909 by supplying rice at Rs. 3 per maund, while the Doom-Dooma Tea Company, with its five big gardens, lost about the same amount. Similarly the Budlabeta Tea Company's loss on rice for 1920 was Rs. 93,685. I mention only three of the leading and best managed companies in this district, but many other companies have similarly lost money on rice concessions.

7. In connection with this question of rice concessions I would point out that it would be quite impossible to fix any standard wage for this whole district, although since the Doom-Dooma riots of 1920 wages and rice concessions have been practically standardised on the big group of gardens round Doom-Dooma. Gardens, which are situated in isolated places and have much spare low land, can settle with their coolies at a nominal rate, land for wet rice cultivation and if their labour force is sufficiently large that leave can be freely granted for cultivation, the labour force on such a garden is quite as contented as, if not more contented than, a labour force on a garden which pays higher wages but which has little or no rice cultivation. Most planters realise that, from the point of view of the coolies' happiness, it is essential for a well-managed estate to have land for rice cultivation, grazing and fuel reserves, as well as for planting tea. On a few gardens in this district where no firewood is available special firewood concessions are given. Thus the big Maijan estate near Dibrugarh pays an extra two pice for every *hazira* as firewood allowance, while on the Assam Frontier Company estate, Sukerating (near Doom-Dooma), firewood is supplied to the labour force at 24 cubic feet for Re. 1.

8. Coolies are paid, either according to a monthly rate which often varies from garden to garden, or according to the unit system, the latter being a system by which wages are paid for the amount of work done. The anna is the unit of pay and a man or woman can do as much work or as little work as he or she chooses and is paid accordingly. According to this system a coolie can earn anything from one anna to ten or twelve annas per day. The unit system is generally only in vogue on gardens short of labour where Managers want to induce coolies to work as much as possible. Many experienced Managers object to the unit system as they say without careful supervision it leads to quantity and not quality of work. Coolies who are paid at monthly rates can often earn *ticca* pay by doing extra work after their set task has been completed in four or five hours' time. The question whether coolies choose to earn *ticca* pay depends mostly on two factors (a) the race of the coolies, (b) the question whether there is rice cultivation on or near the garden. For example, Mundas and other aboriginal coolies of the best type will prefer to do only their set task if they have cultivation to take up in their spare time, while Ooriyas and coolies from the East coast of Madras, who hate cultivating, prefer to turn out in the afternoon and do *ticca* work. Apart from regular wages and *ticca* pay the coolies in this district all get free houses, free medical attendance and either free fuel or firewood allowance. Liberal leave on different rates of pay is given to

Dibrugarh. pregnant women and many gardens give a hot meal free of charge once a day to sickly coolies and to all children who like to come for it. Orphans are well looked after on most gardens and the planter, as a rule, realises that the children of to-day will be the labour force of the future. Generally speaking I consider that planters treat their coolies excellently and that labour troubles are generally due to the Assamese garden clerks or subordinates trying to make money out of the coolies, or to the garden shopkeepers not being sufficiently kept in hand by the Manager. As a whole the tea-garden coolies in Dibrugarh subdivision, especially the Doom-Dooma circle, are quite well off as is shown by the enormous amount they spend in the Government country spirit shops. Mr. Wood, Superintendent of the Doom-Dooma Tea Company, thinks that the recent increase in wages has done little good to the coolies as their extra pay is spent in liquor.

9. I believe that experienced planters are quite correct in saying that garden coolies have more leisure than they had some years ago. The reason of this is that on many gardens the set tasks for hoeing, etc., have been reduced in recent years, while on some gardens intensive cultivation has rendered the soil easier to work. As regards the suggestion made by Sir Nicholas Beatson Bell that coolies should share in the commission earned by garden Managers in prosperous years, I do not think that this practice would work well on tea-gardens though I understand that many industrial concerns in England have now adopted the system of profit-sharing with their employees. Tea-garden coolies could not be made to understand why in the present year, on account of the low price of tea and the high cost of production, no commission would be available, though the amount of manual labour performed by them would be just the same as in other years when large profits are made. The non-payment of commission to coolies in years when the tea market is dull would probably operate as another potential cause of discontent on tea-gardens.

10. Although I have not been able to reply categorically to the questions in your letter I hope that this letter will be of some use to you. I enclose a copy of Mr. Grayburn's letter, dated 5th April, 1921, to my address. Apart from the fact that Mr. Grayburn, M.L.C., is Chairman of the Assam Branch, Indian Tea Association, and Superintendent of the Assam Frontier Company, his letter is very interesting as he shows that the Assam tea-gardens are able to attract labour from Chaibassa and the Santhal Parganas in spite of the huge wages offered respectively by Tata's Iron Works and the Raniganj Collieries. Now that all recruiting for the Assam tea-gardens is done by garden sardars who have had practical experience of life on the tea-gardens, I think that this shows that no interference on the part of Government with tea-garden wages would be justified.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Do you believe that the action taken by the Sub-Committee in this district in raising the wages has adequately met the economic position which you regard as responsible in part for the movement of strikes?

A.—I think that a rise in pay is a satisfactory thing. I could not say that it would be sufficient if prices go still higher. It also depends on some gardens whether tasks have been increased. I understand that one or two gardens which were opposed to any increase of pay said that if the Sub-Committee decided to increase the pay they would increase the tasks. I do not think the coolies would benefit much if that is done.

Q.—There has not been a rise of pay in the Tingrai Circle?

A.—I think the wages are low probably round Naharkatia and Tinkong.

Q.—I take it in the majority of these strikes you were not called on to intervene?

A.—Hardly at all. As a matter of fact garden Managers would not report cases until they were specially asked to do so by the Chairman of their Circles.

Q.—I suppose it is the case that some gardens are in a particularly happy position with rice land, and so on, for their coolies, and can allow them a good deal more leave and freedom?

A.—Yes.

Q.—In such cases it has been pointed out that the wage return may compare unfavourably with these gardens where such land is not available?

A.—Yes. I know of such gardens.

Q.—And the garden is sometimes misjudged by the wage question?

A.—Well, gardens where the highest wages are paid, are not always the most popular gardens. Generally the tendency is for coolies to work "lower down the road" because there is more cultivation.

Q.—So that the higher wages are a premium which gardens have to pay on Dibrugarh account of their peculiar situation in order to attract labour?

A.—I don't think they attract much in the district. Most of the labour is imported from outside. It depends largely on the class of the coolies. I may say the Mundas and people like that are fond of *shikar* and cultivation. I would say that gardens which have a large amount of rice cultivation both in and round the garden grant generally have less trouble in keeping their labour.

Gardens which manufacture the highest grade tea have the highest standard of work and pay their coolies higher wages.

Q.—You speak of Doom-Dooma being badly situated as there is very little land for cultivation. The coolie therefore has to look to his wages; he has got no supplementary means of making money by cultivation, and his wages are therefore higher because he is engaged more fully in working for the garden instead of working for himself in the way of cultivating rice land or going out fishing. Would you expect, in such circumstances, that the wage returns of those gardens would show higher earnings on the average for their coolies as compared with other places where half the time of the coolies is devoted to their own cultivation?

A.—Naturally, if less *ticca* was paid wages would be lower.

Q.—You cannot interpret these returns except in a relative way. You must regard the conditions of the garden as well as the money that is earned?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that it is practically impossible to lay down a uniform rule for the remuneration of tea-garden labour?

A.—I have already said that it is impossible for Government to fix a standard wage.

Major Fox :—Q.—From the last Immigration Labour Return it will be seen that 262,000 acres of land are held by *ex*-tea-garden coolies direct from Government in Assam. I take it that these coolies were allowed special terms by Government?

A.—No; Planters sometimes are given special rates, not coolies.

Q.—Is it fair to say that a tea-garden coolie could hardly leave a tea-garden and go out and settle on land taken up from Government without a certain amount of capital?

A.—I don't think you want much capital. In some places they clear a *bigha* of land and supplement it.

Q.—A coolie probably has got some money, but if he happens to be near a garden he would probably supplement his income by doing *faltu* work (*i.e.*, working on the garden when he felt inclined). Do you suppose that coolies could go off like that from tea-gardens and settle in the *bustees* without any capital?

A.—They must have saved something.

Q.—There is a certain amount of capital required to start in agriculture I take it outside tea-gardens?

A.—I have never made enquiries about that. Budgets of tea-garden coolies were made, but I don't remember budgets having been made for *ex*-tea-garden coolies.

Q.—Would you consider these *ex*-coolies as having improved their condition on the garden or would you consider their departure as any reflection on the garden?

A.—I don't think it is a reflection on the tea-garden.

Q.—May I assume that this is very much to the credit of the tea industry?

A.—I think the majority of the coolies when they save a little money prefer to be on their own.

Q.—Can you describe the economic distress?

A.—I think in certain places the coolies have not been paid much; I have given instances of gardens where I thought wages were very low.

Q.—Do you think the economic distress was brought about by too low wages?

A.—I think the main cause is economic. There is unrest throughout the world and everybody knows it. I do not think the Dibra-Sadiya Railway strike was the main cause of the tea-garden strike. I think the main cause was economic.

Dibrugarh: Q.—Do you think that this rise in wages that was made in the Dibrugarh Circle was a good move?

A.—Yes.

Q.—It forestalled any possible unrest on the gardens?

A.—As a matter of fact the gardens on the eastern side towards Doom-Dooma had already gone on strike. I think it went a good way to allay the distress.

Q.—Do you think the wage return indicates the possibilities of coolies' earnings on tea-gardens?

A.—I think the wage returns may not be absolutely accurate, but they could give you an idea.

Q.—On some gardens wages might be very high and earnings very low also?

A.—That might be if the people were paid half *haziras*.

Q.—Are you satisfied that coolies are getting sufficient wages now?

A.—I am quite satisfied as regards Doom-Dooma and Panitola. There are possibly some gardens on the Naharkatia side where wages may be raised, but rice is cheap in that area. There are at present about 126 gardens and there is no garden I would call unsatisfactory except one or two very small places which are possibly in the developing stage. A large number of new gardens are however being opened out.

Srijut Siva Prasad Barua :—Q.—Were there any strikes or rioting on gardens owned by Indian Tea Companies?

A.—I cannot remember any strike taking place, but on certain gardens coolies ran away because they could not be paid.

Q.—Do such gardens recruit coolies from other districts?

A.—I think they recruit coolies locally; they are mostly *faltu* coolies. The coolies on Indian gardens were allowed to do more or less as they liked. Possibly there was a lower standard of work and a lower standard of discipline.

Q.—Are there many Indian gardens?

A.—Not many in existence at the present time. The Indian gardens round here are not as good as the Indian gardens round Jorhat.

Q.—Probably before the strike of March you inspected a good many gardens?

A.—I had inspected some before the strikes broke out. I commented on the low wages in the case of Nahartoli and Naharkatia. I think the Manager of Nahartoli knew that he was having trouble on account of the low wages. He did his best to get his wages raised because the surrounding gardens were paying higher wages.

Q.—Do you know who were the agitators?

A.—I think most of the unrest caused on tea-gardens was due to Assamese clerks and mohurrirs. In some cases the local staff wanted to make money out of the coolies; in others the clerks and mohurrirs thought that if the coolies got an increase they would also receive it.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—Do you think that there was any movement in your district similar to that in the Surma Valley where a series of resolutions were passed urging the people of that Valley to adopt a programme which was calculated to be directed against Europeans and Planters?

A.—I have already said in my note "No evidence as to the working of outside influences has been obtained although careful enquiries were made by a Criminal Investigation Department Officer. I agree with this officer's opinion that the disturbances were mainly due to economic causes."

Q.—As regards Act XIII agreements, do you know if other forms of labour are put under this Act?

A.—I understand that in some other districts wood sawyers are put under Act XIII.

There were 39 cases under the Act in the Sadr subdivision in 1921 of which 4 cases were dismissed under Section 203, Criminal Procedure Code, 31 cases struck off, and only 4 cases brought to trial. The reason for the 31 cases having been struck off was due either to the complainant not wanting to prosecute the case, or to the accused having still been at large.

I am in favour of retaining the Act as it gives a moral hold on the coolie.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—Is there no other law which could give that hold?

A.—I do not know.

Q.—What about the Indian Contract Act?

A.—Under the Contract Act you would have to institute a suit in the Civil Court and it may take months and months to know the result. I think it is a question of having Act XIII or nothing at all.

Q.—Do you think the abolition of the Act would tend to give the coolie the market value of his labour?

A.—Probably a lot of gardens would not pay the bonus which they are at present paying.

Q.—Would it not be optional for the coolies to leave the gardens or remain?

A.—I suppose the Companies would have no control on a coolie's services, and then Companies would spend less on hospitals and accommodation.

Q.—If they are not given housing and rice concessions would not the coolies demand enhanced wages?

A.—I am not prepared to answer that question straightway.

Q.—Then the abolition of Act XIII would come in the way of granting bonuses and concessions?

A.—I think it would.

Q.—How many *ex-tea-garden* coolies are there living on Government land?

A.—There are large numbers of them.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Is it your experience that Managers, taking them all round, try to do their best to remedy the coolie's lot in times of economic distress?

A.—I think a great many Managers in this district are extremely sympathetic.

Q.—Have they complained to you that they found it difficult to do what they would have liked to do?

A.—Yes, that is so.

Q.—You said that the Agents or the London Board refused to sanction the increase of pay recommended by the Managers of certain gardens?

A.—Yes, I have given two instances, one was at Nahartoli Tea Estate where the Manager's proposals to increase the pay of the coolies was negatived by the Agents, Messrs. James Finlay and Company. I understand that Mr. Wood, the Superintendent of the Doom-Dooma Circle, proposed about 1919 an increase of pay at or about the same time when Mr. Crowe raised the pay in the Frontier Company. Mr. Wood's proposals were I understand negatived by the Company's London Board. Further all the gardens round Doom-Dooma raised their wages after the riots except Tipphuk which belongs to the Jokai Tea Company the Agents of which are Messrs. Balmer Lawrie and Company. Some Planters in the Doom-Dooma Circle told me that they were afraid of trouble arising in the Doom-Dooma Circle because the Agents of that Company refused to come into line with the other gardens. They were afraid that if there was a strike at Tipphuk other gardens which had already granted concessions might be affected. Also in the case of the Mathola Tea Estate the Manager told me that he had promised to raise the pay but that he had not received sanction from the Calcutta Agents.

Q.—Are these the only instances out of 126 gardens where Agents refused to grant an increase of pay?

A.—Yes, as far as I can recollect at the moment.

The Medical examination of coolies in the recruiting districts is voluntary.

No 95.—*Mr. NILAMBAR DUTTA, Manager of Udalguri Tea Estate* :—

There are 300 working coolies on my garden. I have 225 acres under tea. My garden was started in 1912. Labour is recruited locally. The present rate of pay for coolies living outside the garden is Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7 for a woman; those living on the garden are paid Rs. 7 and Rs. 6, respectively. Outside coolies are not under agreement. Most of my coolies inside the garden are under Act XIII agreement. We give a bonus of Rs. 12. Coolies have land for paddy cultivation. About 50 or

Dibrugarh. 60 coolies have land at one *bigha* per head. We sell rice at Rs. 5 a maund. The rate was the same last year. We supplied paddy this year at Rs. 2-8-0 per maund. We increased the rate of wages by Re. 1 in June last because we stopped *ticca* work (both hoeing as well as plucking) on the garden on account of the depression in tea. Coolies do not earn as much in fine plucking as they would in coarse plucking. The task per *hazira* of leaf is 4 to 5 seers; over and above that we pay 6 pies for a seer. For light hoeing at the commencement of the season we allow 25 *nals*. With deep hoeing at the beginning we started with 8 *nals* gradually increasing it to 15. There has been no change in the task. We pay once a month. We never give quarter *haziras*. A *kutchra* house 10' x 10' would cost about Rs. 25; the house will last 3 years. We supply blankets to agreement coolies at cheaper than bazaar rates. I supplied *dhotis* last year when the prices were very high in the bazaar; we deducted the amount in instalments. We give concession rice; men, women and children get 6, 5 and 3 seers a week, respectively.

I have had 5 or 6 cases under Act XIII. I consider Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 *plus* the agreement bonus together with concessions, *e.g.*, medical attendance, housing, is sufficient. A coolie, if he is of a saving disposition, can save a little. Advances under Act XIII are never recovered.

I have had no trouble on my garden. I do not consider it possible or desirable to convert the various concessions received by the coolies into an increase of money wages.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—Why do you use Act XIII?

A.—To bring the coolie back to the garden and not with a view to recovering the money.

Q.—If a coolie wants to go why don't you let him go?

A.—We do not want to lose a coolie easily.

Q.—Do you want your work or do you want the money returned?

A.—We want the work.

Q.—The money therefore is a gift?

A.—Practically so.

Q.—If Act XIII was withdrawn how would you manage?

A.—There would be some difficulty in the management.

Q.—You can take the coolie to the civil court for your money?

A.—That is a very troublesome procedure and not worthwhile.

Q.—You are the Chairman of the Municipal Committee so that you can tell me what the wages of the ordinary unskilled municipal coolie are?

A.—8 annas a day.

Q.—For how much do you get a coolie for private work?

A.—10 to 12 annas.

Mr. McMorran.—Q.—You say 8 annas is paid for a coolie in the municipal area. Do you house coolies, or give them medical attendance, cheap rice, or any concessions?

A.—None at all.

Q.—For 8 annas the municipal coolies work from 8 A.M. to 4 P.M., I take it?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Whereas garden coolies complete their *haziras* in 5 hours?

A.—Yes.

No. 96.—*Mr. P. C. BAGCHI, Pleader* :—

I am engaged on behalf of tea-gardens, and represent some 20 or 25 gardens. I have no garden of my own, but I have a number of shares in an Indian Company.

A coolie earns about 4 annas a day by doing *ticca*. Men and women earn Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 a month, besides holding paddy land at cheap rates and receiving rice at concession rates.

As far as I know, the unrest has not been due to political agitation. It is chiefly due to the high price of cloth, the enhanced rates of foodstuffs and to the depression in the tea market. Last year the coolies generally did not get any *ticca* work. As far as I am aware, wages were not raised on the Indian gardens.

It is not desirable that the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages.

For a maund of rice an ordinary municipal coolie would have to pay Rs. 5. Ten years ago *kazla* rice was sold at about Rs. 4 a maund. On Sundays the coolies of the Chowkidinghi garden work in the town and earn as much as 8 and 10 annas.

There was an attempt at rioting on the Mohakasi garden, but the Manager prevented it I believe by pacifying the coolies. Perhaps it may have been due to the sardars. I simply heard it from the Manager. Presumably it was due to economic causes partly and also to a feeling engendered in the mind of the coolie that since the Manager was drawing the handsome salary of Rs. 1,000 it was desirable that he (the coolie) should get a certain share of profits on the garden. My opinion is that formerly coolies were satisfied with their meagre wants, but nowadays they expect luxuries. Even the temper of the coolie has changed inasmuch as a Manager cannot speak harshly to the coolie. This is all due in my opinion to the growing spirit of independence. Formerly they used to take tea without sugar, but now they do not like to do it if they can afford. Sardars sometimes use *ghee* now as against oil in days gone by. It is almost impossible to get garden coolies as domestic servants.

It is my firm conviction that high pay sometimes tends to less efficiency or to work of a lower standard.

The present unrest is due to the general unrest the world over. It is not peculiar to the tea industry alone. The only pressing necessity would appear to be the supply of cheap cloth. I had a talk with Mr. Woodward, Hoogrija Tea Estate of the Tingrai Tea Company, and he told me cloth was a pressing necessity for coolies and he imported supplies of cloth through me with the result that his coolies became satisfied. Coolies do spend a little money on liquor and *ganja*. Industrious coolies are well off—at least most of them. For instance one coolie possesses a tea-garden and one *faltu* coolie owns an elephant. I consider Rs. 7 may not be enough to keep a coolie well clothed and in comfort unless he receives concessions in addition. Gardens generally suffer losses on account of rice supplies. Coolies are known to buy fowls and ducks for consumption. A duck may cost Re. 1 and a fowl 6 to 8 annas; at the present moment they cost more. Coolies have been suffering from the economic condition since 1920. Standard cloth as far as I know is supplied by the Hoogrija Tea Estate. In some Indian garden budgets I have seen letters explaining the curtailment of expenditure. Coolies did not get much money and on some Indian gardens they actually absconded. Out of 200 coolies at Khenduguri Tea Estate not more than 40 or 50 are left on the garden. In my opinion, European gardens are better looked after than Indian gardens.

President :—Q.—Do you believe that agitators have taught the coolies to ask for high wages?

A.—I don't think that agitators have been able to enter the gardens. If they had at all incited coolies to leave the gardens they would surely be required to maintain those coolies. As far as I remember, no bazaars have been closed in this district.

Some coolies take agreements from the Manager for litigation purposes. I have very rarely taken coolies to Court; when I do so it is with the object of warning other coolies against absconding. I take coolies to the civil court. If I apply for warrants against coolies they are never to be found. In the case of civil suits, the coolies' properties are attached and sold. It takes not less than three months for a case to finish in the civil court.

As far as tea-gardens are concerned Act XIII only has an indirect effect on the coolies because in 99 cases out of 100 they are never to be found and the garden Managers suffer heavy losses. My opinion is that Act XIII exercises a moral indirect pressure on the coolies.

[MR. WITHERS ABSENT.]

No.9 7.—Dr. J. MONCRIEFF JOLY, M.B., *Medical Officer, Pabbojan Tea Company, Doom-Dooma Tea Company, Tara Tea Company, etc.* :—

I am Medical officer in charge of 10 gardens, viz., the five divisions of the Doom-Dooma Tea Company, the Pabbojan and Dhodaam divisions of the Pabbojan Tea Company, the Deamooli Tea Company, Rupai Tea Company, and the Tara Tea Company.

I think it is possible and highly desirable to introduce latrines in the barrack system of lines on gardens. I would recommend some system of septic tank. The system we have in the Tara Company is the bucket system of latrines which is satisfactory, as the latrines are being used by the coolies both in the hospital, as well as in the barracks. The night soil is removed and put in trenches in the tea and covered up at once; it is removed several times during the day. At Dhodaam there is a type of septic tank at one of the hospitals which has proved highly satisfactory. There are bucket latrines at another hospital of the same garden where also the system has proved satisfactory. At Pabbojan there are latrines in one set of lines and they are satisfactory. At Hansara I was told that the latrines in the hospital are not used. At the time they were installed the Manager himself did not believe in them, and my opinion is that if the Manager does not evince any enthusiasm in the matter, one can hardly expect the system to prove a success. In my opinion most lines should contain fewer houses and a smaller number of coolies.

I do not find any difficulty in getting doctor babus, but I do find it difficult to get satisfactory men. There is always a percentage of registered men who apply but far more non-registered men who apply but are not qualified. I employ only fully qualified doctor babus.

President :—Q.—Do you find latrines reduce the incidence of *anchylostomiasis*?

A.—They have on one garden. The hospital ration scale per head for the gardens under my charge is filed for reference of the Committee. I also file a typical indent for medicines of the Doom-Dooma Tea Company. The incidence rate of malaria is very high up here, and it is an extremely serious disease. *Anchylostomiasis* in particular combined with malaria accounts for 90 per cent. of our deaths. The majority of the coolies on their first arrival are found to be infected with malaria. I have not had any cholera cases since I have been here.

I have a routine treatment for anaemia. Once a year I muster the entire labour force on the garden line by line, the Manager and Assistants being present. This takes as a rule five or six days. The coolies are then graded out into three different classes (A), (B) and (T) treatment. (A) coolies go into (A) *chalan*, (B) coolies into (B) *chalan* and (T) coolies are simply placed under treatment without in any way causing interference with their ordinary work. (A) *chalan* coolies are given a dose of anthelmintic once a month and every morning receive a free meal; they get full pay for doing one-third work. (B) *Chalan* coolies get a small meal together with a dose of medicine and receive full pay for two-thirds work. Coolies once put into (A) or (B) *chalans* can only be discharged by me, and I expect to find every week throughout the year fresh coolies put into (A) and (B) *chalan* by the Manager or Assistant Manager of the garden. All coolies on being discharged from hospital automatically go into (A) or (B) *chalans* for light work for at least one fortnight before they return to the garden. All coolies that have had malaria automatically go into (B) *chalan*, as (B) *chalan* coolies get quinine every morning, and that is how the treatment of malaria is followed up. All the gardens are improving under this routine treatment.

The anaemia percentages of the number of coolies seen by me for the five Doom-Dooma gardens are :—

Hansara for 1920	...	...	...	14.09%
Hansara for 1919	...	...	...	15.2%
Beesakpie Division for 1921	...	...	...	9.81%
Beesakpie Division for 1920	...	...	...	18.9%
Samdang Division for 1920	...	...	...	9.41%
Samdang Division for 1921	...	...	...	7.37%
Raidang Division for 1919	...	...	...	12.67%
Raidang Division for 1920	...	...	...	11.5%
Daimukhia Division for 1920	...	...	...	6.72%
Daimukhia Division for 1919	...	...	...	9.72%

I consider anything below 10% anaemia very good up here as a high standard is taken. We have had a lot of new coolies from famine districts in a very bad state of health, but the average coolie who comes up is watched as regards his health for the first three years as he generally tends to become anaemic within that period. It is the same with the European. It takes time for one to become acclimatised.

In 1919 there was a severe outbreak of influenza on the Doom-Dooma gardens. I submitted quarterly reports for each garden every year. The year 1919 was a particularly trying one for children. The effects of influenza and high cost of foodstuffs and cloth re-acted on them. I advised the giving of free food to non-working children in the morning which is being done on all gardens. I am of opinion that during the rains the higher death-rate is due to increased incidence of malaria.

Certain castes prefer the *bustee* type of lines while others such as the Oriyas prefer the more convivial lines such as the barrack type. The Oriyas like living near one another, because they are fond of their feasts and festivals.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—I understood you to say that the Manager could influence coolies in the way of using latrines. Would it not depend to some extent on the character or idiosyncrasies of the labour force as to the success of his efforts?

A.—I don't think so; I think they would all use them provided the latrines are kept clean.

Q.—Assuming that arrangements are made to keep latrines clean during the time of your inspection, supposing you came unexpectedly to inspect a garden and found the latrine filthy, what would happen then?

A.—I would simply tell the Manager that he was not keeping his latrines clean.

Q.—Supposing that happened over and over again what would you say to the Manager?

A.—He would perhaps speak to the sweeper.

Q.—How are you going to continue a garden under a system of compulsion in order to maintain the latrines in an adequately clean condition because some Managers have told me that they cannot speak harshly to their people nowadays? It would seem to me that the difficulties of the Manager would be enormously increased if he has to supervise and see that the latrines are clean. I should like to know how it is going to work out in practice.

A.—For this reason I have advocated the introduction of the septic tank.

Q.—Have you any idea as to how that will work from the point of view of cost, because, after all, even tea-gardens have to consider the fact that they live in a world of competition?

A.—I think the septic tank would decrease your cost of production by saving your labour.

Q.—I suppose this is at the back of the minds of those who advocate it but it has still got to be proved?

A.—I think you can prove it on the analogy of the sugar industries where they found that *anchylostomiasis* took such a heavy toll that not only was the use of latrines made compulsory in the lines, but also portable latrines were taken round and if any labourer was found not using those latrines he was punished by Government. The question of compulsion was taken up by the Government as a Government matter in Ceylon. My impression is that the septic tank as employed in the jute mills of Calcutta would be difficult to introduce up here. But the *agua* privy type is very satisfactory and I understand the cost is far from prohibitive, and I know that it has been used with success. The possibilities of the septic tank are very great and I can assure you that it is the most effective type of latrine. As regards latrines of the other type, the main difficulty is with regard to the disposal of the night soil, and also the inspection of trenches. It must be admitted that the inspection of latrines to a certain extent is difficult but the inspection of trenches is still more difficult. However, I consider that the introduction of the trench system is a step in the right direction.

Q.—Is there any means of illustrating to the coolie the dangers of this form of indiscriminate use of the ground round about his lines in the morning?

A.—I don't think there are any effective means of doing so but you can try to explain the dangers of the disease to the coolie. To start with, he thinks doctors are mad. He cannot understand why you do things for him, unless you only say it is

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dirty. So I think it would be very difficult to educate them up to it. For instance we gave them mosquito nets and explained to them the ravages of malaria. They used the nets for a fortnight and then converted them into *pugrees* and *dhotis*.

Q.—In connection with the treatment of anæmia we have been told elsewhere that under the treatment alone apart from the use of latrines there has been a marked decrease in the incidence of anæmia?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that on the one hand by following out the treatment you are achieving a great reduction; on the other, by the introduction of latrines, you would be preventing the infection?

A.—Yes, but you would not stamp it out entirely.

Q.—Do you find any difficulty in getting coolies to come into hospital?

A.—Among certain castes, e.g., Mundas, the new coolies object to it until they have been on the garden for some time. On the average I should say that the hospitals are popular. I have been over 8 years in India and all my time in the Lakhimpur district.

Taking the average coolie on the whole, I would say that he is well clothed and well-fed. I am satisfied with the water-supply of the gardens under my care. But I would say that there is room for improvement.

My recommendations for sanitation or for a medical staff whenever put forward have generally been accepted except in certain cases on the ground of finance.

I prefer small lines because supervision is better carried out; early cases of disease can be discovered and treated. In the case of illness the coolies often object to take medicines and generally try to hide cases of disease until all their own remedies have proved useless.

No. 98.—MR. C. WOOD, Superintendent, Doom-Dooma Tea Company:—

I am Superintendent of the Doom-Dooma Tea Company.

President:—Q.—Would you say that in view of the great rise in prices which has occurred during recent years the remuneration paid to the labour force in this district is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and in a reasonable degree of comfort?

A.—What we are giving now I think is sufficient, taking into consideration all the concessions in the way of free housing, cheap rice, clothing and garden land. But my private opinion is that a man should be paid not less than 5 annas a day, a woman 4 annas and a child in proportion. The present monthly rates are men Rs. 7, women Rs. 6, and Rs. 5 and Rs. 4 for children. Rice is supplied at Rs. 3 a maund. Coolies who do not take rice get Rs. 9 in the case of men and Rs. 8 in the case of women. The last increase in wages was made on 1st November 1920. There was a proposal to raise the wages in 1918 to 5 annas a day in the case of men, 4 annas in the case of women, and 3 annas and 2 annas in the case of children. At first the proposal was made to increase the monthly wages and subsequently it was altered to an increase of the daily wage. As to whether the remuneration of a coolie is sufficient would depend on the amount of *ticca* earned by him.

There has been no unrest in this district amongst tea-garden labour, but there have been strikes. I came to the conclusion that the strikes were due to indifferent rice being supplied to the coolies. This rice was contract rice. Coolies did make complaints about the quality of the rice they were getting, but conditions were very critical at the time owing to the railway strike and it was very difficult to get rice. Marwaris have a happy knack of letting our stocks run low and then supplying inferior rice. At present I have a civil case on hand in connection with rice which I rejected as being unfit for the coolies. Rice cultivation and firewood are two difficult propositions on this side; cultivation is scarce, while to secure firewood coolies have to go a long way off.

Q.—Do you think coolies have had economic grievances of late years?

A.—Not until 1918 when prices went up, especially the price of cloth.

Payments are made monthly. *Ticca* also is paid monthly.

We have never found it necessary to use the unit system. We have not used it on our gardens to any great extent.

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Q.—Do you think the average coolie saves any money in a year?

A.—Big families do I think; they earn a lot of *ticca*. I know a man who has about 300 rupees saved up.

We have fixed a standard wage for the district and I think it is essential for the smooth working of the district.

Q.—Was there any opposition to the proposed rise of wages in 1918?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Was it among the Managers or were the Managers unanimous in considering it necessary?

A.—There were one or two dissenters.

We provide blankets to all new coolies and to those coolies whom we consider badly off.

We give 3 months' leave before child-birth and three months' after, during which time the mothers could take either Rs. 5 in cash a month or Rs. 1-8-0 a month and free rice which consists of 6 seers a week. Children are inspected monthly, and as a rule the Manager gives the mother 8 annas if the child is in a good condition. We feed a good number of non-working children every day. The loss on rice for the whole Company last year was Rs. 2,88,000. This year the loss is something like Rs. 2,50,000.

I am not prepared to say that it is impossible to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages, but I must say that it is undesirable, situated as our gardens are. As regards the giving of rice at Rs. 3 per maund, those who do not want to take it are given a higher wage. There are however very few coolies who do not take rice, and these include a number of *faltus* living in the lines. Any working coolie can get rice if he wants it up to 7 seers a week; women get 6 seers a week. I think the *kayas* lend money to the coolies, but I do not think they lend to as many now as they used to. If, however, *kayas* are found lending money to the coolies, they are liable to be turned off the garden. This is one of the conditions laid down in their lease. If a coolie wants to borrow money he can always come up to the Manager for it, and the Manager would give the money if he considered the coolie a deserving man. Very few coolies do borrow money from the Manager, and the practice is certainly discouraged.

Houses are provided for all coolies, except to *faltus* who live outside the garden. The loss on rice is calculated as the difference between the purchasing price and the selling price.

No special calculation was made when arriving at the figure 50 per cent. which I consider represented the rise in the cost of living. We have always supplied rice in the Doom-Dooma Company at Rs. 3 a maund.

In 1918 there was a suggestion from the Doom-Dooma Circle Sub-Committee, Indian Tea Association, to raise wages and I personally was in favour of it, but the proposal was not carried out for many reasons. The loss on rice was estimated at much more than previous years; the outlook in tea at the time was also very poor, and it was thought advisable to wait a while. We have not done any recruiting this cold weather. We did a fair amount of recruiting last year. About half a dozen newly recruited coolies tried to abscond last year, but they came back. Recruits are always medically examined. I think it would make some difference if Act XIII was abolished. If Government intend taking away the Act, they should certainly give us some other protection.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—So your chief fear if Act XIII is abolished is that the coolies may desert?

A.—No, it is simply that we shall not be able to recover our bonus.

Q.—If the Act was abolished would you still continue to give the bonus?

A.—Yes.

The plucking cost per maund of tea is Rs. 5.

Pregnant women are given a bonus, but that is left to the discretion of the Manager. The agreement bonus is not taken into account when pregnant leave is given.

I file a statement by request giving comparative market rates of foodstuffs, etc., in 1913, 1919 and 1922.

DOOM-DOOMA TEA COMPANY, LIMITED.
(Incorporated in England.)

DOOM-DOOMA,

ASSAM, 9TH FEBRUARY 1922.

Comparative statement shewing prices of foodstuffs, etc., during 1913, 1919 and 1922.

Articles.	1913.	1919.	Increase.	Current rate 1922.	Increase over 1913.
	Per maund	Per maund.	Per maund.	Per maund.	Per maund.
1	2	3	4	5	6
	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
Rice, Nalchitti ...	5 8 0	13 8 0	8 0 0	7 0 0	1 8 0
„ Usna ...	3 12 0	9 0 0	5 4 0	6 8 0	2 12 0
„ Kazla ...	3 12 0	8 12 0	5 0 0	6 4 0	2 8 0
Dal, Mosur ...	4 12 0	12 8 0	7 12 0	8 12 0	4 0 0
„ Arhor ...	4 12 0	12 8 0	7 12 0	10 0 0	5 4 0
Ghee ...	60 0 0	87 0 0	27 0 0	85 0 0	25 0 0
Mustard Oil ...	18 10 0	45 8 0	26 14 0	27 8 0	8 14 0
Sugar ...	10 8 0	25 0 0	14 8 0	22 8 0	12 0 0
Goor ...	5 0 0	7 12 0	2 12 0	10 0 0	5 0 0
Flour ...	6 0 0	12 8 0	6 8 0	15 0 0	9 0 0
Salt ...	3 2 0	5 0 0	1 14 0	7 8 0	4 6 0
Onions ...	3 12 0	8 12 0	5 0 0	15 0 0	11 4 0
Spices ...	20 0 0	40 0 0	20 0 0	30 0 0	10 0 0
Sago ...	20 0 0	28 8 0	2 8 0	16 0 0	...
Matikalai ...	5 0 0	7 8 0	2 8 0	5 8 0	0 8 0
Soap (country) ...	15 0 0	20 0 0	5 0 0	15 0 0	5 0 0
Kerosene oil (per gallon) ...	0 4 0	0 10 0	0 6 0	20 0 0	0 8 0

These are actual prices ascertained yesterday, the 9th February 1922.

C. WOOD,
Superintendent.

No. 99.—Mr. W. E. H. GRAYBURN, M.L.C., Superintendent, Assam Frontier Tea Company, Limited, Talup:—

I am Superintendent of the Assam Frontier Tea Company, Limited. I have been 24 years in the Assam Frontier Company. I have been Superintendent now a year. I was acting Superintendent for 5 years before that. There are ten estates under my supervision. The total labour force is about 13,931. The bulk of my labour are Chota Nagpuris, that is to say, largely the *jungli* type of coolies. We have both lines, which constitute an aggregation of houses, as well as *bustee* areas on which many people have settled down. In my opinion the *bustees* are more popular.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—Do you find that putting them out in the *bustees* improves or injures the health of the labour?

A.—It improves them; it is the form of living that they are used to in their own country. We have a lot of land available for cultivation to anybody who wants to take it up. Coolies are given land for cultivation by the Company and are charged the trifling rent of Rs. 2-8-0 a *poorah*. We have agreements under Act XIII which we give for one year. We have had this short-term agreement system for years.

Q.—Do you think that agreements could be dispensed with?

Q.—Why do you advocate the continuance of agreements?

A.—The coolies come up and ask for them as they want to take them. We give them a bonus for taking the contract.

Q.—Would it be fair to say that these advances taken by the coolies serve to keep them out of the clutches of money-lenders?

A.—Certainly.

Q.—So that to that extent at least it is advantageous to the labour?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You do not charge any interest for this advance?

A.—Certainly not.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

With the exception of rice which I consider might be converted into a money wage, I think it is impossible to convert the various other concessions into an increase of money wages. As a matter of fact, with regard to rice, it has been our practice to a certain extent to give coolies the option of taking rice or a money equivalent. At the moment 45 per cent. of the labour force are taking the higher rate of wage, and that might roughly be taken to indicate how it has been regarded by the labour. We leave it entirely to the option of the coolies either to take the increased wages or to accept the rice; no pressure is put on them one way or the other.

I have had no experience of any unrest on the gardens under my supervision. There were certain troubles in the Doom-Dooma district, but I was away on leave at the time.

All payments are made by Europeans.

Q.—Are the European Managers or Assistants in charge of groups of labour accessible to the coolies in cases of complaints?

A.—Always.

Q.—Are there many complaints made against the Indian staff?

A.—Very seldom.

Q.—Do you think that on the whole the coolies of the Assam Frontier Company are living in reasonable comfort and have the ability to save something from their earnings?

A.—Certainly. I should say that the same applies to other Companies in this Circle. In addition to the wages coolies have the power of increasing their earnings by *ticca* work. There is no obstacle in the way of earning *ticca* at all. The gardens as a whole are in my opinion healthy for labour. The birth-rate is more than the death-rate; it was 3.63% as against a death-rate of 3.11%. Rice is purchased by me for the whole Company. It is examined before being taken over. For instance every Manager has a sample which he compares with the consignment. If the consignment of rice is defective in quality, it is either returned or rectified. Rice has however got to be brought up to a standard quality; if that is not done, it is returned. Under no circumstances is inferior rice accepted.

Coolies take 3 to 4 hours to complete a *hazira*. They are at liberty to earn *ticca* after that.

We have occasionally received wet rice in wagons and have always repudiated it.

Non-rice takers have been paid Rs. 2 extra since early in 1919. With the exception of Sookerating, where the rate is Rs. 7 for men and Rs. 6 for women, the coolies on other gardens who have been taking rice were not given any extra money. It was about 16 years ago that the Company first decided that it was better to stop coolies from taking rice and that they should be offered Re. 1 extra in lieu thereof. Again in 1919 the sum was raised to Rs. 2 and again in November 1920, it was raised by another rupee bringing it to Rs. 3 per head.

In the opinion of the Doom-Dooma Sub-Committee the rise in the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 has been estimated at 50 per cent. This percentage was I think worked out.

If Act XIII was abolished I would not personally continue to give the bonus.

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Non-takers of rice get Rs. 9 for a man and Rs. 8 for a woman a month; others, with the exception of Sookerating, get Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. Rice is supplied at Rs. 3 a maund.

New coolies are not put under agreement until after 3 years' residence on the garden. Some years ago there was some alteration made in Act VI and the spirit of the concession was that we should not put people under agreement for the first 3 years. Coolies who have not been put under agreement for that period have seldom or never absconded, nor did they ask for the bonus during that period. The coolies come and ask for agreements of their own accord.

Q.—Is it the practice of your Company to give building materials to the coolie and ask him to make his own house?

A.—Yes, in the *bustees*, except in the case of new coolies who have their houses built for them. I am quite satisfied with the huts made by the coolies themselves.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—There are two kinds of coolies, one taking cash and one receiving rice. How are the wages of those coolies calculated?

A.—Only cash wages are shown in the statement. The loss on rice is shown in another column.

Q.—There has been an order to the effect that losses incurred on rice should be included in the statement?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Could I have an idea as to the area given out to the coolies for cultivation?

A.—About 8,900 *bighas* are given out on the Company's grant. This does not include large areas held by coolies on Government land.

The figures shown in the statement include the whole labour force.

No. 100.—Mr. J. M. KILBURN, Superintendent of the Makum Tea Company:—

I have been 17 years in Tea, three years at Pabbojan and the rest of my time with the Makum (Assam) Tea Company. I have been Superintendent for the last three years.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to keep the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

Although it is possible to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages, yet I do not think it is desirable to do so.

My gardens are not unhealthy. The high death-rate has been due to the influenza epidemic.

Our present rate of wages is Rs. 7 for men, Rs. 6 for women and Rs. 3 to Rs. 5 for children. This rate has been in force since 1920. Our rate for *ticca* is 4 annas for task both for outside as well as for garden labour. Outside labourers are allowed to do two tasks only. Coolies living on the garden do one task in hoeing, but as much as they like with regard to plucking. We give *ticca* for hoeing as well. Coolies living on the garden do one task, outside labour do two tasks. The difference is due to the fact that outside labour get no *haziras*. Rice is issued at the concession rate of Rs. 3 a maund. This has been the rate ever since I have been on the garden. We have practically no non-rice takers. In 1921 the plucking cost per maund of green leaf was Re. 1-10-8.

Deep hoeing used to be 15 *nals*; it has been reduced to 12 (*hazira*) and 10 (*ticca*) in recent years.

A coolie cannot earn as much *ticca* for hoeing as he chooses: there is a limit. There is no limit for plucking; they can earn as much as they want. They are now allowed one *ticca* in hoeing in addition to the *hazira*.

There are 205 *poorahs* of land within the garden grant held by 296 adults at the rent of 8 annas per holding. This has only been in force for the past year. Coolies are very keen on it themselves and it tends to check disputes.

About 9 per cent. of the male coolies have got land, but in one division there is much more than that. The North Bank have quite a lot; the South Bank not so much. We provide cow-herds free; no deduction from pay is made in that respect. We have very few irrecoverable loans.

We give 6 months' pregnant leave together with half-pay and concession rice. Most of my coolies are under agreement. We give a bonus of Rs. 12 and Rs. 10 to men and women respectively and do not recover the money.

President:—Q.—Supposing Act XIII was abolished by the Government of India, would you continue to give the bonus?

A.—We would have to in some form or other. I am not in favour of the abolition of Act XIII because it has been a custom and practice with us. It is of no use to us except that it has a moral effect on the coolies. We have seldom run a case under the Act.

New coolies come up as free labourers and occasionally within a few months of their arrival are given agreements. The practice is to give them the agreement a month or two after their arrival. New coolies are not under any obligation to us in consideration of our having paid for their railway fare. Nor is there any guarantee that we would get the benefit of having spent all the money on recruiting. The average sum spent on a coolie for recruiting is something like Rs. 60.

Q.—If you give a coolie Rs. 12 at the beginning of the year you do not require any safeguard I take it?

A.—We have it in Act XIII so far as it goes.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—Are you aware that the Contract Act governs these cases as well as all other cases in India?

A.—I am not aware of it.

Q.—If you have a contract under the ordinary law you can recover the money by having recourse to the Civil Court in the case of an agreement bonus. Would that meet with your desire to have a change?

A.—I am personally not in favour of the change. I would prefer Act XIII.

The Doom-Dooma Sub-Committee estimated the rise in the cost of living between 1913 and the present moment at 50 per cent. They came to that conclusion by an average of the opinions of the various members. Some said 75 per cent., others 45 per cent., and we came to the conclusion that it was 50 per cent. on the average; it varies considerably in different parts of the Circle.

It is a fact that coolies have had grievances of which agitators made capital. For one thing the abnormal rise in the price of cloth afforded some grounds, as also the high cost of foodstuffs.

No. 101.—Mr. A. E. HUNTER, Pabbojan Tea Company, Limited, Dhodaam Division.

I have been 22 years in Tea, the whole of which time has been spent in the service of the Pabbojan Tea Company.

Q.—So far as you were able to ascertain, what conclusion have you come to as regards the trouble of September 1920?

A.—I consider the primary reason was the Dibru-Sadiya Railway strike, and no doubt the general feeling of unrest in the district. The trouble at Dhodaam was undoubtedly due to outside influence.

The coolies put forward three claims—increased pay, increased rice and agreement bonus, which clearly indicates contamination by agitators.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, there was no complaint on the score of the quality of rice supplied. On the day before the actual trouble occurred the coolies were collected and told that an extra seer of rice would be given weekly, the increase being from 6 and 5 seers to 7 and 6 seers, for men and women, respectively. I was present at the meeting of the Sub-Committee in 1918, and it was my opinion that the coolies' wages should be raised. The Pabbojan Tea Company was the first to suggest the increase of coolies' wages.

The coolies' wages return for the month of September 1920 shows a decrease in the amount earned but this was entirely due to the fact that the coolies were out on strike for 4 days during that month. Men's wages from March 1913 to March 1921 rose from Rs. 6-4-0 to Rs. 9-0-1; women's wages from Rs. 5-3-8 to Rs. 8-1-10; children's wages from Rs. 3-4-5 to Rs. 4-6-10. Wages for September 1913 were—men Rs. 10-13-11, 1921, Rs. 12-15-7; women's wages for September 1913 were Rs. 10-11-4 and in 1921 for the same period Rs. 12-10-11; children's wages for September 1913 were Rs. 5-12-4 and for the same period in 1921 Rs. 8-0-7. In March 1920, men earned Rs. 8-6-5, women Rs. 8-4-5 and children Rs. 3-7-8; in September 1920, men Rs. 10-10-11, women Rs. 12-7-8 and children Rs. 7-13-1. It shows that there is a distinct rise in 1920 as also in 1921 when higher rates of wages were given. Rice concessions are not included in the above figures. For September 1921 the rice concessions monthly came to Rs. 2-9-6 for men, Rs. 2-15-2 for women and Re. 1-15-3 for children.

There are two fully equipped hospitals on the estate. We never experience any difficulty in getting coolies to attend.

Suitable latrines are attached to both hospitals. There is a cemetery which is used for all coolies dying on the estate, all castes having separate plots; also a church has been built for the Native Christians.

We have *bustee* lines with neatly trimmed hedges which are greatly appreciated by the coolies.

All coolie lines are regularly swept and kept clean by sweepers. There is a staff of sweepers for every set of lines and we have never found any difficulty in getting these people to do their duties.

Midday meals are given to children free of cost and in addition to this 10 maunds of rice are given free weekly to non-working children.

Four per cent. of the labour force are under 'Treatment' and A and B *chalans*; 75 in A and 75 in B *chalan* out of a working labour force of 2,000.

There are 398 *poorahs* of rice land divided among 380 coolies. Rent is charged at the rate of eight annas a *bigha*. High land is given rent free.

About 90 per cent. of the coolies take rice.

Non-rice takers get a monthly pay of Rs. 9 and Rs. 8, men and women, respectively, and rice takers receive Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 against a previous wage of Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. About 1,000 blankets and 500 coats are sold annually.

Blankets are sold at Rs. 2-8-0 against a cost price of Rs. 3-10-0 and coats at Rs. 3-0-0 as against a cost price of Rs. 5-0-0.

Pregnant leave is given for six months during which time the woman is paid Rs. 5 monthly, out of which she can buy concession rice at Rs. 3 per maund.

Our cost of plucking last year was Rs. 5 per maund.

New coolies are never put under agreement until after two years' residence on the garden. After this period it is optional for the coolies to take an agreement. The majority of the coolies however come up for an agreement at the first opportunity. They are generally put under agreement at the expiry of the two years.

Q.—With regard to the strike and riot which took place at Dhoedaam, are you perfectly convinced in your mind that the coolies had no economic grievance?

A.—I certainly think they had none.

TINSUKIA, LAKHIMPUR, 14TH FEBRUARY 1922.

[SRIJUT SIVA PRASAD BARUA ABSENT.]

No. 102.—Mr. W. H. WOODWARD, Superintendent of the Tingri Tea Company, Limited:—

I have been 25 years in Tea; all the time in Lakhimpur, and 12 years with the Tingri Company. I give liberal leave and though my labour force is big I find it necessary to employ *bustee* labour. My coolies work on an average 3 or 4 hours a day for *hazira*. I have 600 acres of paddy land cultivated by the coolies at Rs. 3 a *poorah*. The understanding is that at least one coolie from each house holding land should work in the garden. The land is taken away only if the whole family refuse to work

and this has never been done. I have had no trouble in the garden but outsiders have entered the garden to ask the coolies to strike for higher wages. This was last year when I was at home. I never found out who they were, but they were not of the coolie class.

Between 1913 and 1920 my coolies had got large concessions and opportunities of earning more money. *Ticca* was always available during this time which was not the case before. Up to 1913 we had only a monthly rate—men Rs. 6, women Rs. 5, children Rs. 4 and small children Rs. 3. From 1913-14 we changed this and paid wages monthly or weekly according to the wish of the coolie.

The present monthly rate of wage is man Rs. 7, woman Rs. 6, child Rs. 5, small child Rs. 4. If the coolie is paid monthly it means a daily rate of man 4 annas 3 pies, woman 3 annas 9 pies, child 3 annas, small child 2 annas 5 pies. If the coolie is paid weekly the daily rate is man 5 annas, woman 4 and 5 annas, child 3 annas, small child 2 annas 6 pies. At first many preferred weekly payment but after a time they wanted monthly. At present 30 to 40 per cent. are paid weekly. If they are paid weekly they get a slightly higher wage and this is the case mostly with the women. Nevertheless 70 per cent. of the coolies prefer monthly pay, the chief reason being they have to go less often to collect their pay and they prefer a bigger lump sum. They must give a month's notice if they want a change in payment. Any suggestions I made were accepted by the Board. I consider that a decent living monthly wage is Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7-8 for a woman together with the usual concessions along with rice at a reduced rate when the market is high. I estimate that the cost of living per adult in 1913 was Rs. 4-13 and 1920 Rs. 7-13. This is assuming that rice does not cost more than Rs. 5 a maund. I think that, taking into account all the earnings and concessions, the average coolie gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort.

If a coolie avails himself of all *ticca* he can in a 7-hour day earn double what he is earning now. About 90 per cent. of my adults have paddy land. For a time in 1921 I dispersed with outside labour to economise. My own coolies in that year made about the same as before. At the end of a year there is a certain amount of outstanding advances against the coolies. The present rate of wage is in force from 1st January 1922. I proposed an increase in 1921 but the garden finances would not permit of it. I got up all the head people and explained why it was impossible to raise wages though neighbouring gardens had raised them. The coolies seemed to understand. With my 600 acres of paddy land I consider myself in a very favourable position. There is no Government land available. I recover the rice advances at the end of a month. I do not sell much in cash. The death-rate in 1921 was 1.88 per cent. in Hoogrijan Division and the birth-rate was 3.73. Fifty per cent. of my labour is housed in outside lines on our land but at considerable intervals; hence the low death-rate. In the last two or three years we have had *kutchra* latrines which we are making more durable. The fact remains that coolies do use the latrines; there is no compulsion.

It is easier to start latrines with a new labour force in new lines. I am very much in favour of latrines. They are expensive in my case because of the scattered labour force. We keep sweepers about one to every 20 compartments. The latrines have *kutchra* walls and with a *pucca* basement cost about Rs. 25 per compartment. The walls have to be repaired annually. *Junglis* form the larger portion of my labour force. In a new division started in 1919 nearly all the coolies use the latrines and there is practically no anaemia. I built the latrines, explained their use to the coolies and asked them to use them. There was no coercion. There is a good deal of liquor drunk. They largely brew their own drink. In a sense the consumption of liquor may be taken as an indication of well being. The nearest liquor shop is at Tinsukia 9 miles off.

The average earnings are more than the monthly wage. I raised wages because this benefited the coolies and as other gardens had raised wages I should have found it difficult not to do so. The task in *ticca* was also lowered this cold weather, e.g., pruning 8 bushes for one anna as against 10 before. The light hoe task is 20 to 35 *nals* against 30 to 45 in 1913. The task for the double hoe is 7 to 12 *nals* against 10 to 15. For *hazira* the light pruning task is 30 to 45 bushes; and this takes on the average from 9 A.M. to 1-30 P.M.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort. It was necessary to raise wages to meet the increased cost

Tinsukia. of living. A coolie could earn 10 annas a day if he did *ticca* in addition to the *hazira*. I consider that a rise of Re. 1 a month was necessary. Perhaps this was more with a view to benefit the coolie who was under average efficiency.

In the old Divisions we have still got hookworm. I am in favour of retaining Act XIII because the coolie likes it. In giving my figures for a decent living wage I do not take into account non-working children. My plucking task is 5 seers for a *hazira* as against 6 in 1913. With a reduced task for fine plucking in my garden it is possible for a coolie to earn as much in a given time as was the case when coarser plucking was the practice.

No. 103.—Mr. S. W. POWELL, *Manager of the Dekhari Tea Company, Deohall Division:—*

I have been 14 years in Tea, and since 1916 at Deohall. I have been all my time in Lakhimpur district. Since 1913 wages have been increased twice, once in 1918, once in 1921 and my Directors on both occasions agreed to the rise. In 1913 the wages were—men Rs. 6, women Rs. 5 and children Rs. 3. In 1918 the daily *hazira* was—men 4 annas, women 4 annas and children 3 and 2 annas. In 1921 the daily wages were—men 5 annas, women 4 annas, children 4 and 3 annas and small children 2 annas. In 1918 the monthly payment was changed to a weekly one. The reason for the rise in 1918 was the increased cost of living. It was necessary. The same was the reason for the rise in 1921. Before 1918 *ticca* was always available throughout the year. Owing to the railway strike on the Assam-Bengal line our supplies ran short but the railway strike had nothing to do with raising our wages. Our garden is 8 miles from the Dibru-Sadiya Railway. The strike was in 1920 on the Dibru-Sadiya Railway. My garden is only served by the Assam-Bengal Railway. My coolies do not go to Tinsukia for their bazaar. I consider that a decent living wage is Rs. 8 for a man, Rs. 6-8 for a woman, assuming that they had to buy rice at bazaar rates. I give a comparative budget showing the difference in the cost of living for an adult per month in 1913 and 1921:—

	1921.		1913.	
	Rs.	a. p.	Rs.	a. p.
Rice—25 seers at Rs. 5 per maund	3 2 0	3 2 0	
Dal—3 seers a month at 4 annas per seer	0 12 0	0 7 6	
Salt—1½ seers a month at annas 2 a seer	0 3 0	0 1 6	
Mustard oil—1 seer a month at annas 12 a seer	0 12 0	0 6 0	
Spices—1 anna per week	0 4 0	0 1 0	
Vegetables and fish—4 annas per week	1 0 0	0 8 0	
Tobacco	0 4 0	0 2 0	

CLOTHING PER YEAR—

Male.

	Rs.	a.	p.
One coat	3	0	0
Two pairs dhotis at	6	0	0
One blanket at	2	0	0
One umbrella	2	0	0
	1	1	3
	0	9	0

Female.

	Rs.	a.	p.
Two jackets	2	8	0
Two pairs saris	6	8	0
One blanket	2	0	0
One umbrella	2	0	0
	1	1	3
	0	9	0

I have 20 or 30 coolies past work who are badly off. They get a pension—men Re. 1, women 12 annas a week. In my answer to question 23 (b) the figure for labour and remuneration in 1919 includes a large sum paid as a bonus to recruiting sardars at Rs. 30 per adult coolie. My figures in that answer show the actual expenditure. In 1919 we had 500 six-month coolies from Ranchi. When the market rate

for rice is high we sell rice at Rs. 5 a maund to old and at Rs. 4 to new coolies. The present bazaar rate is Rs. 5-12 a maund. In my garden *ticca* is available throughout the whole year. I find that increased wages have resulted in less work being done by individual workers.

On this garden we have always resorted to fine plucking. In 1921 the cost for pruning worked out to about Rs. 14 an acre. The task for light pruning is 50 to 63 bushes taking 3½ to 4 hours. I have 400 acres of paddy land held by 420 adults on a rent of 4 annas a *bigha*. Seventy-two of my adult males have cultivation. When I came to the garden in 1916 I wrote off Rs. 7,000 outstanding against the coolies to give them a fresh start. At the end of December 1921 the balance outstanding against my labour force was Rs. 291-10-6 and this includes the price of rice and everything else. I give pregnant leave for 8 months and more if necessary and during that time each pregnant woman gets 10 seers of rice fortnightly free, or 12 annas in cash a week. Newly recruited coolies are not put under agreement for the first 3 years; it has never been the custom. Recently I have had absconders enticed away to new gardens owned by Indians in the Moran district. I lost about 70 to Kenduguri. The garden sent a recruiter up to our bazaar to recruit them. I sent a European to get them back but the coolies were not allowed to leave the garden as the place was picketed by Nepali chowkidars. They were all Gonds recruited in 1919-20 and taken away after being 6 to 9 months with me. As regards Act XIII, I would be prepared to give a bonus at the end of a year's work, but the coolie would object. My short-term coolies were returned in May 1920 after being 6 months on the garden, having arrived in November 1919. They were only engaged for six months; they would not come for longer. I do not believe in the 6 months system. My object was to get a recruiting connection with Ranchi, but I did not succeed.

No. 104.—Mr. A. H. SOWERBY, *Manager of the Itakhooli Tea Company, Ltd.:—*

I have been 32 years in Tea, and since 1913 at Itakhooli. Most of my time I have served in the Doom-Dooma district. My working force is 1,900 and my garden population 2,600. The coolies are paid monthly—men Rs. 8 and Rs. 7 (Rs. 8 to bungalow servants), women Rs. 6, and children Rs. 5-4. In January 1921 I increased the wages of adults and children by 8 annas a month and in April 1921 by 8 annas more. I had intended to raise the wages in 1918 but the other gardens in the Tingri district kept me back and I did not wish to upset coolies of the other gardens. In 1918 I think coolies were earning enough but I wanted to raise their wages to approximate to those in the Doom-Dooma district. Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I consider that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort. I consider Rs. 7 for a man and Rs. 6 for a woman ample. In addition to the monthly wages, coolies can earn *ticca*; and opportunity for this is freely given. The average wages on the daily working strength were—men Rs. 10-6-8, women Rs. 10-8-10, children Rs. 7-4. This is for September 1921. In addition to this there was a loss on rice equivalent to 15 per cent. on the above wages. My rate for plucking is 5 to 6 seers for a woman and 4 seers for children, depending on the flush in the garden. This would take 3 to 4 hours to complete. My ordinary *ticca* rate is 2 pice a seer on week days and 3 pice on Sundays. *Ticca* is given after the task of 5 or 6 seers is over. My light hoeing task is 35 *nals* which would take 2 to 3 hours; deep hoeing 12 *nals* which would take 3 to 4 hours. My *ticca* light hoeing is 25 *nals* for 4 annas. My coolies hold 136 *bighas* of paddy land inside the grant and 46 *bighas* outside. The distribution is 1 to 2 *bighas* per head among 100 adults on a minimum rent of 4 annas a *bigha*. On the whole my coolies depend for their living on what they earn in the garden. I give 6 months pregnant leave; during that period half-pay, or free rice to those that wish it is given. My coolies take Act XII agreements for which they receive a bonus of—men Rs. 12 and women Rs. 10. I do not think I could get on without the Act. The effect of withdrawal would be to make the coolies dissatisfied. I think it would be a mistake to abolish it. The coolies look on it as a concession. I have not filed many cases against absconders under Act XIII. If the Act was abolished I would still continue to give the bonus. If other gardens not under the labour rules, try to pimp my labour, on abolition of the Act the coolies would have to be allowed to go. It is not possible or desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages as coolies will not understand this.

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I tried to convert the allowance of rice into an increased money wage but the coolies refused to accept it. If I had tried to enforce it I might have lost some of my labour. We have no control over the price of rice in the bazaar and there is not sufficient rice locally to supply my garden. The Marwaris import it, and I make the contracts with them. In the Doom-Dooma district those who do not take rice get higher wages. I offered the coolies a rise of Re. 1 a month if they would stop taking rice from the garden; but the coolies would not agree to this. I have a *kaya's* shop in the garden. I exercise no control over it. There is no condition that he should not sell above market rates. If the shopkeeper charges too much, the coolie has the alternative of going to the bazaar. Coolies sometimes complain against the shopkeeper.

Wages were not raised in Doom Dooma in 1918: there was only a talk about it. My Directors in 1918 wrote me that they were agreeable to raise wages on my garden if Doom-Dooma district did so. I deal direct with my Home Board. In recent years owing to influenza my garden has been rather unhealthy. I have no difficulty in getting people to go to the hospital. I have started a latrine in connection with my hospital and if it is a success I will extend it to the lines. I have framed typical coolie budgets which I hand over to the Committee. There is no *ticca* for 4 months in the cold weather. I have tried it but people will not hear of it. At the end of 1918 or early in 1919 the Superintendent and Managers of the Doom-Dooma Circle met to discuss the question of increased wages. Mr. Wood, Superintendent of Doom-Dooma, was in favour of increasing wages then. I do not know what decision the Doom-Dooma Sub-Committee came to. My increase in January 1921 and April 1921 did not follow that of the increase in the Doom-Dooma district. I thought independently that the coolies should get more pay. I had no trouble in my garden in the end of 1920 or beginning of 1921 nor was there any trouble in the neighbouring gardens. I did not give a rise with a view to forestalling trouble. I do not know if the Indian Tea Association turned down the proposal of the Doom-Dooma Circle to raise wages. I am $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Tinsukia. The Dibru-Sadiya Railway strike had no effect on my garden. *Ticca* work in the cold weather is optional but the coolies are not willing to do it. My plucking rate in 1921 was Rs. 1-5 per maund of green leaf or Rs. 5-3 per maund of tea.

No. 105.—MR. W. J. A. MACDONALD, *Manager of the Zaloni Tea Estates, Limited*:—

I have been 15 years in Tea the last 12 of which I have spent in Lakhimpur, I was previously in Jorhat district. I have been on my present garden since 1913.

I employ outside labour as I give unlimited leave. Between 1917-1921 there have been 150 deaths and 63 births. Influenza is partly responsible for the large death-rate. In the Zaloni garden some of the men get Rs. 7 and the women Rs. 6 but there are only a few of those left; the others get Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. Since 1913 the rate of wages has not increased but the labour force has been given smaller tasks and more *ticca*. I consider that a decent living wage is Rs. 7-8 for a man and Rs. 6-8 for a woman if rice does not rise above Rs. 5 a maund. I should say that whereas a coolie in 1913 could live on Rs. 4-12, he would have required Rs. 7 in 1920. In the cold weather of 1920 there was no *ticca* as I had to work with a reduced budget, but now the coolies can earn as much *ticca* as they like. It takes an average coolie 4 to 5 minutes to do light pruning on a bush. If the task is 50 bushes this would take about 4 hours but the best coolies would take much less. I have not much paddy land in the garden but there is much outside and there is plenty of waste land still available. About 75 per cent. of the adult males have got cultivation.

I find no difficulty in getting coolies to go into hospital. I have no latrines in the lines. I do not stock clothing or blankets but sick coolies get blankets free. Last year I sold paddy to the coolies at an average of Rs. 3 a maund. I make forward contracts. This year the cost will be less, probably Rs. 2-8. Most of my coolies are not under agreement but when they want money they come for agreements. I have many agreement coolies living in the village *bustee*. It would depend on circumstances as to whether I would give the bonus if there was no agreement. I have practically no absconders. If the Act was abolished and if I continued to give a bonus to those who at present take agreements the others who are the majority might be discontented.

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In 1922 owing to the reduced price of paddy—probably Rs. 2-8 a maund—the cost of living of the coolie will be less; the price of cloth is coming down; so the position of the coolie is at present improving. I think the coolie would work just as much if the cost of living comes down a bit. There is not much drinking in my garden but a good deal of opium is consumed and I do not think there is any tendency for this to decrease. Pruning is of different kinds—light, heavy and medium. I have tested the time that it takes to do light pruning—for an average coolie about 4 minutes a bush. I have some very good men who can do *hazira* and one *ticca* in 5 hours. A good many of my coolies take opium. Some confirmed opium-eaters say that it costs them 4 to 5 rupees a month to keep them in opium. That might be about 3 *tolas* at about Re. 1-8 a *tola*. Many of the coolies make their own liquor. The nearest liquor shop is 15 miles off but the opium shop at Bordubi Road is much nearer. There has been no interference by agitators with my coolies. I have not altered the rates of wages. I do not charge rent for my grant land. I consider the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

SONARI, SIBSAGAR, 16TH FEBRUARY 1922.

(SRIJUT SIVA PRASAD BARUA ABSENT).

No. 106.—DR. EUDO S. SMYTHE, M.D., B.CH., B.A.O., L.M., *Medical Officer, Singlo Tea Company, Lukwah Tea Company, etc.*—

Sonari.

I have been connected with Tea for nearly 22 years. I have been 20 years in the Sibsagar district. I am in charge of seven gardens altogether—four of the Singlo Company and the rest belonging to the Lukwah Company and Nahorhabi Tea Estate.

There are no latrines, except those attached to one or two hospitals.

President:—Q.—Do you think latrines are desirable?

A.—Certainly, if you can get the coolies to use them.

Q.—Have they never been tried here?

A.—Not in this district.

Dr. Williams:—Q.—Do you consider the district a healthy one?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Was it always so?

A.—There have been certain years when it has not been so healthy as at present for instance.

Q.—Has there been continual improvement?

A.—I think so.

The great majority of the coolies are infected with hookworm.

Q.—I take it that it has been constantly seen to?

A.—Yes. We have musters every quarter and we pick out all the anæmics and place them under treatment.

Malaria is common but not very bad. I should not call this a very malarious district. We get outbreaks of cholera now and then.

I am satisfied with the water-supply. Most of the lines are built in block form by the garden.

Q.—Where you have a large population in a small area, don't you think it advisable to have latrines?

A.—I certainly think it is advisable, but the great difficulty is to get the coolies to use them. Another difficulty is the supply of sweepers. It is all a question of expense and water-supply. In this district we have got no wells at all. We have to use nothing but tanks. Wells are not practicable here; you dig as much as you like and you will simply get blue clay.

Q.—Where there are no latrines is there not the difficulty of the ground becoming infected although you treat a large number of cases?

A.—Certainly, and it all depends on the rainfall. When you continually get rain and very little sunshine there is an increase of water sores and anæmia.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Do you think the physical condition of the coolies suggests that they are not earning sufficient to keep them in reasonable health and comfort?

A.—No.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Do you think coolies are as well clothed now as they were in 1913?

A.—Possibly not, because the price of cloth has gone up.

Q.—It may be that they have not got enough money to buy sufficient cloth?

A.—Possibly, they may not have as many changes of clothes as formerly. I have not seen any coolies in rags or anything of that sort.

No. 107.—Mr. A. D. MACFARLANE, *Manager of Borbam Tea Estate.*
I have been 40 years in Tea. I have been in Nowgong and Dibrugarh. I have been 21 years in Sibsagar.

I employ a certain number of *faltu* labourers. I give agreements to coolies who do not live in the lines.

I had a strike on my garden about July 1921 which lasted for two days only. The coolies demanded an increase of pay: they did not say how much they wanted. The wages for men are Rs. 6-8, for women Rs. 5 and Rs. 4, Rs. 3 and Rs. 2 for children according to the age of the child. The rates for men and women have been in force for 20 years.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—In answer to question No. 25 you said that since 1913 prices have gone up from 50 per cent. to 75 per cent. And if the wages remained the same, how did you try to better the coolie's condition in view of the rise in prices?

A.—We helped them by reducing the tasks.

Q.—Now take plucking for example: you resorted to fine plucking in 1921. Of course you gave a lower task but you say here in your answer that a coolie could not do a task of fine plucking in the same time as coarse plucking. So far as plucking is concerned, I suppose a coolie did not and could not make the same money.

A.—Yes, it took a little longer to earn the same money. I have altered nothing: everything is the same.

Q.—I do not quite see how the coolie benefited by the reduced task in fine plucking?

A.—He did not benefit.

Q.—As regards plucking, you mean to say that the coolie did not make any more?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Did the coolie make more in hoeing?

A.—He did just as much as usual.

Coolies do not want to do 'doubles'. I have tried to make them do 40 *nals* and to pay them for the extra 10, but they do not like it.

Q.—In spite of the fact that living has increased 50 to 75 per cent., I do not see how the coolie got any increase in earnings to meet the high cost of living?

A.—You must remember that by plucking they earned a tremendous amount. In 1921 they certainly earned enough to go on with. They could earn more if they liked to.

Q.—So if the coolie did not earn more, did he reduce his standard of living?

A.—Not much except in the way of cigarettes.

Q.—Do you think he is now as well clothed as he was then?

A.—Speaking for my own coolies, I think they are.

Q.—You say 11.3 per cent. of the adult male coolies have land so that a good many have not got land?

A.—They have got land outside the grant.

Q.—Have you any idea as to how many coolies have not got land either inside or Sonari outside the grant?

A.—I am afraid I do not know.

Q.—How long have the coolies held this land?

A.—For several years: in fact every old coolie on the garden has land one way or the other. My garden is an old established garden.

I sell rice at a fixed rate. The rate for rice was Rs. 5 a maund and paddy Rs. 3 but now paddy is down to Rs. 2-8 and we are selling it at that rate. We make no profit. We have been supplying rice at concession rates ever since I have been at Borbam.

Q.—Well here we have the facts, *viz.*, that you have given this rice concession for many years, coolies have been holding land for many years, tasks have not been reduced and you have not increased the rate of wages, so that I do not quite see how the coolies have been able to maintain the same standard of livelihood?

A.—They do not now earn quite as much as they used to, but they earn just sufficient for their needs.

Most of the coolies are under contract. I still put them under agreement for 3 years if they want it; no force is used. We give advances of Rs. 36 and Rs. 30 for 3-year agreements. I have seen the new Act XIII and I am aware of the conditions as laid down therein. The arrangement whereby I give a coolie a 3-year agreement is mutual. I have never filed a suit against a coolie in all my life and no coolie has filed a suit against me.

The cost per maund of manufactured tea was about Rs. 5. The cost of hoeing has not gone up during the last 7 years. The cost of plucking went up in good years when I had a lot of leaf. The case of pruning is the same. My tasks are always the same. Tasks are much easier now.

I give pregnant leave for 6 months on half-pay, or rice or paddy as an equivalent. We supply clothing and blankets to children and weakly and sick coolies. Last year I got up blankets for the coolies. The cost price worked out to Rs. 5 a blanket and I told the coolies that they could pay me back in small instalments, but they returned the blankets to me. I had eventually to write off the cost of the blankets as 'paid.' As regards clothing, a poor woman with a lot of children certainly does need clothes.

Q.—You say "It is now becoming customary to give opportunities of earning *ticca* in the cold weather." Was that not the case before?

A.—They could earn *ticca* if they liked. With reduced rates in pruning we give it to them.

Q.—Have you got many advances outstanding for rice?

A.—Just for the current months, of course some coolies are behindhand to a greater extent.

Major Fox :—Q.—With regard to the figure about the cost of living which is said to be 50 to 75 per cent., have you worked out any details by which you came to that conclusion?

A.—Some of the gentlemen did. That figure was arrived at in consultation with other planters in the district.

Q.—Would it be fair to say that this figure represents the rise in the cost of living in 1920?

A.—It is very much lower now.

Q.—Would it be fair to say that it has gone down to a figure very much approximating 1913?

A.—Not quite, but the price of rice is certainly lower.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—What is the condition of the coolie to-day as compared with 40 years ago?

A.—Most excellent. He is looked after more than ever he was. Better houses are given, better medical attention, better water-supply—everything.

Q.—Is the health of the coolies better now than it was before?

A.—Very much so. It was quite a usual thing in the old days to have cholera. I lost as many as 60 coolies in 36 hours from cholera in those days. Now there is never anything of that sort except sporadic cases. The water-supply is good now. We have a few cases of dysentery. There is malaria also. We have no latrines. We tried them once with the result that we lost a good many coolies. For one thing we could not get sweepers to clean them, and for another, coolies would not go there. So they just cleared out altogether. This occurred about 30 years ago at Surma.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—What was the price of rice in 1913?

A.—I could not tell you without looking at the books.

Q.—What was the price in 1920?

A.—I think we were paying as much as Rs. 4-8 per maund.

Q.—Could you do without agreements?

A.—I would not care to try it.

Q.—There are plenty of coolies who are not under agreement. Why would you not try it?

A.—Other planters can try it, but I shall not.

Q.—You said just now that you have been supplying blankets and clothing free of cost. I suppose that was from Calcutta and besides that supplies are got from the *kayas*. How much have you had to pay for the latter?

A.—I do not know.

Q.—You were pleased to say just now that if a coolie has got a family and the children require clothing you give it. Does it mean that they cannot themselves purchase it?

A.—Very likely not. If the husband is not strong or the wife, the children all get food and clothing free. Children who cannot be fed by the parents are fed at the hospital. I have got 40 children in the hospital; they have been kept there ever since 1918.

Q.—Besides the orphan children, how many other children are there who are fed at the hospital?

A.—I do not know.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—You say Rs. 6 for a man and Rs. 5 for a woman is a decent living wage, sufficient to keep them in health and reasonable comfort with a possibility of saving a little. Is that assuming there is no cultivation, or do they need cultivation in addition?

A.—No, they can live comfortably on that sum. There are sardars and syces who do not want their wives to work and although they only earn Rs. 6 to Rs. 10 they manage on it independent of any *ticca* earnings.

Mr. Das :—Q.—You do not think it necessary that wages should be raised?

A.—Certainly not at present. It is ample. Besides their *haziras*, they can do as much *ticca* as they like.

No. 108 :—*Mr. J. S. Elliot, Manager, Towok Division, Assam Company.*

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Would you say that your garden is under-staffed?

A.—I could do with some more. My garden has never been healthy owing to its geographical situation. It is right up under the hills and there is a lot of malaria. Anæmia now is under 5 per cent. I have both lines as well as *bustees*. I have got three sets of *bustee* lines and two-sets just the ordinary kind. The *bustees* naturally contain healthier coolies for the reason that those coolies are acclimatised. We have no latrine system, nor have I any experience in that direction. The coolie who suffers from anæmia is not, in my opinion, able to earn as much as a healthy coolie. Every Monday morning I have a muster of *lettra* (i.e., weakly) coolies and I and the doctor babu go and inspect the coolies. Those who are found to have improved from anæmia are given hard work and those who are still anæmic continue on light work and get full pay.

I have had no strikes on my garden. During the last week however we have heard of agitation in the immediate vicinity of the *bustees* alongside us. So far the agitators have not been trying to get at my coolies. Formerly I was paying my coolies on a monthly basis of Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 for men and women. I changed it to the unit system towards the end of 1920, for the simple reason that we had heard so many people speaking favourably of the unit system. They said that payment was in exact proportion to the amount of work done and the coolies understood what they were receiving and that coolies would and could earn more, knowing that every unit

meant so much more money. The garden would also benefit to the extent of getting more work done. So far I have been disappointed with the system because I find that the coolies are not doing as much work as they used to do. The only explanation I can offer is that the coolies do not require more money. The money is there for them and I keep urging them but they do not want to earn more. They say 'We earn 4 annas, why should we earn more?' Coolies do 3 *nals* for an anna but I cannot get them to do 15 *nals* for 5 annas. I always got 15 *nals* before and now I am only getting up to 12 *nals*. Generally they do not want to do more than 4 annas work.

The increase in the cost of living between 1913 and 1920 is somewhere between 50 per cent. and 75 per cent. It is a rough estimate formed in consultation with planters. I consider Rs. 6 for a man and Rs. 5 for a woman a decent living wage with a possibility of saving a little. I know from experience that it is enough even without the possession of cultivation. My motor boy who has a wife and a child earns Rs. 8 a month. He gets no *ticca* earnings; he may get a few 'tips' whenever he drives anybody. He lives quite comfortably on that sum. His wife, a strong coolie woman previously worked, but now does no work. In 1913 I was going round the garden one day and I casually met an old Santali and I asked him what it cost him to live. He said, Rs. 4, and then he said 'I have a wife and child, so it would cost Rs. 4-12.' I have got 412 acres of paddy land inside and outside the garden and about 400 coolies cultivate that land. I charge rent at 10 annas a *bigha*. My coolies hold about 250 acres of land inside the garden grant, and about 162 acres outside. We had fine plucking last year. The cost per maund of manufactured tea was Rs. 5. We are selling rice just now at Rs. 5 a maund. In 1921 we were charging more during the rains. We were giving the coolies 7 seers for the rupee as they were earning more money from *ticca*. I have been giving this rice concession for a number of years. We give agreements for 3 years. I believe under the new Act XII coolies are not supposed to be put under agreement for more than one year at a time. But I give my coolies agreements for 3 years, because they want a big sum as bonus money. The coolie probably wants to buy cattle and needs a lump-sum of money. The Act has a moral effect on the coolie, and I am in favour of its retention.

I have not run any cases for the last 5 years. In case the Act was abolished I would not continue to give the bonus freely. I would limit it to deserving coolies. At the same time you have got to consider your proprietors and share-holders and they would surely say, 'Why do you give this money without any security?' Of course if a coolie had cultivation on the garden that would be a certain amount of security.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Would you say that this is a cheap district for food-stuffs?

A.—Comparatively.

Q.—Is there considerable inequality of rates for rice ruling in different parts?

A.—I don't think so.

Q.—I was told in an Indian garden yesterday that rice could be purchased just now on the basis of 12 seers per rupee?

A.—That would only be by coolies going into the villages to get it. In the bazaar they get it at 8 seers.

Q.—That is a fairly high premium for labour to pay if they have to go into the bazaar. Is there any possibility of negotiating direct transactions?

A.—Yes, but I have never heard of coolies getting rice as cheap as 12 seers to the rupee.

Q.—That garden has a large area with a great deal of paddy so that this emphasises the fact that a great deal depends on the condition of different gardens.

Conditions of food supplies have a very important influence in enabling the coolie to meet the cost of living adequately. So that even within the same district it is possible to find gardens so differently situated as to require to differentiate between what applies to one garden and another?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Would you say, comparing the coolies as you see them at the present time, that they look as healthy and well-fed as they ever looked before?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Are they quite as well clothed as they used to be?

A.—In my opinion they look well-clothed.

Q.—Do they seem to be profuse in ornaments?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Flocks and herds have not decreased in number recently?

A.—On the other hand they have done very well in this district.

Q.—Would you regard the possession of these things as evidence of well-being?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You are clearly of opinion that Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 does provide for men and women a decent living wage which would enable them to live in comfort, and what they may earn in addition to that is something that adds to their well-being, e.g., agreement bonus and *ticca*?

A.—Yes.

Q.—The maintenance of children is not included in the Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 just mentioned?

A.—Yes, it is sufficient for a family, and besides as encouragement, I give a bonus of Rs. 3 for all children reaching a year, a further Rs. 2 at the end of the second year, and Re. 1 at the end of the third year—total Rs. 6 for all children reaching the age of 3 years. Pregnant women are given 2 annas a day. If children have nothing to live on we always feed them. We have a hotel system. There is no hunger. I have 7 *kayas*' shops and 4 Muhammadan shops. I believe they lend money to the coolies sometimes.

We recruited over 300 coolies last year. Recruits are always medically examined in the Assam Company. I cannot say whether the Company is satisfied with the examination. I personally am dissatisfied with the age classification of the individuals. Otherwise, I think we get a good class of coolies. We give new coolies full pay, also rice and pice weekly, until they are settled, and then they go on just as the others. It takes about 6 months for a new coolie to settle down. On the average new coolies do not take up cultivation during the first 3 years of their stay. I give rice to all those who come for it. Very few however take it. At present I am selling rice at 8 seers—same as the bazaar price. I think about 50 children are fed in the hotel. I could not tell offhand how many coolies were supplied with clothing last year and the year before, but I think the number was not large. If I see a coolie going about in bad clothes, I give him a letter to the hospital and he is supplied with new clothing.

Q.—Was he going about in bad clothes because he was not able to purchase his own clothes?

A.—Sometimes coolies have children and are unable to supply themselves with it; these are mostly widows with young children.

Q.—Do you think if the agreement system were abolished coolies would abscond?

A.—Coolies as a rule would not abscond; but there might be a malcontent or two who would take the agreement money on one garden and then move on to another garden and do the same. We purchase rice at wholesale rates and sell it at concession rates. Even if cheaper rice were to be had from the *bustees*, coolies would not care to get it especially in the rains when they find it very difficult to get in their supplies. We import rice from Calcutta. About 5 per cent. of the coolies are indebted to the *kayas*.

We have more leaf than there are labourers to pluck it.

No. 109.—MR. T. H. KNOLLES, Manager, Borhat Tea Estate, Borhat Tea Company, Limited.

I have been in Borhat since 1908; before that I was in Golaghat from 1904.

Mr. Dawson:—I consider Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 a decent living wage. I think a man earning Rs. 6 in cash is well off. We have no rice deductions. We sell rice at the concession rate of Rs. 5 a maund to old coolies, or paddy Rs. 3 per maund, and paddy at Rs. 2-8 to new coolies and rice Rs. 3-2 to new coolies. I do not consider the system of rice advances is a good one. Men are paid 4 annas a day, i.e., Rs. 6-8 for 26 working days. We increased wages from Rs. 6 to Rs. 6-8 because we considered it necessary to do so as things became expensive during the war and also because we thought that the system of running the accounts would be facilitated and it would be easier for the coolie to see what he was getting.

Q.—Do you think the coolie is as well clothed now as he was before the war?

A.—No. I don't think he has so many changes of clothing. But then we have all felt it ourselves. I certainly would like to see a coolie have more clothes.

The plucking task has been reduced. The unit system I think does tend to produce indifferent work. We however do not work on the unit system. I do not intend adopting that system because it is rather difficult to supervise. I prefer the idea of expressing the *hazira* as a unit, viz., in annas (if possible) in preference to so many rupees per month in which the rate per day changes according to the number of working days in the month. In dealing with $\frac{1}{2}$ annas, as say, Re. 0-4-6 per day, then the Rs. 7 rate per month is generally used. I favour the *hazira* system and the giving of plenty of *ticca* (the latter at the ordinary rates). Under this system, and if found advisable or necessary, under local conditions, the *hazira* should be raised, but not the *ticca*. I would like to raise my wages to Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 because world conditions point to more pay. Personally I think Rs. 7 for men and Rs. 6 for women would be a decent living wage. I think the men, however, pretty well off and it is the wages of the women I consider should be raised. The main reason for this is that women's clothing is more expensive. It is due largely to the price of clothing that I make the suggestion to raise the wages.

Q.—Supposing a man had a family consisting of his wife and 2 non-working children, in that case would Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 cover the lot?

A.—He would probably have to do a little more *ticca* work. It would also depend a good deal on whether he has any land and whether rice concessions are given him. But supposing that he had no cultivation but was given a rice concession, even then I consider that he would require a little more than Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. He could, however, do a little more *ticca* work to keep the family going. The woman would earn a good deal more than Rs. 5 when out plucking; as a matter of fact I don't think Rs. 5 would be enough for a woman in this instance; she would have to do a little more work unless the husband earned good *ticca* instead.

Agreements are given for one year only and the advances not recovered, but many coolies would like two-year ones.

Q.—Supposing Act XIII were abolished, would you still be inclined to give the bonus to a good working coolie?

A.—Our agreements up here are pretty high—Rs. 12 and Rs. 10—which works out roughly in a calendar year to one rupee a month. If you did away with the Act, I think the coolie would be disappointed. When the Government reduced the term to one year, the coolies asked why they should not be given an agreement for two years if they wanted it. I would not be prepared to continue the bonus if the Act was abolished. The Act has a certain moral effect on the coolies, and after all, only a very small number of law-breakers would be affected by it.

From the coolie point of view, I consider it undesirable that the various concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages; but from the garden point of view it might be desirable. This would be most difficult to arrange satisfactorily.

Q.—You have not considered the possibility of raising wages and giving no paddy or rice?

A.—I have, but that is a very difficult problem. You cannot always be chopping and changing prices according as the market fluctuates. If there is a big local supply of food-stuffs in the bazaar all the year you could stop giving paddy or rice, but if not, then arrangements must be made and the price fixed. The coolie then knows how he is situated. The price of rice and paddy fluctuates and you have got to take that into account. Concession rice is being sold to the coolies since the time I have been in Borhat, i.e., from 1908. The rate for old coolies now is Rs. 3 for paddy and Rs. 5 for rice. New coolies are given paddy at Rs. 2-8 and rice at Rs. 3-2 a maund. Paddy is almost entirely given on this estate as the coolies prefer it for they can make either *usna* or *arroa* rice out of it, which they have been accustomed to eat. We do a lot of recruiting. We spent Rs. 78,004-6-9 on recruiting during the last 5 years. The labour force is the same number as in 1917. In November 1918 we lost 80 working coolies and 33 others from influenza.

We spent on recruiting in—

						Rs.	s.	p.
1917	...	...	...	...	...	6,911	2	2
1918	...	...	...	...	...	1,226	1	2
1919	...	...	...	...	...	38,565	6	0
1920	...	...	...	...	...	26,453	4	3
1921	...	...	...	...	...	4,848	8	6

Sonari.

The labour force in 1917 was 1124; on 31st December 1921, the labour force was 1,106. We have got a large amount of land and our coolies are very well off for rice and paddy. Coolies retire into the *bustees* and sell paddy. During the last 5 years I have lost about 5 per cent. of my coolies by their having settled down on Government land outside the garden. We have got only about 10 to 17 outside coolies. I think the revenue on Government land is 9 annas per *bigha* and one anna in the rupee for local rates. There is a big draw to Government land as the rates are low and there is a lot of land awaiting development not far from the garden.

If a coolie cultivates four *bighas* equal to one *poorah* of land he will get sufficient paddy for himself and his wife for a year. There were 46 deaths in 1921 as against 60 births. The garden is very healthy and popular. The births and deaths from 1916 to 1921 were:—

Year.				Births.	Deaths.
1916	...	...	...	44	41 (Excluding cholera.)
1917	...	...	...	57	33
1918	...	...	...	55	27
1919	...	...	...	48	93 Influenza.
1920	...	...	...	40	59
1921	...	...	...	60	49

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—The development of *bustees* in the vicinity tends to increase the supply of food-stuffs?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And that, I presume, makes the cost of living reasonably low in your district?

A.—It is low at this time of the year but it is going up gradually because *kayas* are getting into the way of buying and collecting all the paddy. Before, all the rice used to come up from Calcutta, but now there are rice-mills in the district and *kayas* go round collecting paddy with the result that prices are going up. We can purchase paddy from the cultivators direct but that is very difficult and unsatisfactory because it does not lend itself to check, and further there is the prospect of the paddy becoming spoilt; we find it better to buy it from the *kayas* and bring it in. It is a sort of contract which is given to the *kayas*.

Q.—Is there no way of modifying the system?

The Government carry on agricultural banks to assist the ryots and to make them independent because they have got to pay high rates of interest. Do you think a co-operative society might assist the cultivator to get out of the hands of the *kaya*?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that the tendency of prices since 1920 is to decrease?

A.—Yes.

Q.—The coolies have to pay much more in the local bazaars for their paddy than they would have to pay if they got it from you? The keeping of garden stock helps to control prices?

A.—Yes.

Q.—But the purpose of the garden in altering the rates is partly to check the market rate and prevent coolies from having to pay outrageous rates?

A.—Yes, that is certainly one of the objects. If the prices go up abnormally high in the markets, the coolies can always resort to the garden for their supplies. We stock very little rice, but a good deal of paddy. We import a little *arroa* rice from Chittagong and Calcutta. In 1920 we lost Rs. 8,907 on rice. *Kayas*' shops are situated within the garden land. I have a lease with them. They have to pay rental for their houses. There are no conditions stated in the lease as regards prices, but if I am displeased with them I can give 3 months' notice.

I have an arrangement with the *kaya* to conform to the official standard of prices prevailing at Dibrugarh plus an allowance for the cost of getting things from there to the garden. The difficulty is to get the official standard. It was printed at one time in the "*Times of Assam*"; then it stopped over some disagreement I understand. Later, occasionally, it has been printed again. My doctor babu goes to the bazaars occasionally to enquire about prices. We are 21 miles from Sonari and there is not much scope for competition. Our geographical situation is unfavourable.

Mr. Withers:—Q.—Do you think that an increase of wages would have any effect on recruiting?

A.—I think so.

We have recruits medically examined. Medical examination is certainly a difficulty especially in the case of women who object to being examined. We give agreements to new coolies—Rs. 5 for each year up to 3 years. We give it to them as soon as they come in order to set them up and avoid advances. The money is not deducted. We give loans from time to time; they are deducted by easy instalments.

I do not consider that agreements hold back the coolies for one moment. A coolie may take an advance to-day and abscond to-morrow. There is no knowing, but the average coolie always discharges his obligation. I consider the Act has a sort of moral effect on the coolie, but a good coolie does not think about it.

The price of rice is Rs. 5-4 at present and there is every possibility of its rising; it depends a great deal on all-India prices.

Unless you can replace Act XIII by some other equivalent I am in favour of its retention. If you take away the bonus money from a coolie straightway, he would not understand the reason. It does not concern me whether the Act is retained or not, except as regards a few malcontents, but from the coolie's own point of view, I think it is necessary.

NAZIRA, SIBSAGAR, 17TH FEBRUARY 1922.

(SRIJUT SIVA PRASAD BARUA ABSENT.)

No. 110.—DR. JOHN R. MACNAMARA, F.R.C.S., Principal Medical Officer, Assam Company,

I have been in Assam 23 years now. I have been 19 years in the Assam Com- Nazira. pany.

I am Principal Medical Officer in charge of the Assam Company's gardens. There is one European doctor in charge at Sonari and another at Moran.

Q.—Are you in favour of the barrack system of lines or the village system?

A.—If you can separate the coolies and let them go out, they can do better, but it must take time for a new coolie to attain that standard. But if they are looked after in the lines they do well.

We have got no latrines. We have never yet tried them though latrines have been discussed a good deal. Major McCombie Young was here and I showed him round the place and he told me that there was no use for small privies and that the septic tank was desirable. The trench system is adopted in Java, and it might be adopted with advantage here. But then the fly question comes up. I believe coolies are getting accustomed to use such latrines. We have 14 gardens and we cannot afford the money to provide septic tanks for so many gardens.

Q.—Do you think if latrines were provided it would have any effect on *anchylostomiasis*?

A.—It would; we could keep the jungle round about clear and that would prevent infection. For instance infection from the soil could be prevented. We treat thousands of cases of *anchylostomiasis* but fortunately we do not get it up to a very bad stage though there is a good deal of it.

Q.—If the ground is infected you have a sort of vicious circle?

A.—Yes, *anchylostomiasis* impairs the efficiency of the labour to a certain extent, but I don't think on our gardens here it does interfere with labour very much.

Q.—We were told in Cachar by a Medical Officer that *anchylostomiasis* diminishes the efficiency of the labour force by at least 50 per cent.

A.—Yes, in certain cases I believe that is the effect.

New coolies are medically examined before they leave the recruiting district, but *acutti* coolies are not examined.

Sardari coolies are segregated. We get both healthy and unhealthy coolies from the recruiting districts. Sardars bring up sometimes a very poor class of coolies and sometimes a good class of coolies. It depends what locality they are recruited from.

The majority of the coolies are not highly infected with disease, but generally their health improves up here and the incidence of disease diminishes as time rolls on. We had a few cases of cholera last year. The water-supply is excellent. I would say that the medical arrangements are gradually improving and this is certainly due both to the Medical Officers and the energies of Managers. We are never short of medicines. Hospital accommodation is improving now. I am quite satisfied with the attention paid to medical questions.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—There seems to be a difference of opinion about the use of latrines and as to the practicability of introducing them. Do you think any good purpose might be served by having a conference of tea-garden Medical Officers on the subject of hookworm with a view to making practical recommendations?

A.—Yes, it would be a very good thing. At the same time you must have the co-operation of labour in a matter of this kind.

On our own gardens one septic tank would not do. The gardens are scattered and we would require 4 or 5 of them so that the cost would be prohibitive. We would require 5 gallons of water per head in a day for the use of the septic tank. We would require a more adequate water-supply than is usually available. It is certainly a matter calling for careful consideration so that the right kind of system may be adopted with due regard to the cost.

Q.—Do you think that some advantage might result through Medical Officers conferring on such matters from time to time?

A.—I think so. I agree that it would be of advantage if Medical Officers met together and considered questions of public health in a sort of organized conference. Government could probably supply the services of an expert if they are interested in improving the health of the gardens. I also agree that such an idea might be suggested for consideration.

Q.—Do you know that a coolie gets sufficient to keep him in comfort?

A.—I do not think he is over-worked at all events.

On the whole, the birth-rate and death-rate are very nearly on a level.

We have experienced no difficulty in getting indoor patients into hospital. A good deal certainly depends on the popularity of the doctor babu. New coolies before coming up undergo a medical examination. I have been satisfied with the medical examination which takes place in the recruiting district. But nowadays I do not see much of the newly recruited coolie because he goes straight on to the garden. *Arcutti* coolies have always been kept here for some days and I always inspected them before sending them to the gardens. If I found any of them unfit I would send them back.

Q.—Would you say that a coolie is as well provided with clothing now as he was 7 or 10 years ago?

A.—At one time, I was just thinking he was not, but that is a point on which I would not like to offer an opinion. My personal opinion, however, is that I do not think he looks very well clothed.

Pregnant leave is given. Women are brought up before me and I am very liberal as regards granting them pregnant leave. I generally grant them a couple of months leave before childbirth and they are given full pay for the period. I should think that pregnant leave is the most liberal concession on the gardens. We used to give a bonus on the birth of a child but we have now dropped that system. The rule was to give the bonus to healthy children when produced for inspection after a certain time and the result was that the really miserable children were neglected while the children who looked quite well were being given the bonus. I have adopted the system of *shalans* on some gardens in the case of weakly coolies, but we do not require it very much here as there is not much anæmia.

A 33 per cent. increase of wages was given to the coolies of the Assam Company in 1920. Previously coolies were getting Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 : they now get Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7 for a woman. This does not include *tioca*. Most gardens now work on the "unit system" and a coolie gets paid for the work he actually does each day and there is no doubt that he makes more money than he ever did before.

I have been connected with the Assam Company for the last 30 years. I have been Superintendent for six years now.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

We work on the unit system which is adopted throughout the district. In hoeing we give three *nals* for one anna and in plucking two pice for one unit of roughly speaking a seer. We pay coolies fortnightly. We changed the system in January 1921. Before that women were earning three annas and men roughly four annas. We now pay five and four annas for men and women ; it is the rate adopted on all the Assam Company's gardens. The unit system affords coolies facilities of earning more during the cold weather, and of thereby equalising pay throughout the year. They make more money now than they used to on the old system, but the tendency is to work shorter hours. The unit system has resulted in a decrease of work but at the same time we have lowered the task. When first I came to the Company, 15 or 20 years ago, coolies were doing 20 *na's* deep hoeing for four annas. Now they get six and a half annas for the same amount of work. As regards plucking we used to give eight seers for a task and anything over that was considered as *tioca* for which we paid one and a half pice a seer. We now give two pice a seer for all leaf plucked. A coolie now cannot earn as much by fine plucking in a given time as was the case when coarser plucking was the practice. With regard to weighing leaf, we have baskets of a standard size. All our leaf works out to a unit of four maunds which makes one maund of tea. Sometimes we lose, sometimes we make on it. In wet weather we are more likely to lose ; in dry weather we may gain. On the average we get for 4 maunds of leaf 1 maund of finished tea. Before the unit system was introduced coolies could not do more than the ordinary *hazira* in the cold weather. They were unable to do any *tioca* work in the cold weather.

The physique of the newly recruited coolies is not quite so good as ten years ago. We used to recruit coolies from the *jungli* areas before, but now we cannot do it.

President :—Q.—Do you think the raising of the monthly wage would be any inducement in getting a superior stamp of coolie?

A.—I don't think so. Most of my coolies are under Act XIII. I give a bonus at the rate of Rs. 12 for one year. We still give three-year agreements. Coolies come and ask for agreements and we give them for whatever period they want. We give a commission of one rupee to sardars who bring coolies for agreements. Coolies would not like the Act abolished. We have never taken coolies to court. As a matter of fact I consider the Act to be no agreement really ; it is just a sort of system.

Q.—If the Act was repealed, would you still continue the bonus?

A.—That would have to be considered. I don't think I would give it. I am in favour of retaining the Act.

I consider that a single man would require probably Rs. 6 a month to enable him to live in comfort. A family would probably live on less, perhaps Rs. 5 on the average per head. That must however depend entirely on the price of paddy. As a rule coolies buy their own paddy.

Mr. Withers :—Q.—Under the unit system how do you pay garden sardars. Do they get a fixed wage?

A.—We pay them about Rs. 10 to Rs. 12 a month according to ability.

All orphans are fed by the garden and given clothing. Generally blankets are supplied to new coolies during their first year on the garden at cost price. The coolie would not like Act XIII to be abolished for the simple reason that he gets a lump sum of money as a bonus.

Q.—But you could make a special contract and give him an advance?

A.—We do not give advances except in the way of rice and paddy.

Rice is sold at the concession rate of Rs. 5 a maund all the year round. Coolies pay cash for this rice. We also give rice to those who are ill. This year we have had a very strong non-co-operation movement and the method of the agitators has been to induce villagers to supply rice to the coolie at two *dhons* to the rupee which is ridiculous. Six *dhons* to the rupee would come to Rs. 3-3 a maund of rice. Cultivators have been tutored to ask high prices from the coolies.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Was the suggestion made that the coolies should ask for higher wages in order that they may be able to pay extreme prices to the cultivators?

A.—Yes, I understand that was the case. In my opinion all the recent disturbances in connection with tea-garden labour have been the work of political agitators.

We had latrines in 1916-17, but the coolies would not use them, unless they were kept clean. The latrine system in 1916 consisted of an ordinary house with holes dug in the ground and plastered with lime. It was not a success and the Director of Public Health said he was not in favour of it. He preferred the septic tank. Gardens which are situated away from the river are handicapped for water, but we do not like to put up lines near the river for the simple reason that coolies are inclined to drink the river water and contract cholera. We have had no difficulty with regard to the drinking water supply, but the tanks are not large enough for the septic system. The introduction of the septic tank would involve a considerable outlay, and even then, unless the garden managers were invested with the powers of a third-class Magistrate to force the coolies to use the latrines, it would be no use introducing any system of latrines. We must get people to use latrines willingly; it is no use putting pressure on them.

New coolies are put under agreement after one or two years. They are better looked after on their arrival; they get easier work and are supplied with rice. Coolies with families living on the garden become as settled as old coolies after a year. If they are short of pay we make it up so as to ensure a living wage.

No. 112.—Mr. W. B. ANDREW, *Manager, Nahorhabi Tea Estate.*

I have been 23 years in Tea.

I had a strike for two days on my gardens. On the day before the strike the coolies held a meeting and we heard that they were going on strike on the following days. I went to the lines with my Assistant and the only complaint I had was that paddy was not supplied cheap enough. At the time paddy was offered by the villagers at two or three *dhons* for the rupee. After two days they went back to work. At that time we were not supplying paddy nor were we storing it. In 1921 we sold rice to the coolies by importing it from Calcutta. We sold it at Rs. 4-12 a maund. I think that was the maximum price at which we sold rice. We have practically no rice advances outstanding against the coolies. We wrote off between Rs. 400 and Rs. 500 last year. Our advances are altogether very small. Wages are Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 for men and women, respectively; these rates have been in force for years.

The cost of living between 1913 and 1920 has risen by 25 per cent. I should say.

President :—Q.—How did the coolies meet the increased cost of living?

A.—The tasks were lowered. The task for light hoeing is 30 *nals* and 10 to 12 *nals* for deep hoeing. The tasks have been altered from this year. If the soil is very hard the task may be varied, but the usual established rate is 15 *nals* for deep hoeing. The task for plucking used to be 8 seers and over and above that we gave a pice a seer. We had orders in 1921 to pluck very fine. We reduced the task to 6 seers and paid 2 pice a seer over and above that. It takes longer for a coolie to earn as much within a given time in fine plucking than would be the case with coarse plucking. In a good flush of leaf the task takes 4 hours and with an average flush about 5½ hours. We make a deduction for the basket in the weighing of leaf and also for wet leaf. On days of heavy rain a big deduction is made. About 4 maunds of green leaf would make 1 maund of manufactured tea.

Q.—Could you say what was the cost per maund of green leaf or manufactured tea last year?

A.—I could not tell you now.

The cost of plucking has gone up in recent years. The cost of hoeing in recent years has not altered very much; in fact it is about the same. Pruning, however, has gone up very considerably. The ordinary pruning task would be about 60 bushes, and the average coolie would take at least 5 hours to do it.

We put coolies under Act XIII agreement. Most of my coolies are under agreement. We give a bonus of Rs. 10 to a man and Rs. 8 to a woman. Coolies very often come up and ask for an agreement for two years, but I generally give it to them for one year. I would not be inclined to give any advances if the Act was abolished.

Q.—Would they be more inclined to leave the garden if you did not give them the advance?

A.—Probably so. Coolies have got about 380 acres of land for cultivation, and in addition to that, they take land from the Assamese as well; to what extent, however, it is very difficult to say. About 70 per cent. of my adult coolies have land inside and outside the grant.

Taking the average coolie, I don't think he is as well clothed now as he was before the war. This is due probably to his not having sufficient money to buy his clothes; but at the same time I consider that he is well off. Perhaps he is not quite so well off as regards clothing. I don't think coolies are badly off as if they were, there would not be so many daily absentees in the garden. There are a good many absentees nowadays. As regards the average coolie I do not consider that an increase in wages would tend to make him work more. I do not think the coolies are hard up at present even with the increased cost of living. We pay wages fortnightly. We do not work on the unit system. I do not consider that the coolies need any concessions at all now. I consider that a man and his wife earning between Rs. 10 and Rs. 11 a month each would be able to maintain 2 non-working children in addition to themselves. All sickly coolies are put on easy work so that they may earn fairly good pay.

Q.—Are you in favour of giving coolies some recreation?

A.—They do have recreation such as hunting deer, etc.

Coolies drink a tremendous lot of *laopani* and they feel happy in doing so.

I estimate the rise in the cost of living between 1920 and 1913 at 25 per cent. At the present time it is higher than in 1913.

Q.—Are the labourers badly clothed?

A.—They are not so well dressed as they used to be 4 or 5 years ago especially the women. They used to get expensive clothes before and I would not say that there is the same smartness now in their dress. In other words they are not so fashionably dressed now. In 1913 the price of paddy was slightly under Rs. 2 a maund. Now it is about Rs. 2 a maund. We place no restriction on coolies to earn *ticca*. As a matter of fact it is very difficult to get them to earn *ticca*.

Q. Would it be fair to assume, therefore, that the earnings of a coolie amply cover the cost of living?

A.—Certainly.

Q.—Would you say that Rs. 6 is a living wage even if a coolie had no rice cultivation?

A.—No. If he had facilities for earning *ticca* then I think it would do.

There is a country liquor shop about three-fourths of a mile from the factory. Country liquor shops for recent months have been picketed and closed. Coolies never asked for an increase of pay between 1913 and 1920. Nor do I think it necessary to raise their wages. About 7 or 8 children are fed at the hospital at present. There are probably about 200 coolies not under agreement.

They prefer sitting in the lines. I do not think *laopani* is an expensive luxury to the coolies. We do not employ much *bustee* labour.

Q.—Have you noticed any deterioration in the clothing of the *bustee* labour?

A.—I cannot say exactly. I have seen *bustee* people coming into the bazaar and they are usually dressed up in their best. I do not know how they are dressed in their *bustees*. Clothing has become very expensive of late years and even Europeans have felt the high prices of cloth.

Q.—Don't you think the same argument would apply to the Indian?

A.—Possibly so.

Q.—Am I right in understanding that on your estate coolies have every facility of earning more than they do actually earn?

Q.—Certainly.

Q.—Is it reasonable to infer that this sufficiently indicates they have enough to meet their requirements?

A.—It is very difficult to say, but the money which they do earn seems to meet their approval and besides they are quite contented. The only discontent which has been bred recently is due to political agitators working outside in the different *bustees*.

Nazira.

Q.—Do you find that a large number of the coolies absent themselves throughout the year, or is it the case only at a particular season?

A.—No, throughout the year. They absent themselves in greater number during the cultivation season.

Q.—Does the fact that you have rice and paddy crops within the garden grant enable them to remain on the garden?

A.—Yes.

We have a lot of coolies under agreement.

Q.—What do you do in the case of those coolies who take an agreement but do not work?

A.—We simply postpone their agreements for months. We put new coolies under agreement after they have been a year on the garden. I, however, have no objection to giving agreements within a year of their arrival.

I think it is beneficial to the coolie to take the agreement immediately he comes up as it enables him to make a start in life. I generally give a new coolie who takes the agreement Rs. 5 the first month and another Rs. 5 the next month. The system is appreciated by the coolies. New coolies come up with a certain amount of utensils which are provided by the agent before they are sent up. Agreements are given for 313 days. We pay coolies half *haziras* if they do half tasks. At the time of giving the next advance to a coolie we generally remit a couple of months of the unexpired term and start afresh. Under the old Act VI this period used to be added on to the fresh agreement, but that is not done now. Sardars are given commission for bringing coolies from their country.

No. 113.—MR. E. W. HUGHES, *Manager, Madoorie Tea Estate* :—

I have been in Tea since 1909, and on my present garden since December 1919.

There are 447 acres under tea. The working population on my garden is 480 coolies—men, women and children. We have the unit system; one anna is the unit. The system was recently introduced with the object of allowing the coolie to earn more money and to do a little more work. The result has been that the coolie earns a little more money, perhaps, but he does not earn as much as he could earn.

President :—Q.—Do you think the unit system is not a success?

A.—I think it is as good as the other system. The coolie undoubtedly has a better time under the unit system because he earns the same money by doing less work. As many units as a coolie does he is paid for. I have been recruiting coolies every year.

Q.—Do you find that the coolies recruited now are as good as 10 years ago?

A.—They have not been as good this year at any rate.

I consider the coolie is as well clothed now as he was before the war. In my opinion he is very well off in every respect. I have had no trouble on my garden up to date. The great majority of the coolies have land for cultivation. We charge rent. In weighing leaf we deduct for the basket and wet leaf, and nothing else.

Supposing a woman brings in 25 pounds of leaf we credit her with 24 and not 26 because it would not then be a commercial proposition, the rate paid for 24 and 25 pounds being the same. We do not write up fractions of an anna because it would complicate the keeping of the account books. The average for light hoeing is about one anna for 7 *nals*. A coolie is not bound to earn any particular amount; he can do what he wants to.

The cost per maund of green leaf last year was about Re. 1-4. Four maunds of green leaf make 1 maund of manufactured tea.

The majority of my coolies are under contract. The agreement bonus is Rs. 12 a year. I give agreements for one year.

Q.—Supposing the Act was abolished, would you still continue to give the bonus?

A.—I would have to consider the question. Coolies can buy paddy from the factory; the price of paddy varies. No appreciable amount of rice or paddy was sold in 1921 although we had a supply at the factory. The reason for this is that coolies do not want to buy it from the factory when they can get it cheaper elsewhere.

We recruited about 50 coolies from the Central Provinces last year, and I have been satisfied with them. They were medically examined before coming up. I think medical examination costs something like Rs. 2 per head. This amount is paid by the Agents. Nazira.

We put new coolies under agreement after a year's residence on the garden. The agreement is given for so many working days. As regards *khuttia* days, if the coolie is a good worker we excuse him, but if he happens to be lazy then he is not excused. I was in the Surma Valley for 6½ years. I consider the garden I am on now is healthier than the garden on which I served in the Surma Valley. The actual money a man draws is very much the same in the two valleys. Last year was undoubtedly dearer than any year during my experience in Sylhet, but from the coolie's point of view I think the cost of living is generally speaking about the same. Sibsagar I think is just as cheap as Sylhet.

I would certainly say that ordinarily the normal coolie gets enough to maintain himself in health and reasonable comfort.

Q.—Supposing an average coolie was taking advantage of the opportunities that you give him of earning money, what do you think he might earn per day on your estate?

A.—Eight annas in the case of men and 6 annas in the case of women.

For deep hoeing we pay an anna for 4 *nals* or 3 *nals*. It would take 3 hours to earn 4 annas at present. Coolies earn 5 annas in 4 hours. Coolies who do not take agreements do not want to bind themselves down to agreements. We introduced the unit system about May last year. Before that we used to pay a monthly rate of Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 for men and women. I do not know how long that was in force. About 200 acres of rice land are cultivated by coolies. I think the rent is Rs. 4 a *poorah*. It is physically possible for coolies to do 24 *nals* deep hoeing in a day. As a matter of fact they could do 32 *nals* which would take about 7 or 8 hours. Of course that would be on particular soils and would depend on the class of work accepted. When I was in Sylhet the payment for plucking was by the ticket system. At Magura the task was based on the average of the weight of leaf brought in daily. For a 3-anna *hazira* the average task was 20 pounds. The pluckers were given quarter *haziras* for each 5 pounds.

Q.—With regard to the question of payment for leaf, are you not swindling the coolie out of a pound of leaf by writing up 24 when he actually plucked 25 pounds of leaf?

A.—It is merely for the sake of convenience that it is entered up in the books as 24 pounds, the rate paid for 24 and 25 pounds being the same.

Q.—Would it not be as convenient to enter it up as 26?

A.—Yes, but the coolie would then draw more pay than he is entitled to.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—If a coolie is working under the unit system, is his work varied at all during the course of the day? Would a coolie be put on a particular kind of work in the forenoon and on another kind of work in the afternoon?

A.—That very seldom happens. It might happen only in special cases.

NAZIRA, 18TH FEBRUARY 1922.

(PRESIDENT, MR. MC MORRAN AND MR. DAWSON PRESENT.)

No. 114.—MR. J. S. RONALD, *Manager, Galeky Tea Estate, Assam Company* :—

I have been connected with Tea since 1895, and have been all my time in the Assam Company. I am now at Galeky. I was till recently Acting Superintendent of the Assam Company. Nazira.

The area under tea at Galeky is 1,316 acres and the outturn per acre is 7 maunds 12 seers. The number of working coolies per acre is 1.18. About 300 acres of rice land are cultivated by coolies in the garden grants and about 460 acres on *bustee* land.

The total working population of the garden is—men 960, women 1,018 and children 377—a total of 2,355. This force comprises 10 per cent. of Oriyas and about 15 per cent. Central Provinces people. We have got 2 per cent. of Garos; the

Nazira.

rest come from the United Provinces right down to Guntur in the Madras Presidency. We employ about 60 outside labourers; in the rains more are employed, especially when the women come in to pluck and the heavy flushes are on. All these people are *ex-tea-garden* coolies practically. Last year the death-rate was just over 2 per cent. I have had no trouble on the garden.

Rice is supplied at Rs. 5 a maund; paddy at Rs. 2-8 to Rs. 3 a maund. In 1921 we supplied as much paddy as the coolies wanted. They are however not keen on taking it and prefer to buy it from the villages. There are not many rice advances outstanding against coolies.

We work on the unit system and pay coolies twice a month. The system was started about a year ago. Before the unit system was introduced the wages were Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 for men and women, respectively.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—You say that the increase in the cost of living since the war is 15 per cent. You say that coolies with cultivation are not affected to any great extent except with regard to cloth?

A.—Yes.

Q.—When the coolies worked under the old system of *hazira* and *ticca*, was the amount of work that was given out as *ticca* less than the *hazira* so that if a man did *ticca* in hoeing he would receive more?

A.—No.

Q.—What is the hoeing task?

A.—Deep hoeing just now is 3 *nals* for an anna. We used to give no *ticca* for deep hoeing; coolies now earn as much as they like. A coolie is able to do 25 *nals* in deep hoeing, so that he would receive payment at the rate of 3 *nals* to the anna.

Q.—Do many coolies do as much as that?

A.—Probably 30 per cent. of the men earn 8 annas, in other words do 24 *nals*.

Q.—Could a coolie keep up that rate of work for many days in the week?

A.—I think a coolie could keep it up in the following week if the soil is light. A coolie takes 4 hours to do 24 *nals* of deep hoeing.

As regards light hoeing the task varies. Coolies get one anna for 6 *nals*.

Good coolies go out to work early in the morning and finish for the day by 11 or 12 o'clock.

Before the unit system was introduced a man's *hazira* was about 3 annas for 20 *nals* of deep hoeing. This was 3 years ago. Just then the wages both of men and women were raised by Re. 1 on account of the rise in the price of foodstuffs and cloth.

Q.—Are the wages the same now as they were 3 years ago?

A.—No, they are very much increased. The second increase took place in the beginning of last year when the unit system was introduced. We had no political agitation three years ago such as is going on now.

The plucking rate is 2 pice a seer. We were plucking fine last year.

With a reduced task for fine plucking it is possible for a coolie to earn as much in a given time as was the case when coarser plucking was the practice. In weighing leaf only the weight of the basket is deducted. When leaf is scarce at the beginning and end of the season, a woman gets 4 annas for going out and bringing in what she can. Four maunds of green leaf would make one maund of tea. Our coolies have a fair amount of grazing land, and we are opening out more land at present. Coolies with buffaloes contribute to the pay of cowherds. We supply on the average 1,500 to 2,000 blankets annually and a certain amount of clothing. Many blankets were taken in the cold weather of last year. If a blanket costs us Rs. 3-8 we would sell it for Rs. 2.

Q.—Do you think that coolies are as well clothed now as they used to be before the war?

A.—I think so.

Q.—Have you any system of feeding children and weakly coolies?

A.—Yes, there is a free meal at the hospital every morning and in the rains there is a free meal for every child and for old people at the tea-house.

Five seers of concession rice are allowed to every man and woman and 3 seers to working children in a week.

We have about 800 coolies under contract. We give a bonus of Re. 1 a month to men and 8 annas to women. The bonus is paid in a lump sum, Rs. 12 and Rs. 6

at the beginning of the contract, and is not recovered. We used to put coolies under *Nazira* agreement for 3 years. New coolies are not put under contract until they have been over a year at least on the garden. Contracts are written on stamped paper.

Q.—Do you think that agreements are necessary?

A.—The coolie likes them.

I have never taken any cases to court.

The standard of work for deep hoeing has had to be lowered somewhat in recent times so that with a lower standard of work it is easier for a coolie to earn a larger sum per day if he cares to do the work. There have been no attempts made to force up the price of rice against the coolies. The only trouble we had was when the bazaars were closed down for one Sunday. Now however rice is coming in freely.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—We have been told that cultivators were asking a rupee for 2 *dhons* of rice. Have you any experience of that kind?

A.—None. So far as my estate is concerned, there has been no attempt to hold up supplies. I consider that Rs. 6-8 each for a man and woman is a sufficient living wage in addition to concessions such as cheap rice (at Rs. 5 a maund), housing, medical attendance, cheap blankets, free firewood.

Q.—Would Rs. 6-8 be sufficient without any other income, assuming that rice was given at Rs. 5 a maund?

A.—Yes, quite sufficient.

The price of rice at present is 8 seers to the rupee. Paddy costs less and coolies prefer it to rice because they can get out the husk from it for their cattle and fowls and ducks. They can get paddy freely round about the estate. The coolies like to go out a mile or two to barter for a maund of paddy. The present price of paddy is Rs. 2-8 a maund. I consider that barely a maund of paddy would do a coolie for the month in lieu of rice.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

I do not think coolies are doing more work under the unit system than they used to do; they are earning more relatively now.

We charge Rs. 2-8-0 a *poorah* of rice land. One *poorah* gives a coolie 30 maunds of rice.

Q.—Would one coolie have as much as a *poorah* of land?

A.—He might have more: some have as much as 3 *poorahs*. The average however would be a quarter of a *poorah* taking the whole labour force into consideration. That is equivalent to one *bigha* or 7 or 8 maunds of paddy. Coolies have probably about 300 buffaloes, 750 cattle of sorts and also pigs and goats. These constitute sources of revenue in addition to what they earn on the estate.

Q.—Do you think that the economic pressure on the coolie which he may have experienced in regard to foodstuffs has lightened recently?

A.—I think so. The cost of food has come down and the tendency for everything is on the downward grade, except in the case of cloth which is still dear.

Q.—Can you say if the scale of prices is in any way fixed by the action taken in regard to *Bilati* cloth?

A.—Yes, that is my inference. Coolies take both *Bilati* and *Swadeshi* cloth, which we import from Calcutta.

Q.—The price is the consideration with the coolie but the supply that may come into the bazaar may, I take it, be influenced by people who are imbued with political views?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that agitation in favour of *Swadeshi* cloth has tended to put up prices?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You endeavour to break the effect of that so far as your own labour force is concerned by importing cloth in order to sell it at concession rates?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you charge anything for the service you are rendering in bringing it up?

A.—We give the cloth at cost price. The price is a little below the rates at which the *kayas* sell it. A coolie would probably have to pay Rs. 3 for a pair of *dhotis* now. I am not in a position to say how many *dhotis* a coolie would require in a year. Coolies spend much money on drink (*laopani*).

Q.—Is *laopani* a costly thing so far as the coolies are concerned?

A.—It is just a question of the cost of rice. They purchase very little spirituous liquors.

I consider it most undesirable both from the garden as well as the coolie's point of view that the various concessions should be converted into an increase in money wages. The coolie would not understand the conversion and if it was effected he would still expect the concessions. Any changes made in the garden are apt to be looked upon suspiciously by the coolie.

Q.—Did you find the coolies suspicious when the system was changed from the *hazira* to the unit system?

A.—It took them some time to understand it thoroughly, especially the *iunglis*. But they are now quite satisfied.

Q.—What do you think would be a sufficient cash wage if a coolie bought his own rice?

A.—Rupees 6-8.

Q.—Does the coolie sell the produce of his land or does he consume it?

A.—As a rule he consumes it, unless he has got too much.

Q.—Could not the rice concession be converted into cash?

A.—I don't think it could. Conditions here are different to conditions elsewhere.

Q.—Would something not depend on whether you had an adequate supply of rice or not. If supplies of rice were freely available?

A.—Yes, but we never can tell.

Q.—If you have plenty of rice-growing land in the vicinity of the garden and a large supply of rice available for sale, presumably the wages might be increased and the rice concession cut out if you chose to do so?

A.—Yes.

We import very little rice, say about 300 or 600 maunds in a year simply for the purpose of giving it out on Sundays in the hot season to the tea-house people who work on Sundays and cannot get away to the bazaar. As a rule the local supplies are sufficient.

Q.—How do earnings of coolies in September 1920 compare with last year?

A.—The wages, excluding rice concessions, are:—

			September 1920.	September 1921.
			Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.
Men	...	...	8 4 4	11 1 11
Women	...	...	7 1 9	7 13 7
Children	...	...	5 5 11	5 13 1

The Indian staff start as probationers on grades—I, II, III, and IV. Ten per cent. of their pay in grade I goes into the Provident Fund. A *mohurrir* starts on Rs. 12 and rises to Rs. 21. Grade II starts from Rs. 31 and goes up to Rs. 40. A head *mohurrir* gets from Rs. 40 to Rs. 65; head clerks from Rs. 75 to Rs. 100. Deserving servants of the Company get a pension of half-pay. Permanent clerks can only be dismissed by the Superintendent. The head clerk gets a servant allowance. The Company allows him 6 per cent. interest and then increases it to 25 per cent. when he is finally paid up.

No. 115.—Mr. W. D. SMILES, D.S.O., Superintendent of the *Moran Tea Company, Limited*.

I have been 18 years in Tea and 10 years in the Moran Tea Company.

The answers put in by me refer to Sepon Tea Estate.

The area under tea is 914 acres, and the outturn about 8 maunds per acre. The labour force is 748 men, 657 women and 319 children or a total of 1,724. The number of working coolies per acre is very nearly 1½. Fifty per cent. of the coolies have got land for cultivation, of which 45 per cent. is inside the grant and 5 per cent. outside. The rate is one rupee per *poorah*. Coolies hold land inside the grant

on the condition that they work at least 9 months in a year for the garden, otherwise they are liable to be turned out. I have, however, never yet turned out anybody. We employ about 400 outside coolies on the Sepon garden.

I make a favour of giving coolies the agreement bonus of Rs. 9 to men and Rs. 6 to women. This is not recovered. I give a new coolie on arrival Rs. 6 to keep him going for the first month.

My coolies consist mostly of Oriyas from Cuttack and of Khorooas from Chota Nagpur and Daltonganj. I also have Bilaspuris and Telegu speaking people.

The total number of deaths last year was about 56, as far as I know, and births 62.

We have not been supplying rice for the last three years. We are going to do so this year, because of the unrest in the province. At present coolies are making their own arrangements by buying paddy in the villages.

We work on the unit system more or less; it was introduced 12 months ago. Before the new system was introduced the monthly pay was Rs. 6 for men and Rs. 5 for women. Before the war coolies were getting Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 and now they are getting an equivalent of just over Rs. 8 in the case of a man and Rs. 6-8 to Rs. 6-12 in the case of a woman. All coolies are given opportunities of earning *ticca*, but twice during pruning this year I had to stop it because they were doing bad work.

I am convinced that the unit system tends to bad work. The Unit system, however, is a fairer system as the hard working coolie is sufficiently remunerated while the lazy one is penalized through his own indolence. Earnings in my opinion are adequate in the cold weather as compared with the rest of the year. In September and August a good many of the coolies are away cultivating. The wages of carters are never included in the wages returns. The task for deep hoeing is 3 *nals* for an anna. I am thinking of reducing it because we have had no rain. It takes a man to earn 5 annas, or in other words to do 15 *nals*, about 3½ hours according to the class of work done by him. None of the coolies do 24 *nals*. The work for 5 annas is bad and I do not encourage them to do more, nor are they themselves anxious to do more. On the average they do 15 *nals* as a result of my forcing them to it. The rate for plucking last year was Rs. 7 a maund of tea. We were doing very fine plucking last year and the task was in consequence reduced. Before that plucking used to cost Rs. 3-12 a maund of tea. The women earned quite as much in a given time with fine plucking as was the case with coarser plucking.

I consider Rs. 14-8 which may constitute the earnings of a man and a woman something more than a subsistence allowance. I would call Rs. 5-12 a bare subsistence for a single man. If two or three people live together the bare subsistence allowance would come down.

My answer to question No. 73 is "No". With regard to clothing, I am underselling the *kaya* by about 4 annas per cloth. At present we are getting cloth from Manchester. I lost on blankets. I sold about 100 blankets this year. I charge Re. 1-5 for each blanket.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Have you had any experience of non-co-operators trying to close down the bazaars on your gardens?

A.—No.

Q.—Has there been any attempt made to put up the price of rice supplied to your coolies?

A.—I have no direct evidence to that effect. Both coolies and *mohurrirs* have complained to me though.

Q.—Is it an engineered trouble?

A.—Yes. I think our coolies are treated very well. They have no grievances to put forward. The cost of production has gone up at the present moment. The cost of pruning has gone up for the simple reason that coolies do not do as much work as they used to do 5 or 10 years ago. They finish a task in about 3½ or 4 hours where it used to take them 5 hours to earn the *hazira*. In the case of minor children we certainly have no system whereby the father comes up and takes the agreement on behalf of the child. But a boy of 8 or 9 years may be put under agreement if he wants it. He would get Rs. 2 as agreement money which we enter in the agreement book, the agreement being for 12 months.

On the whole, I do not think the average coolie is as well clothed now as he was before the war, but the same is also the case with the *sahab*. I consider, however, that the coolie is well fed.

I prefer the unit system. There is accommodation for indoor patients in the hospital and whether coolies avail themselves or not of the hospital accommodation must depend a good deal on the personality of the doctor babu, also whether you are liberal with your hospital expenses. At Sepon the coolies do go into hospital but they do not at Moran.

No. 116.—Mr. C. Simkins, *General Manager, Amgoorie Tea Estates, Ltd.*

I have been connected with Tea since 1890, and have been all the time in the same Company.

We have Directors in England and forwarding Agents only in Calcutta.

There are 5 gardens under my charge.

The area under tea for the Amgoorie Division is 1,065 acres. The outturn per acre is eight maunds. The working force is approximately $1\frac{1}{2}$ adults per acre. There are 317 acres of rice land at present cultivated by the coolies of Amgoorie Division within the grant. There is also a certain amount of land sublet by Assamese to coolies outside the grants.

The working population is 501 men, 607 women and 225 children, altogether 1,332, out of a total population of 2,291. The remainder includes many *faltu* coolies who work more or less regularly.

I consider Rs. 9 for a man, and Rs. 8 for a woman sufficient monthly earnings to enable them to live in health and reasonable comfort with a possibility of saving at the present time.

In 1913 a subsistence wage for men and women was Rs. 4-14. In 1920 when I wrote to the Tea Association it rose to Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 8-5 in the case of a woman in consideration of the high cost of cloth. Then again in 1921 it fell to Rs. 6-11-6 for men and women.

Yes, the cost of living has gone down since 1920. Taking into account all the earnings and concessions I consider that the average coolie on my gardens gets enough at present to keep him in health and reasonable comfort.

Rice and paddy are supplied at special rates.

The usual rate for rice is Rs. 5 per maund and when it costs the gardens less they get it for less.

Except in the case of indigent and new coolies requiring special consideration the principle of payment in kind is wrong; it is optional, uncertain and liable to abuse if the management is unscrupulous or careless. I wrote about this once to the local Tea Association, because I thought it tended to pauperise the coolie labour.

Mr. Dawson : — Q.—Could these concessions be converted into cash except in the case of rice?

A.—A living wage should allow sufficient margin to meet normal fluctuations in the cost of necessaries, and it is better to allow a fair margin for these fluctuations than to compensate for them by concessions such as clothing and food below market rates; it is better for the labourer who should not be dependent for a living wage on more or less optional concessions by the management. When times were very hard and conditions abnormal, it was necessary to do many things to enable the coolies to feed and clothe themselves, and under similar circumstances it will be necessary again. These included formerly blankets and cloth at concession rates and arranging for supplies at the garden cost and risk.

We still supply blankets at reduced rates including a large number of blankets to orphans and indigent poor class people free of charge, and if the price is more than a coolie can pay, it is reduced proportionately. Poor class indigent people and orphans will of course always require these, whatever rates of pay are in force.

The rate of wages in 1913 for men and women was Rs. 5 and Rs. 4. In 1917 it was raised to Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. In 1920 it was raised to Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 for men and women, and children proportionately. I wanted to raise it still further to Rs. 8 and Rs. 7 and my Directors agreed. The Directors left it to me, but I was not supported by the Tea Association the majority of whom were against it.

I did not raise the rate of wages further as I thought it might give rise to friction between my neighbours' and my own gardens.

Q.—Did you think these rises were necessary owing to the cost of living?

A.—Yes, and that was the reason why we gave the increase.

I have also compensated for it by reducing the task and affording more opportunity for *ticca* work.

We have not reduced the plucking tasks but when leaf is short, and the average brought in is less than the ordinary task, the average for the day is taken as the task for that day.

With regard to pruning, coolies could not earn *ticca* before, but I have now initiated a system that enables them to earn *ticca*, the task being reduced.

Generally speaking the actual cash earnings have gone up, and on all work, except plucking, coolies can earn much more for the same amount of work than previously.

Our plucking tasks are an 8-seer average for adults and six pies a seer *ticca*, and coolies have always been able to earn very good money at this work. In deep hoeing an average coolie doing a *hazira* and *ticca* daily would have earned in 1913 Rs. 10-8 a month; for the same amount of work he now earns Rs. 16-4 a month.

I am satisfied that a coolie on my gardens can earn enough if he likes to work for it. Under present conditions, new coolies and indigent poor class coolies require special consideration, i.e., lighter tasks instead of the full tasks. Coolies are put under contract for two years as a rule, occasionally three years. I do not recollect ever taking a case to court.

Q.—Have you any system whereby the father of a child gives an undertaking that his child would work for a certain time?

A. No. We have no system of agreement for minors. We pay Rs. 36 as agreement bonus to men, and Rs. 18 to women for three years.

Q.—Is the coolie, in taking an agreement for three years, under the impression that he has got to work for three years?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Taking the average coolie, would you say that he is as well clothed to-day as he was before the war?

A.—A year ago he certainly was not; it compares much better now.

As regards our system of weighing; it has always been our custom to weigh to the quarter, that is to say, four maunds of leaf would make one maund of tea.

The weight of the basket only is cut, and the leaf under half a seer goes to the garden, and over that to the coolie; if it was over half a seer, he would get the full seer, and if under it, the seer below.

The plucking task is only adjusted at certain times of the year.

We pay at the rate of four maunds of leaf to one maund of tea.

Leaf cost us in 1921 Rs. 1-5-9 per maund. Pregnant women are given a half *hazira* for four months after which a bonus of Rs. 5 is paid.

Q.—If Act XIII was abolished, do you think it would affect the gardens very much?

A.—I think it would; taking the average coolie, if he is discontented and a malcontent, no agreement will keep him, but otherwise a coolie generally recognises the obligation he is under to work out his agreement as a legal obligation, and good men generally work off the agreement honestly.

Coolies like the agreement money because it comes to them in a lump sum, and they can put it to some good use if they care to, e.g., as a deposit in the village for paddy or to buy cattle they would not be able to get otherwise, for many are very improvident and will not try to save whatever they earn.

Q.—If the Act was abolished, would you still continue to give the advance to a deserving coolie?

A. I think I would give it for a time, but gradually the abolition of the Act, and the fact of there being no legal redress would affect us when the coolies come to know about this.

In 1919 we got up a good many recruits, but we stopped recruiting last year because of the crisis in tea. The 1919 lot were very poor physically.

Coolies are medically examined before coming up, and I consider a good many ought not to be passed.

I was not at all pleased with the class recruited in 1920. When I returned from home I had to repatriate a good number.

Q.—Did it pay you to do so?

A.—Yes; only worthless coolies with relatives in their country were repatriated.

We had no trouble with our coolies previously. There was a strike among the coolies on one of our Divisions on Monday last; the coolies returned to work on the Wednesday. We experienced no trouble whatever previously and no complaints came to my knowledge. No concessions were granted as a result of the strike.

On neighbouring concerns there were simultaneous strikes; these also had not experienced trouble before. I believe the strikes were arranged by agitators through the Congress Committees and in conjunction with some of the Indian establishment.

There has been a boycott of bazaars and supplies in many parts of the district by agitators, but our own have not so far been interfered with. Our neighbours have suffered in this respect.

It has been generally reported that the Assamese and other villagers have arranged to give 2 *dhons* of paddy to the rupee only. I have made arrangements for storing paddy and supplying the markets if necessary with paddy at five *dhons* to the rupee.

For some weeks this has proved to be necessary; supplies are now satisfactory again.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—About the rate of plucking, is it not an important thing for the coolies that the rate for plucking should be such as to enable them to earn a decent wage?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Under any system if the rate for plucking is low the coolie may not earn sufficient. Supposing he was to pluck a maund of green leaf, it might be difficult for the coolie to earn a decent wage?

A.—Yes, if the rate was too low.

Q.—But perhaps if you were to pay Re. 1 there would be a chance?

A.—Yes, we pay for *ticca* leaf at Rs. 1-4 a maund; four maunds of leaf at this rate would make one maund of tea; the cost per maund of tea is therefore Rs. 5.

The actual average cost of our leaf for the year 1921 was Rs. 1-5-9 per maund.

I am the Chairman of the Nazira Circle, Assam Branch, Indian Tea Association. The majority of the members of that Circle agreed with my proposal to raise the rates of pay at a meeting held at Nazira on 20th October 1920, but the Assam Branch of the Association disagreed with my proposal and it was ultimately thrown out; of course my views did not apparently accord with those of the majority of the Brahmaputra Valley Planters as represented by the Tea Association.

The majority of the gardens in this Circle refused to be bound down by the decision of the Tea Association and raised the rates of pay. Medical attendance is not necessary for all coolies for all the time, though it may be necessary for every coolie at some time or other.

Q.—Do you think it would be advantageous to the labourer to cut out medical attendance and give him an allowance which is calculated on the cost of the medical service for the whole force?

A.—As things are now it could not be done; medical attendance is a thing which the garden should provide. It is in the interests of both parties that medical attendance should remain a concession, and not be converted into a money wage.

Q.—It is a concession that the garden would not have to pay if outside labour was engaged and therefore it may be taken as a part of the remuneration of labour?

A.—Perhaps, but under the present system of importing labour, the garden must be responsible for the general health, and it is in the garden's interest as well as the coolies' to provide it.

Q.—I suppose you can convert clothing and cheap rice into cash?

A.—Yes.

Q.—If you are going to make a concession of extra wages to the coolies on Nazira, account of rice, you might fix a particular level below which you would not supply rice, that is to say, instead of supplying it at Rs. 3 a maund, you might say to the coolie:—"You would get so much wages, but you must supply your own rice, say, at Rs. 6 a maund"?

A.—I put the figure at Rs. 5 a maund.

Q.—But you would have to be assured that you had a plentiful supply of rice available in your bazaar?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Supposing there was a scarcity in the bazaar, there might be real hardship to the coolie if he alone was required to purchase it?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Was the rate of wages Rs. 4 and Rs. 5 under Act VI?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Did that rate apply to all coolies irrespective of the time they had been on the garden?

A.—Generally speaking, yes.

President :—Q.—As regards medical attendance, it is in the interest of the garden to keep coolies in good health and see that they are fit to work?

A.—Yes.

Q.—From his own point of view the coolie, I take it, does not regard medical treatment as part of the cash equivalent?

A.—I don't think he does; I think he looks upon it as a right.

CINNAMARA, JORHAT, 27TH FEBRUARY 1922.

Cinnamara.

[MR. FOX ABSENT.]

No 117.—MR. A. L. CARLESS, *General Manager, The East India Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been 24 years in Tea, and at Duflating for 21 years.

As a rule I put coolies under Act XIII agreement. I did not put coolies under agreement last year. Until last year we had coolies under agreement. We have just started giving agreements again. We give agreements for one year (313 days) in all cases. The total working force is 2,000. I work on the unit system which has been in force for the last 8 years.

The task for deep hoeing is 3 *nals* for an anna and coolies can earn as much as they like. The average coolie earns this time of the year in deep hoeing only 4 to 5 annas because the ground is hard. About 50 *per cent.* of the coolies earn as much as 5 annas.

The task for plucking leaf is 2 pice a seer. We are plucking finer now than was the case last year. We have no *haziras*. Coolies work on the unit which is one anna for 3 *nals* deep hoeing. If a coolie does 3 *nals* only he gets one anna.

The cost per maund of green leaf last year was Rs. 1-4-0.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Do you find that the cost per acre for hoeing is increasing?

A.—Yes, in this way that we have reduced tasks. Coolies used to do 10 *nals* for an anna in light hoeing; now they do 8 *nals*.

As regards the weighment of leaf we deduct for the basket and in addition for wet leaf. On a wet day if women bring in 6½ pounds they get paid for 6 pounds. My experience is that 4 maunds of green leaf make, if anything, a little less than one maund of tea.

Q.—Do you think the unit system is an improvement, taking it from the point of view of the garden?

A.—No. Many coolies prefer the *hazira* and *ticca* system. Their argument is that they get their *hazira* paid them monthly and *ticca* weekly; if they earn Rs. 5 or Rs. 6 and are paid at the end of the month, they know what to do with that lump sum. On the weekly pay system they get Re. 1-8-0 or Rs. 2 weekly which they are inclined to spend immediately they get it and consequently save nothing.

Cinnamara. A coolie can live comfortably on Rs. 7 a month and save sufficient out of that to buy a goat to start with, then a cow, and after that a pair of bullocks. For a woman Rs. 6 is sufficient. For a man and his wife with 2 non-working children to support, I think Rs. 13 between them would be sufficient for their needs.

Q.—Do you think the coolie is as well clothed now as he was before the war?

A.—I don't think he is. Perhaps before the war, when cloth was cheaper, he was a little extravagant; now he is careful.

We have both lines and the *bustee* system of houses, but more of the line system. We are just starting a system of latrines. A deep pit is dug in the ground and plastered with lime with a flyproof covering over it. This has been the outcome of the doctor's suggestion on account of hookworm.

The majority of the coolies have got land for cultivation. Pregnant leave is given for a month before and two months after child-birth during which period the mother receives full pay.

Agreements are never given to small children; only to boys from 14 upwards. We give a bonus of Rs. 12 to men, Rs. 10 to women and Rs. 8 to children. Concession paddy is given to anybody who asks for it. At present paddy is being sold at Rs. 2-8-0 a maund.

Q.—What is the ruling principle in fixing your rate for paddy?

A.—I go by the market rate as a rule. The idea is always to let coolies have it cheaper than they can get it outside. I lose up to 8 annas on a maund of paddy. This year I managed to buy it for Rs. 3 and am selling it for Rs. 2-8-0, but coolies are not coming for it freely now.

I have not had any strikes or trouble on my garden.

I consider that the remuneration in money payments, together with the various concessions received by the coolies, is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort.

I do not consider it desirable that any alteration should be made in the way of converting the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

Q.—You say that the coolies were more extravagant before the war. What was the rate of wages before the unit system was adopted?

A.—Rupees 5 and Rs. 4 for men and women. Then of course they got the agreement bonus which was another rupee a month in the case of men.

It takes about 4 years for new coolies to become acclimatised to the garden. We recruited no coolies last year. I am recruiting this year. My sardars went off 3 weeks ago. We recruit from Palamau, Ranchi, Bilaspur and Cuttack. We get a medium class of labour.

Q.—What is the reason for that?

A.—On my garden the soil is very hard which is not an attraction to the ordinary coolie. There are gardens with lighter soils and these are more popular. Of course the sardars tell them the conditions on the various gardens. Good *jungli* coolies are difficult to retain; they generally leave after 4 or 5 years. We have not had many absconders.

Mr. Withers :—Q.—You said that your coolies prefer the monthly wage system to the unit system. Could you tell me why you cannot adopt that system?

A.—Because my Agents prefer my paying weekly.

Q.—Do you know why the Agents prefer it?

A.—They ordered me to work on the unit system and requested that wages be paid weekly.

Q.—Is it a cheaper system?

A.—I don't think so.

President :—Q.—Is any commission paid to sardars under the unit system?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Is commission paid to sardars or babus for bringing up coolies to take agreements?

A.—No. As a matter of fact coolies themselves clamour for agreements, and last year we were not able to meet their demands. Last week I gave out that we were prepared to give agreements and the whole labour force turned out.

Agreements are given only for one year. New coolies are not put under Cinnamara agreement.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—It is not absolutely necessary I take it that payments should be made weekly to coolies?

A.—It is far better for coolies to be paid weekly under the unit system, as they can then keep tally of their earnings more correctly. Previously the coolie earned Rs. 5 to Rs. 6 in a month under the *hazira* and *ticca* system. His *haziras* were paid monthly and *ticca* weekly, and he was able to keep tally fairly correctly. If paid monthly under the unit system, it is difficult for him to keep a correct tally and he might find that his account did not agree with the pay book. He is apt to think that he has not got what was actually due to him. I should say under the unit system a coolie could keep tally for a week and not more.

Q.—The impression created on my mind is that coolies prefer the monthly payment. Why not try it then?

A.—Coolies like getting their *ticca* weekly and their *haziras* monthly.

The majority of my coolies have got rice land, and rent is in some cases charged at the rate of one rupee a *halsa* (i.e., *bigha*.)

The coolies hold about 300 acres of land. Agreements do not tie down coolies to the garden. They may go if they satisfy their liabilities by paying up the agreement money. Every year a certain number go out and take up land in the villages.

Q.—If the agreement system was abolished, how would you stand from the garden point of view?

A.—We would save about Rs. 18,000 a year.

The loss on paddy sold last year (1921) was roughly about Rs. 2,500.

The Agents of my garden are Messrs. Williamson, Magor and Co. I believe all the gardens belonging to this Agency have adopted the unit system.

Srijut Siva Prasad Barua :—Q.—Is it a fact that Messrs. Williamson, Magor & Co., advised all the gardens to adopt the unit system?

A.—I think so.

Q.—Do you think that a coolie earns more under the unit system than under the monthly system?

A.—I think the thrifty ones do, but the lazy do not.

President :—Q.—Was the unit system recommended instead of an increase in wages?

A.—No. I think under this system you have a better check on the babus, and I think it was done so as to allow the coolie to earn as much as he liked.

Mr. Das :—Q.—The difference between the wages of the men and women is due to the women not being physically capable of earning as much as the men, except with regard to plucking; it is also due to the women not eating as much as the men?

A.—Yes.

There are 300 acres of land let out to about 1,000 coolies.

There has been unrest round about the villages surrounding my garden and my markets were disturbed, but so far my coolies have not been interfered with and they are quite satisfied at present. Three weeks ago when there was picketing going on, they became frightened and thought that Mr. Gandhi's *Raj* was coming. Now things have quieted down and they have begun to gain a little more confidence. There have been strikes on adjoining gardens.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—To what do you attribute your immunity from strikes?

A.—I cannot say.

Q.—Are your coolies paid better?

A.—No; they get the same rates as other gardens in this locality.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—You say the unit system was introduced partly with a view to giving the coolie the opportunity of earning as much as he liked in the cold weather. Under the old system, was it not possible to give *hazira* and *ticca*?

A.—It was possible, but in those days it was not done. Perhaps the gardens could not afford it.

It used to take a coolie 7 hours to do a task of deep hoeing in the cold weather, and they usually did a better class of work. But now the task is lower, the work inferior and they earn more.

Cinnamara.

Q.—Is it possible for coolies to earn any *ticca* in the cold weather or not nowadays?

A.—Yes; I do not know of any gardens within a radius of 10 miles working on the *hazira* and *ticca* system.

No. 118.—Mr. E. B. SIM Manager, Katonibari Tea Estate, Jorhat Tea Company:—

I have been altogether 15 years in Tea. I was in Mangaldai, the Dooars, South Sylhet and Doom-Dooma. I have been in the Jorhat district for about 6½ years now. The Jorhat Tea Company took over the garden in January 1921.

We do not work on the unit system. Our rates are Rs. 7 for men, Rs. 6 for women and Rs. 3 to Rs. 5 for working children.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—How do you calculate the pay for the month of February?

A.—At 24 days.

Q.—What would a coolie woman receive?

A.—She would receive 4 annas a day for 24 days.

Q.—How do you record the wage in the *hazira* book?

A.—It is written down as a *hazira*, $\frac{3}{4}$ *hazira* or half *hazira* as the case may be. The amount in annas is not written.

In the month of February a woman would get Rs. 6 if a full *hazira* task was done.

At present the labour force is sufficient, but there are periods in the year when it is not sufficient. But that does not mean that on the average the coolie has got to work longer. The work simply takes longer to do. If there is less labour, there are chances of giving more *ticca* and of earnings being supplemented. We have not had very many absconders. My working force now has increased compared with 1916. As a rule the death-rate slightly exceeds the birth-rate. But I would not call my garden unhealthy on that account. There is a fair amount of anaemia and we have taken steps to try and check it. Coolies are treated for anaemia. We sell rice at concession rates.

Q.—Do you think it would go to the root of the matter in checking anaemia if latrines are established?

A.—Yes, I do think so. We did nothing in that direction until recently when the question was mooted. We employ doctors and we look to them to make suggestions. I am prepared to advocate the introduction of latrines.

Q.—You speak of cattle fines. Under what circumstances are the fines imposed?

A.—If cattle are found grazing in tea, fines are imposed. Coolies have 4 cow-herds and they are supposed to hand their cattle over to these men. But a lot of the coolies like to keep back their cattle during the rains when grass is more luxuriant. Usually the fine is 2 annas to 4 annas, but if the coolie gives a satisfactory excuse, he is not fined at all.

New coolies are given a settling allowance of Rs. 5 on their arrival. We have no system whereby a new coolie is paid a full *hazira* for 6 months irrespective of the work done.

Q.—Do you think that new coolies before they become acclimatised are fit to do the full task?

A.—They manage to do it.

Q.—You say in your answer to question No. 17 that in certain cases labour may have had grievances both economic and personal against the management and this would account for the sporadic outbreaks when agitators got at them. Are you speaking from experience?

A.—No, it is hearsay. I have had no trouble on my garden.

In 1913 the wages were Rs. 5 for men and Rs. 4 for women. In 1915 at Katonibari I raised the pay of the old coolies to the level of the new coolies, i.e., from Rs. 5 and Rs. 4 to Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. In 1921 the pay of the men was raised to Rs. 6-8-0 and that of the women to Rs. 5-11-0 and in January 1922 it was further raised to Rs. 7 and Rs. 6.

Q.—With regard to hoeing, taking the cost per acre in 1913 and the actuals for 1921, has the cost increased much?

A.—I don't think it has. The wages were increased but the tasks remained the same. The actual cost per acre of light hoeing in 1920 was about Rs. 3. I don't know the figure for 1913 as I was not in charge. The rate for plucking in 1920 was a little over Rs. 5 for a maund of tea. In 1921 it was very much higher.

Q.—Do you think that increased wages have appreciably increased the cost of working the garden?

A.—I think so. *Hazira* is paid monthly, *ticca* weekly, but we pay weekly to a certain number of coolies who are improvident. *Ticca* is given in the cold weather, though we have not always done so. The *ticca* has appreciably increased in recent years.

Paddy and rice is sold at cost price now except to anaemic coolies who get them at concession rates. I used to make a considerable loss on rice, but now that coolies can afford to buy it I sell it at cost price. There is always a certain wastage which I pay for. I examine the rice before taking it over from the *mahajan* and then have it cleaned. We incurred a loss of about Rs. 11,000 in 1920. Previous to that we were selling rice at Rs. 5 a maund.

Q.—Do you think that the coolies' earnings have increased to such an extent that they can now afford to pay the cost price?

A.—Absolutely.

There are about 200 acres of rice land and rent is charged at the rate of Rs. 6 an acre.

The task for plucking is 8 seers. The plucking task has not been altered during recent years except when leaf has been short and then the task is reduced. The *ticca* rate for plucking is 2 pice for a three-pound unit, which is going to be the standard rate on all the gardens belonging to the Jorhat Tea Company. The plucking cost works out roughly to Rs. 4-8-0 per maund of *pucca* tea. We intend shortly to give 2 pice for a seer and half of leaf. Last year my plucking cost me 2 pice a seer, but the estimate was only one pice a seer.

A deduction of 6 pounds is made for the basket by starting the scale at 6 pounds. For leaf we make a further deduction. The average weight of the basket is probably 5 pounds. Supposing a plucker brings in 25 pounds she would be credited with 16 pounds. A woman would get her full *hazira* even when leaf was short; we work it out on the average basis. The agreement money is entered up as pay. Last year the cost for a seer of green leaf was 6-06 pice; this year it would be less. The plucking rate would be Rs. 4-0-0 as against Rs. 5 last year.

The task for deep hoeing used to be 15 *nals*. Now it is 20 *nals* for a one "chop," which is really a medium hoe. The task for light hoeing remains unaltered. There is no limit to *ticca* earnings. I know coolies who can earn one *hazira* and two *ticcas*, that is, 12 annas a day.

We write off as irrecoverable loans about Rs. 400 a year on the average. This figure represents mostly cash advances and rice advances, the latter to pregnant women. Also if a woman has to attend to a child in hospital, she gets a full *hazira* for that day. This has all along been my practice.

Agreements are given for one year since the introduction of Act XII. We give a bonus of Rs. 12 for men and Rs. 8 for women.

Q.—If the Act was abolished, would it make much difference to the garden?

A.—It would make much difference to the coolies who would still want the agreement money.

Q.—Would you give it to them if the Act was abolished?

A.—That is rather a difficult question. We would wait and see.

As a rule we do not find any difficulty in getting coolies to go into hospital as indoor patients.

Q.—Taking the average coolie, would you say that he is as well off for clothes now as he was before the war?

A.—I think he is much better off now than he was before the war. Standard cloth is sold here. Of course there are a certain class of people who are just as badly off as they were before the war.

Provided a coolie works, I would say that taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

It is neither possible nor desirable from the garden or from the coolie point of view to convert concessions into an increase in money wages.

Cinnamara. It is always possible for the coolies of my garden to get access to the Manager when making complaints.

Q.—Do you, as a rule, have a lot of complaints from coolies direct?

A.—I have a lot of Oriyas and it is their custom to bring up a lot of petty complaints.

The working population on the garden is 983 souls. There are 200 acres of land for cultivation divided among most of the working coolies. There is one *kaya's* shop on the garden. The *kaya* lends money to the garden coolies, in this way that the latter pawn their utensils sometimes. The interest charged is 2 annas in the rupee per month, but I discourage this myself as much as possible by giving advances. The giving of advances acts as a check to a certain extent. This pawning takes place with those coolies who are improvident and do not care to work, but on the other hand like to keep themselves going by stealing, selling firewood, etc., and pawning their utensils.

I make no concessions to new coolies. Formerly my predecessor used to give new coolies a rupee more than the old coolies, but I raised the pay of the old coolies to the level of the new coolies, making no distinction between the two.

About 10 coolies absconded in 1921.

Q.—Why did they abscond?

A.—Because they had plenty of money.

The agreement money is paid to the coolies as a bonus and is not recovered. It is in addition to the wages. I think we pay Government Re. 1-8-0 a *bigha* for the land we give coolies. Coolies have to pay much higher rates in the *bustees*. During the first year when new land is broken up for cultivation in the garden the rent is remitted.

Q.—What is the rent charged for a coolie's hut 10' x 12'?

A.—It would be very, very difficult to fix the rent.

Q.—You sold rice at the concession rate of Rs. 5 a maund when it was dear. Could not that rice be distributed to the coolies in the way of increased wages?

A.—Yes, it could have been done, but I don't see the object of it. If we did so, the *kaya* might keep the price over and above what we gave it to the coolies for, and the very fact that we sell it at a low rate tends to keep down the *kaya's* price.

Q.—Could not the concession of medical attendance be converted into cash?

A.—No. I can never imagine a coolie going into hospital and paying for his medicine.

Q.—Does the Government not supply medicines free of cost to the ryots who cannot afford to pay for the medicines?

A.—I believe so.

Q.—Should not tea-gardens also supply medicines free of cost?

A.—Yes, we do so.

Q.—Why look upon it as a concession?

A.—I have no reason to give for that.

Mr. Withers:—Q.—Do you prefer the monthly system or the unit system?

A.—I prefer the monthly system.

Q.—Do you think that labour now is generally adopting a higher standard of living than it did 8 or 10 years ago?

A.—Yes.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—Do you think it is fair that the coolie should earn enough or get opportunities to earn enough in order to meet the higher standard of living?

A.—He is earning more now than he did before, and the more the coolie gets the higher his standard rises.

I was in Sylhet for about 7 months and the Dooars 6 months; the rest of my time in Assam.

President:—Q.—Was Act XIII made use of because it was cheaper to work under it than Act VI?

A.—I don't think so.

Q.—But there were certain obligations imposed by Act VI such as the supply of rice at Rs. 3 and you have got rid of it?

A.—Yes. In Mangaldai we stocked a certain amount of rice but the coolies used to get their supplies at Rs. 2-8-0 a maund in the local bazaar.

I have been about 21 years in India. I have been 18 years on the western side of India and about three years this side. I am paid partly by tea-gardens and partly by Government.

I recognise, in appearing before this Commission, my position is a little difficult. Objection has already been raised to a conversation which I had with certain Members of the Committee a few months ago in Shillong. I came here this morning because I am interested in social questions, and I thought I might be of some little use.

First as to the unrest generally in the province, I think it is due to several causes. This period of unrest generally throughout the world does exercise a psychological effect. Secondly, there is an awakening among the depressed classes throughout India—a dissatisfaction with their position. Speaking as a *Padre* who has worked among them in the Punjab, and in Baluchistan where large numbers have migrated, and also speaking as Secretary of the Diocesan Board Missions in Assam, I find that there is a vast mass movement among these people throughout India towards Christianity and sometimes towards Islam, seldom from any religious motive, but largely a "social movement," because the people desire to improve their social position. We see the same thing to-day in Assam. Talking to *Padres* of other Missions, they tell me they have found many cases where large numbers of coolies would like to become Christians for the same reason, *viz.*, that by so doing they would improve their social position. I think these two or three facts show that there is a movement or awakening amongst these "untouchables." Thirdly, there is the "economic pressure." The Commission is best able to judge the rise in the cost of living during the last five or six years. I examined the Resolutions on Immigrant Labour for the years 1913, 1914, 1915, 1919, 1920, and 1921, and it seems to me that there has been a very small rise in proportion to the rise in the cost of living; hence all feel the pinch. These people also see others around them earning more, *viz.*, on the Railway, and the ordinary day labourer in the Jorhat district would earn at least 8 or 10 annas a day. Moreover, on several occasions, planters have said to me—"The truth is the coolie does not in some cases get enough wages." In my opinion the non-co-operation movement, together with the aforesaid conditions, has, in many cases, but not in all, brought about the present crisis. Talking to various Indian friends, I gathered that the non-co-operator has framed his appeal to suit the coolie. The coolie has been told in some instances that under *Swaraj* he is going to become free and also that he would get more wages and other benefits. I think all these things have contributed to the unrest in the province.

Now with regard to wages: We have in this province in different centres Indian *Padres*. Some of them originally came from the depressed classes. I sent a note to some of these men asking for their opinions on (1) the cost of living, (2) the average price of rice, (3) the cost of clothes, (4) what they considered a fair wage, (5) what was the average *hazira*, (6) what extras a man, a woman and a child could earn, (7) had they any suggestions to make in order that the lot of the coolie might be improved, (8) how could the coolie be encouraged to earn more money. I also met these *Padres* at a conference we had with regard to other affairs and had a friendly talk with them. In the course of our conversation I asked "What do you think is a fair wage for a man to live on—a living wage for a fair day's work?" I think I might say that it is an axiom recognised to-day that the first charge on any industry is a living wage to those employed. The living wage depends on two things: (1) cost of commodities necessary; (2) requirements of the person needing the commodities. As regards (1) cost of commodities, I suppose most of the Commission are aware, but with regard to (2) requirements, I might say that a strong man doing a full day's work, in the opinion of these *Padres*, would require a seer of rice, the average man not more than 1½ or 1¾ pounds. A man also requires *dal*, salt, *masala*, oil, tobacco, and in many cases, rice beer. As regards clothes, a man would require 3 *dhotis* and 3 coats, a woman 3 *saris* and 3 *jholas*, and children would require *kurtas*. Blankets would also be necessary. They seemed agreed that for a man living by himself—not with a family—a living wage, not a mere subsistence allowance, was somewhere near Rs. 9 a month. This sum included all allowances and what they might get out of their *dhan khet*, but it would not include medical cost, as I found, in talking to men from down country, that in most cases there is a Government hospital or dispensary, and most of the villagers can obtain free medical attendance. A single woman by herself might require Rs. 7 a month; a child between 8 and 14 years, about Rs. 3-8-0; between 4 and 6 years, Rs. 2-8-0. All these figures may be reduced where the family lives together and the vast majority do

Cinnamara. live in families. You hear the argument constantly put forward that "if more wages were paid no more work would be done," that the coolie is content to get along with a mere existence and that he sits in the house idling away his time. I ask "What is the incentive to earn more money? Has any bonus been paid during recent years?" As one looks down the Reports of the 68 Companies of tea-gardens during the prosperous years, one finds that about 45 were earning anything from, say, 15 *per cent.* up to, say, 50 *per cent.* in dividends. The remedy that offers itself to my view is that if you want a man to do more work, you have got to "enlarge his outlook." The higher the man rises in the social scale, the greater his requirements. As we know "the luxuries of one generation become the necessities of the next," and that applies to the coolie. Welfare movements, I think, might do something to give the coolie a larger outlook and to give him an incentive to more work.

With regard to the present wages: I have in some cases seen books; I have often had long friendly chats with various planters, and from enquiry I learn that the average *hazira* for a man is 3 annas 6 pies to 4 annas, for a woman 3 annas to 3 annas 6 pies, for a child 1 anna to 2 annas; but that a man might earn 4 annas extra, a woman 3 annas extra, and during the plucking season more; a boy or girl could earn 1 anna or 2 annas extra. Now these various *Padres* who, as I said, originally came from the depressed classes—and all of them are educated and speak English—seemed to think that the *hazira* should be 6 annas for a man, and 4 annas for a woman, and I was told by residents down country that in Chota Nagpur the men earn 6 annas and women 4 annas and that prices were lower than in Assam, and the cost of living less.

Again, tasks vary according to the different soils—ten to twelve *nals* are required for deep hoeing and fifteen to twenty-five for light hoeing. Occasionally perhaps—I qualify all my statements—sufficient consideration is not given by some men to soils in different districts. For instance, a very senior man said to me about a certain man: "*Padre*, he is asking for trouble; he does not understand the soil of our district and asks for 25 *nals* when it is impossible to do more than 12 a day."

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—Can you give the name of your informant?

A.—No, it would not be fair to him.

Now then coming to grievances—here I would again qualify my statements—most men are doing all they can for their labour, many men would do more, but in some cases they are held up by their Directors and Agents. Many at Home at the present time do not realise the changed conditions in India, and personally I feel that if the Commission can help to open the eyes of the Home Boards they would assist many planters in their difficulties. There is one grievance that has been spoken about, and that is, the coolie in some cases has difficulty in approaching his *sahib*—and on most gardens I believe for a coolie to approach his *sahib* is quite possible, but not on all; hence occasional trouble. The coolie too fears the *babu*, and though the coolie approaches his *sahib*, the *babu* will on occasion have his own back afterwards. I was also told by *Padres* from Ranchi that the Province of Chota Nagpur sent large numbers of coolies to Assam, but that the census returns showed no increase in the population of these people in Assam. I have not been able to verify the figures, but one has read these various resolutions on immigrant labour, and one sees the various black lists, but I must say, after all I have heard, that I doubt the completeness of some of the death-rate returns among the coolie population. I have seen a good number of figures and in some cases found the death-rate exceeded the birth-rate. The great majority of the men of course play fair, but I have heard it at many places from Europeans and Indians that occasionally numbers are put down as absconding instead of, as a Planter expressed it, "Kingdom Come."

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—Have you ever seen any instances yourself?

A.—I found two coolies in my own compound—one dead, the other in a dying condition, whom I sent to the hospital. Of course it is possible these coolies had run away from hospital.

Again, speaking of hospitals I might mention that I took a short medical course in England, also a course in Tropical Hygiene and Sanitation. I have worked in Mission dispensaries, and have seen a number of dispensaries, Government and Mission, on the other side as well as on this side of India, and I must say that in some cases things are not satisfactory. Hospitals are dirty, and there seems to be in some places a want of necessary instruments. As regards sanitation, I have served on the Municipality of a big Indian city, and on the Sub-Committees, and I do think that the high mortality might be reduced by latrine.

The *bustees* are not so bad, but when you see large numbers of people living in lines, the soil round about those lines must be in a terrible condition. I hear the argument constantly used that you cannot teach these people to use latrines. I was in the Quetta Cantonment before the war. There we had some few thousands of these depressed classes employed on the dirty work of the Cantonment and living in lines very similar to those we have here on tea-gardens. At the end of every line there was a latrine and the people there used the latrine or the authorities soon knew the reason why.

Again I think that something could be done such as has been done in other parts of India in educating the people with regard to the causes of disease. For instance, we, in Quetta, got out a large number of posters with regard to tuberculosis, plague and cholera (illustrations shown to the Committee). We plastered these bills in various places. Few of the people could read but a large number look at the pictures and invariably ask those who can read as to what is the meaning of the pictures, and this serves as a means of education.

With regard to agreements, here again I have been told by the Chota Nagpur *Padres* that at the time of recruiting, the coolies are promised land and this serves as a great attraction in getting them up to Assam. I find here that some of the coolies do not realise that at the end of the year they are free. Again I repeat my qualification, the vast majority of men play fair, but here and there you do find a man exercising undue pressure. The *babu*, for instance, tells the coolies that they were ill certain days and they have perhaps another month or two to serve.....

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—Sir, if this gentleman is going to make these charges I protest. I object to so many general statements of his with all these qualifications?

Witness:—A.—I cannot give names, but as I have already said, I qualify my statements.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—You qualify them to the extent of making them useless?

Mr. McMorran to the President (continuing):—We are not going to accept an *ex parte* statement by one who has not come in actual contact with the labour. I protest on the ground that we must have first-hand evidence in qualification of the various general statements put forward by this witness. Most of the statements are not relevant.

President:—I think a good deal is relevant. (Mr. McMorran here left the room protesting that general statements should not be admitted. The President then put the question to the vote and the remaining members seeing no objection, the witness was allowed to continue his evidence.)

Witness (continuing):—As I say, I qualify my statements. I have heard some of these things from down country and I have heard many of them up here—in some cases from Europeans and in regard to the others from educated responsible Indians, not from coolies.

I am sorry, gentlemen, to bring up these various things, but I believe there are grievances to put right, and after consultation with my Bishop and other responsible people, I feel it my duty to do so.

There is one other thing I would like to refer to, namely, the "welfare movement." As you know in Bengal and Madras such things have been started. It does help to bring in the "human element." For instance a good deal has been done in regard to the education of *dhais* and midwives and a good deal more can be done, if Government could make a grant for it as is done in some other Provinces in India. Sports and games would make the lives of these people more cheerful and happy. It is the dead monotony that tells on anybody and the more you can keep a man's time and attention occupied in such diversions, the less trouble there would be for Government and the planters. That is all, gentlemen, I have to say.

President.—I think most of what you have said contains a great deal that is of interest and importance.

No. 120.—DR. GEORGE, C. WINCHESTER, M.D., Medical Officer, Jhanzie Tea Co., Ltd., etc.:—

I have been 16 years with the Kanan Devan Hills Produce Company, the Jhanzie Company, and 30 years in tea-gardens. There are 20 gardens under my charge.

I cannot say off-hand what is the total labour force on the various gardens, but on the average perhaps there are over 1,000 coolies on each garden. There is no latrine system on the gardens.

Q.—Do you think that in congested lines with a large population, latrines are essential?

A.—I think so. With the *bustee* system of lines, it would be impossible to introduce latrines. To begin with it would be difficult to get people to use the latrine and moreover the cost would be prohibitive. I have not definitely made any special recommendations for the introduction of a latrine system because the gardens are pretty healthy. We have not as much hookworm as we used to have in years gone by.

Q.—Is that due to the fact that the lines are not congested?

A.—We are very careful in the matter of this disease. A certain amount of care is taken of the lines and cleanliness is enforced. As soon as the disease makes itself known we tackle it at once.

Dr. Williams.—Q.—What are the diseases causing most trouble on tea-gardens in this district?

A.—Lately we have had more influenza than anything else; also malaria and *anchylostomiasis*. There has been a certain increase within the last few years of cases of tuberculosis. As a rule these cases are isolated.

Q.—Is there any system of keeping births and deaths, *e.g.*, from the 1st of January to the 31st December?

A.—A return of births and deaths is sent to the Deputy Commissioner every month.

Q.—Are the books on the garden kept from the beginning of the year or from the Government inspection day?

A.—They are kept as births and deaths occur. On some gardens births were not written until the children reached a certain age, but that has been stopped now.

In 1921 at {
 Meleng the death-rate was 22.1 *per mille*.
 Meleng the birth-rate 25.75 *per mille*.
 Nakachari the death-rate 11.4 *per mille*.
 Nakachari the birth-rate 21.5 *per mille*.
 Rajmai the death-rate was 24 *per mille*.
 Rajmai the birth-rate 33 *per mille*.

Q.—What is your opinion about the reliability of these statistics?

A.—I can only say that they are absolutely correct.

Q.—What is the worst death-rate you have ever had?

A.—I cannot remember what it was. We have had one garden—Gabru—on the black list owing to influenza. The death-rate on that garden reached 70 *per mille*. We had 50 deaths in a week. We have very little cholera and dysentery. I am quite satisfied with the water-supply. The majority of the gardens have tanks in this part of the country; there are wells also.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad.—Q.—Are the indents for medicines for all the gardens sent through you?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What is the expenditure per head on medicine?

A.—I cannot tell you because I do not work that out. I work out the quantity of medicines required for the year and the garden office works out the cost.

Q.—Is it your experience that indents are higher than they ought to be?

A.—There is always more medicine than is required.

Q.—Have you to pass through the *bustees* whenever you go from garden to garden?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Is it your experience that cases of hookworm are fewer in the *bustees* than in the garden?

A.—You don't see much hookworm in the *bustees*.

Q.—Have you investigated in the villages?

A.—No, but I have on the gardens.

Mr. Dawson.—Q.—I suppose if there is a lot of anæmia, it weakens the labour force?

A.—Undoubtedly.

Q.—If the effect of latrines in congested lines was to lessen anæmia, it may be cheaper in the long run even if the latrine system costs a good deal. Is that possible? Cinnamara.

A.—On some gardens it would be a success, but on others I think it would be a total failure. It may be a good thing to have latrines in congested areas. I have no practical experience however about latrines.

Q.—Do you think the average coolie is as well clothed to-day as he was before the war from your own observation?

A.—I don't think he is.

Q.—In the gardens under your control, are many blankets given either free or at reduced rates?

A.—Yes, on all gardens to weakly people, and at reduced rates to coolies in the majority of the gardens.

Q.—If a coolie has not got sufficient clothing, say, in the rains to be able to change when he gets wet, would that affect his health?

A.—It is possible but a coolie could do without clothing till the wet clothes get dry. For instance, when they come up they have absolutely little or no clothing.

Q.—Take the cold weather for example; if a coolie has not got sufficient clothes he is more liable to pneumonia?

A.—Undoubtedly.

Q.—Do you think it is a good thing for a woman on a rainy day to take out an infant with her?

A.—She cannot help herself. Of course from the point of view of the infant it is better not to subject it to exposure.

We have indoor accommodation in our hospitals and no difficulty has been experienced in getting coolies to become indoor patients. As a matter of fact they come of their own accord in a large number of cases. It is a fact that the Santals hate going into hospital, but it has been an old custom on my gardens, except where the lines are broken up and scattered into little *bustees*.

Q.—Would you say that the success of hospital treatment depends largely on the personality of the doctor babu?

A.—Yes, as also on the Manager. I would not put one without the other.

Q.—Do you think that something depends on making the hospital building itself rather attractive instead of the dingy hole that we have seen in some cases?

A.—Yes, but only if patients are well treated.

Pregnant women are given 3 to 4 months' leave, with half *haziras* as a rule. On one or two gardens full *haziras* are given.

Q.—Are there cases where they do not get *haziras*, the argument being that a particular woman belongs to a well-to-do family?

A.—I do not think so. The general rule is to give half *haziras*.

Taking the gardens under my control, I would say that the birth-rate is about level with the death-rate. Some gardens have higher birth-rates.

As the health of the labour force improves the birth-rate improves. Amongst the Oriyas venereal disease is very common. They suffer a lot from syphilis and that affects the birth-rate to an appreciable extent by bringing about a number of abortions and miscarriages.

Q.—In 1918-19 a lot of Oriyas were recruited on your gardens. Would you call them satisfactory on the whole?

A.—A large number of the labourers were of a very bad quality. They were not up to the usual physique. That was the year before the influenza epidemic.

Q.—Do you think there was room for improvement in the way of rejecting unhealthy recruits in the recruiting districts?

A.—Yes, many ought never to have been sent up. Large numbers arrived in a very emaciated condition.

Q.—Is medical examination in the recruiting district insisted on by all your gardens?

A.—I think so.

Mr. McMorran.—Q.—You referred to Oriyas suffering from various diseases. Were they suffering from these diseases before coming up?

Cinnamara.

A.—They arrived with those diseases. Sometimes of course venereal disease is contracted up here by a large number infected.

Dr. Williams:—Q.—Was it recent infection or old infection?

A.—Old infection.

No. 121.—MR. A. MOFFAT, *Superintendent, Jhanzie Tea Company* :—

I am Superintendent of the Jhanzie Tea Company. I have been about 31 years in the Company and as Superintendent since May 1908. I have been all my time with the Jhanzie Company.

The acreage under tea including the Borpatra Division is about 5,000 acres. The labour force including *fattoo* labour is about $1\frac{1}{2}$ per acre. We have retired coolies living on our land and a good many *fattoo* workers who are not on the books. We have been working on the unit system for a year now. But with regard to hoeing and pruning we have been working on the unit for the last three years. We extended the unit to plucking since last year. I prefer the unit system partly because it involves less work in book-keeping. We pay fortnightly irrespective of the month, *i.e.*, every second Saturday, and close books on Thursday. The coolie knows exactly what he earns; as an example of the success of the system, I may refer to the results at the *kaya's* shop. The *kaya* told me that since the introduction of the fortnightly system very few things have been put in pawn by the coolies.

Under the old system coolies never did any *ticca* in the cold weather and that was a disadvantage. I have figures illustrating their present ability to earn money. This is an abstract from the Government return showing the difference between 1914 and 1921. There are 8 typical cases showing that for deep hoeing the good men earned in January 1922 under the unit system Rs. 10, Rs. 11, Rs. 12, and Rs. 13 a month and the inferior men from Rs. 4-14-0 to Rs. 6-15-0. Eighty per cent. may be put as good and 20 per cent. inferior. The Oriya class predominates on my gardens but they are not easily amenable to discipline and are given to thieving.

There was trouble on two gardens in my neighbourhood—Borsilla and Amguri struck work on the 20th of this month, Halwating on the 21st, Seleng on 22nd, Boisahabi on 24th. At Gabru there was a riot on the Friday and the coolies struck work on Saturday, the 25th. The latter is one of the Assam Company gardens. Before the 20th there was no trouble whatsoever. There was never a word and not a grumble about their pay. As to the cause we are not in a position to give very much away about it because it is difficult to get evidence. If there is anything said, the people would be warned and our efforts in getting further evidence would be unsuccessful. But Mr. S. tells me there are two leaders from outside; one is a *darzi* (tailor) and another a villager. Most of our coolies did not know what they were out for. They apparently got orders from outside. Mr. S. told me on Thursday night that he could not give me any further evidence, for reasons already stated. Apparently there is sufficient to show that it was all engineered from outside. This confirms my own information.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—Is it your opinion that the presence of the Labour Committee is in any way the cause for an opportunity to strike?

A.—I do think so.

Q.—Can you give any reasons why you think so?

A.—The attention of the coolie was concentrated on the wages question and he was made to understand that the idea of the Commission was to increase his wages, and he was told that by striking and putting pressure he would get an increase straightaway.

President:—Q.—That has not been the result in any other district; it is peculiar to the Sibsagar district?

A.—I understand they have had grievances in other places as well, but now it is certainly not a case of wages. At Gabru the coolies were earning 5 annas a day and were quite contented. When they saw they were getting nothing and were straightened up by the presence of the police on the garden they turned out to work and three days after the strike was over, 124 men out of a hoeing body of 200 actually earned 8 annas. They were actually on the same section and on the same rate. That shows that the coolies could easily have earned more money if they wanted to before the strike and that it was not a matter of wages.

Mr. Dawson:—(Quotes from proceedings of Jorhat Sub-Committee of February Cinnamara, 1922.) Have you heard at any time that the Labour Enquiry Committee in any way interfered with the labour force on gardens?

A.—No.

Q.—Had you any reason to believe that the Committee would interfere with the labour?

A.—I had reason to believe that questions would be put to the labourers.

Q.—Have you heard what questions were put by the Committee either to the Managers or to the coolies?

A.—No.

Q.—Supposing a coolie was casually met by a Member of the Committee and he was asked what pay he was getting, how long his *hazira* took to complete, what work he had been doing?

A.—I don't think questions of that nature would cause any harm, but I think we ought to have been advised that questions would be of that nature.

President:—Q.—I think objection to Members of the Committee questioning coolies was taken before the strikes occurred?

A.—I shall give you one of the reasons in regard to questioning coolies. A Superintendent of Police was questioning the coolies of a certain garden and they were telling a parcel of deliberate lies to the Superintendent within the hearing of their own Manager. They were saying that they had to do 20 *nals* when the task was only 12. There is no established morality amongst coolies and they would take every opportunity of making out a case for themselves.

Mr. Dawson:—Speaking for myself, I may tell you that at the time of my visit to various gardens the Manager himself asked me to question his coolies.

Witness:—I have no objection to the proceedings of the Jorhat Sub-Committee of 15th February 1922 and my forwarding letter of February 1922 being placed on the record of the proceedings of the Committee.

I consider Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 for a man and woman, respectively, an ample monthly wage provided rice does not cost the coolie more than Rs. 5 a maund. If it costs Rs. 7 a maund, then the wages might not be sufficient.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—In answer to question 15, the Jorhat Sub-Committee states "We do not agree that there has been any widespread feeling of unrest in this district. Grievances crop up in all communities the world over, but apart from political interference there has been nothing but which Managers could have settled in the usual way." It is possible that there were some grievances which Managers in some cases did not settle in the usual way?

A.—Of course, I suppose there are exceptions to every rule, but I am not sure that I have heard of any.

I put my coolies under a one-year agreement and sometimes for more than one year, *e.g.*, when the coolie comes up to me and says he wants to buy a cow. As a rule, we put them under agreement for one year only. I do not know of any cases where coolies were put under agreement for three years. Personally, I discourage even two years' agreements. Minor children are not put under agreement.

Q.—Have you heard of a father signing a form undertaking that his child would work for one year?

A.—I have never heard of it.

If the agreement were abolished, I think we would still have to give the advance. We take the thumb impression on the agreement paper and it has a moral effect on the coolie.

On settled gardens, I don't think the coolies would abscond. I can only recollect having taken one case to court. New coolies are never put under agreement. But if a new coolie happened to fix up a marriage within a year of his arrival, he might, as a special privilege, be allowed an agreement.

The plucking rate in 1921 was on the average Re. 1-2-6 per maund of green leaf. The unit system for plucking has been in force one year now. Under the unit system I think the cost is going to work out more. Our estimate this year is Re. 1-4-0. Under the old system the *hazira* was 8 seers. On the unit system a woman gets two pice a unit. I have known of a woman having drawn Rs. 17-12-0 in one month. The unit system for hoeing has now been in existence three years. Deep hoeing costs a little more under the unit system, and for light hoeing there is

Cinnamara. not very much difference. Cost of plucking has increased. Pruning varies very much now. Before the unit system was started the wages were Rs. 6 and Rs. 5; that was from about 1915. Before 1915 the wages were Rs. 5 and Rs. 4. We give concession rice and I consider it essential. If we had not been giving concession rice during the war, when prices were rising, the shop-keepers would have made it into a profiteering business and prices would have soared. We give concession rice so as to keep down the market prices outside. We give 4 *dhons* to the rupee in the case of paddy and 8 seers to the rupee in the case of rice. We have never on any occasion charged more than Rs. 5 a maund. In fact, we sell it at a lower rate to new coolies.

Q.—Is the average coolie as well clothed to-day as he was before the war?

A.—I think he is. Recently coolies have had opportunities of getting cloth at reasonably cheap rates.

Mr. Withers :—Q.—Have you any objection to putting new coolies under agreement?

A.—I have never thought of the matter, but I don't think I would object. It would be a good thing in the way of giving the new coolie a start.

Q.—Which system do you prefer—the unit or the monthly system?

A.—From the labourer's point of view, I prefer the unit system. As I say a strong man could do more than a weak man and I don't see why he should not be benefited to a greater extent. Under the unit system he does earn more than the weak man.

The present standard of living is I think higher as coolies get far more fish and fowls and ducks now than they used to get.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—When recommending the wages Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 for men and women, did you calculate them on the daily expenses of a coolie or merely by guess work?

A.—They were arrived at partly by calculation and partly by actual experience. Two men for instance who had not been three months on the garden, had saved Rs. 11-3-0 between then so that I think our calculation is not very far wrong. It depends very much on the individual coolie himself. You get improvident people who would be hard up with Rs. 12 a month. This is how we arrived at the calculation; we took the amount of rice, *dal* and salt required in a day and added the total together and allowed Rs. 1-8-0 a month for clothing. Of course we started with the presumption that rice was selling at Rs. 5 a maund.

Q.—Are you in favour of the abolition of Act XIII?

A.—I cannot say I am in favour of abolishing it, because it has a certain amount of moral effect which is useful. As far as I can see, it has done no harm and I don't see any reason for causing trouble by taking it away.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—Have you had any experience of political agitation in this neighbourhood?

A.—I have seen a fair amount of it. We had a man a *mochi* by caste—who came into the lines and we dealt pretty strongly with him. We have been policing our bazaar now for the last 6 months and have managed to keep it going without any great trouble. A rival bazaar was started recently and we made the coolies return to the old site. Trouble started some time during the rains.

Q.—How did these coolies get to know that we were making these enquiries?

A.—By outside agitators—the go-betweens. As I say we are investigating now and I am not in a position to give any evidence on that point. Mr. S. is getting on the track, and I cannot tell you anything at this juncture.

Q.—Have you reason to suspect that your babus know anything about politics or the intentions of this Committee?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What view did they take of the matter?

A.—They are more or less sitting on the fence. Some of them have been going away to the villages, but their jobs are too good to throw up lightly.

Q.—Have they been working against the interest of the garden or have they been disturbing the coolies?

A.—I have had no evidence of that on my own gardens, but on other gardens I know the disturbance was traced directly to the head babus.

Q.—Can you give any reasons for such action?

A.—It was purely using the coolie as a tool and causing trouble to the *sahibs*. I have been told that they were trying to get the gardens for themselves.

Q.—Did Mr. Gandhi's visit make any difference to the atmosphere?

A.—I think it was in our favour. Of course Mahomed Ali lost his temper and hammered a few people at a railway station near us.

Q.—So the visit of Mr. Gandhi has proved beneficial whereas the Committee's visit has not proved beneficial?

A.—I think so, locally.

President :—Q.—Did the local Committee ask for European troops?

A.—The order was given on the evening of a conference in Shillong. The Tea Association had nothing to do with it whatever, except being represented at that conference. There was a petition sent in by this neighbourhood signed by 70 planters which had not reached Shillong then.

Q.—Were European troops asked for because danger was apprehended from the Assamese or from a general rising of the coolies on the estates?

A.—It had nothing to do with the coolies but the idea was that if the people saw a regiment of British troops it would show them that the British was after all a real living *Raj*, and the influence of marching a body of European troops through might settle the situation and prevent it hanging on and giving continued trouble.

Q.—Do you think that the march of the Assam Rifles has done any good?

A.—I certainly think so.

Q.—It has not prevented these strikes?

A.—They were unfortunately started two days before the troops arrived in our neighbourhood and, with the assistance of the Deputy Commissioner, the troops were diverted through the gardens.

On their arrival new coolies are segregated for a fortnight and fed separately and for a time they are put on easy work. Some new coolies have been setting a good example to the old ones by earning more money.

No. 122.—Mr. B. J. DURANT, *Manager, Borpatra Division, Jhanzie Tea Company, Ltd.* :—

I have been about 17 years in Tea and about a year in the Jhanzie Tea Association. I have been most of my time in the recruiting districts, except for the period I have been in Assam.

My labour force is not sufficient at present. I have been recruiting in recent years. The average coolie on my garden works 6 to 7 hours a day.

My death-rate was considerably in excess of the birth-rate in 1920-21 because we had an epidemic of dysentery which took a heavy toll. My water-supply is good, but I would like to improve it. We have 3 wells and we have the river alongside. We send our cattle to the river, and sometimes when the water in the wells is scanty, the coolies avail themselves of the river supply. We have a good deal of hookworm. Our coolies are housed mostly in lines. I prefer the line system to the *bustee* system if there is no congestion. We have a septic tank installed at the hospital, but coolies do not care to use it, and we have had great difficulty in getting them to use the latrine. There is no latrine system attached to the lines.

It is not the case that we overwork our coolies owing to the shortage of labour and thus undermine their health. Sunday work in 1921 has been the exception rather than the rule. I think I only worked one Sunday in 1921 if I remember aright.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—You say that the sardar may not cut a *hazira* without consulting the Manager (*vide answer to question 10*). In what circumstances is the *hazira* cut?

A.—It is cut if the work is very bad and deliberately done.

Q.—Supposing a coolie did 12 *nals* deep hoeing and you considered it badly done, would he get anything for it?

A.—He would get something for it. If the sardar made the report I would look into the case personally and decide on its merits.

We work on the unit system entirely.

The sardars draw commissions on the coolies' earnings; it is in addition to their fixed pay. We give the commission to encourage the sardars to get coolies out to work.

In my answer to question 17 for the word "entirely" please substitute the word 'partly'. I said that the causes of the sporadic nature of the troubles that have occurred apart from deliberate political agitation are *entirely* due to coolies not having their grievances immediately attended to sympathetically by the European staff. I might elucidate the point by saying that the *Sahib* may leave things to be dealt with by the *kerani* babu instead of attending to them personally, and in some cases perhaps this may have been the cause of trouble.

As regards deep hoeing the alteration of the task is left to the discretion of the Manager.

The daily rates for a full task are 5 annas, 4 annas and 2 annas; tasks that we cannot give a unit for are paid 5 and 4 annas, *e.g.*, unloading coal.

The unit on my garden is one anna. The units have been so fixed that a man can earn 5 annas a day or more. It would take 6 hours at the outside for an average coolie to do a task of deep hoeing.

Rice at present sells at 4 to 6 seers for a rupee. The country is not very much opened out and rates are raised to any height if there is no supply of rice on the garden. In 1913 rice was sold from 10 to 14 seers to the rupee. The price of cloth to-day is 60 per cent. more than in 1913.

Assuming that rice is selling at not more than Rs. 5 a maund, a coolie would require Rs. 7 a month to keep him in health and reasonable comfort together with a prospect of saving a little. The principle in fixing the rate of rice has been to give it at not more than 2 annas a seer.

The cost per maund of green leaf in 1921 was I think Re. 1-4-0.

Under the old system the coolie used to do *ticca*. For instance if he found he had nothing to do at home after completing his task or on a leave day, he would make a little money by *ticca*.

We have written off about Rs. 3,000 a year as irrecoverable loans which represent rice and cash advances.

Q.—Would it be fair to say that this was written off because the coolies could not pay it back?

A.—Yes.

I have started a weaving establishment. We have got only 2 looms going at present. I started one in the early part of the year and have begun with the second one now. The coolies appreciate buying hand-woven cloth very much.

Coolies are put under contract for one year and the bonus is Rs. 12 and Rs. 10 for men and women respectively. I am in favour of doing away with the agreements. I would personally give the coolies a monthly bonus of Rs. 2 in the case of men and women and Re. 1 in the case of a working child provided of course they worked 24 days in the month. I would give the bonus at the beginning of the month.

Q.—In your covering letter to the answers you say "Also I should like to see free recruiting established." Do you mean to say that anybody could send a sardar and bring up coolies without reference to anybody?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Would that not lead to abuses?

A.—It might, but it would not if you had a sardari system just as in the Doocars.

Q.—Do you think you can get on without agreements?

A.—Yes, provided the bonus is given.

The rates for the cloth woven at our factory are:—A *sari* would cost Rs. 4 to Rs. 4-8 but if I find a coolie is hard up and not able to pay for it at that rate I might sell it for Rs. 2; the usual rate however is Rs. 3. *Dhotis* cost me Rs. 2 to Rs. 2-4 but I sell them at Re. 1-8.

The recruiting districts I have been in are Chota Nagpur, Daltonganj, Chaibassa. I have never been to the Central Provinces.

The coolies eat a good deal of fish and fowls.

Q.—In arriving at the figures Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 which you say would be a decent living wage, did you include fish and fowls in the expenses of the coolie?

A.—I worked out no details as regards fish and fowls. I simply put it at that Cinnamara from experience. The coolie cooks his food in oil and I estimated the monthly expenditure on oil at 2 annas to 4 annas. As regards clothes I made a calculation in regard to his outfit, which was provided by the garden. I cannot say how many clothes a coolie would require in a year as that must depend upon himself. Of course in arriving at those figures I put down a certain amount for cloth and a certain amount for other luxuries.

I have a *kaya's* shop on my garden. I do not think he lends money to the coolies. My garden is a new garden and coolies have got a good deal of land for cultivation. I cannot say how much land they have, as no record is kept.

No. 123.—MR. A. PHILLIPSON, I.C.S., Deputy Commissioner, Jorhat:—

I have now been 13 or 14 years in the service. I know the district fairly well. I have been here for about 10 months now and I was in charge for a time in 1917, and was Subdivisional Officer, Sibsagar, in 1915.

President:—Q.—You have had a number of tea-garden strikes since you have been here?

A.—Yes, for the last 10 months.

Q.—Could you state briefly the chief periods of those strikes?

A.—Strikes have occurred in the district frequently for the last year or two and there has been an epidemic of them at least since May last. My fortnightly confidential reports frequently referred to them. There was a strike at Letekujan (Jorhat) on 28th May 1921; on 13th June 1921 agitators spoke to coolies at Kanu, Pogabag, and Tinglibam; on 30th June 1921 I reported labour disturbances at Dahingepar, Nayabari and Nagadhuli. There were complaints against the sardar at Dahingepar for unfair treatment of coolies in the matter of rice weighing. Subsequently at Teok Rajbari (Sibsagar) there were disturbances on account of alleged grievances against the Indian staff. At Borhat the head moharir who was at the bottom of the strike, was dismissed, and the coolies returned to work. At Towkok a strike was apprehended but averted. Khumtai (Sibsagar) coolies were incited to strike. Then again on 9th July 1921 I asked the Subdivisional Officer of Sibsagar to give me a summary of garden disturbances at that time in his subdivision; and I reported to Government disturbances at Teok, Borahi, Borhat, Towkok, Khumtai, Dipling, Suntok (serious rioting), Joboka, Banfera, with apprehension of disturbances at Cherraideo, Atkhel, and Mazenga. Again on 30th September 1921 an agitator, since convicted, incited coolies to strike at Bokahula. There was a similar attempt to stir up trouble at Borhat. On the 26th of December 1921 (*vide* fortnightly report) I reported that *ex-tea-garden* coolies had been enlisted as volunteers to disturb labour. In my fortnightly report of the 31st January 1922, I reported eight strikes, but about the time that I despatched this report there were actually 14 at one time.

Q.—The Manager of Kanu garden told us there was a strike on his garden in June 1921. Did anybody go there to enquire into the matter or was it settled?

A.—I do not remember. We have had a large number of strikes in the district and it has been quite impossible to deal with every one of them. If however a strike appears to have been of a peaceful nature, the officials usually did not interfere, but if there is any apprehension of a disturbance it is the business of the local officers to prevent a breach of the peace.

I have on occasion visited gardens where strikes were reported to be a danger to the public peace, and I sometimes found that by speaking to the coolies and explaining to them the simple truth I was successful in getting the coolies to return to their work and in avoiding any disturbance of the public peace. For instance, lately at Gotanga I found that the coolies there were being incited by agitators in the locality and I explained to them the simple truth with the result that they all went back to work. There have been various strikes lately in Sibsagar and Jorhat and I had a report only a couple of days ago to the effect that there were a number of strikes in the Golaghat subdivision and that official interference was unnecessary.

Q.—What do you give as the chief reason for all these strikes?

A.—The coolies invariably say that they want more pay. If you go and question them they say "We want more pay." I have frequently examined the books in the course of my visits to gardens. I noticed that the average earnings of the coolies were

Cinnamara, not particularly bad. But I say frankly a great deal depends on other conditions, whether they cultivate land and how long they take to do their tasks. All these things must be taken into consideration along with their wages.

At Suffry there was a riot. The coolies assembled armed with sticks and *kudalis*. There is a case pending in this connection. At Gabru tea estate the coolies suddenly demanded more pay on pay-day. They threw stones on the tea-house roof and came armed with sticks and made a great deal of noise. I think they committed slight assaults on one or two mohurris and there was a certain amount of violence, but nothing very serious occurred. Political agitation was going on all this time.

Q.—What was the cause of the Suntok riot?

A.—I don't think any definite reason was given except that they said they wanted more pay and they also had a grievance against the Indian establishment on the garden. In fact the coolies threatened to murder the Indian staff. I submitted a special report to Government in connection with that occurrence.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—How far would you say that economic reasons are at the bottom of those strikes?

A.—It is an extremely difficult question to answer, but I should say that had all the coolies been quite contented agitators would have had far less influence. On the other hand, had there been no agitation the coolies might have been a little slower to disclose their grievances or to make a great noise about them. I think both causes must be taken together; one re-acts on the other.

President :—Q.—But the noticeable feature of these strikes is that they occur on a whole series of gardens in one neighbourhood?

A.—I should explain that by saying that coolies get to know what is happening in the locality, and I have not the slightest doubt that political agitators have assisted them in this. In fact we have seized papers which showed there was a definite organization throughout the district not only to disturb the garden bazaars with the object of drawing away the coolies from the gardens and speaking to them, but there were papers showing that they intended to get at the labour.

Q.—Do you think conditions are better now? We have seen no outward or visible signs of any unrest during our tour in this district?

A.—Yes, there is a very distinct and marked lull in the non-co-operation movement at the present moment. The turning point was perhaps about the 5th of February. On the 6th February about 80 villages were proclaimed in the gazette notification for additional police and it was clearly made known to the people that if the previous lawless activities continued responsible villages would have to pay the penalty by bearing a share in the cost of the additional police. Soon after we began to realize the cost in many villages. We also made it known that failure to pay land revenue by a certain date would involve the defaulters in the risk of having to bear a share in that cost and soon after a column of the Assam Rifles arrived in the district. People found that they had to pay their land revenue and that brought them to the bazaars and things began to be more normal. At present I have not heard of a single bazaar having closed down. At the end of January or during the beginning of February nearly all the bazaars in the district were interfered with but now conditions are much better. I believe that underground agitation is still going on.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—I think I am correct in inferring that the position is due to a combination of economic and political causes and possibly the economic grievances might incline coolies to listen more freely to the suggestions of the agitators?

A.—I think so.

Q.—Is the agitation associated with Mr. Gandhi's name?

A.—Undoubtedly.

Q.—It is extraordinarily difficult to find out how far the economic argument can be traced because we found conditions varying on different gardens?

A.—Yes, I think it is a most difficult question to decide. If I may make a suggestion I should say the only way to do it is to take a considerable number of cases and then go into the coolies' budgets, the income and expenditure, and make a comparison with the coolie's budget in 1913 and 1914. Frankly I do not know whether he is better off though I have seen the wage returns. As I said, it depends on many conditions.

Q.—Have you any means of judging from your own knowledge as to whether the earnings of coolies generally are sufficient to meet the cost of living and also to enable them to save a little?

A.—I have no definite means of judging, except by looking at the wages returns for the best period of the year and for the worst period. The wages vary from Rs. 5 and Rs. 6 to Rs. 11.

Q.—But I think you rightly stated that one would require to follow out the activities of the coolies.

A.—Yes, that is an important factor.

When I pay official visits to gardens I always ask what other occupations the coolies have and I find that only a certain number actually have other occupations; many of them have cattle.

Q.—For an exact idea of the coolie's well-being you would require to take into consideration these ancillary sources of income in cash, or whether they may be able to supplement the ordinary wages?

A.—Yes, that should be considered.

Q.—You have not yourself attempted to make out a budget with a view to comparing the income?

A.—No.

Mr. Das :—Q.—What do you consider the lowest wage a coolie should be given?

A.—I cannot say. But the lowest paid servant of my establishment, a *paniwala*, gets Rs. 12 a month.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—Might I ask whether the coming of this Committee is an adequate explanation for the series of strikes that have taken place this month in this district?

A.—I don't think so.

Q.—Do you think it has had a very disturbing effect on labour?

A.—Most of the disturbances which occurred here took place long before the Labour Committee was even contemplated.

President :—Q.—I suppose you know that the Committee have been asked by the local Sub-Committee of the Tea Association here not to question coolies and not to interfere with the labour in any way?

A.—I saw a copy of certain minutes and understood that the question had been discussed, but I did not know that they were putting it into effect by definitely asking the Committee not to interfere with the labour.

Q.—I suppose you agree that it is rather difficult to conduct an enquiry if you are not allowed to put questions to persons concerned in the matter?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that is a biased attitude to take up?

A.—I think that this attitude is ill-advised, unless there is actual disturbance on the garden at the time of enquiry.

28TH FEBRUARY 1922.

[MR. FOX ABSENT.]

No. 124.—MR. W. A. B. NICHOLETT, *Manager, Cinnamara Tea Estate, Jorhat Tea Company.*

I am Manager of the Cinnamara Tea Estate. I have been 24 years in the Jorhat Tea Company and about 18 months in Cinnamara. Before that I was Manager of Seycotta for 10 years. I have been on all the gardens of the Jorhat Company but one.

We have not got the unit system. We work on the *hazira* system, but units are given for *ticca* work. The present system may be termed a modified unit system.

We pay Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 for men and women, respectively. The wage for children varies according to their age; it may go down to Rs. 3.

The total acreage under tea at Cinnamara is 1,017 acres. The outturn last year was 8½ maunds. The working population is 1½ or a coolie and a half per acre.

We employ some outside labour. I used to employ Assamese, but I now have a good many Bengalee villagers.

There are about 300 acres of rice land cultivated by the coolies. There is plenty more land available. I cut and cleared 37 acres last year for cultivation. I have brought no figures showing the proportion of the labour force under contract. We have not been giving 3-year agreements for some years now. I gave a few when I was on my last garden and had to stop the practice when I was told that it was no in order. I have not been giving them at Cinnamara.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—How is the *hazira* book kept? Is the wage entered in annas or as 1 or $\frac{1}{2}$?

A.—At the present moment it is entered in units.

The task for deep hoeing is 20 *nals*. This is what they are doing at present; it is a kind of deep hoe. The task on the average would take about 5 hours to complete—I should say 6 hours.

Q.—What was the pay in 1915?

A.—I cannot remember, but it was raised two or three times. The wages were raised to Rs. 6 and Rs. 7 on the 1st January 1922.

Q.—From the garden returns submitted to Government it will be seen that the rate of pay in 1920 was Rs. 6 and Rs. 5, excluding *ticca*. It was raised to Rs. 6 and Rs. 7 in January last. Why was the rise given?

A.—It was decided by the Board of Directors to give a rise. I suppose it was considered necessary to raise the pay in January owing to the high cost of living.

Q.—What would a coolie receive if he worked the whole month of 21 days in February?

A.—He would be paid as for 26 days.

Q.—Do you know what that works out to in the month?

A.—No, I have not worked it out.

Q.—We found on one of your gardens that the method of making the entries in the *hazira* book was to enter "3 annas, 4 annas, 4 annas, 3 annas, etc., i.e., Re. 1-6 a week and for February it would work out as Rs. 5-8 for 24 working days. The loss to the coolie woman on the Rs. 6 monthly rate would be 8 annas. Is that your system in the *hazira* book?

A.—I am not writing up *haziras* like that. I am writing it up in units. For instance if a coolie does any *ticca* he would get say one or two units over and above his *hazira*.

Q.—Don't you write the *ticca* down in a separate book?

A.—Yes, that is done.

Q.—Is *ticca* entered up in the *hazira* book at all?

A.—I don't think it is.

Q.—In entering the *hazira* the system I have just described is I understand followed?

A.—Yes.

Q.—It is made in order to avoid fractions and thus simplify the accounts?

A.—Yes; a woman would get 5 annas for the last 2 days of the week in order to make it work up to Rs. 6.

President:—But that was not the case in the *hazira* book I examined the other day.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—You say that you enter up 4, 4 and 3 every day. What is your objection to entering up actuals?

A.—I have no objection. The reason why this was done was because we were going to have the unit system and we were told to prepare for it. Then the pay was raised and we found that it could not work out in even annas daily and therefore it was found necessary to follow that method.

Q.—You said just now that for a 24-day month like February a woman would get Rs. 5-8 instead of Rs. 6. Supposing the woman is under agreement for one year, what would the wage be entered down as?

A.—As Rs. 6.

Q.—But as a matter of fact the woman does not get it?

A.—Yes, for one month of the year.

Q.—So that to that extent she is losing?

A.—Yes, in that particular case.

There is much Sunday work in Cinnamara.

The plucking rate is 8 seers for a *hazira*. The *ticca* rate varies from one pice a seer to 2 pice a seer.

Q.—Was there a proposal that the rate should be 2 pice for $1\frac{1}{2}$ seers and the Managers met and said that it could not be done?

A.—I did not attend any such meeting.

We give concession rice. New coolies who have been on the garden for 6 months are given concession rice at Rs. 3 a maund; for the rest of the year they get it at Rs. 5 a maund. After that rice is sold to them at the market rate—of course this is not always the case, as we occasionally give them a concession. For instance if rice was selling in the market at Rs. 6-8 a maund I would give it at Rs. 6. We do make a loss on rice and paddy. I cannot give the loss for 1921 as I have not come prepared.

I have had no trouble on my garden. My birth-rate does not exceed my death-rate at present.

Q.—Is the garden unhealthy?

A.—I think it is a healthy garden.

There is a certain amount of hookworm, but not a great deal.

Q.—You say that wages have been increased. Can you say if the cost of working the garden has increased taking hoeing for example?

A.—Yes.

Children are put under agreement. In the case of children under 16 years, names or entries are put in the cash book, but in the case of children of 16 years and above, it is written up in the cash book and in the agreement book.

Any coolie can get concession rice provided I consider he is deserving of it. When I consider it no longer necessary, it is taken off.

Q.—Has your labour force decreased in the last 5 years?

A.—I cannot give you a direct answer, but I should not think it has decreased much. It may have decreased a little in 1918 owing to the influenza epidemic.

Q.—You say that the hoeing task is 20 *nals*?

A.—Yes, it is a *chop* hoe; it is not a double hoe.

Q.—The coolie gets an anna for 5 *nals*?

A.—Yes, that is the unit which he would get after his *hazira*.

Q.—We were told at Bokahula that it takes an average coolie 6 hours to do his task. I suppose the soil at Cinnamara is the same as at Bokahula?

A.—Most of Cinnamara is very light loamy soil. Bokahula is perhaps more sandy in places, and sand packs hard.

Q.—Can you give us the estimated cost of plucking last year?

A.—I have not brought the figures with me.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

I do not consider it possible and desirable to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages. As a matter of fact I think it ought not to be done. I think it would be disadvantageous to the coolie to make such a conversion.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—May I know why it is not in the interests of the coolie that he should be given these concessions in cash?

A.—I think he likes the concessions and as concessions he looks forward to them. He would probably get them in any case.

Q.—Don't you think the coolie would be more pleased if the concessions are given to him in the shape of so many rupees in a year?

A.—I cannot answer that because I cannot put myself in his place. What I have said is from my own point of view.

Q.—You have been getting some coolies from the *bustees* to work on your garden. Can you say what they are paid?

A.—We have stopped outside labour now. They used to be paid 5 annas about two years ago for 20 *nals*.

Q.—Your present labour force I take it is enough to do the whole work of the garden?

A.—I have some villagers also who are Bengalees.

Q.—What do you pay these people?

A.—They get practically the same pay as the ordinary coolies, that is to say, Rs. 6 and Rs. 7; they are generally paid weekly.

A certain number of coolies have absconded during the last five years but I would not say that the number is large. They might have been enticed away perhaps owing to the proximity of a large town where they can get work as servants. The political situation also partly accounts for a certain number of absconders. Some of the men who absconded were under agreement but we never bothered about instituting cases against them. I have never prosecuted any one.

Q.—If Act XIII was abolished would it affect your labour force?

A.—Well, the Act is useful because it has a moral effect on the coolie, and moreover the coolie himself would not like to do without the bonus. I am in favour of retaining Act XIII.

New coolies are not put under contract until they have been 2 years on the garden. After that if they come up of their own accord and ask for the bonus, they are put under agreement for one year. The bonus is Rs. 12.

Q.—Do you find that new coolies are more liable to abscond than old coolies?

A.—They get home-sick and may abscond. Old settled coolies do not abscond except in cases where a woman is concerned.

Q.—Why are you in favour of retaining Act XIII?

A.—For one thing it is entirely to the interest of the coolie to retain the Act, and from the garden point of view it is a good thing. It gives the coolie to understand that he is not at liberty to throw up his work and clear off. He has got to work for the party who has engaged him. Morally he must be bound in some way.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—You have had no trouble on the garden. Is it a fact that your Superintendent asked that the Assam Rifles should march through your garden?

A.—Not that I know of.

Sardars get no commission for bringing up coolies to take the agreement.

The garden did fairly well in recruiting last year. This year we have recruited about 30 new coolies up to date. The influenza epidemic of 1918-19 affected recruiting a good deal.

Q.—Do you think that every labourer should work every day?

A.—I work 365 days in the year. At any rate I am perfectly certain that no coolie does work the full period of his agreement.

Q.—Has it been brought to your notice that latrines would be useful in the case of hookworm?

A.—Yes, by my Medical Officer and my Superintendent. We are taking a latrine system in hand. Moulds are being constructed for concrete blocks. The matter has been under consideration for a year. I received final orders about two months ago.

The total population on the garden would be roughly a coolie and a half per acre. My estimate for this year is Rs. 2,34,000, which is a little more than last year's estimate.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—Is it correct to say that four-fifths of that sum go to the coolies?

A.—I could not tell you; part of it goes in paying the coolie as this estimate is for the total expenditure on the garden.

Sardars get commission on *ticca* work.

No. 125.—MR. D. SLIMMON, Superintendent of the Jorhat Tea Company :—

I have been 26 years in the Jorhat Tea Company, and have been Superintendent for 3 years. I have been on most gardens of the Jorhat Tea Company. The total acreage under tea is 10,000 acres. The outturn last year was 73,460 maunds. The

working population is about a coolie and a half per acre. The figures I have given are for the 7 gardens of the Company which lie in the Jorhat subdivision. There are in all 13 gardens belonging to the Company.

The working force per acre is 1.36 coolies or 1.47 including working children. There are 1,510 acres of land held by coolies within the garden grants and about 600 acres outside. These figures represent the Jorhat gardens only.

President :—Q.—What is the number of men and women under agreement?

A.—I am afraid I have not got those figures.

Q.—Have you any idea of the percentage of the working force under contract?

A.—Not less than 75 per cent.

Q.—Are contracts given to new coolies?

A.—In going into the matter I found that the custom varies on different gardens. Some gardens give agreements almost immediately after the arrival of new coolies; others about a year after; others 2 years after. In one case I found that the coolies were not given agreements until after 3 years. Contracts now are mostly given for one year, but in certain cases where advances are asked for the purpose of a marriage or for buying land or cattle, agreements are given for 2 years. Coolies are told that the Government order is one year, but they want the money. In the case of new coolies contracts are given for one year only. In one case a Manager told me that he had been putting coolies under agreement for 3 years. The rate of advance is Rs. 12 for men and Rs. 6 for women for one year's agreement. In the case of 2 years, the agreement money is double; for 3 years it is treble. The money is always paid in cash, except in the case of long-term agreements where the coolies may have been given an outfit and a set of utensils the cost of which is deducted from the bonus money. The actuals which the coolies get are somewhere about Rs. 6 or Rs. 7 after deducting the cost of bedding, cash advances for rice and various other things.

Q.—But surely cash advances ought to be entered in the agreement?

A.—It is all put down as bonus to new coolies. Advances are made to the coolies later on for the whole year, probably for 2 years and sometimes for 3 years. I do not approve of that practice.

Q.—A new coolie is supposed to have an outfit when he comes up which is according to a certain scale. What is the outfit?

A.—It is laid down in the Labour Association rules—2 blankets, 2 *dhotis*, 2 coats, one set of cooking utensils, and the cost is put against each coolie at present as Rs. 15-8 in the case of all coolies over the age of 12. Individually the cost is Rs. 10.

Q.—If a new coolie gives an agreement for 3 years on arrival it should not be necessary, I take it, for him to be given an outfit. He ought to be given the money in cash?

A.—Well, it is not an agreement.

Q.—It must be an agreement if it is drawn up on stamped paper. Does the ignorant coolie believe that he is bound to the garden for 3 years?

A.—It is very difficult to say. I can only imagine that he considers it a sort of custom that he should remain on the garden for 3 years.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Were you in Kharikatia garden of your Company?

A.—Yes, for 12 years.

Q.—Would it be correct to say that the agreement system you have been asked about is an inheritance of your own practice at Kharikatia?

A.—Apparently.

Q.—When you were in Kharikatia, did you give agreements to minor children?

A.—No.

Q.—Is that done at present?

A.—I could not say.

Q.—You might take my word for it that it is done now. I was shown a little black book which showed that minor children were put under agreement for 313 days.

A.—Of course it is not uncommon for children to get advances. When I say advances, I mean that they come up and ask for an advance at certain times of the year for festivals, etc., and they get the money which, instead of being treated as an advance, is put down as a bonus.

Cinnamara.

Q.—You are a member of the Jorhat Sub-Committee?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You were present at the meeting of the 15th February last?

A.—Yes.

Q.—One of the points put forward in the Sub-Committee's meeting is—to quote it word for word.—

“Regarding the proposed visits to individual gardens the Committee was strongly of opinion that these should be confined to the examination of books, lines, etc., and that no personal enquiries be made from coolies, or the labour in any way interfered with

I call attention to the expression “the labour in any way interfered with.” This is a letter from Mr. Moffat, forwarding the above minutes. He says “I expect you reserve the right of calling for additional evidence.” Do you agree with Mr. Moffat?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Two witnesses, the *Padre* and Dr. Bradley, volunteered to give evidence before this Committee. Did you at any time write letters to them intimidating them from giving evidence here?

A.—I wrote to them saying that they should not give evidence. I suggested to Dr. Bradley—“suggested” was the word I used—that it might probably be better that he should not give evidence.

Q.—Can you give any reason why you wrote that letter?

A.—I did it out of kindness to Dr. Bradley.

Q.—Is it not right that the Committee should be helped by witnesses?

A.—Not by Dr. Bradley.

Q.—Why?

A.—Because he does not know anything at all about the coolies. He does not know their language and cannot ask them any questions. He takes no interest in the coolies and what opinion could he have given?

Q.—At any rate the Committee might have heard him, and it would have afforded the Committee an opportunity of judging for themselves?

A.—I defer to your opinion, but I still hold that I did it out of kindness to Dr. Bradley.

Q.—You suggested to the *Padre* that he should not give evidence?

A.—I deny that *in toto*. What I did say to the *Padre* was in connection with his having spoken to some members of the Committee at Shillong before the Committee started on their tour. I told him that it was very wrong of him to bias the minds of members of the Committee and that if he had anything to put forward he should have done so before the Committee as a whole.

Q.—Don't you think it would have been more courteous to the Committee if those witnesses were allowed to appear before the Committee?

A.—That point of view did not appear to me. My desire was to give the Committee every information and I think you will agree that the Committee have had a number of witnesses from here to sufficiently represent the conditions prevailing. For instance Dr. Foster is a man of very great experience. Unfortunately he is unable to give evidence being detained at Calcutta. He knows the coolie inside out and is also up-to-date in arrangements regarding the septic system of latrines, sanitation and so forth. Dr. Bradley has absolutely no experience in such matters.

President:—Q.—But has Dr. Bradley not had experience of Asiatic labour?

A.—I believe he has. But I don't see how it is going to assist him very much in tea-garden labour. My idea was to place before the Committee first class evidence such as would emanate from Dr. Foster. He would tell you about everything far better than this man could.

President:—Of course we do not know what he would have actually said.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—What is your general principle in giving concession rice to coolies?

A.—Broadly speaking the new coolies, the thriftless and poorer coolies get rice concessions at Rs. 3 a maund.

Q.—Don't you encourage the thriftless in that way?

A.—No.

Q.—But the good hard working coolie gets concession rice at a higher rate—usually how much? Cinnamara.

A.—Usually about Rs. 2-8 to Rs. 2-12 for paddy and Rs. 5 for rice.

Q.—Sometimes you have been selling rice to coolies at over Rs. 6?

A.—Perhaps in isolated cases, but not in recent years.

Before 1915 the wages for the Jorhat gardens were Rs. 4 and Rs. 5. They were later on in 1916 raised to Rs. 5 and Rs. 6. Then again in 1920 they were raised to Rs. 5-12 and Rs. 6-8 and finally on the 1st of November 1921 the wages were raised to Rs. 6 and Rs. 7 for women and men respectively. We raised the wages for the same reason as in other parts of the world, namely, increased cost of living and also owing to the increased standard of living demanded. Of course latterly it was simply to meet the higher standard of living.

Q.—Do you think that the coolie's standard of living has gone up since 1913?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that is a good thing?

A.—I do.

Q.—What is your system in the Jorhat gardens in writing up *hazira* books?

A.—One garden I believe wrote them up in units; others in *haziras*.

Q.—Take the wage of Rs. 6; how is that written up in the *hazira* books?

A.—As 4 annas each day.

Q.—Take Rs. 7; how is that written up?

A.—I think it is all through written down as Re. 0-4-4.

It is the general practice on the gardens to write up the pies also.

Q.—Are you sure of that? I may tell you that on one of your gardens it is not done?

A.—It is a general order.

Q.—Did you not issue an order either verbal or written to your Managers not to write up fractions?

A.—No.

Q.—In one garden I found the *haziras* mixed up, the result being in the case of a woman that instead of getting a monthly wage of Rs. 6 she got Rs. 5-15 for a full month's work.

A.—That of course was very wrong and it is up to the Manager to look into it.

Q.—Can you tell me why instead of writing up in units of work done, the system is adopted of writing up in complete annas of varying amounts so as to avoid fractions?

A.—On some gardens the actuals are written up; on others they are not. Different people have different ideas.

Q.—Now taking Bokahula as an example since 1913 has the task for light hoeing increased or decreased?

A.—The position of Bokahula is different from other gardens, but I know that during the war the task was lower than it had been the years before.

Q.—Since 1913 the wages have risen so that it would be natural to expect an increased cost of working assuming that the task had not been increased?

A.—On the Bokahula garden 40 per cent. of the *ticca* work is done by village people and their rate has neither increased nor decreased. I know that nearly half the leaf is plucked by village people.

Q.—In 1913 at Bokahula your light hoe worked out to Rs. 2-7 an acre. In 1922 your estimate is Rs. 2-8 which seems to be a very small rise if the tasks have not really been increased along with the increase in wages?

A.—It is a question of how much is done in *hazira* and how much *ticca*. In 1913 the pay was Rs. 5 and the rate was 35 *nals*.

Q.—But I am taking your actuals?

A.—As I say at that time the garden was very much dependent on outside labour.

Q.—What is your rate for plucking?

A.—Our rates for plucking like other gardens vary. At the beginning of the season in March and April it is a full *hazira* for whatever is brought in. In May

Cinnamara very often the rate begins at 5 seers and 6 seers. After the 15th May *ticca* comes in except in the case of unpruned tea when *ticca* is not given. Then from June usually the *hazira* is raised up to 8 seers but if the leaf happens to be short it is not.

Q.—I found on one of your gardens that was not the case. The task was not reduced even if there was a shortage of leaf.

A.—That is very unusual.

Q.—I was told by the Manager that he had no orders to do it?

A.—That is not so.

Q.—Supposing a coolie woman has a sick child in hospital and she cannot go to work but is required to look after the child. Do you give the woman any allowance?

A.—As a rule, yes. If the people were well off they may not get the allowance, but as a rule they do receive it.

Q.—I found one case where a woman was absent for 17 days in hospital attending a sick child and she got no allowance?

A.—Did you enquire into the circumstances of the case?

Q.—No.

A.—It is always given in deserving cases only.

Three months' leave with full pay is given to pregnant women, and in addition a bonus of Rs. 10 during the year for every child born. More leave is given on the recommendation of the Medical Officer.

Q.—May I take it that your usual plucking rate is 2 pice a seer?

A.—This year I propose to make it 2 pice during the plucking season for 3 pounds, but I have left it to the discretion of Managers either to continue on last year's rates or to adopt the unit system.

President :—Q.—What would be the saving per maund?

A.—There would be no saving.

Q.—What does your plucking rate per maund of green leaf work out to on the average?

A.—About Rs. 4-8 per maund of tea if they make a full crop, otherwise if the crop is shorter the expenses go up.

Q.—What was the estimate last year?

A.—About Rs. 4-4 I think. It is a little more this year because the wages have been increased slightly.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—In your estimate for one of the gardens I notice that the plucking estimate rate for 1922 is Re. 1-1 per maund or 5-10 pice a seer; in 1921 it cost 5-52 pice. So it is going to be cheaper this year I take it?

A.—Probably, it all depends on the crop.

Q.—Have you done much recruiting within the last 5 years?

A.—Yes, a considerable amount.

Q.—Is it the case that the majority of those new recruits have died?

A.—No, that would be a very sweeping statement to make.

Q.—What proportion would you put down?

A.—It is very difficult to answer without going closer into the matter. Of the coolies we got in the famine year we repatriated over 400 to their own country under instructions of the Tea Districts Labour Association. We gave them blankets and clothes and Rs. 5 each and sent them back.

Q.—Were these unsuitable people?

A.—Yes, they were beggars. Many of them who came up did not want to work; they simply started their old trade, viz., of begging.

There have been strikes on many of our gardens. In connection with the Bokahula strike an agitator was caught while in the act of preaching in the lines and convicted. He told the Manager in the morning through a deputation that it was Gandhi's order that the coolies were not to work until they received Rs. 15 and Rs. 12 a month.

Q.—Did you ask for the Assam Rifles to march through Cinnamara garden?

A.—No.

Kharikatia tea estate was on the black list on account of the high death-rate in 1913. The Civil Surgeon inspected the garden and drew attention to the presence of hookworm and anaemia.

Q.—Have you taken any steps towards improving hookworm and anaemia?

A.—Yes, by better supervision and treatment. We have no system of latrines in the lines.

Q.—Do you believe in latrines?

A.—Yes, I have recently given orders for the construction of latrines in the hospital and round the tea-house, but not in the lines so far.

Q.—After the Committee was appointed?

A.—I don't think it had any connection with the Committee because we had latrines in our Golaghat gardens last year and I was anxious to introduce them here.

Q.—Do you think that latrines in compact blocks might help to decrease hookworm?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Are you prepared to spend money on that?

A.—Yes, but you have got to go step by step with the coolie. We have tried the system of trench latrines before and I have tried various things. You will perhaps agree that one can lead the coolie but not drive him lest he be driven out of the garden entirely.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, would you say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities?

A.—Yes.

Q.—In connection with improving the sanitation of the gardens, you are conscious of the difficulty of making rapid changes?

A.—Very conscious.

Q.—You might easily precipitate trouble with the labour especially at a time like this if you act hastily?

A.—Undoubtedly.

Q.—Then you must also have the co-operation of your Medical Officer in order to accomplish that?

A.—Certainly.

Q.—You have had experience I think of people who talk a good deal but do not do very much in connection with such matters?

A.—Unfortunately I have, and that is one of my difficulties.

Q.—You get an atmosphere of prejudice created by irresponsible talk which does not really convey what it is to have a healthy labour force?

A.—That is so.

Q.—Questions were asked of you about the Assam Rifles marching through the gardens. They went to the Cinnamara bazaar but not to the Cinnamara lines. Did they go there at your request?

A.—No.

Q.—You know the difficulty of getting coolies to conform to rule?

A.—I am very sensible of that from past experience.

Q.—You have no particular legal authority to impose your will on them?

A.—None.

Q.—It must therefore be done by moral suasion?

A.—Yes, also by the consent of the coolies.

Q.—So that it is not unreasonable that you should proceed somewhat carefully in introducing these things?

A.—Yes, you must proceed very carefully and educate the coolie.

Q.—When you begin by introducing latrines in connection with the hospital and perhaps with congested lines, you are going as far as it is reasonable to go as a first step?

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A.—Yes, as a first step the hospital latrines have been suggested by Dr. Foster.

Q.—So that you are acting really in concert with the advice of one of your Medical Officers?

A.—Yes, so much so that you have got to act on the practical steps suggested by your doctor.

President:—Q.—You have only begun quite recently to introduce any system of latrines?

A.—Yes. In Jorhat I have been trying to introduce a system of latrines after the Golaghat gardens and I sent our Medical Officer Dr. Bradley to Golaghat several times but we could not see things exactly in the same light. When he returned I had plans made out and I said that these would have to be acted upon, and he was made to work on a set principle.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—I suppose, Mr. Slimmon, it is your experience that you cannot get your men to do things just as you want them to be done. The difficulty is that you may have good ideas and then what is the use of good ideas when you have not got the support of the executive. The only thing you can do, in these circumstances, I take it, is to continue to press your ideas and to get rid of any unsatisfactory instruments?

A.—Quite so.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—You employ outside village labourers on your gardens. How are they paid?

A.—They are paid exactly the same as the coolies living on the garden. The *ticca* rate however differs slightly because the village people are not given any concessions such as housing, sanitation, medical attendance, etc.

Q.—Is it correct to say that the villagers are paid higher wages than the coolies on the garden because they get no concessions from you?

A.—That is true to a certain extent, though not altogether.

Q.—What is the plucking rate allowed to a coolie on the garden and to an outsider?

A.—The villager gets 25 per cent. more; in hoeing, not quite so much; as a rule the same.

Q.—Besides the 400 coolies that were repatriated, did any coolies abscond from your garden?

A.—Yes, a number absconded.

Q.—How many absconded say within the past 5 years?

A.—I have not got the figures by me, but I should say the number is not unusual.

Q.—Could any reason be assigned for their having absconded?

A.—No, it is very difficult to assign any reason.

Q.—Was it the impression that the coolies could not make both ends meet by continuing to serve on the gardens?

A.—Not at all; I am perfectly convinced that the conditions were infinitely better at the time they absconded than was the case when they first came to the garden. The majority of the coolies who absconded came from the East Coast I think.

Q.—Were these coolies at the time of their absconding under agreement?

A.—No.

Q.—Have any coolies who took agreements absconded?

A.—That is a difficult question to answer. I shall have to go into the whole matter in detail, but my personal idea is that it does not make any difference in their absconding.

Q.—In your experience have there been many prosecutions under Act XIII?

A.—Practically none.

Q.—So that if the Act were abolished it would not affect the labour force at all?

A.—Yes, unless we had something else to go on with. Suppose the sections of the Indian Penal Code remained as they are, then Act XIII might be withdrawn, but until our system of recruitment is altered it would be a dangerous proceeding. What I mean is this that at present we have got an Act which lays down how we shall recruit and what we shall do. If this Act was swept away and we were allowed to

recruit in the same manner as the Dooars then I should be in favour of the Act being swept away. In the case of the Dooars the driving force is the sardar. Take away the Act and allow us to recruit in the same way as the Dooars and give us about 10 years to make the change, and I am perfectly sure that it would be beneficial both to the coolie and Assam in general. I am not in favour of abolishing the Act until the conditions of recruitment are changed. I do not consider it possible or desirable from either the coolie's or garden point of view that present concessions should be converted into an increase in money wages.

No rent is charged for the land on which a coolie's hut is built.

Q.—Is it a fact that in the recruiting districts the residents of the villages are given houses free by the *malguzars*?

A.—I do not know.

Q.—Are you aware that in Assam itself these coolies generally build their own houses outside the garden areas?

A.—I am aware of that, but I think that is not a prevalent custom.

Q.—Are coolies capable of constructing their own huts?

A.—Some are; others are not.

Q.—Have they not got houses in their own country?

A.—Some have hovels.

Q.—Regarding hospital charges, what do you think is the cost of medicines on your gardens for one year?

A.—I have just received an indent which is supposed to be for 6 months and it is over Rs. 15,000 for the 7 gardens in the district and this figure does not include quinine, alcohol, lint, cotton, oils and other things.

Q.—What is the population affected by that indent?

A.—15,000.

Q.—Are you aware that Government provides medicines free of cost to those who cannot afford to pay them?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Don't you think that poor coolies should be entitled to free medicines either from the Government or the Tea management?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Therefore the coolie who requires medicines would get it free without paying for it?

A.—Government have no dispensaries provided for indigenous coolies dependent on tea-gardens. The question is whether the coolies would get it from the Government.

Q.—Are there villages for which Government have not provided any dispensaries?

A.—I am unable to say. The dispensaries here are few and far between.

Q.—Is that not due to the population being very thin? On your gardens the population being dense, dispensaries would appear to be indispensable?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think the coolies like being doled out their kitchen food, their pregnant leave or things of that kind by way of concessions?

A.—I think coolies are very much dependent on these concessions.

Q.—Is it the case that they cannot earn enough to make ends meet?

A.—No.

Q.—Then why do you say that they depend on these concessions?

A.—I think it is inherent in the coolie to have somebody to look after him.

Q.—Then who do you think looks after him in his own country?

A.—I am afraid in many cases coolies are not looked after at all. They have just got to take their chance.

Q.—Is it because a coolie cannot live in his own country that he comes to this place?

A.—That is the prevalent reason. It applies, I think, universally. People are pushed out for better earnings.

Q.—So that the coolie is not an exception to the general rule?

A.—No.

Cinnamara.

Cinnamara.

Q.—Do you think that if the various allowances made to the coolies by way of pregnant leave, rice, etc., were converted into cash and given them, it would be welcomed?

A.—No, because it is a duty which we will never be able to get rid of.

Q.—Does it stand to reason that a healthy coolie's wage should be reduced because of an unhealthy coolie companion?

A.—No.

Q.—Then why should a strong coolie be made to suffer in respect of his wages on account of the weak coolies?

A.—I take it that is the case the world over. You take for instance welfare people who are out for giving charity and we are simply giving it in charity to the coolies after the same manner.

Q.—But a coolie who earns 4 to 6 annas a day is not expected to give anything in charity. What I say is that Companies could afford to keep dispensaries and the strong coolie who requires no medicines should get the full value of his labour. Don't you agree?

A.—Of course the aim of the Company is to see that he does get the full value of his labour.

Q.—Then is it not looked upon as a concession?

A.—It is called a concession, but I think it is a part of his remuneration.

Q.—It is deducted from his pay, is it not?

A.—No.

Q.—How does it become a part of his remuneration?

A.—It is given by the Company.

Q.—It is given to the weaklings so that their health is maintained? Coolies differ in physique and if you are going to make all the coolies equal as regards earnings the weaklings are bound to suffer. Is it not reasonable to expect that the strong coolie who works harder and longer than the weak coolie should get more pay than the latter?

A.—How are you going to arrive at that? Men are not born equal.

Q.—How are the unit systems worked?

A.—Well, we help those people who are down on their luck in the same way as you would do with any community in the world.

Q.—Does the coolie look upon this medical attendance as a concession at all?

A.—Yes.

Mr. Withers :—Q.—With reference to the agreements for 3 years which were given to certain coolies without the advances, would you say that these instances were due to a lack of loyalty amongst your staff?

A.—I would put them down to carelessness.

Q.—Do you know what are the wages paid to labour employed outside the gardens?

A.—We pay outside labourers who come to work for us 5 and 6 annas. If I employ Assamese labour to work in my bungalow I pay 5 annas a day.

Dr. Williams :—Q.—What is the total annual expenditure on the gardens?

A.—I cannot give you that information now.

Q.—Was the Cinnamara bazaar interfered with definitely by political agitators?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that the visit of Mr. Gandhi increased the agitation or did it decrease the agitation?

A.—I think his visit had a salutary effect in consequence of his speech at the Dibrugarh Club. I would however say that this agitation is beyond Mr. Gandhi's control.

Q.—So then so far as his visit was concerned, it produced a good effect?

A.—I think it did no harm. He told the Congress people that this agitation on tea-gardens must cease.

Q.—Do you think the coming of this Committee has been the cause of the disturbance of the labour?

A.—I think the Committee undoubtedly gave a handle to the non-co-operators working against us and I think they are making use of this as a sort of lever to engineer strikes. This has been made very patent to me by one or two gardens. We sent out one or two people from our gardens to one of the gardens that were on strike, to convince my people that no increase in wages was given on the other garden. They were told that this Committee of Enquiry was out to increase their wages and that this was the time for them to strike for at least two days if they at all wanted to get an increase.

President :—Q.—How many coolies were repatriated?

A.—About 400.

Q.—Why were they sent up from the recruiting districts?

A.—That is a question—"Why". I represented the matter very strongly to the Tea Districts Labour Association, not only that we fed the coolies and kept them going for 3 years but that we would still have kept them if they showed any inclination to work.

Q.—Do you think that such a class of coolies was sent up because the wages in Assam were not sufficient to attract a better class?

A.—No. These people went so far as to bribe the sardar to take them to the depôt. The fault lay undoubtedly with the Agents there and the Tea Districts Labour Association.

Q.—It used to be stated that the distance to Assam was so great, the prospect of return so small and the wages given so insufficient that the coolies would not come to Assam while they preferred to go to the Dooars. Have these reasons ever been put forward by the recruiting agents?

A.—The Dooars have experienced trouble as much as we have. I think the wages given here are far in excess of what they get in their country. Of course recruiting is more favourable in a famine year, because conditions are so bad in their country that they are forced to go out. But when there is a bumper crop they are able to fill their bellies and to feel comfortable. Recruiting is greater in famine years.

For instance last year was a good year and the recruiting figures were very much less. We are finding difficulty this year except in places where crops are not so good.

Q.—Given a good year, that is to say, a good average crop, is it difficult to recruit because the inducements are not sufficient?

A.—I would not put it that way. I would put it down to the unwillingness of the coolie. A coolie has to leave his friends and country and stay up here for many years.

Q.—A coolie, as a rule, does not leave his country so long as the conditions in his country are congenial to him?

A.—That I take it is the case the world over.

Q.—But he does not go unless it is a bad year?

A.—Unless he is more or less pushed to it.

Q.—Do you think putting coolies under 3 years or 939 days' agreement on arrival is likely to have a prejudicial effect on recruiting?

A.—It is difficult to say.

Q.—It is said that agreements under Act VI did have that effect?

A.—Of course Act VI was a severe agreement, but this form—Act XIII—is more or less a shadow. It is only the power behind the shadow that makes it worth having at all.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—What is "the power behind the shadow"?

A.—The mere fact that they make an agreement.

Q.—Do you mean putting the thumb impression?

A.—It amounts to that. Morally he has given his word that he would stay on the garden for the 3 years.

Q.—Was this explained to him?

A.—I do not know.

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President :—*Q.*—Under Act VI agreements for more than one year had to be executed before the Magistrate, but now they can be executed for 3 years or 939 days without anybody knowing anything about it.

A.—Well, the one is a legal instrument, while the other is not.

Q.—You consider it illegal?

A.—Yes, it is not worth the paper it is written on. I would call this agreement stupid.

Mr. Withers :—*Q.*—Why do you have them?

A.—I do not know myself. Many people have no papers. In fact so far as I know it is merely done in the agreement book as regards half the gardens.

President :—*Q.*—You do not think the existence of this agreement exercises any prejudicial effect on recruiting in the recruiting districts? Do you think the coolies know that they would be put under agreement as soon as they come up?

A.—I would not like to say one way or another. I do not think it exercises any prejudicial effect.

I have in a few cases given new coolies the agreement so as to enable them to settle down, and I am satisfied that it was appreciated by the coolies. I have been giving them a few rupees to start with on their arrival and then later on I would give them the balance.

Q.—Do sardars in the recruiting districts hold out inducements to coolies to come to Assam by over-stating or exaggerating the conditions obtaining here?

A.—I do not know.

Q.—You give the sardars a commission on the number of coolies they bring?

A.—Yes, of Rs. 10 to Rs. 20.

Q.—So that it would be natural for the sardar to exaggerate the conditions?

A.—Perhaps.

We pay sardars commission on overtime work. I think the coolie wants to work as easy as he can, and until you raise the standard of his living, you cannot get him to do any more work.

GOLAGHAT, 3RD MARCH 1922.

Golaghat.

No. 126.—*Mr. A. D. Jones, Manager of Nahorjan Tea Estate, Nahorjan Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been 10 years altogether in the Nahorjan Tea Company except for a period of 4 years when I was at Home. I have been 21 years in Tea. Previous to my joining Nahorjan, I was with the Rajmai Tea Company in the Golaghat subdivision.

Mr. Dawson :—*Q.*—You spent Rs. 76,505 in recruiting between 1916-1920 and you have an increase of 358 in consequence. You say the *unsatisfactory* result is entirely due to the poor class of coolie recruited during 1918-1919 a large proportion of whom died before reaching the garden. Also the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 accounted to a large extent for the unsatisfactory result. Now you say there has been an increase in 1921 as compared with 1916?

A.—What I mentioned in the answer is the actual increase in 1921 over 1916.

Q.—Would you call it unsatisfactory?

A.—Yes, from the point of view that the coolies we got up early in 1919-1920 were very, very poor physically. They were in a very bad condition. I think those coolies came up because of the hard times in their own country. They came up in poor health and the influenza epidemic carried away a heavy toll.

Q.—I suppose in famine years coolies are obtained more easily than in normal years?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think you can get up good coolies in a year of good crops in the Golaghat recruiting districts?

A.—Yes, with good sardars it is possible.

There was a disturbance on my garden in September 1920; it was the work of a few malcontents among the coolies. This disturbance followed immediately after the Doom-Dooma riots.

Q.—What was the disturbance due to?

A.—The men on my garden had been put on to pluck—a task which they very seldom have to do. This work is uncongenial to them; they prefer to do hoeing. About 3-30 p.m. they had finished a number and the mohurrir in charge wanted to put them on to another number, and the coolies were dilly-dallying. My Assistant went across and made them do the work. Subsequently when the gong went, they refused to weigh the leaf. My Assistant took the small basket from a man and poured the leaf from it into the big basket. He put this big basket on the man's head and told him to proceed to the factory and have his leaf weighed. The lot of them refused to go and remained there for an hour or more. The coolies however were tutored by an absconder who had arrived from Doom-Dooma a few days previously and this was the whole cause of the trouble.

On my return from long leave in 1919 I became aware of a certain amount of dissatisfaction among the coolies owing to economic conditions. I relieved the situation in many ways. For instance, I gave them a bigger concession in buying factory paddy. I made it easier for them to earn *ticca*, and in several ways I made things better for them.

Previous to September 1918 the wages were Rs. 5 for men and Rs. 4 for women. After that I raised them to Rs. 6 and Rs. 5. Then the unit system was adopted in January 1921 and this has given the coolies an opportunity of increasing their monthly wage by 8 annas in the case of men and 12 annas in the case of women.

Q.—How far did they avail themselves of that opportunity?

A.—Before, the wages were Rs. 6 a month for a man whether he worked 25, 23 or 27 days in the month. I altered them so that he was paid 4 annas for every task he did, and if he worked a 23-day month he got Rs. 6-8 and a woman Rs. 5-11.

I consider Rs. 8 for a man and Rs. 7 for a woman a decent living wage assuming that paddy was selling from Rs. 3-4 to Rs. 3-8 a maund. If it was selling at a higher rate they would require a little more.

Q.—You say in your answer to question No. 25: "Bazaar prices have increased about 35% since 1913 but in this garden where the coolies have the opportunity of buying 1 maund of *dhan* per month at from Rs. 3 to Rs. 3-4, also stores brought in bulk from Calcutta at bed-rock prices such as *dal*, salt, sugar, matches, etc., the increase in the cost of living is not more than 10%." That is interesting. Did you buy stores wholesale from Calcutta?

A.—Yes, I did so in 1921. I did so to help the coolie along because the local shopkeepers had raised their prices to an enormous extent.

Q.—You say in your answer to question 35: "To a certain extent the unit system has been adopted on this garden. The system is as follows: A man is paid 4 annas for every task completed during the month so that in a 25-working day month he can earn Rs. 6-4, in a 26-working day month Rs. 6-8 and in a 27-day month Rs. 6-12 for the regular task set. A man is paid for half or full *hazira*. A hoeing man is allowed to earn as much as he chooses provided the quality of his work is up to standard. *Ticca* hoeing may be shut down if climate conditions are not suitable, i.e., during heavy rain but this has seldom to be done....." You fix a *hazira*?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How, then, does your unit system come in exactly?

A.—They are paid for every task over the *hazira*. Under the other system they might do 25 tasks and get Rs. 6 and 26 tasks and get Rs. 6. Immediately they finish their ordinary task they get 6 *nals* of light hoeing for an anna. I have adopted the unit system only to that extent in the *ticca* work. My usual rate for plucking in the season is 6 seers for a *hazira*, and *ticca* 2 pice a seer over the 6 seers as against 1½ pice a seer before the war.

Q.—To what extent have your coolies got cultivation? You say here "to a small extent inside the grant and to a large extent outside—roughly 50 acres by about 50 coolies inside the grant."

Golaghat.

A.—I have only got about 50 to 60 acres of good rice land in the garden grant. They hold land to a large extent outside. About 50% of the adult coolies have got land either inside or outside the grant. I have just applied for a big grant of 500 acres for rice cultivation.

In 1920 Rs. 872-15-3 was written off as irrecoverable and in 1919 Rs. 925-11-6. In previous years the average was about Rs. 500. It is our custom to look into the coolies' advances every year, and any advance which has accumulated during the year against a coolie through no particular fault of his is written off and the reason explained to the coolie.

As regards pregnant leave before birth, half *hazira* is given from the time the Medical Officer recommends it, and light and suitable work is arranged for pregnant women. After birth 4 months' leave on full pay is given to all mothers and this in many cases is extended to 5 and sometimes to 6 months if recommended by the Medical Officer or Manager. This has been the practice only since 1919. Previous to that a bonus of Rs. 5 was given when a child was born and Rs. 10 later on if the child was well looked after and not neglected by the mother. A mother does not need to go out to work on the average for 5 months.

During 1920 an average of 15 weakly coolies and 130 children were fed daily by the garden. Families apply for their children to be fed. I find out how many there are in the family. I might feed the children of one family for one month, and then feed another family the next month. The Medical Officer very frequently inspects the children on my garden and makes his recommendation as to who should be fed and who should not.

We sell paddy only. I have never sold at above Rs. 3-4 a maund. But previous to 1919 when I was away at Home it was sold at Rs. 3-10 to men and Rs. 3-8 to women. No restriction is imposed with regard to these concessions, except when the coolies deliberately stay away from work.

I have what I call my weekly payment coolies. Men get 6 annas a week and so much rice. They get paddy if they want it at Rs. 2 a maund. They are improvident people whom you cannot persuade to work and that is why they are put on the weekly payment list. I then have an opportunity of seeing their work for a week and of finding out more about them. They get the balance of their pay at the end of the month with the rest of the coolies.

Q.—Supposing you have a good working coolie who makes a decent wage. Do you say to him 'You are making money, why should I give you concession rice'?

A.—Never.

Q.—What is your argument for that? Why do you give it to the man who is earning a decent wage?

A.—Because I find the man who is earning a decent wage is the best man and the man I want; so I give it to him.

My allowance of paddy to adults is one maund a month. Children not up to adult work get a wage of Rs. 4. We give coolies agreements. A man gets Rs. 13 and a woman Rs. 10 for 313 completed tasks. We have no formal agreement or printed form. We simply enter it up in the book.

Q.—Supposing a woman got Rs. 10 to do 313 days of work on let us say the 1st of June 1921, and on the same date in the following year you find that she had not completed the required number of tasks. What would you do?

A.—The names are put up before me with the number of completed tasks. I go into the matter and judge on the merits of the case.

I do not recover the advance; it is a bonus. I do not give 3-year agreements. New coolies are usually given agreements during the first year they are on the garden. I put them on the weekly payment list when they arrive on the garden and transfer them to the monthly payment list as soon as they show signs that they are fit and willing to do the usual garden tasks.

I adopted the unit system as regards the men doing *ticca*. I thought it would encourage them to do more work and earn more pay. I was always in favour of the unit system as over and above the tasks they are given an opportunity of earning, say, 5 or 6 annas if they like.

I cannot say what was the cost per maund of green leaf in 1921.

I consider that the wages which a tea-garden coolie gets are sufficient to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with a possibility of saving a little.

Golaghat.

I think it is neither possible nor desirable either from the coolie's or the garden's point of view to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages. If I gave in detail my reasons for this opinion it would take a volume, but in brief, the chief factor against the suggestion is that the bulk of the coolies must be "cared for." I cannot think how else to put it. If the coolies were given "consolidated" pay and left to look after themselves in respect of food supplies, medical attendance, housing, etc., I am certain the result would be disastrous for the coolies.

Q.—When getting coolies up from the recruiting districts in filling up the form do you ask for medical inspection?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Were those coolies with whom you were dissatisfied in 1919 medically examined before they came up?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that in spite of that inspection you thought that some people were sent up who were not physically fit to undertake work on a tea estate?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that seems to call for some reform in the method of examining coolies before they leave the recruiting districts?

A.—Under the conditions existing then it would have been necessary.

Q.—Of course you recognise that there is a certain responsibility on the gardens who send down their sardars to select coolies. In sending down these sardars, do you specially instruct them to see that no coolies who were physically unfit are brought up?

A.—No, because most sardars recruit their relations and friends and it would probably mean that an old mother or an invalid father would have to be left behind which of course is not practicable. If they bring up their relations as they usually do, I would not say that they should leave behind a delicate brother or an aged parent.

We got up about 1,000 coolies in 1919. A great many died through the influenza epidemic and also before they reached the garden.

Coolies have about 100 acres of rice land inside the grant. Land which is suitable for rice cultivation is not suitable for tea plantation.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—Why did the Medical Officer in 1919 recommend the feeding of children and weakly coolies at garden cost?

A.—Because they were not being properly looked after by the parents.

Q.—Were they under-fed by the parents?

A.—They were neglected and therefore under-fed.

Q.—It is because parents cannot afford to feed them?

A.—In the majority of cases—No.

Q.—What happens when it rains on a particular day and the coolie cannot finish his task? Is he given a *hazira* for the whole day or is he required to complete the task the following day?

A.—In my experience there has been seldom a day on which a coolie could not complete his daily task except early in the rains. During the heavy rains of course the coolie is allowed to go to his house on a rainy day and the *hazira* is written up. The coolie would not be required to complete his task the next day.

Q.—If it rains steadily for 8 hours and a coolie gets completely wet and is unable to do any work within one hour of the rain commencing, would he be given a *hazira* for the whole day?

A.—If it is absolutely on account of climatic conditions, he would receive the *hazira*.

Q.—How often does it happen in the year?

A.—Four or five times.

90 per cent. of the coolies are under agreement. If the agreements were not given, yet they would stay on. The agreement is not a binding force on them.

Q.—Would it matter if the agreement system was abolished?

A.—Yes, because the coolies would miss the lump sum which they receive as bonus money. Most of the coolies are improvident and cannot save, but if they receive a lump sum, they would be able to save something.

Golaghat. Q.—It is immaterial from the coolie's point of view whether the agreement is taken or not inasmuch as he gets the advance?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Therefore the execution of the agreement is unnecessary?

A.—No.

Q.—Is it from the management's point of view that it is necessary?

A.—Yes, for the benefit of the coolie. I must say that I do not think for a moment that the agreement keeps the coolie on the estate, but I say that the lump sum which the coolie receives is beneficial to him. Of course the agreement is required from my point of view. I am not prepared to answer from the coolie's point of view.

We recruited in 1919 because there was a project for extension of the tea cultivation. We considered it advisable to get as many coolies as possible in that year.

Coolies are never called up to take agreements; they come up voluntarily.

Q.—Do they come to sign the agreement or to take the money?

A.—To take the money.

Q.—I suppose if you don't give the coolies this agreement bonus, they would resort to the money-lender or *kaya*.

A.—Yes, if they were in need of money, but I do not think it would be necessary.

Q.—You simply say to them "You work for a year and we give you so much." You do not give the money out of charity?

A.—No, we give the money not out of charity, but because they agree to work on the garden.

President:—Q.—I suppose in 1919 the policy was to extend tea cultivation during the boom when the slump was not foreseen?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Was it the Directors who got up this large labour force?

A.—It was arranged before I took over charge. It resulted in a very unsatisfactory class being got up and a heavy mortality.

Mr. Withers:—Q.—The agreement bonus which is given to new coolies is the same in the case of the old coolies I take it?

A.—Yes.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—Would you think it fair to say that the arrangement whereby you give an advance to a coolie in exchange for an undertaking by him to serve the garden for a year, was one that is beneficial?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You are prepared to pay something more to any coolie who promises to do a year's work for you. If a coolie is not prepared to do that you do not give him the bonus of Rs. 12 or Rs. 10?

A.—No.

Q.—But it is advantageous from your point of view to be assured of the work of the coolie for, say, 313 days as it gives a certain assurance of stability and continuity?

A.—Yes.

Q.—It is not an unusual thing in agricultural operations to have undertakings of that kind by workers?

A.—No.

President:—Q.—Were 3-year agreements under Act XIII ever taken on your garden?

A.—Never.

No. 127. Mr. C. INGRAM, Manager, Rungajaun Division, Rungajaun Tea Company, Limited:—

My total male population on Rungajaun division is 1,187 and the working strength 797. The difference consists of very old men, most of them retired, and also some young men who have not been working on the garden. Whenever these people

work, they are put on *ticca*, and their earnings are not included in the *hazira* book. As Golaghat, a matter of fact they are paid separately in cash. Very few of these people do work; last year none of them did any work.

We do not employ outside labour as a rule, except for a little building work in the cold weather. Practically all the work is done by the garden labour.

In 1918-19 I spent Rs. 68,483 on recruiting. The class of coolie recruited in that year was not up to the usual standard; I should say the coolies were very much famine-stricken. We recruited 229 coolies in 1918-19 and many of these people are still on the garden.

President:—Q.—What do you estimate as the annual wastage of the labour force due to various causes including absconders, people going into the *bustees*, deaths, etc.?

A.—I think anything approaching 10% and occasionally more in unhealthy years.

First class labour is more difficult to get owing to greater demand for good labour and the poorer class of coolie has got to be employed, the result being that we do not get the same amount of work done by such coolies.

Q.—Do you think that if the rate of pay was raised, you would get a better class of coolie?

A.—I do not for a moment think so.

Q.—Do you think the attractions are sufficient to obtain a good class of coolie?

A.—Yes. I don't think that would have any effect on recruiting.

Sardars get Rs. 2 to Rs. 3 fixed pay; then they draw commission on the total earnings of the coolies at 2 pice per rupee. They make up to Rs. 8 and Rs. 10 in the cold weather and over in the plucking season.

Q.—Is it ever necessary to make up the pay to Rs. 8 because they do not draw enough commission on the work?

A.—Yes, when a sardar has only a small lot of coolies to supervise.

Very little *ticca* is done in the cold weather. In my experience I have never found the coolies very keen on the unit system. We still work partly on the unit. This cold weather I have given increased *haziras* on the unit, but it practically means a reduced task.

I increased the pay of the coolies last year by 8 annas and this year by about nearly a rupee working partly on the unit system.

The men are drawing Rs. 7-5 a month and the women up to Rs. 6-8. The daily *hazira* rate is Re. 0-4-6 to Re. 0-3-6 for men, Re. 0-3-0 to Re. 0-3-6 for women and Re. 0-3-0 to Re. 0-2-6 for children. The rise in pay since 1913 is one rupee a month plus extra *ticca* work done on the unit system. We have had the unit system for many years, off and on.

The task for plucking leaf is 4 to 6 seers and full *hazira* is paid at the beginning and end of the season. I reduced the task for fine plucking 2 seers last year. The *ticca* rate for plucking is 2 pice a seer. It is the general rate in this district.

I give contracts under Act XIII and an advance of Rs. 12 to men and Rs. 8 to women which is not recovered. We give new coolies a bonus of Rs. 6 to Rs. 7 simply to afford a start before they draw their pay. They get the agreement later. Up to the year 1920 we gave agreements for 930 days, and new coolies were put under agreement for that period. They were given the bonus, but actually it did not constitute an agreement. From about the end of 1920 we discontinued the practice of giving agreements for 930 days owing to the change in the Act. I certainly consider that my coolies did not like it. They preferred to get Rs. 20 or Rs. 30 in a lump sum. My former rate for deep hoeing was Rs. 5 an acre; now it works out to Rs. 6 to Rs. 7 for the current year. The estimate last year was Rs. 5-4 and the actual cost Rs. 5-12-9. The estimated plucking cost was Rs. 4 a maund of tea, and the actual cost Rs. 4-13, and this year the estimate is Rs. 5.

There are more absconders in the Woka division than in the Rungajaun division, and the reason for that is a poorer class of labour, and the coolies are not so well settled. But although they are a poorer class, they are capable of earning a decent living wage, being physically fit. They abscond principally through private reasons; this is more often the case with the Sambalpur people. About 35 coolies absconded from the Woka division last year. In 1919 the Woka division garden was put on the black list owing to famine-stricken coolies having been brought up in 1918-19.

Golaghat.

Q.—Would it not have paid you to repatriate a good many?

A.—That is very difficult to say, probably half the family were first class workers and the other half or a small proportion sickly people. It would have meant losing the good workers also. We try to do our very best for these weak sickly people and look after them in the hope that they may become fit once again.

The fixed daily task for deeping hoeing is 12 *nals* for which a man gets 4 annas.

We have the unit system; a daily task is given which gives *haziras* of four and a half annas for men and three and a half annas for women. We expect every man practically to do 12 *nals*; with the reduced task and unit system he can earn more.

I consider Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 for men and women a decent living wage, assuming that *dhan* was selling at about Rs. 3 a maund.

It is hardly possible and not desirable either from the point of view of the coolie or the garden to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages but for the general information of the public I estimate concessions given to coolies, e.g., free housing, medical attendance, clothing, garden land, free grazing, would be equivalent to Rs. 3 a month; this does not take into account loss on rice.

We sold about 3,000 maunds of paddy last year. Act XIII is used simply because it acts as a moral binding on the coolie.

Sardars get a commission of Rs. 10 per head on recruiting.

My coolies own a large number of cattle and buffaloes for ploughing their rice land.

My garden is an old settled garden with a large area of rice land.

No. 128.—Mr. R. J. P. GILMORE, *Manager, Dooria Tea Company* :—

I have been 22 years in Tea and at Dooria since the beginning of 1916. Before that I was in the Bishnath district.

I work on the unit system. I first adopted and started the "unit system" on my garden—Borpukhuri—in the Bishnath district. Coolies were paid in cash weekly.

The unit system was an adaptation from the token or ticket system which was in vogue on some of the gardens in that district.

I was permitted by the Agents to adopt the unit system in preference to the token system.

The unit was one anna.

We give agreements for 626 days. The bonus is for men—Rs. 12 a year, and for women and big boys and girls—Rs. 6. These bonuses are not recovered.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—In your agreement papers on the printed form, the monthly wage is shown as Rs. 5 for a man and Rs. 4 for a woman, although the garden works on the unit system. I think you told me that this was simply a survival of the previous practice?

A.—That is so.

Q.—In the last two years you have given no agreements for 3 years and the reason was that the garden was not in a financial position to pay such a large bonus. I would like to ask whether you intend, when the garden is better off, to continue or resume the 3-year agreements?

A.—That would depend on the financial position of the garden. Of course we would give it *only* if the coolies wish it, and if the garden itself is in a financial position.

Q.—When a coolie takes an agreement for 3 years, is he under the impression that he has got to remain on the garden and work on it for 3 years?

A.—Yes.

In 1918-19 I recruited a good many coolies who were of a most unsatisfactory type. They were of poor physique, and in many cases, it took about a year to nurse them up to a healthy standard. I have been particularly unfortunate in having had a good deal of *kala-azar* on my garden and for three years Government stopped recruiting for the Dooria division. The result is that in some ways now I have lost touch with the recruiting districts.

Q.—I looked at one of your sardars' certificates and found the entry 'nil' Golaghat. against the item about medical inspection?

A.—I can give you the reason for that. Under the sardari system of recruiting new coolies are generally brought up in families and it may so happen that if a family comes into the *depôt*, and if one or two members of that family are not medically fit, it must necessarily mean keeping back the whole family as these coolies never like to separate themselves from the family group. We have known of cases where the whole family has been held up simply because of one member of that family being physically unfit, while the remaining members of the family are quite fit. It is on account of this difficulty that we do not insist on medical inspection.

We give new coolies 4 annas and 3 annas daily to men and women respectively until they become acclimatised and are able to do the full task. This is in addition to their food which is given free twice a day.

Q.—Can you give us some idea of your losses on account of *kala-azar*?

A.—The hypothecated losses on account of *kala-azar* are between £40,000 and £50,000 sterling or in other words, £40 to £50 per acre. About 270 coolies died from *kala-azar* between the years 1916 and 1921 (December). Roughly speaking, there have been 500 cases of *kala-azar*, of whom 270 died. At the present moment there are 7 cases.

Q.—Now you are more or less clear of it?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What *haziras* do you pay *kala-azar* people?

A.—They are paid full *haziras*—men 4 annas a day, women 3 annas a day. On the day of treatment, they get double *hazira*. Over and above that, they are fed free.

Q.—You have had to burn down 371 double houses?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What do you pay your doctor babu for looking after your *kala-azar* cases?

A.—Rs. 100 a month and allowances.

Before the unit system came into force, the wages were Rs. 5 and Rs. 4 for men and women, respectively. I consider the unit system an undoubted success, both from my point of view as well as from the point of view of the coolie. From the coolie point of view I certainly think he gets better pay and better concessions such as paddy land. From our point of view, we get more work and we pay for it. We give very little rice or paddy.

We feed the children of the whole labour force gratis. The reason for so doing is that we believe that recruiting will become more and more difficult and it will pay us to feed up the younger generation.

There is a much bigger demand in India for labour in industries other than tea, and the financial position of tea is such that tea cannot afford to pay the higher rates of pay offered by other industries.

The same stamp of labour is not now available, as other industries being in a position to pay much higher rates of pay, can command the best class of labour, and tea has more or less to take the sweepings.

Q.—Would you say that the standard of living among the coolies has gone up?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that a coolie is as well clothed nowadays as before the war?

A.—No.

In deep hoeing, with a task of 3 *nals* per anna, it would take an average coolie on average conditions of soil, about 4 to 5 hours to do a *hazira* task. Of course I expect coolies to do first class work and I am prepared to pay for it. The tasks are adjusted accordingly.

About 48 per cent. of the adult coolies have got land, and about 172 acres in the garden grant are held by them. I have had very little trouble in getting my coolies to go into hospital as indoor patients. In-patients are paid and fed during the time they are in hospital. We encourage this simply with a view to accelerating the coolie's recovery by inducing him to go into hospital and place himself under treatment. It certainly pays us to do so, as otherwise if they do not go into hospital, it may probably take them a fortnight or a month to recoup and this must certainly mean a loss to us in the long run. We also pay a coolie man's wife a sustenance allowance for looking after him in hospital. My Directors have sympathised with me in

Golaghat. connection with this *kala-azar* scourge, and have left me with a free hand and the result is that I am practically free from *kala-azar*. We have a good deal of anæmia at Buthlon, but we are taking steps to eradicate it by systematic treatment. We have latrines attached to all the hospitals. *Kala-azar* first started in the *bustees* long before 1916 and was only diagnosed in 1916. As a matter of fact *kala-azar* has been noticeable since 1913.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—You say *kala-azar* has been noticeable since 1913. Has anything been done to treat cases in the *bustees*?

A.—We have treated and cured many *bustee* cases free of charge purely from a humanitarian point of view. We had a small hospital for this purpose, but at the present moment, Government have a dispensary within about 4 miles of the garden. *Kala-azar* is very bad in the surrounding *bustees*.

Q.—Is there any indication as to how it got into your garden? Was it brought in from the surrounding country?

A.—I cannot say definitely. It was mostly epidemic in the old coolie lines.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I consider that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

President :—Q.—Contracts for one year under Act VI had to be verified by the Inspector of Labourers when he visited the estate and contracts for 3 years or more had to be executed in the presence of the Magistrate or Inspector of Labourers. What was the idea, when it was decided to do away with local contracts entirely?

A.—I have had very little Act VI labour to work and in consequence know very little of the Act and I do not consider that I am in a position to express an opinion on this point.

Q.—Do you think it was to facilitate recruitment?

A.—I could not say.

Q.—After the local contracts under the Act were disallowed, do you think it was a breach of faith to put coolies under contract for 939 days under Act XIII of 1859 without any of the restrictions imposed under Act VI?

A.—I do not consider it a breach of faith to put coolies under contract for 939 days under Act XIII.

It is entirely optional with a coolie as to whether he will take an agreement or not, either for 313 or 939 days,—the bulk of my coolies more or less demand 939 days and I have had very considerable trouble due to the financial position of the garden in reducing the length of agreement.

Q.—The practice of putting coolies under these long terms of agreement has persisted up to date?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think the coolie is in a worse position than he was under Act VI when the contracts had to be verified by the Magistrate?

A.—I cannot say as I have had no experience of Act VI.

Q.—How long have you been in Tea?

A.—Twenty-two years. I mean to say I have not had any very large experience of Act VI. I have always worked under Act XIII.

Q.—Why did you prefer Act XIII when Act VI was in force?

A.—I had to conform to the views of my Agents.

New coolies are not put under agreement until they have become acclimatised, that is to say, not before 2 or 3 years.

Q.—Do you think it is right to put coolies under long-term agreements on unhealthy gardens?

A.—In our case I am sure that had we stopped giving agreements to our coolies during the time of the epidemic of *kala-azar* we should have lost a large number of families by absconders and incidentally broadcasted *kala-azar* throughout the province. Financially it might have paid the Company to thus have lost many of its *kala-azar* families, but any financial saving in this direction would have been most strongly condemned by the Directors and management of the Company.

It is optional to the coolie to take the agreement. We put no pressure on him.

We give no commission to sardars.

Q.—How do you calculate the *khutia* days?

A.—They are deducted sometimes, but supposing a man has a few days more to work off his agreement and wants to be put under a fresh agreement, we do not then cut for *khutias*. We do not put minor children under agreement. We give big boys and girls a bonus, and after a year or two they are at liberty to take adult agreements.

No. 129.—MR. A. LOCKET, Manager, Borsapori Tea Estate, Jorhat Tea Company :—

I have been 23 years in Tea. I have been with the Jorhat Company since December 1921. I have been on the Borsapori garden 8 years now. The garden has only recently been taken over by the Jorhat Company.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—In 1913 the wages were Rs. 5 and Rs. 4 and the daily wage in 1921 was 4 annas for a man and 3½ annas for a woman. It still remains at that figure. Do you think that is enough?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How do you enter up the *hazira* book?

A.—We enter up 1 for 4 annas and alongside it the amount of *ticca* in annas. We are gradually introducing the unit system. For some time we entered "4," "4," "4," but we have now abandoned that practice. As we are gradually going into the unit system I am going to write up whatever the coolie does for the day. The present system of 4 and 3½ annas is based on a daily wage being calculated on the number of working days per month. We pay outside labour 4 annas both to men as well as women and 2 pice a seer for leaf all through the year. We sell paddy, the present rate of which is Rs. 3 a maund. We have sold paddy up to Rs. 3-8 a maund; we never went beyond that figure.

The average coolie would certainly attempt to do less work for the higher pay under an increased rate except of course in the case of a first-class coolie. We introduced the unit system with the object of trying to get the average coolie to earn more throughout the year. Under the present *hazira* and *ticca* system the coolie does a very small amount of *ticca* during the cold season.

Q.—Does the unit system mean higher pay?

A.—Yes; in adjusting the rates it does come to a little more, that is to say, for 8 annas they work a little less. It is just a little bit to the coolie's advantage.

The estimate for plucking in 1922 works out to about Rs. 4-4 a maund of *pucca* tea. On our gardens it comes to 3½ to 3¾ maunds of leaf to one maund of tea. The plucking estimate for a maund of green leaf would probably come to about Re. 1-3-6. The actual cost per maund of green leaf in 1921 was very nearly Re. 1-3. This is speaking from memory. The estimate for light hoeing in 1922 is Rs. 2-8 to Rs. 2-12 per acre.

Q.—How does that compare with the actual for 1921?

A.—I have not got those figures by me. On one division it was Rs. 2-12 and in another it was Rs. 3. Under the unit system light hoeing will cost us a little more, but that will be a negligible amount. Sardars will be paid a commission under this system. I used to pay commission on the old system.

We have about 600 *bighas* of land cultivated by about 500 coolies inside the grant.

We generally give agreements for one year and occasionally for two years only to old coolies when they desire it. We pay a bonus of Rs. 12 for a man and Rs. 6 a woman. We have no 3-year agreements.

Q.—Do you put children under agreement?

A.—I give them a bonus.

Q.—It is written down in the book?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You give old settled coolies two-year agreements. What does a coolie understand by that? Does he understand that he is supposed to remain on the garden and work for 626 days?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Supposing the Act was abolished would you still give the bonus?

A.—Yes, I would. As a matter of fact it would not alter conditions at all in our case if agreements were abolished.

Golaghat.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I consider that, provided he works regularly, his wages are enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

I consider Rs. 6 a decent living wage for a man and Rs. 5 for a woman, under the conditions of the garden. This is, of course, in the case of a man working together with his wife and one child. In the case of a single man I think he would require other concessions to keep him in comfort, such as rice in larger amount from the garden. He would be paid weekly. He is specially looked after by being put into the hotel in case he does not look after himself. In this case he is fed at much greater expense to the garden.

I do not consider that the average coolie is as well clothed to-day as he was before the war.

It is perhaps possible to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages, but I certainly do not think it desirable to do so.

Khan Sahib :—Q.—How many people are fed at your hotel every day?

A.—The number varies very much according to the time of the year. At the present time I have about 45 orphan children and about 40 adults, and I have about 280 small (non-working) children.

Q.—Why are these people fed?

A.—Because they are coolies who for one reason or another are unable to support themselves and to keep themselves in comfort. In many cases coolies are unable to make adequate provision for themselves without being assisted because their knowledge of the local conditions in the bazaars is limited. Many of them require medical supervision and are therefore put into the hotels to be medically supervised daily. Many of them require special concessions in the way of light work so as to be able to do the full *hazira*. Many are paid for no work at all, and others are paid full for half work only.

The labour force is 1,623—men, women and children.

Mr. Withers :—Q.—Do you prefer the unit system or the monthly wage system?

A.—My experience of the unit system is limited, but from what I see of it, I must say that I prefer the unit system.

President :—Q.—And why?

A.—For one thing a larger proportion of coolies can be easily induced to earn more money; for another it would assist the garden to get more work done, and incidentally assist coolies in obtaining higher remuneration in a month.

My experience is that the average coolie would certainly attempt to do less work if he is given higher pay under an increased rate.

Q.—But although he gets more pay under the unit system, he does not do less work?

A.—I distinguish between monthly rate of pay for given tasks, and total monthly earnings at the same rate of tasks. The unit system is found to increase the latter in keeping with individual coolies' capabilities.

Q.—Do you think the advantage of the unit system consists in that?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that there is no use raising the monthly wage because you consider the coolie would do less work?

A.—Yes. It is to our advantage to get extra work done even though we may be required to pay slightly more for it.

Q.—What inducements are held out to coolies in the recruiting districts? Are coolies told what rate of pay they would receive, and are the advantages of the unit system explained to them?

A.—The particular system obtaining on the garden is written on the recruiter's question sheet and sent out to him.

Q.—Do you think the average coolie in the recruiting district would understand?

A.—But the sardar does, I think, explain everything to the coolies; he is carefully instructed to do so.

Q.—Is it the allurements offered to recruits in the way of high pay and rice land, etc., that brings up the coolies to Assam, or is it because coolies are in an utter state of starvation that they come to Assam?

A.—All the coolies who come up to Assam do not come up through starvation.

We recruited about 420 coolies in 1918-19. They were not unsatisfactory as a class, but I must say they were not in a good condition. We still have a good many of them left on the garden. We suffered many losses during the first year of their recruitment. They belonged to a most undesirable caste from the Bankura district. We recruited these coolies because we were opening out a new garden in those days and we wanted more labour.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—In spite of your having recruited in 1918-19, the labour force which in 1916-17 comprised 1,740 coolies has now come down to 1,632. What is the reason for that?

A.—We have a very large number of coolies who have moved out to the *bustees*. They were gradually taken off the books. There has been a considerable exodus of coolies from this part of the district for many years and that accounts for the decrease in our labour force.

Q.—What do you reckon the annual percentage of wastage from various causes?

A.—About $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., but when we had pneumonia and influenza, it went up to $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

Q.—Have you had to be contented with a lower standard of work?

A.—In certain cases that has been the case.

No. 130.—*Mr. G. BRADDOCK, Superintendent, Brahmaputra Tea Company, Negheriting* :—

I have been 31 years in Tea and all the time with the Brahmaputra Tea Company.

My daily rates of wages are 4 annas and 3 annas to men and women respectively. In 1913 they were 3 annas to men and $2\frac{1}{2}$ annas to women. The rates were raised to 4 annas, in the case of men in 1920, and 3 annas in the case of women in 1921.

I have been supplying paddy at Rs. 2 a maund ever since I have been with the Company. I have always supplied paddy at that rate. Every coolie takes paddy. Some coolies take and sell it at higher rates as they recognise that as a part of their wages.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Is that the reason why the wages look rather low?

A.—The cash rates might be rather low, but if you take into consideration the low price of paddy, it easily makes up for it. Two years ago I offered to give coolies Rs. 2 a month as an equivalent, but they refused it.

Q.—I suppose they have become accustomed to it and did not like the change?

A.—That is so.

The amount of paddy which the coolies receive every month is $1\frac{1}{4}$ maunds for a man, one maund for a woman, and a child receives it in proportion according to age. Paddy taken is not paid for in cash; it is cut out of their pay at the end of the month.

I consider Rs. 6 for a man and Rs. 5 for a woman a decent living monthly wage, provided paddy does not rise above Rs. 4 a maund.

The tasks for hoeing have not actually been altered. We are really not very particular about the task, as we have a huge labour force. My labour force is 3,167 men, 3,303 women, and 1,567 children; in all 8,037 souls and the acreage is 4,829. Until last year the average yield per acre was about 10 maunds. Now it is 5 maunds. The task for light hoeing is 10 *nals* for an anna. Few do more than 4 annas work. I have hundreds of people who are cultivating on their own, and in July and August the leave list is simply enormous. The average soil is moderate in three divisions and light in the fourth. The usual rate for deep hoeing at present is 3 *nals* for one anna or 12 *nals* for a *hazira*. We get a moderate hoe, and having a large labour force, we improve it by trenching later. The average coolie would take about 3 hours to do a task of deep hoeing. We are not importing coolies at present, but we hope to recruit again. There are 4,600 *bighas* of garden land cultivated by the coolies. It is quite a common practice for an Assamese to hand land over to the

Golaghat. coolie who cultivates it and receives half a share in the yield. We give half pay for 3 months to pregnant women.

				Rs.
In 1917 the loss on paddy was	...	...	...	42,000
In 1918 ditto	...	...	...	22,000
In 1919 ditto	...	...	...	64,000
In 1920 ditto	...	...	...	1,40,000
In 1921 ditto	...	...	...	1,60,000

On the Brahmaputra Tea Company's gardens the agreement between the coolie and myself is mutual. I give him a bonus of Rs. 30 for three years. This is only for men. On the other three Divisions the women get agreements.

Under the mutual agreement, if a coolie does not wish to serve his full term, he has got to return me the bonus for that part of the term. I introduced this mutual agreement, and at first wanted to bring it into line with the agreement which is ordinarily entered into by Assistants just out from Home. They are put under three years' agreement and if they break that contract, they are penalised for it. The Government of course would not hear of it. It is now a civil contract simply between the coolie and myself.

President :—*Q.*—Would you enforce it in the Civil Court ?

A.—I would not go to Court.

Mr. Dawson :—*Q.*—Do you have many absconders ?

A.—There may perhaps be about 12 absconders in a year, and these are generally cases of boys running away with girls.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie I certainly think that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities. As a matter of fact I have scores and scores of coolies on my gardens with Rs. 500. This is particularly the case with the Muhammadan and Kurmi coolies who number about 500 and come mostly from Hazaribagh. The men are excellent, but the women do not want to work much. We got 30 or 40 of this class last year but none this year.

I would be very delighted to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages, but the coolies would not like it.

We feed only sick people. No children are fed.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—*Q.*—You spoke of the high losses incurred on paddy. May I know how that is calculated ? Was it not the case that when your cash wages were low, paddy had to be advanced to the coolies ?

A.—It is looked upon now as a part of the coolie's wage.

Q.—Was the loss due to the fact that you had to advance paddy at a cheap rate to the coolies because you were paying them less wages ?

A.—No, it was due to the policy of keeping the coolies in good health.

Q.—But was the advance of paddy a part of the coolie's wage ?

A.—You may consider it so.

No. 131.—*Mr. A. G. PATTON, I.C.S., Subdivisional Officer* :—

I have been a little over 6 years in the Service. I have been 3 years in Golaghat, except for one cold weather.

President :—*Q.*—I think you have prepared a statement which you may perhaps wish to place before the Committee ?

A.—Yes. This is my statement :—

There have been no serious labour disturbances since I came to this subdivision three years ago. Apart from the recent strikes due to political reasons, I can only recall four occurrences of minor importance which necessitated official intervention on gardens.

Of these the first was at Negheriting immediately after my arrival here ; a number of coolies came into Golaghat with a trivial complaint, and I enquired and found no legitimate grievances at all. The women wanted agreements which they had never had on that garden, and the men wanted an increased bonus. The Superintendent apprehended trouble on pay-day, and police were sent to the garden and no breach of

the peace occurred. Subsequently the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police went down and the leaders were bound down under Section 107, Criminal Procedure Code, and removed to Jorhat Jail ; no further trouble ensued, and the Superintendent believed it was a put up job from outside.

The second occurred at Socklatinga Tea Estate during my absence on special duty, when Mr. Rhodes was in charge of the subdivision. A breach of the peace was only averted by his going out immediately and dispersing the coolies with police, and trying and removing the ring leaders. I learned subsequently that in this case also the grievance was imaginary and was due to the weakness of a former Manager who had advanced money to an ill-behaved lot of coolies from his own pocket, and when they found the new Manager would not repeat his predecessor's mistakes they caused trouble.

The other two incidents immediately followed on the Doom-Dooma riots and one at least was probably an echo of these as one of the ring leaders had recently returned from that locality. One was at Nahorjan and one at Rangamati Tea Estate, the Assistant on the former garden and the Manager on the latter being hit with a stick and the coolies going on strike for a day. I went out to both places, and listened to the coolies, but by the time I arrived work had been resumed and they had nothing to say about pay, which I found satisfactory on both gardens ; that topic had been raised at Nahorjan to the Manager, but the origin of the Rangamati episode was trouble between a compounder and one of the Santali women, in which the Manager, after enquiry, had decided in favour of the compounder.

In only one case was the management of a garden severely censured and that was after an inspection by Mr. Rhodes of a new garden in a very jungly area, Bhukial ; here the sanitary arrangements were so bad and the coolies were allowed to live in such a squalid manner that the death-rate, always high on a new garden, rose to the enormous figure of 40 per cent. By the time the garden was first inspected, however, the Manager at fault had been dismissed, and under the new Manager, the death-rate has come down to normal. The conditions of the coolies have been much improved and new lines erected.

Within the last six weeks I have been called out to strikes at Borkathani, Moheema and Rangajan Tea Estates ; in no case have I found the stories of low pay substantiated by the books, and these strikes, as well as those which have occurred, to my knowledge on North Gorunga, Hautley, Betiani, Khumtai, Borjan, Rungagora, Dholaguri, Morangi and Numaligarh Tea Estates, have obviously been fomented by political agitators, the same demands for Rs. 15 and Rs. 12 being put forward in all cases ; in all cases the coolies have returned to work without securing any concessions and only in the case of Numaligarh did they strike for more than two days.

I have never had any complaints made to me in the course of my inspections of gardens and though I can see the welfare of the coolies is more considered on some gardens than on others, it is impossible to expect uniform conditions everywhere, especially in view of the poor financial conditions of some gardens, and I do not think that the labour force is badly treated on even the worst run garden in this subdivision.

NOWGONG, 8TH MARCH 1922.

Nowgong.

[*Mr. Fox, Dr. Williams, Mr. Das and Srijut Siva Prasad Barua, absent.*]

No. 132.—*Dr. J. DODDS-PRICE, Medical Officer, Consolidated Tea and Lands Company, Limited* :—

Mr. Dawson :—I have been 30 years in this district. I have ten estates under my charge. Generally speaking I would say that the district is healthy as far as the tea-gardens are concerned. Hookworm in this district is negligible now, but when I first came here, it was extremely bad.

Q.—How would you account for its disappearance ?

A.—To begin with, we used to hold regular musters. We used to make lists of those people who were infected and we dosed them with medicine constantly. We were never very successful with latrines, the reason being that we had no money to introduce latrines on a scientific system. We had the ordinary *kutchra* type of latrines. Moreover, in those days the class of coolie was hopeless. They never co-operated. The present-day type of coolie is much better in that respect.

Nowgong. Q.—What do you think of the possibility of latrines in compact lines proving a success?

A.—Unless it is done on a really scientific basis I think it is far better to let things alone.

The majority of the hospitals have bed-pans. There are no latrines. I believe in being very liberal in the grant of confinement leave and the gardens trust me. I give as much as 5 or 6 months' leave. I am however only in favour of giving long leave after birth. The granting of leave for any length of time before birth is to my mind not desirable, as I consider that a pregnant woman, provided she is healthy, is all the better of some work up to the time of her confinement. Of course there may be exceptions when it may be necessary to give one month's leave before birth. But, generally speaking, pregnant women are capable of doing light work until about three or four days before childbirth. The water-supply on the gardens is good. Every garden has its *paniwallas*. There is very little dysentery or bowel trouble on my gardens, and cholera we rarely see. *Kala-azar* is reappearing, but we are fighting it. Formerly the death-rate was 95% from this disease; now it should be 95% recovery. We treat *kala-azar* cases with injections which not only cure but check the transmission of the disease, but unfortunately many of the *bustees* are full of *kala-azar*. When I was Civil Surgeon of Nowgong in the years 1916 to 1920, Government did a lot to eradicate the disease in the *bustees* and they are still continuing to take steps in the matter, but supervision is required.

Q.—When you were Civil Surgeon can you tell me how the health of the *bustee-walas* compared with that of the garden coolies?

A.—That is a difficult question to answer. In some instances the health of the *bustee-walas* was decidedly bad. They suffered much more from influenza than the garden coolies and cholera was often very prevalent among them. Even hookworm was comparatively bad in the *bustees* as proved by my experience as Medical Officer of the Jail.

Q.—What is the rainfall of the district?

A.—It varies tremendously—from an average of 50 inches at Kondoli a year to 100 inches a year at Udmari.

Q.—Do coolies work in the rain during plucking time?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do they often get wet?

A.—Yes, but wetting does not affect the coolies provided the temperature is high. The time they get pneumonia is the cold weather, due very often to exposure when they are drunk.

Q.—Have the coolies got sufficient clothing to meet the effect of being drenched?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How many pieces of cloth would a coolie require for a year's use?

A.—I think three complete changes would be sufficient.

President :—Q.—During the epidemic of *kala-azar* in 1893-94 the people cleared out of their villages I suppose?

A.—Yes.

Q.—So that if the villages become unhealthy the villagers are able to go away and change the site?

A.—Yes, but they ought not be allowed to, for in this way, the disease is disseminated; all affected areas should be notified.

Q.—But on a tea-garden the coolie cannot leave the garden?

A.—That is so, unless he runs away, and many did in the height of the epidemic—1893 to 1900.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Would you say that the average coolie is as well clothed to-day as he was before the war in the way of surplus clothes and changes?

A.—I have not gone into that question. To my mind he appears to be well clothed now.

President :—Q.—During our inspection yesterday we found two cases in one of which a pregnant woman received 8 annas at the end of the month. The woman is supposed to get half pay, but Rs. 2-8-0 was cut on account of rice advances including the rice advances for the month during which she was on pregnant leave. Do you think that is right?

A.—Presumably she got enough to feed herself. On some gardens it is the rule Nowgong. in addition to giving rice to give a minimum of Re. 1 over and above that.

Q.—But where it is less than a rupee, you do not think it is sufficient I take it?

A.—Yes.

No. 133.—Mr. A. CHRYSTALL, *Manager of Amluckie Tea Estate, Amluckie Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been connected with Tea since 1889 and have been all the time in Cachar and Nowgong. I have been at Amluckie since 1899, except for a period of 2 years when I was away in France during the war.

The total population of my two Divisions is 3,024 souls, of whom 256 are infants: of the remainder, 869 are men, 823 women and 1,076 children. Three hundred and sixty men and 364 women are under agreement.

A large proportion of my labour force is housed in *bustee* surroundings; a small proportion in lines.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—That is possible because you have a very large grant?

A.—Yes, consisting of some land suitable for tea and a lot of low-lying land suitable for *dhan khet* cultivation, and I have allotted portions suitable for coolies' settlements. My coolies thus have a fair amount of cultivation. Inside the grant 740 coolies including women hold leases for 2,160 *bighas*, i.e., equal to 102% of the agreement coolies, but all the agreement coolies do not hold land. The total adult male population holding land is 43%. The majority of the agreement coolies, however, have rice land.

Q.—Is your garden a healthy one for labour?

A.—Well, before I went to France I think my garden ranked amongst the healthiest of the Assam gardens.

Q.—I presume a labour force must be healthy to be able to show a big birth-rate of healthy children?

A.—Yes, the birth-rate on my garden ranks amongst the highest of the Assam gardens.

Q.—In your answer to question No. 18, you ask on what figures the Committee bases the enhanced cost of living. Do you mean to say that 1913 may not necessarily represent an average pre-war year?

A.—Undoubtedly not. For instance the present year is favourable for *dhan*, whereas 1920 was not favourable. So that a comparison between 1913 and 1920 for the purposes of this enquiry is not necessarily a fair basis for the industry. Of course I am basing this statement only on the cost of rice.

We work on the unit system. With regard to wages, we had a meeting of this Sub-Committee (rice was then 5 seers per rupee) and made a recommendation that all Managers should, during the cold weather months, when *dhan* and rice were dear, pay coolies an average daily wage of 4 annas 6 pies for men and 4 annas for women for daily tasks. I have been paying my coolies at these rates. But for the past few weeks, rice and *dhan* have become considerably cheaper and I would feel perfectly justified in going back to the former rates. At all events I think the coolies are entitled to the present rates. The task for deep hoeing varies according to the soil. Where the soil is in good tilth the coolie gets a pice a *nal*. On some harder soils where restricted cultivation had been imposed, owing to financial considerations, the coolie had to be given 2½ pice a *nal* to ensure good work and an adequate wage. As regards light hoeing for ordinary soils coolies get one anna for 8 *nals* for the first 32 *nals*, and after that, one anna for every 6 *nals*. The cost per maund of green leaf in 1921 was Re. 1-4. In 1919, 7,655 maunds of tea cost Rs. 25,839 for plucking. In 1921, 5,041 maunds of tea cost Rs. 25,020. In 1919 we plucked leaf for 2,600 maunds more tea for practically the same cost. A maund of tea in 1919 cost Rs. 3-6-3 for plucking; in 1921 it cost Rs. 5. Our agreement bonus is Rs. 10 to a man and Rs. 8 to a woman. In order to protect myself I give them the bonus and write it up in the cash book as an advance. The advance is never recovered from the coolie unless he absconds. Also nearly all the children in the garden get bonuses if they come up and ask for it.

Q.—Then you don't regard these as Act XIII agreements?

A.—No.

Nowgong.

Q.—Are they included in the number of agreements specified?

A.—They are not included in the agreements taken by the adults. The real reason why these little children come up and ask for the agreement advance is because their parents are too lazy to provide them with clothes and the children take the initiative themselves.

Q.—What obligation rests on those children who receive the advance?

A.—No obligation whatever. There is no legal claim on them; they can do as they choose.

Q.—Have you any cases of *kala-azar* on your garden?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What action have you taken with regard to this?

A.—Well, I have implicit confidence in my Medical Officer. I leave the matter entirely in his hands.

Q.—Had you any cases of burning down houses infected by *kala-azar*?

A.—Formerly we used to adopt that plan, but of recent years we have abandoned it. This practice is based on the recommendations of the Medical Officer.

Q.—Do you notice any difference in the health of the coolies living in the *bustees* as compared with the lines?

A.—There is no perceptible difference.

Q.—Do you think your coolies are as well clothed to-day as they were before the war?

A.—I think so.

Q.—In the matter of clothing, what is the tendency of prices just now?

A.—I think the tendency is to decrease.

Q.—Have you any actual figures of the cost of cloth to show whether it is going up or coming down?

A.—No.

Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, I would say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities.

I do not consider it desirable either in the interest of the coolie or of the garden itself, to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

Coolies supplement their earnings by selling the produce of their *dhan khets*, vegetable gardens, etc.

President:—Q.—Did you bring any cases under Act XIII?

A.—Yes; as far as I can recollect I brought 3 cases.

Q.—The Deputy Commissioner's register shows 22?

A.—He may be correct. I may have applied for warrants for 22 coolies.

Q.—But when you apply for a warrant you institute a case don't you?

A.—Taking it in that light, yes.

Q.—In two cases the coolies were sentenced to 3 months' rigorous imprisonment, with the option of returning to finish their agreements.

Was that after they had served their terms of imprisonment?

A.—No, my recollection is that they were told to return to the garden to complete the agreement, and having failed to do so, they were sentenced to imprisonment. Failure to return to the garden occurred in the case of one coolie, who was sentenced to 3 months' imprisonment, whereas the other coolie returned to the garden.

Q.—Is it legal to order a coolie to return to work on a garden after he has served a term of imprisonment under Act XIII?

A.—I do not know: but in this particular case the man expressed a desire to the Magistrate, of returning to the garden and the balance of his sentence was condoned.

It was our practice formerly to give 2-year and 3-year agreements, but we discontinued it on the very day the Act was passed.

Q.—How many persons have been put under agreement this year from the 1st of January 1922?

A.—I have not got the figures with me here.

Children, as I said, are given a bonus of anything between Rs. 3 and Rs. 8 according to the ability of the child to perform a task. Their names are written up in the agreement book.

With regard to the price of *dhan* within the last two months, it has been sold at Rs. 3 a maund. We began the unit system in 1919. It was then based on 4 annas in the case of a man and 3 annas 6 pies in the case of a woman. Some time during the past rains, owing to scarcity and dearth of rice which was then 5 seers per rupee, I thought it advisable to increase my rates to 4 annas and 4 annas 6 pies. Before 1919 the wages were Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 for men and women, respectively. Formerly under Act VI the wages were Rs. 5 and Rs. 4 for men and women, respectively, with the condition that rice had to be supplied at Rs. 3 a maund. We started finer plucking last year. Finer plucking has undoubtedly increased the cost of plucking. All women do not work the whole day during the plucking season. Some work for 7 or 8 hours; others 5 hours only. Generally the women go out to work about 8 to 9-30, some at 10 o'clock in the morning. The forenoon leaf is weighed in on the garden about noon and the afternoon leaf at the factory; women come in at any time from 3 to 4-30 P.M., according to the distance their village is from the factory.

Q.—Supposing a woman came back at 12 o'clock and did not go back, would she get any *hazira* for that day?

A.—Yes, a half *hazira*; but if she plucked a full task by 12 o'clock, she would be paid a full *hazira*. Of course, at present when plucking has just been started there is no fixed task. The woman is supposed to work for the whole day. But if a woman came back after 4 hours' work she would only get a half *hazira*.

In the last 5 years we spent about Rs. 70,000 on recruiting, and I have been satisfied with the results.

I have had no trouble on my garden. I have said in my answer to question No. 15: "I do not believe there was any widespread feeling of unrest prior to this year and I do not think, where coolies were well paid and looked after, any trouble would have manifested itself, but for the work of agitators."

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—Does that not imply that where coolies are not well paid and well looked after, there is a possibility of trouble?

A.—Since writing that I have changed my opinion. I should like to say instead that I have gained information from gardens to the effect that trouble has manifested itself in other districts. At that time my opinion was that with a well-treated labour force there would be little chance of a rising. Later experience shows me that it is possible to have such trouble, but I have not had any personal knowledge of it. In spite of the agitation there has been trouble only on one garden in the Nowgong district.

Q.—In your answer to question No. 17(a) you say: 'The economic conditions were the only grievance'?

A.—Of course, like us all, the coolies felt the pinch, everything having gone up in price.

Q.—But there is a difference between you and the coolies?

A.—Each feels the pinch in his own way.

Q.—You say there has been a certain amount of economic grievance?

A.—I should say that the economic conditions, e.g., in 1921, were certainly not as favourable as they were in some previous years.

As regards plucking, a considerable proportion of the coolies plucked their task by 12 o'clock earning 3 annas 6 pies by that time, that is to say, they actually did 3½ hours' work.

Q.—Supposing you had given the same task in 1921, as in previous years, how many hours would it take a woman to do it?

A.—It is impossible to say; perhaps a third longer or in other words 4½ hours. She would require a much longer time to pluck the same quantity.

Q.—For 25 pounds of actual leaf a woman gets credit for 9 seers or 18 pounds. What is the 7 pounds deducted for?

A.—For factory wastage, loss on manufacture, and other items.

Q.—I will put it in another way. What is the extent of your surplus approximately?

A.—On this rate of plucking, viz., Re. 1-4-0 a maund, there is no surplus.

Nowgong.

Q.—But formerly you used to get a surplus?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Up to what percentage?

A.—I have not got the exact figures here, but we had a surplus.

Q.—Do you think by the system of deductions there is a danger, if it is not carefully watched, that a coolie may be "done"?

A.—There is a possibility of it.

I do not give any rice advances and have never done so all my time in tea.

Q.—Do you think it is a bad system to give rice and cash advances and to deduct all at the end of the month?

A.—Certainly. It may result in impoverishing the coolie and involving him in debt.

No. 134.—Mr. R. J. RAMSAY, *Manager, Jiajuri Tea Estate, Patrakhol a Tea Company, Limited* :—

I have been 23 years in Tea and 14 years at Jiajuri.

The rate of wages on my garden is 4 annas 3 pies for men and 3 annas 6 pies for women. We have been paying our coolies weekly for the last five years although the contract under Act XIII stipulates for a monthly wage which was Rs. 6-8 and Rs. 5 about the end of last year. The rates were raised to Rs. 7 and Rs. 6 about the end of January last to keep in line with the neighbouring gardens.

President :—Q.—How do you calculate the wages for a month like February? Does a coolie get Rs. 7 or Rs. 6 if he or she works 24 days in February?

A.—No.

Q.—And why not? If the amount is actually written in the contract that the coolie would receive so much a month, I do not see why he should not be given the full wage?

A.—It would be awkward as we are paying weekly, and in payment of a reduced rate for the first week of the following month there would no doubt be trouble.

Q.—So that in a short month the coolie does not get his full monthly wage even if he works every day?

A.—No.

Q.—About the provision in the garden budget for the remuneration of labour your written answer says that the amount given in 1919 is Rs. 86,053, and the number of coolies 630, but the actual amount paid to coolies was only Rs. 44,480-7-3. How do you account for the balance?

A.—Strictly speaking the first set of figures was not wholly for the remuneration of labour; they included other items such as establishment, coal, stores transit, and so on.

Q.—Is that the general practice?

A.—Yes, so far as I know.

Q.—So that the answer to that question is rather misleading?

A.—Yes, the whole ought to have been written down as local expenditure.

Q.—You do not give much *ticca* in the cold weather?

A.—I give as much *ticca* as the coolies desire, but the fact of the matter is that they do not want it as they have a fair amount of cultivation. About 20% of the labour force hold Government land. We sell practically no *dhan* to the coolies, but we keep a stock of *dhan* in case it is needed by the coolies. Coolies pay cash for their *dhan*. I have no advances outstanding against coolies on account of the purchase of *dhan*. Coolies are put under agreement for 313 days and given a bonus of Rs. 10 and Rs. 12 which is not recovered. New coolies are never put under agreement when they first come up. We used to give 3-year agreements but the practice has now been discontinued.

Q.—Do you give agreements to children?

A.—Yes, if they belong to a good family they may be given a bonus which is not recoverable.

I do not employ much outside labour although I am not very well off for labour. I have not been recruiting for the last 2 years. I have only this year sent off 30 sardars and I do not know what the results are likely to be.

Nowgong.

Q.—Do you feed any children at the hotel?

A.—Yes, at times when necessary; not always.

I am in favour of retaining Act XIII. For instance it is necessary in the case of a new coolie who may abscond soon after his arrival, especially if he be a single man. Through the Act we might have a little power over him; so also in the case of an old coolie. The retention of the Act is to the interest of the new coolie himself as he would get a bonus perhaps within a month or two on his first arrival, and about 80% to 90% of the coolies have come up voluntarily for the agreement about a month or two after their arrival.

Q.—Do you put children under agreement?

A.—They are not put under agreement, but are required to affix their thumb impression. Of course the bonus is given them because their parents wish it. The amount of the advance to children varies: it may be Rs. 5 or Rs. 6, but it is never less than Rs. 5. The lowest age is 10 years. Agreements are only taken for one year, and the bonus is given only on the condition that they work for 313 days.

The rates of 4 annas for men and 3 annas 3 pies for women have been in force for 5 years and have only during the past 3 or 4 months been raised to 4 annas 3 pies and 3 annas 6 pies.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—In your answer to question No. 20 you say "When necessary measures have been suggested and if not always sanctioned have generally been approved by the Agents." What does the expression 'if not always sanctioned have generally been approved' mean?

A.—It means that they have been thought of favourably on paper only.

Q.—Have you ever asked for anything during the past 5 years with a view to improving the prospects of the coolies?

A.—Not so far as I remember.

Q.—Apparently you have asked for something which has not always been sanctioned though generally approved. Was that for a rise of pay?

A.—I asked for a rise of pay for the Indian establishment. At that time it was not approved owing to the bad state of the industry, but it has been since. The wages of the coolies were raised after previous sanction.

Q.—Would you say that the average coolie is as well clothed now as he was before the war?

A.—Yes: I think he has a sufficient number of changes.

Q.—You say it takes a woman 5 hours on the average to do a plucking task. Have you made any alteration since 1913 in your tasks for deep and light hoeing?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You say 'There has been no alteration, as on account of extra hoeing in of green manures and cultivation during the rains, and also changes in climatic conditions the soil has become more friable all over the garden.' May I take it that you have not altered your task?

A.—If you take light hoeing separately then my answer is 'Yes, I have' because I never do over 30 *nals* now. Before it used to be 35 *nals*. Deep hoeing depends on the weather entirely.

Q.—I suppose there has always been an alteration at different times according to the season?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Would you stick to the statement that there has been no alteration?

A.—Only an alteration as regards light hoeing.

Q.—As regards *ticca* hoeing you say the coolie can earn more than before the war as no limit is now given?

A.—Yes, a limit was imposed up to the year 1919. In the cold weather they are allowed *ticca* hoeing.

No. 135.—Mr. J. C. HIGGINS, C.I.E., I.C.S., *Deputy Commissioner, Nowgong* :—

President :—Q.—How long have you been in Nowgong?

A.—Since May 1920.

Nowgong. Q.—Have you had much trouble in tea-gardens in this district in consequence of the agitation?

A.—No; very little.

Q.—There has been one strike in tea-gardens. Was that connected in any way with the agitation?

A.—Yes.

Q.—In what way?

A.—The agitators had a meeting within a couple of miles of the garden a few days before (it was just after the Chargola exodus) and instigated the coolies to demand 8 annas a day for men and 6 annas a day for women. That was in May 1921.

Q.—Were the agitators from Sylhet?

A.—They were Nowgong agitators.

Q.—How did they know about the Chargola exodus?

A.—Because the leaders read the papers. The day the coolies went on strike was the 30th of May. The meeting took place about 10 days earlier.

Q.—Did they remain on strike long?

A.—About 24 hours, and then went back to work.

Q.—Has there been no other trouble on any other gardens?

A.—Not that I know of. But there has been a good deal of agitation in this district, though probably less in than other districts.

Q.—You were attacked at Jamunamukh?

A.—They threw stones at the train, but I do not know whether they intended to hit me.

Q.—Were many agitators arrested in connection with the Jamunamukh affair?

A.—About 40 or 50; that was quite recently.

Q.—Has there been any serious trouble before?

A.—No. There was a mob of 6,000 people in Nowgong one day in December last, but they were fairly tractable and gave no trouble. They were Assamese.

Q.—I understand you have a written statement. Will you please read it out to the Committee?

WRITTEN STATEMENT.

Unrest on tea-gardens during 1921-22.

There has been only one instance in this district. In May 1921, shortly after the Chargola exodus, 1,200 coolies of the Sagunbari and Kondoli gardens of the Kondoli Division of the Salona Tea Company struck work for one day. The Superintendent of Police and I went straight to the garden with 20 armed police, and the strikers returned to work. The strike was caused by political agitators, who had recently held a meeting and urged the coolies to demand 8 annas and 6 annas per day for men and women respectively. I inspected the gardens shortly after the strike and found that the coolies had no real cause for complaint, and were easily able to carry out tasks sufficient to enable them to earn the above amounts in a day. But the Manager told me that he had only allowed the coolies "doubles" a few days before the strike began, and the fact that their earning capacity was temporarily limited may have had something to do with the strike, though I am not prepared to say definitely that it had. In my opinion, the strike was mainly due to political agitation. The strikers were mainly, if not entirely, Uriya coolies.

Reasons for absence of trouble on Nowgong tea-gardens.

(1) The gardens are favourably situated. They lie along the foot of the Mikir Hills range, and the neighbouring villages consist chiefly of *ex-garden* coolies, Mikirs, Lalungs, Kacharis, etc. These primitive peoples are not particularly interested in politics or non-co-operation.

(2) Managers have taken every precaution to keep agitators out of their gardens, and have taken prompt action against them whenever they appeared.

(3) Coolies are well off and contented. There is plenty of land available for rice cultivation on or near most of the gardens and jungle is everywhere available, for firewood, building materials, *shikar*, etc. Wages may possibly be lower than

in some other districts. But most gardens are not over-stocked with coolies, with the result that the coolie can almost invariably get as much work as he is willing to do, and his earning capacity is not limited.

(4) I have throughout done my best to prevent non-co-operators getting into touch with the coolies. After the Sylhet exodus, I wrote and spoke to the leading agitators in the district, pointing out the disastrous effects to the whole community of such an exodus, and threatening immediate and drastic action in the event of any attempt to tamper with garden labour. Since then, the few attempts that have been made have been promptly dealt with, either by the Managers or by me. Recently the hands of some of the Managers have been strengthened, where necessary, by their appointment as Special Inspectors of Police, with selected men from the garden staff and labour force as special police officers under them. The occasion was the closing of the *hāts*, and the threat of attempts to close garden *hāts*, with the attendant possibility of looting and lawlessness generally.

Mr. McMorran:—Q.—You have sometimes made reports to Government about the conditions of tea-garden labour I take it?

A.—Yes.

Q.—What was the general conclusion as regards the enquiries in the district?

A.—Exactly what I have just said, *viz.*, that the coolie is well off in this district and that he has very little to complain of.

Q.—Is it your experience that the tea-garden coolies have the opportunity of earning enough?

A.—Yes.

Q.—The statements as submitted to Government by you indicated what the capacity for earning was?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And from that you came to the conclusion that in this district the coolies were well off?

A.—Yes.

President:—Q.—Have you made any enquiries when inspecting gardens about the indebtedness of the coolies?

A.—No, not particularly.

Q.—Do you know if any coolies are very much in debt on the estates?

A.—I know that in some estates they are indebted for rice taken, also for advances. The amounts are considerable.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—I think you are aware that the prices of the necessaries of life have increased of late?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And that there is a marked increase in these things as compared with the prices of 1913?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you hold that the wages of the coolies have risen in the same proportion?

A.—No. I have said the same thing in the Government report. At the same time I also said that a coolie could earn more than a living wage.

Q.—Therefore the coolie had cause to complain because his wages had not risen in proportion to the prices of foodstuffs?

A.—I think the whole community has that cause.

Q.—Of course they may have personal grievances on some gardens and not on others. I suppose those whose incomes are higher than the coolies' have less cause to complain of the rise of prices than the coolies themselves?

A.—Possibly.

Q.—When the margin of savings is very small—I am talking of an average man of the middle class?

A.—They have more intelligence and are more easily able to understand.

Q.—All the same they feel the pinch. But these poor people with whom the margin of profit is very small, could not bear it?

A.—I would not say that they could not bear it. The coolie is still able to maintain himself, but there is a field for the agitator to work upon.

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Mr. Dawson:—Q.—This is the register of complaints. In 1920-21 from the 1st of July 1920 to the 30th June 1921 you have had 76 cases and from the 1st of July 1921 up to date you have had 69 cases. I noticed one case here where the Manager of a certain garden in this district got a warrant issued against one who you say was obviously under age. Is that an isolated case, or is that the only case you remember?

A.—No, possibly in 5% or one in 20 cases you would find a boy or girl who was anything between 12 and 18 years. Eighteen is the legal age at which a coolie can enter into an agreement. I have never seen a case as far as I know of a child under 12 being put under contract.

Q.—In this case this boy was obviously under age or he must have been distinctly under 18 and was therefore discharged?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that warrants should not have been issued against such people?

A.—I discharged them because the practice to my mind was illegal. They were incapable of entering into contract being under age.

Q.—Do you give the coolie, as a rule, the alternative of going back to the garden if the case is proved?

A.—No. I usually ask them if they will go back, and if not, I sentence them. If the circumstances seem to indicate that the coolie should be given the alternative, then I give it to him. I give a weakly coolie the alternative of paying back the money. In the case of failure the usual sentence is 3 months.

President:—Q.—Do you think that 3 months' rigorous imprisonment is excessive in the case of coolies recruited locally?

A.—No.

Q.—What was the advance given to those coolies?

A.—I do not know.

Q.—I suppose they got some advance?

A.—Yes, or else they would not have been liable to conviction.

Q.—Do you find many new coolies put under agreement in this district on arrival?

A.—The practice varies in different gardens, but I think a good many are.

Q.—Do you think that most of the new coolies are put under contract?

A.—I do not know. I think in a good number of cases they are, but I am not certain.

Q.—Do new coolies receive a substantial bonus or just Rs. 2 or Rs. 3.

A.—I cannot say.

Q.—You have got to examine the agreement register?

A.—Yes. I am not prepared to speak from memory. I have not inspected gardens for 10 months now.

Q.—Do you think the practice of inspections should be continued?

A.—I think it ought to be continued.

Q.—Do you think once in 2 years is sufficient or do you think it is necessary to inspect every year?

A.—I should say once in two years is sufficient.

Q.—Do you think, if inspection is to be continued, that general instructions ought to be issued to inspecting officers?

A.—I think it would be useful because in some cases inspecting officers do not know what to look for.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—Q.—I could not understand the procedure that is adopted in these cases under Act XIII. When a complaint is made and the accused appears is he given the option of going back to the garden or repaying the advance?

A.—That is left to the discretion of the court.

Q.—Does the court not give the accused the alternative of paying the remainder of the agreement money and going away wherever he likes?

A.—No, not always. The court can do as it thinks fit.

Nowgong.

Q.—Was it given in any of the cases mentioned?

A.—The right was exercised in one case. I cannot say, speaking from memory, in how many cases altogether. I know that the option was offered in more than one case, but there are not many such cases.

Q.—When these cases are put up before the court is the Agreement Register produced in evidence?

A.—Yes. When I try the case I always call for it. The usual practice is to file the agreement with the complaint and then the Agreement Register is produced at the hearing, and, as a rule, corroborated by the evidence of the man who paid the advance.

Q.—I wanted to know this because there have been some statements made in regard to it. The register has got evidential value?

A.—Yes.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—In 5 of those Act XIII cases 3 months' rigorous imprisonment was the sentence passed. The coolies were in jail from July 7th to August 12th. They were then released and ordered to work off 271 days in one case, 279 in another and 313 days in each of the 3 other cases. Would you say that that was legal?

A.—No, I am prepared to admit that it was illegal. The proper procedure should have been to refer the matter to the Local Government to get them released. I took the responsibility of releasing them immediately because it was advantageous to the State, the employer and the coolie. The coolies requested to be released; they said they preferred the garden to the jail. I know of another case in which a man said that the deep hoeing was harder in the jail than it was in the tea-garden and wanted to go back.

No. 136.—*Mr. G. STEWART, Manager, Kellyden Tea Estate, Chabwa Tea Company:—*

I have been in Tea since 1905 and all the time in the Chabwa Tea Company. I have been at Kellyden all the time except for a period of one year.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—In the last 5 years you spent about Rs. 70,000 on recruiting but the net result is a decrease of 76 in your labour force. Could you give any reasons for that?

A.—Take the year of the famine. We got up about 350 or 400 short term coolies; it cost a great deal of money and they all went away involving us in a heavy loss.

Q.—Your labour force is insufficient to run the garden?

A.—Yes, without outside help.

Q.—And you propose to do recruiting?

A.—I am recruiting now.

Q.—What were your wages in 1913?

A.—Rupees 5 and Rs. 6.

Q.—Has that been raised?

A.—Yes, in March 1920 to 4 annas and 3 annas 6 pies a day. It is now a weekly wage.

Q.—Now take a man who used to get Rs. 6 a month, that is to say, working all the working days he would get Rs. 72 a year for his monthly wage. Now under this system of 4 annas a day—the weekly payment system—he gets Rs. 78 a year as against Rs. 72 excluding *ticca*, that is to say, he has had a rise of 8 annas a month?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How long were the wages of Rs. 6 and Rs. 5 in force?

A.—Since about 1908. Before that it was Rs. 4 and Rs. 5.

Q.—When it was Rs. 4 and Rs. 5 do you remember if there were many Act VI coolies on the garden?

A.—There were a great many Act VI coolies then. They got Rs. 5 (women) and Rs. 6 (men) with full pay till they were acclimatised.

Q.—The Act VI coolie in the fourth year of his agreement got Rs. 6 and he also got rice at Rs. 3 a maund. When you gave Rs. 6 in 1908 after the Act was abolished, did he still continue to get rice at Rs. 3 a maund?

A.—No.

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Q.—Would it then be fair to say that to that extent he was not so well off?

A.—I would not say that because he must have been some time on the garden and probably had a little cultivation, and was able to earn more *ticca*.

President :—Q.—But the new coolies were worse off having no cultivation and property?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Would you say that that continued up till 1920 when you raised the wages?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do you think that the coolie felt the rise in the cost of living?

A.—Honestly I cannot say so of my garden. The coolies, as far as I am able to see, are as well dressed as—in fact better than—they were in previous years. Also the standard of health has distinctly improved.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—You say between 1913 and 1920 the cost of living went up about 75%. More *ticca* was earned especially in leaf plucking and hoeing?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You say that a decent living wage for a coolie is Rs. 7 (men), and Rs. 6 (women). You have got a large quantity of land—1,100 *bighas* of land inside the grant cultivated by about 400 coolies. The rent is 2 to 4 annas a *bigha*. For the first two or three years the land is given out rent free?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Have you altered your tasks for light hoeing and deep hoeing since 1913?

A.—If the ground becomes hard it is reduced. It is a matter of the weather in the cold season and the jungle in the rains.

In *ticca* they get the same money for less work but the *hazira* work is about the same.

We are required to write off a fair number of irrecoverable advances. In the last 5 years we have been writing off, taking a fair average, about Rs. 1,000 a year; this is talking from memory. I cannot give the exact sum outstanding against the coolies as advances, but I should say roughly it is about Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 4,000. Of course this represents advances given to buy cattle, clothes or anything like that, but not for rice.

Q.—Was it necessary for them to take those advances to buy clothes because they had not enough money left out of their earnings?

A.—I could not say. Sometimes they might have gone sick and received short pay.

We give very little leave before child-birth, unless the coolie insists on it, but after child-birth the women get from 4 to 6 months, and are at liberty to go and feed in the hospital any time they like. They get Rs. 3 at child-birth and Rs. 2 at the end of the year. While a mother is on 4 months' leave, she has got to come to hospital if she wants to get her food free.

President :—Q.—But suppose for the first few days the woman is not able to go?

A.—In that case she gets this Rs. 3.

Q.—Is that sum given as an advance?

A.—No, it is not recovered.

The highest rate at which I sold rice is Rs. 5 a maund.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—As regards the contract, would you say that it is the fact that the coolie knows that he is liable to be imprisoned that makes him carry out his contract?

A.—I would not say that. A man comes up of his own accord for the agreement and knows that he is taking it for a year, but in the meantime he might have a quarrel with any of his relations and, agreement or no agreement, he would clear away to some other relations or people in the village, but knowing that he can be got back by warrant, he stays on.

Q.—Could you do without the Act?

A.—No.

Q.—Do you think coolies would abscond if you did away with the Act?

A.—I would not say they would abscond, but I am inclined to think that outsiders, like *kayas*, would get hold of them and use them.

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Q.—Have you run many cases under Act XIII?

A.—Last year there were a few cases.

Q.—Do you put new coolies under agreement at once?

A.—Yes, as soon as they come up. We give them an advance of Rs. 4.

Q.—Why do you give them only Rs. 4?

A.—Because we do not know how long they are going to stay, but after six or seven months they get the balance.

In the agreement we enter up Rs. 4 as the first instalment of the advance. We had 5 cases under Act XIII and the sentence passed was 3 months' rigorous imprisonment. The coolies remained in jail for a certain time and they were ordered to go back. Of course they went back of their own accord. Non-co-operators had induced them to go to jail.

Children are put under agreement and given advances ranging from Rs. 6 to Rs. 8. The minimum age is 6 years. We write up their names in the agreement book to keep accounts square, and they are given to understand that they will have to work with us for 313 days. This system has been in force for ages. I know that I have no redress if they abscond. We do not recover agreement advances.

Rice is never charged at more than Rs. 5 per maund. We have sold rice at 10 seers to the rupee and *dhan* 14 seers to the rupee. Of course the coolies take very little *dhan* from me as they buy it in the villages. During the last 5 years I have been giving out blankets and clothes to those who could not afford to buy them. I usually distribute about 200 blankets in a year.

Q.—Am I to understand that there are 200 coolies in your garden who cannot afford to purchase blankets?

A.—No, the blankets are used for the hospital. Of course those who can afford to buy the blankets get them at a reduced rate.

Coolies who do not have any cultivation would find it difficult to pull on unless they do *ticca* work. We have a certain number of coolies who do not and will not work. These have got to be kept going with a subsistence allowance. They are also fed in the hospital.

Talking from memory the losses on rice, *dhan* and cloth in 1919 amounted to something like 8,000 or 9,000 rupees. I cannot give the exact figure. I cannot give the figures for 1920 and 1921 from memory. The strength of my labour force is about 1,100.

All non-working children can get a free meal twice daily if they wish. At present, I feed 80. All indoor patients are fed free of charge.

No. 137.—Mr. W. MELDRUM, Manager, Salolah Division, Salolah Tea Company, Limited :—

I have been 16 years in the Salolah Tea Company. I have been in charge of the Salolah Division from the end of October 1921. We do not work on the unit system. My wages are Rs. 6 and Rs. 7. *Ticci* over and above the *hazira* is given at so many *nals* for hoeing and so many seers for plucking. We pay our coolies monthly.

President :—Q.—What do you think of the unit system?

A.—I prefer it to the other system because the coolie understands how much he has to get and it would also reduce the necessity of advancing rice and *dhan*.

Q.—Does not the unit system require more supervision?

A.—I do not think so; the coolie would assist in that I think.

We pay commission to sardars for *ticca* work in addition to their monthly wage.

We raised our wages last in December 1920. Before, they were Rs. 5 and Rs. 6.

Q.—What was the reason for having raised the wages?

A.—There was a meeting and it was stated that the wages were possibly low and we all decided to raise them. That was on account of the increased cost of living. The wages were Rs. 5 and Rs. 6 from 1901 up to December 1920.

We give Act XIII agreements. To coolies in whom we have confidence and trust we give contracts for more than one year. There is no written contract. Children

Nowgong. are not put under contract. We put new coolies under agreement and give them a bonus of Rs. 10. They receive Rs. 3 at the time of taking the agreement and the rest is deposited and handed out periodically. I have not done much recruiting during the last two years. There was a lot of recruiting done in 1919. We have this year sent out 61 sardars. So far we have not been successful. It is difficult to get coolies. The people say that they are well off in their own country and that they do not find it necessary to leave their country. We pay a commission of Rs. 50 to sardars for good Ranchi people and Rs. 25 for people from Cuttack. A sardar would not get his commission at this rate if he brought up a lot of coolies. Up to date 11 new coolies have been recruited. We are supplying rice just now at Rs. 5 a maund because we bought it at Rs. 6-14-0. We are now buying rice at Rs. 4-10, so that next month we hope to sell it at a reduced rate. Rice advances are deducted from the pay of the coolies at the end of the month. My advances on account of rice are very heavy. We have not introduced the system of paying cash for rice at the time of issue at Salonah. I think about Rs. 18,000 lies outstanding against the coolies on account of rice advances. The task for leaf is 2 pice a seer. The task is 6 seers and we give 2 pice a seer over that in the height of the season. We have not started plucking yet. Just now we are paying *haziras* without a fixed task.

Q.—Is it a time-scale?

A.—Yes, if a woman went out for 3 or 4 hours she would get a half *hazira*.

The rate for deep hoeing is 14 *nals* for a *hazira*. The *ticca* rate used to be one *anna* for 3 *nals*; it has come down now owing to the drought. The task for light hoeing is 30 *nals* at the beginning of the season in the case of men and 20 in the case of women and 20 *nals* for *ticca*. The cost of light hoeing in 1920 before the wages were raised was Rs. 2-12-0. Last year it was estimated at Rs. 3-8-0 per acre and this year Rs. 3-12-0.

We give 3 months' pregnant leave on half pay after child-birth. Advances are deducted from that. We deduct the cost of rice advanced during the month and also sometimes portion of the previous advance. We have no minimum rate. The loss on rice during the last 5 years has been Rs. 60,685 and this figure has been included in my answer to question 26 (b).

There are 1,500 *bighas* of paddy land.

Q.—Why is it necessary to advance so much when you have got such a quantity of paddy land?

A.—The land is badly situated and some of the coolies sell a good deal of rice if they can get a good price for it. I am not certain who buys rice, perhaps the *kaya* does in many cases. I do not think coolies are much indebted to their fellow coolies. I think they are chiefly indebted to the garden.

Q.—You say that there is nothing repugnant to the coolie about agreements any more than it is repugnant to yourself to execute an agreement with the Company. Do you mean to say that the coolie does not object to the agreement any more than you object?

A.—Well, I cannot be sent to jail if I broke the agreement.

I think it would be a great mistake to abolish Act XIII. I am in favour of its retention. It would act as a deterrent in the case of malcontent coolies who would go off from one garden and take an advance on another garden only to leave soon after for other gardens with the intention of doing the same thing.

SHILLONG, 20TH MARCH 1922.

Shillong,

(MR. FOX, MR. WITHERS, MR. DAS, AND SRIJUT SIVA PRASAD BARUA, ABSENT.)

No. 138.—Mr. A. G. CRESSWELL, Manager, Rampur Tea Estate, Limited, Cachar :—

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—How long have you been in Tea?

A.—About 30 years, all the time at Rampore.

Q.—Would you mind giving us your experience of non-co-operation and about coolies leaving your garden?

A.—In my answers to the questionnaire, I have stated :—

"I noticed no unrest until the non-co-operation movement started, since when ignorant coolies have doubtless been subjected to bad advice from those opposed to Government and tea-garden Managers. It has been unfortunate that this garden should be situated so close to Barkhola bazaar, where the non-co-operation movement may be said to have met with exceptionally strong support."

This is in answer to question No. 15. Then in answer to question No. 16, I said "I attribute disturbances on tea-gardens as being practically entirely caused by agitators. My own experience has been as follows :—

I recruited during famine years some 375 Oria Pan Tantie coolies. It is true, unfortunately, there were among them a few men, who had perhaps known somewhat better days, and had seen something of the world say in Rangoon and elsewhere. The agitators, for months, were preaching to these people just outside the garden and in the bazaars. In June, when these coolies went to Barkhola bazaar to get their weekly rice, which they were receiving at about Re. 1-8 per maund below cost price, the agitators succeeded in forcing the rice contractor not to open his godown three times by proclaiming a *hartal*. They then finding the coolies were upset at getting no rice, advised them to strike for 8 annas per day, and if not given it to leave the garden in a body. The coolies left the garden; they were fed by non-co-operators at Barkhola bazaar, and were then housed by members of the 'Khilafat Society.'

As to whether agitators have made capital of any grievances which the coolies might have had, I would quote my answer to question No. 17 in reply to this question I said :—

"Coolies have not generally complained, but they have doubtless felt the effects of increased prices, especially in connection with cloth,—caused by non-co-operators destroying and boycotting imported cloth while the supply of *deshi* cloth was so short as to allow of higher prices being demanded. In my opinion, without prejudice, in view of semi-sedition openly preached, the resolution passed in public congress at Sylhet, continually being advised not to work for the white man, it is indeed strange that coolies have given so little trouble."

Q.—What are your wages at present?

A.—Well, formerly I was paying four-anna *haziras*, but now in order to come into line with the general wish, I have reduced my tasks in order to allow of my coolies receiving 20 to 25 % more than formerly for doing the same task.

Q.—You say your rates are four annas for men, three annas for women and two annas six pice for children. You say the rates have been increased since 1913 by 12 %.

A.—Well, I do not think that that would be the exact figure. I meant to say that it was raised by 'about' that percentage. Formerly we used to pay three and a half annas to men, and for the women the *hazira* used to be calculated at Rs. 5 a month which really did not work out to three annas.

Q.—Up to when was that the case?

A.—I do not remember exactly, but I should say till about 1909 when I altered it to four annas and three annas.

It was my intention from 1st December this year that the coolies should receive 20 to 25 % more than they formerly received, whether it was done by reducing the task or by giving them an extra 20 % for doing the same task. That was my intention. I must also say in fairness, that formerly I had always given my coolies rice at concession rates, and have been rather free with the amount of rice I gave my coolies. Since December the non-co-operators have boycotted me to such an extent that I have been required to pay say Rs. 7 for a maund of rice which would actually be worth Rs. 5 a maund. I discussed the matter with my coolies and they expressed themselves as being perfectly willing and consented to my proposal of stopping the grant of rice in consideration of an extra anna more per day. My position is a little different from others. Having been 30 years on the garden naturally I know everybody very intimately.

Q.—If you will look at your answer to question No. 41. You say "I consider the coolies on this garden are entitled to a small increase in pay for doing the same amount of work, and that with this they will then work about the same number of hours. If, however, the pay be increased beyond, say 20 % they will do less work?"

Shillong. A.—I have since thought 20 to 25 % is reasonable. But I maintain that if their pay be increased by more than 20 to 25% they will do less work.

Q.—You say that the coolies are entitled to a small increase in pay. How long have you been of that opinion?

A.—For some time.

Q.—For about two or three years?

A.—Yes, I may say certainly for two years. In my last report to my Managing Agents, written possibly a year ago, I alluded to the fact that, in my opinion, some small increase in pay was necessary for the coolies.

Q.—Who are your Managing Agents?

A.—Messrs. Kilburn & Co.

Q.—What reply did they give you?

A.—They replied that I had full permission to do anything I considered advisable in such a matter.

Q.—How is it that, if you thought about it two years ago, you are only taking steps now?

A.—I would perhaps correct the expression "two years ago." My report would have been made say in March 1921, i.e., twelve months ago. However, I may say conscientiously even before that we had very dear rice—in fact exceptionally dear—and all the coolies were receiving rice at very big concession rates. The prices of all commodities in my district invariably tend to rise with the price of rice. If rice goes up to Rs. 9 a maund, every other commodity more or less follows suit.

Q.—You say that if the pay is increased beyond, say, 20 % or according to what you have just said—from 20 to 25 %—the coolies will do less work. Have you any particular reason for making that statement? You have not tried to increase it beyond that amount, I presume?

A.—No, but I have found, from experience, that when coolies are easily able to earn more money, and very often when *ticca* is very plentiful, for some little time after that the coolies slack off and apparently show very little desire to earn more than just a nominal sum. In fact they frequently like to go into the *bustees* instead of working on the garden.

Q.—Would you agree that if you increase the wages in proportion to the increased cost of living, the coolie would do the same amount of work?

A.—The tendency of late years on my garden has been that the coolie wishes to have rather more of an easy time than formerly. Therefore I am not prepared to say that if I increase the wages in proportion to the increased cost of living he would either do more or less work. He would do about the same I think—probably rather less. As I say the tendency is the better he is paid the less he wishes actually to work.

Q.—Do you think that the coolie's standard of living has gone up since 1913, or of recent years? Do you think that he is living better now?

A.—The coolies on my garden live pretty well.

Q.—Would you say that the average coolie to-day is as well clothed as he was, say, in 1913, or before the war?

A.—Certainly not to-day. In the first place he cannot obtain cloth.

Q.—Would you put it in another way? Would you say he has not got money to buy cloth at the present price?

A.—Yes, I should say so.

Q.—Your answer to question No. 24 about a decent living wage is:—

"With concessions as at present on this garden, men Rs. 7-8-0 to Rs. 8-8-0; women Rs. 6-8-0 to Rs. 7-0-0. A good deal depends on the *jat* of the coolie."

Would you like to amplify the last sentence, viz., "A good deal depends on the *jat* of the coolie"?

A.—Yes. A good *jungli* coolie can easily earn more money if he wishes to, and requires it. The poor *jat* of coolie—the Norwesters, generally known as 'yellow bellies'—are contented often to half-starve themselves, and they do not seem to require to put either into their stomachs or on their backs, anything like the same amount of money that others do.

Q.—Your answer to question No. 25 about the difference in the cost of living Shillong between 1913 and now is:—

"Actual increase to coolies on this garden was about 55 % as they were helped by concessions. At the present time rice is about Rs. 4-4-0 against Rs. 5-4-0 this time last year."

A.—I am afraid I must alter that. The present price of rice is Rs. 5-0-0 as against Rs. 5-4-0 this time last year.

Q.—You probably wrote this answer in January last when the price of rice was Rs. 4-4-0?

A.—Yes, in December 1921.

Q.—So that rice is tending to rise?

A.—Yes, in my particular district; I am unacquainted with conditions in other districts. In my particular district we have the hills immediately up against the garden. There is no cultivation behind us and very little in front of us. Hence the supply of *dhan* and rice is generally on the short side.

Q.—You must have read in the papers the other day that the restrictions as to the export of rice have been removed. Is it possible that this might raise the prices?

A.—No. I generally have to import Rangoon rice, unless there is a bumper crop.

Q.—Do you think that the increased duty on cotton goods would raise the price of cloth?

A.—Not to any great extent.

Q.—With reference to question No. 45 about leaf-weighing, as a rule, do you have a surplus?

A.—In the early part of the year there is none. Probably about July or August, a surplus is obtained. On wet days there may be none; perhaps it may be a loss. But speaking generally, it is the endeavour, say from July to October, more or less to obtain a small surplus each day.

Q.—At the end of the season what do you find, as a rule?

A.—At the end of the season my accounts balance. It works out to four maunds of green leaf to one maund of tea.

Q.—You have reduced the rate for plucking from 20 to 14 pounds—I suppose you mean in the height of the season?

A.—The answer to that is: In the beginning of the season we pay the coolies on the average of the task. At Rampore we pay coolies on the average of the amount of leaf brought in. For instance, say, the average coolie brings in only 8 pounds, that is taken as the average for the fixed 3 annas or whatever the rate may be. If a woman brings in 9 or 10 pounds she gets over that amount. On some gardens perhaps it is not the custom, but it is the custom with me.

Q.—You say that a woman on the average, would take four to four and a half hours to do a plucking task.

A.—Yes, that is so when leaf is reasonably plentiful.

Q.—Now for plucking without a task, say, at the beginning or perhaps at the end of the season, there is no fixed task, I suppose?

A.—We reduce the task at the end of the season. If we have been giving fourteen pounds, it comes down to ten pounds, and then probably in November when leaf gets scarcer, it comes down another pound or two. Generally speaking, at the end of the year we endeavour to have a task of some sort. At the beginning of the year there is no task.

Q.—And now what happens at the beginning of the year? If a woman goes out, say, at nine o'clock in the morning, when does she come back?

A.—Women go out at 7-30 or 8 and come back at 11 o'clock; then go back at 2 P.M. or 2-30 P.M.; my coolies particularly like to return late in the evening because they are blessed with many children who require to be fed and washed and looked after in the middle of the day; hence the coolies like to work late in the evening and have some leisure in the middle of the day.

Q.—At present at the beginning of the season a woman gets a *hazira*. Supposing she only did one *bela*?

A.—There would be some reason for her doing only one *bela*. At any rate if she did only that, she would certainly be spoken to.

Shillong.

Q.—I suppose she would not get full pay?

A.—If she had some particular duty to do or had worked well in the forenoon and brought in a reasonable amount of leaf, she would get a full *hazira*, but it would not be encouraged.

Q.—Your task for light hoeing, on the average, is 25 to 23 *nals* and you have got no real deep hoeing—you call it a medium hoe?

A.—Yes. I have two or three gardens, on one of which, a *tila* garden, they are doing 12 *nals*; and on another garden they are doing 16 *nals*.

My rates for hoeing have not altered since 1913, but the hoeing is apt to get worse. It takes a coolie 4 to 4½ hours to do the task.

Q.—Your task for *ticca* hoeing is about the same as in 1913?

A.—Yes. My coolies have agreed with me that for the slight increase of pay which I have given them they will work at *ticca* for the same rates as at *hazira* work.

Q.—Formerly your *ticca* was paid at 20 % higher than your task work. What about now?

A.—My coolies are agreeable, in consideration of the increase, say of 25 % to work *ticca* at the same rate, that is to say, instead of having a separate plot where they may go off to make *ticca*, they wish to be allowed to go on working on the place where they are working for task and will receive the same pay from extra work.

Q.—Does that not slightly minimise the effect of giving them this concession?

A.—Yes, it does; they thoroughly understand the position. They are not new coolies.

Q.—You have got 116 acres of paddy land within the garden grant, and many coolies have got land outside the garden. Your rice land is of excellent quality and you charge Rs. 3 a *kear*—that is a large *kear* of 112 *nals* square. About 40% of your male coolies have got land either outside or inside the grant?

A.—Yes.

Q.—In answer to question No. 64 which is: "On an average how much do you write off annually as irrecoverable?", you say: "Rs. 4,286-12-5 in 1920 alone." That is fairly large, considering your labour force?

A.—Well, in 1920 our loss on rice was Rs. 14,000; irrecoverable advances are written off every week or month. There were 375 coolies who were receiving rice at Rs. 4 to Rs. 4-8, when the purchasing price to the garden was at times up to Rs. 9. This amount which was lost last year was written off in connection with the number of coolies that left the garden. They had concessions up to June.

President:—Q.—Do you mean to say that you lost 375 coolies and they did not come back?

A.—Yes. They were advised to leave by the non-co-operators, and I have not yet received one back.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—This money which you wrote off was partly on account of the coolies having left you?

A.—Yes, and partly on account of free gifts to poor coolies. My custom, however, is to start at the beginning of the year with a clean sheet.

Q.—Your experience of indoor patients is that coolies do not go into hospital without considerable pressure from the management and they also sometimes absolutely refuse?

A.—That is my experience.

Q.—About clothing and blankets, you say that you supply clothing free at times but only to those who are deserving but poor?

A.—Yes.

Q.—During the war you have been stocking cloth for sale to the coolies at concession rates?

A.—Yes, in 1917; I may say that it is the wish of the coolies that I should do so. I came in contact with Sir Thomas Smith of the Muir Mills at Cawnpore and he told me that they could cater for my requirements at cheaper rates than I was getting. I have since been in communication with them and have received price lists, but I am sorry to say that I can see no saving in purchasing from them.

Q.—Generally speaking, since 1913 have you sold much clothing to coolies at Shillong concession rates?

A.—I should say just about the average amount that we formerly sold. Formerly we used to give blankets. Of course the blankets this year have fallen in price considerably, but a couple of years ago they were very expensive, and when they were so very expensive, one did not encourage coolies to take as many as one does now.

Q.—When the blankets were expensive, did the average coolie find it rather difficult to pay for them?

A.—Well, I think last cold weather, when we were feeling the effects of the slump in tea, a large number of coolies found it difficult. These were coolies who had little or no connection outside the garden. Those who had any connection outside the garden were, more or less, I should say, encouraged to go out and work in the *bustees*. These coolies, I might say, fended for themselves. But the ordinary coolie who perhaps had been on the garden five or six years, would have felt it.

Q.—Have you sold any *dhotis* and *saris* during the last 7 years?

A.—Yes, but very few, hardly worth mentioning. I must, however, say that we got up bales and bales of *markin* cloth which really amounted to the same thing, and we sold it to the coolie at actual cost price.

Q.—You give as much leave as a pregnant woman likes to take. Sick pay is only given to those who need it. No bonus is given?

A.—No, that is my practice to suit the class of labour I have to deal with.

Q.—In a good many gardens half-pay or full pay is given for 3 months, and in some cases a bonus is given, while in others it is not. Do you believe that that is a sound thing to do?

A.—Personally, I am the Manager of a small garden and I know everybody on it. I see the coolies every day and follow their mode of living; hence I accordingly judge for myself as to their poverty or otherwise. If I think a particular coolie deserves a bonus I give it to him. Then again with regard to pregnant women, we have a parade of them occasionally, and I see to their welfare. As I say mine is a small garden and I am able to do this without any difficulty.

Q.—The loss on rice in 1920 was Rs. 14,000. What was the highest rate at which you sold concession rice to the coolies?

A.—Rupees 5-4 a maund.

Q.—Did it often go beyond Rs. 5?

A.—I should say up to about June, July, there was very little rice taken, but after that rice cost us Rs. 9. We were, that year, expecting to do quite well as far as prices for our tea were concerned, and money was reasonably plentiful, and we were able to give plenty of money for extra work in every way. The old coolies more or less were informed that there was money going and that they should make a point of earning as much as possible. Hence I charged, I think, my old coolies up to Rs. 5-4 a maund and the new coolies that year received it at Rs. 4.

Q.—May I take it that the average rate to old coolies was Rs. 5-4?

A.—No; the average rate would have been rather less than that.

Q.—Your allowance is 10 seers to a man, 5 to 6 seers to a woman, and the allowance to children varies?

A.—On my garden the custom formerly was to supply rice which we purchased from Calcutta. We used to get *Kazla* No. 1 or No. 2, and the coolie would take, say, ten seers which after being sifted and winnowed, would come to about eight seers of clean rice. The custom also was to regulate the amount of rice according to the amount of work done by a coolie. A decent coolie may take 10 seers for 4 weeks and then he may have nothing extra for 2 or 3 days before the month is out. As far as rice is concerned, I believe that the coolie is not like a sporting dog that works better on an empty stomach.

Q.—In 1921 did you give out concession rice?

A.—Not to old coolies.

Q.—Did you receive any instructions from your Agents to make as little loss as possible in concession rice in 1921?

A.—When the non-co-operators broke up the bazaars in Cachar, the Agents in Calcutta—I deal with three Agency houses—particularly drew attention to the fact that owing to these *hartals* it might be that rice would rise up to a very high figure.

Shillong. Hence so many bags of rice were despatched and a very heavy loss was made on this rice. To one garden 500 maunds were consigned. On this garden, which is near Barkhola bazaar, the non-co-operators, with the intention of causing a loss to the garden, succeeded in persuading the coolies that Rangoon rice was not suitable for them, and this consignment of 500 maunds had to be disposed of at considerable loss.

President :—Q.—Do you think that Rangoon rice is unsuitable?

A.—The practice with me is to supply *dal* with Rangoon rice, and as long as that is done, the coolies like it.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—In paying for concession rice, did the coolies pay in cash or was it written up and deducted at the end of the month from the coolies' wages?

A.—It was cut from their pay.

Our payments formerly were monthly. Last year it was fortnightly, and now it is weekly.

Q.—Do you think the system of making the coolie pay cash for his rice is better than that of writing it up and deducting the money at the end of the month?

A.—Formerly my coolies preferred to have it cut from their pay. When I altered the system, there was great grumbling. The rice now is purchased from the shop which I maintain and where it is sold at current prices, *i.e.*, the prices ruling in the district, and just now rice sells at 8 seers for the rupee. My coolies, however, expect that they should get it at 10 seers for the rupee.

Q.—You say your practice is not to put newly recruited coolies under agreement for about two years?

A.—Yes. But sometimes new coolies, when they hear of old coolies taking agreements, wish to do the same, but as they cost Rs. 140 to Rs. 150 now-a-days to recruit, one generally hopes that they will work for another year or more before they demand to be put under agreement. Unfortunately they are very insistent, and one has very often to give way and allow them the money which is really a bonus.

Q.—Supposing Act XIII was repealed, would you continue to give the bonus?

A.—Perhaps. I recently said :—

"If the whole of these advances have not always been actually recovered or even a part of the sum it is immaterial to the point. That is in connection with the present procedure of giving advances. The coolies on almost all gardens demand these advances and carry out their contracts because they know there is some sort of liability. In these days of trouble and serious unrest, matters may be quite different if there is no liability and so, generally, I consider that we should strongly oppose the withdrawal of the Act as we now have it."

That is in connection with the withdrawal of Act XIII.

Q.—I am assuming that the Act is repealed by the Legislative Assembly. What do you think would happen about the bonus and advances?

A.—Well, the coolie will demand the continuing of the bonus no doubt. I do not myself give bonuses to women, but when I stopped it in 1898 I agreed that women directly or indirectly should not be losers.

Q.—How did you arrange that?

A.—It was done by arranging a certain amount of *ticca* work for them; then those who failed to have sufficient for their requirements for the weekly bazaar, would always find facilities provided for obtaining them—and of course at that time, rice concessions came largely into the matter. Personally, if the Act is done away with, I shall endeavour, as far as I am concerned, if I am in the country, to see that my coolie gets the amount which he formerly received in the form of slightly increased pay, rather than by way of a lump sum.

Q.—You do not put women under contract then?

A.—No. Only men are put under agreement and given a bonus of Rs. 10. This is only in the case of Rampore. But on the other gardens, which are not so popular, I give the women agreements.

Q.—What would be your answer to the question whether the remuneration in money payments, together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort?

A.—My answer is 'Yes', but they will leave a very little margin, and in consideration of the enhanced prices and conditions as we find them to-day, I consider that on my garden in order to bring this about I should give a slightly increased remuneration per unit of energy expended.

Q.—And as regards the conversion of these various concessions just mentioned Shillong. into an increase of money wages, what have you to say?

A.—The concessions vary so much on various gardens. My personal opinion is that the granting of these concessions tends to keep me on friendly terms with my coolies. They know that these are concessions.

President :—Q.—Do you mean the rice concession?

A.—Well, I have arranged with many people to do away with the rice concession, but there are so many other concessions. I presume you mean by 'concessions' all concessions such as sick pay, blankets at cheap rates, housing, medical attendance, and everything else.

Q.—These concessions were all compulsory under Act VI?

A.—Yes, a good many of them were.

Q.—Do you think the coolie is worse off than he was under Act VI, especially with regard to his rice concession which was given at Rs. 3?

A.—Well, it depends on what he is being paid. I am of course speaking for myself. Formerly under Act VI when he had his rice at Rs. 3 on many gardens, we did not cut him down to the daily allowance. He was allowed to take 8 seers a week and he got that at the rate of Rs. 3 a maund. But I consider he is no better off with 4-anna *haziras* as against the wage allowed by Act VI, if he has to pay Rs. 5 to Rs. 5-8 for his rice. Personally, I do not think it desirable to convert the various concessions into an increase of money wages.

Q.—Do you think reducing tasks is a satisfactory way of dealing with the wage question?

A.—No.

Q.—The general tendency has been to reduce tasks rather than increase wages?

A.—Lately it has been so. Of course, I am speaking from hearsay only.

Q.—Why are the tasks reduced?

A.—In order to enable the coolie to get more money.

Q.—But would it not be more satisfactory if the coolie's wages were increased instead of his task being decreased?

A.—Personally I consider it so, but it is a matter of opinion.

Q.—The reduction of tasks rather lends itself, does it not, to unfair treatment sometimes?

A.—No, I do not see that it should, but there again it is a matter of opinion.

Q.—That is to say, if the task is really reduced. What is the present indebtedness of the coolies on account of rice advances on your gardens?

A.—Nothing.

Q.—Is that because you have taken to weekly payment?

A.—We start with a clean sheet every year.

The figures I have given in my answer to the question 23(d) are actuals. These particulars were written by me about the 14th December last, so I did not know exactly what amount I should be paying. The amount estimated for December has been added to the actuals up to the end of November. For instance, say, the actual expenditure up to the end of November is Rs. 60,000, I estimate that it will be Rs. 64,000 for the year including December.

The actual expenditure for the year would not be more than Rs. 25 difference from the figure I have given.

Q.—Do these figures represent the sum actually paid as wages to the coolies, or do they include other items?

A.—They would, of course, include the loss on rice, but beyond that nothing else. It is the actual coolie expenditure. It is the actual wages expenditure which includes loss on rice, provisions of pay to sick and pregnant people. They would not include the cost of buildings, etc., or such items as freight, etc.

Q.—For 1921, I suppose the actuals will be considerably less because a number of coolies left the garden in July?

A.—Yes, I must say also that during the months of January, February, March and April, and probably May, old coolies were allowed to go and work in the *bustees*, in consequence of the fact that we were faced with a loss of about a lakh of rupees and

Shillong. it was necessary if possible to keep down expenditure. If they could earn money outside we encouraged it. I employed them on Local Board work and on any other kind of work which I was able to secure for them.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—If you will look at the wages earned by the daily working strength in September of 1921, you will see that they rose as circumstances had improved, so that when the tide had turned, the average earned by the coolies was Rs. 10-3 for men, Rs. 8-8-10 for women and Rs. 5-7-6 for children, showing a considerable increase over 1913, when the men only received Rs. 8-5-4, the women Rs. 7-5 and the children Rs. 7-15-3.

A.—In July of 1921, when we saw more hope of the industry pulling through, we were only too pleased to let the coolie have as much as we could give him, so that he actually received a considerable increase in earnings, say, for September as compared to what he was getting formerly.

Q.—With regard to indoor patients is it only the coolies who go into the hospital as indoor patients, who get half *haziras*?

A.—No. Those who live in their houses and come to hospital for treatment get the allowance, provided they are really unfit.

Q.—You say that you give women agreements on the gardens which are not so popular as Rampore. Agreements, I take it, are to give you a hold over the coolies?

A.—No. At Rampore there are certain reasons. The *jat* of coolie at Rampore is, as a rule, exceptionally prolific in the matter of having families. Hence in the case of women it often led to disputes between the doctor babu and myself, as to whether the woman was fit or unfit for work, with the result that agreements to women were eventually given up. On the other gardens I have more *jungli* coolies who are a better class and the women do not want to take leave for eighteen months or two years. They wish to work as much as possible and are generally agreeable to do a lot of hoeing, if necessary. At Rampore the women do not do any hoeing.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—You indicated that your garden is unfavourably situated for rice so that these conditions of dear rice which are prevailing even now are not necessarily general conditions?

A.—Certainly not.

Q.—In fact we have heard lately of *ghan* being available for anything between Rs. 2 and Rs. 3 a maund.

You were speaking of the unfavourable conditions in the industry. How did that affect your garden particularly? Did you actually make a loss in working in any year?

A.—Yes, in 1920.

Q.—So that it was under the influence of losses that you were encouraging your labour to work outside the garden at the beginning of 1921 at a time when it seemed that you might incur a loss again in the next year?

A.—Yes.

Q.—That was the general experience in Cachar and Sylhet in 1920, I take it?

A.—I believe it was so.

Q.—What was the magnitude of the loss that your garden suffered in 1920? Can you give the figure?

A.—I do not know, but I can give you some idea. When the accounts were closed the estimated amount of loss was Rs. 1,03,000.

Q.—I suppose when conditions improved in 1921, you encouraged the labourers to come back and work on the garden?

A.—Yes, about the month of May the labourers naturally came back. When it came to July we were very glad to have them. Of course there is no continuous work for these people in the *bustees*, and the 375 coolies who left are still round about the garden.

Q.—You told us that they were subsidised?

A.—The non-co-operators have personally told me that they were tired of them and would like them to come back.

Q.—Do you know if they are still fed by them?

A.—I very much doubt it.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—Were the 375 coolies who left your garden Shillong. new coolies?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And the number of coolies stated in your answer is besides these 375 coolies?

A.—Yes.

Q.—And therefore the loss of Rs. 14,000 in 1921 was incurred on the 1,400 people?

A.—Yes.

Q.—You just now remarked that if the coolie's wage was increased by more than 20% to 25% he does less work?

A.—I did not commit myself to say he does. In my opinion, I say, he will do less work.

Q.—You say your tasks were reduced in 1921?

A.—Yes; and the same rates still continue. That was done by me in order, more or less, to fall into line. I have not increased the wages openly or definitely, but I considered that the coolie should receive somewhat more money. Therefore I reduced the tasks. For instance where they were doing 20 *nals* of hoeing, I reduced it to sixteen *nals*, but my coolies having been accustomed to do 20 *nals* looked upon it as a point of honour that they should go on doing it, so that for doing 20 *nals* they will receive one anna more.

Q.—Am I to understand that the result is that they are earning one anna more per man than was the case before?

A.—Yes.

Q.—How far is your garden from Silchar?

A.—Eight miles.

Q.—*Dhan* and other things are brought by train to Silchar?

A.—Not much *dhan* is brought into the district. All the *dhan* goes out of the district. Rice is only brought in when it is dear.

Q.—As regards the prices of rice and *dhan* there would, I take it, only be that difference between the prices at Silchar and on your garden which is covered by the freight?

A.—The Silchar bazaar is generally a little cheaper than the Rampore bazaar. At Silchar the difference would probably be 6 annas. But a reference to the *Assam Gazette* would always give the figures. I cannot state it off-hand.

Q.—Do you think the prices given in the *Assam Gazette* are correct?

A.—Generally speaking they are correct.

Q.—Was any concession in the shape of cheap rice given both to old and new coolies in 1917, 1918 and 1919?

A.—I cannot tell you off-hand. I have a rice book which I have kept carefully for 25 years but without reference to it my memory does not carry me to the exact figure. During the first year of the war, 1915, I think we had exceptionally cheap rice which was being sold at Rs. 2-4 and Rs. 2-8 a maund. The next year it ran up, I think, to about Rs. 4-12.

Q.—In Chargola because of the wages having been raised, the agreements were done away with. Is that so?

A.—The Manager of one of the large gardens in Chargola, I understand, at a meeting, said that concessions had been done away with, but I have no recollection whether he definitely alluded to agreements.

Q.—Did he mean all the concessions?

A.—I cannot answer that.

Q.—I was not able to understand your remark about the allowance to coolies not being reduced to the jail level. Do you mean to say that the coolies eat more than the jail prisoners?

A.—I do not say that they do eat more. I mean that naturally in jail they would not be given more than was considered actually necessary, whereas the coolie particularly objects to the housewife measuring out his rice. He likes to see a little left over in his plate to be given to his dog, cow or cat; he likes to be a little lordly.

President :—Q.—What is the objection to converting the rice concession into a cash wage?

A.—I do not know what the objection is. I have had to do it now because the people have boycotted me to such an extent, but my coolies would really prefer

Shillong. to go on with their rice concession. But unfortunately at the present moment, I am not in a position to do it. I anticipate that I shall have to import rice if it becomes dear. In fact I have established a shop for that purpose in case rice should become dear. In my district the price of rice rose to Rs. 9 a maund. As a matter of fact I have sold it to many people outside the garden at Rs. 9 during times of floods, and famine.

Q.—Would it be impossible to convert the rice concession into a cash wage?

A.—It would be very intricate. It rises and falls so much that I think it would lead to grumbling amongst the coolies.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—There is one point I should like to ask. Mr. Crawford delivered a speech the other day at a meeting of the Tea Association, and there was one point in his speech which I could not understand. It was something about a misunderstanding in connection with rates. Could you throw any light on that?

A.—Yes, the coolies of an adjoining garden to mine—Khoreal—struck work. They put in a petition to the Deputy Commissioner, and one of their points was that they wished to receive the same pay as the Rampore coolies. I also received a letter from one of the leading political societies in Silchar, explaining to me the reason for the coolies striking, and cautioning me that unless I brought pressure to bear on the Manager of that garden they would also stir up trouble with my coolies. The concession of giving the Khoreal coolies at that time the same pay as Rampore, would have meant no loss to Khoreal, but the coolies afterwards withdrew this supposed grievance, saying that they wanted Khoreal tasks and Rampore pay which was rather another matter. The coolies at Rampore, having been under continuous management for a long time, had possibly settled down into doing rather higher tasks than the Khoreal coolies on which garden there have been many changes of Managers, and this generally tends to lower the standard on a garden. The result was that, in order to assist my coolies to get a little more and also not to discourage the Khoreal coolies, I reduced my task to the same level as Khoreal. There were also one or two other Managers in probable disagreement with me who may have made comments on the raising of pay above the level of the district, but you will find that at least one garden had always paid the men at Rs. 8, whereas we paid Rs. 6-8 and Rs. 7, and the tasks had also been slightly reduced by them.

SHILLONG, 21st MARCH 1922.

(PRESIDENT, MR. FOX, MR. WITHERS, AND MR. DAS, ABSENT.)

No. 139.—MR. J. A. MILLIGAN, I.C.S., *Chairman, Assam Labour Board*:—

I have been 18½ years in the Indian Civil Service and since December 1920 Chairman of the Assam Labour Board.

Before 1919, coolies from the United Provinces were not medically examined in the recruiting districts unless the local agents so decided, or the garden Managers specifically asked. In February 1919, Mr. Lewer, Superintendent of the Tea Districts Labour Association in the United Provinces, ordered all coolies to be medically examined, and in December 1919 Messrs. Begg Dunlop and Co., Secretaries of the Association, passed orders that all recruits in all recruiting districts should be medically examined whether Managers asked for this or not, and the present practice is that all coolies are medically examined whether the Managers have requested this or not in the written instructions sent with sardars. In some places examination is by the Civil Surgeon but in most large recruiting districts the Association has its own medical agents who are paid a fixed salary. Where an outside doctor like the Civil Surgeon is employed, he is paid a fee on the number of persons examined. The majority of those rejected are rejected on sight, without a formal examination.

Mr. Kirkham, Supervisor of the Assam Labour Board in the Central Provinces, United Provinces and South India, was of opinion that many of the coolies sent up in 1918-19 should never have been passed. He said that many had not been medically examined at all. His opinion was that in 1918-19, the local agents failed adequately to protect the Assam tea industry, inasmuch as they sent up people who should never have been sent up. The reason why good *jungli* coolies are not obtained in larger numbers for tea-gardens is that recruiting is

being done in the wrong places. There are still many good *junglis* available and the question of opening recruiting centres in new areas is under consideration. Coolies who go to the jute mills and other industries nearer their homes go for short terms and I do not think that the Assam tea-gardens could offer terms high enough to attract them as permanent settlers.

Many people of the class that formerly emigrated to Assam now find they can go away for 6 and 8 months (to jute mills, the new docks at Vizagapatam, Tata's and other works, the coal-mines and Calcutta) and leave their families at home. Formerly the Mundas, owing to their custom of subdivision of land in the family, used to be driven to emigrate to Assam but now they can go to various industries for 6 or 8 months and leave their families on the land. This, however, will in all probability be merely a temporary phase, as in India population always presses hard on the means of subsistence. The good crops of last season were followed by an unusually large number of marriages. This does not apply so much to the *jungli* type as to those who are getting somewhat civilised. By tapping new fields, I think *junglis* will be obtainable on the terms which the tea industry can offer.

Some of the coolies who left in the Chargola exodus have returned to Chargola. I cannot say how many; the number is not large. Others have gone to other gardens in the Assam Valley changing their description.

Calcutta is the big competitor of Assam at present. Unskilled labourers when they go there have to work about 9 hours a day and they earn about one anna per hour. When they acquire some degree of skill they earn more.

Sufficient care is not bestowed sometimes by Managers in filling up the column in the sardar's instructions as to the wages which are obtainable in the garden. For example, in some gardens in Lakhimpur, where wages have been raised, the old wages are still shown. There are also cases of over-statement of the wage, the potential *ticca* earnings being apparently included.

I would like to say something about the physique of the coolies recruited now-a-days. Formerly coolies were sent up by contractors who picked out the best, and the Manager in his turn picked out those whom he thought best. Now-a-days sardars recruit families, and often there are one or two members of inferior physique among them. With sardari recruiting it is in general the inferior type that emigrates to Assam. Those of better physique go as short-term coolies to Calcutta or other places. Most of the coolies do not like working in the mines unless where there is surface work to be done. There have been very good crops this year; many marriages, and therefore a hope of restoring the population that suffered from influenza and famine; thus the outlook for emigration is hopeful.

The selection of recruiting sardars is not so careful as it might be. There are too many complaints from Managers of the riff-raff of the bazaar being sent up to Assam. The Agents of the Tea Districts Labour Association are required to see personally all coolies that are sent up and are supposed to reject all undesirable recruits. It is desirable that a recruiting sardar should have relatives in the recruiting districts and that he should not have been so long away that he has lost touch with his district.

In the case of a family being sent up if some members are unfit for labour, they are sent up as dependents, but if unfit to travel they are not allowed to go and in that case it is possible that the whole family may decline to go. Colonel Kennedy has been appointed as Travelling Inspector for the Tea Districts Labour Association. His chief duties will be to exercise close supervision over local agents and to act as *liaison* officer between the garden Managers and the local agents.

The other day I came on a case in a garden in Sylhet where I found several undesirable coolies in a new batch recently arrived. I told the Manager to represent the matter to the Secretaries of the Tea Districts Labour Association and have them repatriated. Messrs. Begg Dunlop and Company have agreed to bear the cost of repatriation and to refund the commission. These coolies had presumably been passed by the local agent and had also been medically examined.

I should advise gardens to recruit only the labour which is suitable for them and they should not take advantage of famine or other similar conditions to rush up a large number of coolies many of whom may die or abscond.

Down to 1915 during the *arcutti* days the Surma Valley was able to recruit cheaply from the United Provinces. The Surma Valley got special facilities for recruiting in the United Provinces, as it had undertaken early to give up Act VI. The contractors in the *arcutti* days got a high price for good *jungli* labourers but coolies from the United Provinces were cheap.

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The Tea Districts Labour Association, for the purpose of calculating commission and providing the outfit, classifies as adults those who are 12 years of age and over. Anyone over 12 pays full fare on the Railways. The rates of commission are adults Rs. 15, and those between 4 and 11, Rs. 7-8-0. The rule of the Association is that the age and classification by the Agents' doctors should be regarded as final. The present working of the system is not altogether satisfactory.

I have travelled to some extent in recruiting districts. As regards the class of people who emigrate because it is their only means of gaining a livelihood, I think that in most places in Assam they are better off than in their own country. I say most places because I have not visited all gardens in Assam. The type that comes to Assam from the United Provinces is the landless agricultural labourer. In his country he has a fluctuating income. If the harvest is bad, his position is precarious. It is true that he can find employment in odd jobs, such as serving for others, cutting firewood or fodder. I have not been sufficiently in the interior of the Central Provinces to be an authority on the economic condition of the labourer there. I have no definite idea of how much a United Provinces labourer can earn in his own country as the amount fluctuates during the year.

Evidence continued on 24th March 1922.

(MR. WITHERS, MR. FOX AND MR. DAS, ABSENT.)

The medical officers employed by the recruiting agents are Indians with medical qualifications. I do not know exactly what those medical qualifications are, but I believe they are at least equal to those of the average tea-garden doctor babu. The opinion of the agency medical officer as to the age of the recruit is final. This is a recent rule. If the agent disagrees with the doctor's opinion as to the physical fitness of the recruit, the doctor's opinion is final, but I have known of a case where the agent overruled the opinion of the doctor as to fitness. The agent explained that he was unaware of the rule as to the doctor's opinion being final. The practice of the agent overruling the doctor has been stopped. Presumably the agent's object was to earn as much commission for the Tea Districts Labour Association as he thought legitimate.

Where the garden Manager takes a personal interest in the welfare of his labour force, coolies are happy and contented, and such gardens have no difficulty in getting labour. When I said, in my previous day's evidence, that Chargola coolies who had gone to gardens in Assam had changed their description, I meant that they would not admit that they had been in the Chargola Valley. It is only by inference that one can conclude that they had been in Chargola. I gathered this information in two gardens in Darrang and one garden in Golaghat.

Mr. Dawson:—Q.—Have any enquiries been made in the recruiting districts as to what Chargola coolies returned after the exodus?

A.—I believe that the Tea Districts Labour Association did so and deputed a European to enquire, but I have not seen his report.

The Assam Labour Board, soon after the exodus, made enquiries in the Central Provinces, the United Provinces and South India, with a view to seeing how many of the coolies who had left Chargola could be traced. There was a letter from the Central Provinces Government to the Assam Government to the effect that many Chargola coolies were anxious to return to Assam. On making enquiries I found that there was nothing in it. I enquired if any particular batch could be found. The answer was in the negative. That letter simply boiled down general opinions expressed by District Officers in the recruiting districts. I doubt if Messrs. Begg Dunlop and Co., Secretaries of the Tea Districts Labour Association, would produce before the Committee the report written by the gentleman who made the enquiries on their behalf, as it was, I believe, confidential, and they are not in a position to prove all the statements that may be made therein. I hear that the report said that work had been found in the home districts for many of the coolies and that they were not likely to return. I believe my informant was Mr. Crawford of Messrs. James Finlay and Co. It is said that many of the coolies got employment under Zemindars in their own country. I think that the name of the gentleman who made the enquiries was Mr. Gilroy. Some Chargola coolies said to me that some of them only got 2½ annas a day in the garden. They showed me some brass tickets for half and quarter *haziras*.

President:—Q.—Do you think that the primary cause of discontent was Shillong. inadequate pay and that the non-co-operation movement only gave an impetus to the discontent and consequent exodus from the Chargola Valley?

A.—I could not tell you as I never visited the Chargola Valley until after the exodus.

Q.—Did the local enquiries made by the officer of the Tea Districts Labour Association go to support that view?

A.—I could not tell you. As far as my information goes, there was no allusion to the pay received on the garden. The coolies I believe were well provided for after going home and did not need to return.

Q.—Do you consider 3 annas 9 pies and 3 annas a sufficient daily wage?

A.—In some recruiting districts it is more than the ordinary rate of wage for the class of people who emigrate. I was informed last year in some places that 2 annas was the local rate for coolies at the time.

Q.—Do you think the wage mentioned is quite sufficient to attract them from their country?

A.—When people come to the point of emigrating through poverty they do not ask questions about the wages in Assam. They do so in order to get a new home and a fresh start in life. The chief attraction is the prospect of land which is held out to them.

Q.—I suppose they are told by the sardars that they would get extravagant wages?

A.—That is true sometimes, but every effort is made to stop it. It is the business of the local agent to tell the coolies the conditions of the particular garden to which they may be going.

Q.—I think you have got figures in this book (Tea Districts Labour Association Handbook) about the recruitment of labour for a number of years?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Do these figures apply to Assam and the Dooars as well?

A.—I think I am right in saying that it is only within the last year or two that the Tea Districts Labour Association has recruited for the Dooars. They started at a place called Lohardaga not far from Ranchi.

Q.—As regards the figures for 1918-19, in that year 45,112 sardars were accredited and they recruited 172,096½ adults. What is the reason for the boom in recruiting in that year?

A.—I have always been told that those were famine days in the United Provinces and a very large number of these people came from the United Provinces.

Q.—Yes, but why were they required in Assam? Why were arrangements made to get such large numbers?

A.—I understand there had been some depression in Assam and recruiting in the previous year had not been high and also there had been influenza which had reduced the labour force, and the gardens, in general, I believe were short of labour, so they took advantage of this year to replenish their labour forces. I have the opinions of other people on the subject, but I am afraid, as I was not in touch with Assam in those days, it is rather difficult for me to give my own personal opinion.

Q.—The figures for six years are given and the figure for this particular year was about equal to that of the three previous years and the two subsequent years. What was the reason for bringing up such a large number of coolies to Assam?

A.—I suppose there was a demand for them.

Q.—But why?

A.—May I read a note of Mr. Kirkham, my Supervisor, on the subject?

Q.—Yes.

A.—He says:—

"I will briefly touch on the happenings of 1918-19. The finances of the Association had run perilously low in 1917-18 when they nearly closed down. The previous year's recruiting had been inadequate and in 1917-18 only 13,000 adults were sent up. A wave of influenza passed over the gardens taking a very heavy toll and bringing matters to a climax. Fortunately for all concerned 1918-19 dawned brightly for the tea industry. Influenza in the recruiting districts was followed by widespread scarcity

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and the anticipations of a busy recruiting year were handsomely realised. A large number of sardars came down and by the end of the season about 172,000 adults had been recruited. Replenishment both of the plantations and of the Association's finances was the watchword well in the forefront. It is no exaggeration to say that some thousands of emaciated and otherwise unsuitable coolies who would not have ordinarily been sent, were despatched."

Q.—Is it a fact that the majority of these people should never have been sent to Assam?

A.—It is a fact that a great many should not have been sent, I believe; but I am not in a position to say whether the majority of them should not have been sent up. There is no doubt that the evidence I have had tends to show that a great many were sent who should never have been sent.

Q.—Is it a fact that large numbers of them died on the way?

A.—I have been told so.

Q.—And that some of them had to be carried to the gardens and that they died on the gardens like flies?

A.—Well, I have heard such statements but actually I have not seen it.

Q.—Who was responsible for sending up such people?

A.—The local agents of the Tea Districts Labour Association.

Q.—Do you think they were to blame?

A.—Certainly, the local agents cannot be held blameless in the matter. They had no business to pass people who were not fit.

Q.—A great many were not medically examined?

A.—The examination was optional at that time and it was only in the following season that the Tea Districts Labour Association made it compulsory.

Q.—As a result of what happened, I suppose, that year?

A.—Very likely.

Q.—It resulted in a heavy mortality, and I suppose considerable scandal?

A.—Yes.

Q.—A great deal has been said about concessions. Are you aware that most of these concessions were compulsory under Act VI, for instance, house accommodation, water-supply, sanitary arrangements, rice at Rs. 3 a maund, hospital accommodation and medical attendance?

A.—Yes, most of these things, if not all, were provided for in Act VI, and penalties were attached under sections 189 and 190 of the Act.

Q.—Do you think that the coolie was placed in a worse position by the abolition of Act VI which at any rate secured for him rice at Rs. 3 a maund and also all the concessions mentioned?

A.—I find it somewhat difficult to answer that because I have no direct experience.

Q.—You will admit that Act VI gave the labourers security against illegal long-term contracts, especially in the case of minors?

A.—Contracts were made in terms of Act VI and as such they could not be illegal.

Q.—I mean to say that a minor under 16 could not be put under contract.

A.—That is so.

Q.—Do you consider it a breach of faith to put coolies on arrival under long-terms of contract, e.g., 626, 939 days and so on?

A.—Well, not altogether, as some gardens state in the sardars' question sheets that this is their practice.

Q.—I was going to add "in view of the increased facilities of recruiting given after the repeal of sections 118 and 121 of Act VI"?

A.—I understand that the use of Act XIII was definitely contemplated by Government for this purpose when Act VI was done away with.

Q.—I do not think Government contemplated the use to which Act XIII would be put. Otherwise, what was the object of withdrawing sections 118 and 121 which provided for local labour contracts to be verified on the garden in the case of one year

contracts, and, if for more than one year, to be executed before the Magistrate. If Shillong. contracts for a longer period for indefinite terms expressed in days were allowed to be executed on the gardens without any supervision, what was the object of it?

A.—It was reported that Act VI labour contracts were one of the chief obstacles to recruiting, i.e., the compulsory execution of the contract there and then in the district.

Q.—Then do you think it is safe to assume that Government did not realise that long-term contracts for 939 days, and so on, would be entered on under Act XIII?

A.—I am afraid I have got no evidence one way or the other. I have never seen it in any official document, except that there is a definite provision in Act XIII providing for tea-garden labour.

Q.—What is the section?

A.—In Act XIII there is a clause or a ruling covering the case of coolies working on tea-gardens.

Q.—There may be a ruling by the High Court?

A.—Yes: it is a ruling, not a clause; that is my mistake.

Q.—I think you said that local labour contracts under Act VI were withdrawn in order to facilitate recruiting?

A.—I believe that was the reason. The 1906 report laid stress on the desirability of getting rid of this local labour contract and this was done in 1915 for the Assam Valley.

Q.—Would you say that the misuse of Act XIII has nullified that?

A.—I have not had any evidence of the misuse of Act XIII personally. I have never known of any case myself of oppression under Act XIII.

Q.—Have you inspected any of the Emigration offices in Assam?

A.—No. I do not think I am entitled to.

Q.—You do not know much about the working of Act XIII?

A.—No.

Q.—Can you explain why Act XIII became so popular. Was it cheaper or did it involve less Government intervention while putting the labourers under long-term contracts?

A.—The only signs of popularity I have seen have been on the part of coolies who were anxious to take such agreements.

Q.—Do you think a coolie voluntarily enters into a 939-day agreement on arrival?

A.—There is the inducement of the advance.

Q.—Do you know that the advances given to new coolies are simply in the nature of *khoraki*, i.e., Rs. 2 or Rs. 3 at the outside?

A.—I am not aware of that. I have nothing to do with inspecting garden management. I merely look at the conditions under which coolies live on the gardens.

Q.—Do you imagine that a new coolie on arrival would be given Rs. 20 or Rs. 30 when he executes a 939-day agreement?

A.—That is a question of fact. I have never actually seen new coolies being put under agreement, so I do not know what the practice is.

Q.—Are you aware that sentences of 3 months' rigorous imprisonment are not uncommon under Act XIII, and that coolies under a sentence of imprisonment in jail are illegally sent back to the garden from jail to work off their contracts on the application of the Manager or his agent, following the old procedure under section 202 of Act VI?

A.—No. As regards the first part of the question, I have heard that sentences as high as 3 months have been imposed but I saw some of the figures of the Assam Government showing that out of 270,000 odd garden coolies under contract, some 60 people have been convicted in the past year.

Q.—It did not give the number of cases instituted?

A.—Yes, about 1,600. It was in reply to a reference by the Government of India and a copy was sent to me for information.

Q.—Did the Assam Government state that long-term contracts were illegally entered into?

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A.—To the best of my recollection that was not mentioned.

Q.—Do you think that they were probably unaware of the fact?

A.—I suppose so, as a contract for longer than one year is not a legal contract.

Q.—They would have mentioned it if they had only known of it?

A.—I am not in a position to answer that question.

Q.—You have had 9 years' experience in the Dooars as a District Magistrate?

A.—Yes, in various capacities.

Q.—Why is it necessary to have a penal Act in Assam if no penal Act is in force in the Dooars?

A.—The Dooars were opened out with free labour and always have had free labour. The Dooars were more accessible than Assam.

Q.—And so it was never found necessary to have a penal Act in force?

A.—Yes, because they have always been able to get labour more cheaply there.

Q.—Have they ever asked for the introduction of Act XIII?

A.—Not to my knowledge.

Q.—You will admit, I think, that the Dooars were as inaccessible as Assam for many years?

A.—To a certain extent.

Q.—So that the question of inaccessibility has nothing to do with the question of the necessity for the penal contract?

A.—All except the outlying gardens are more accessible to the recruiting districts.

Q.—But for many years there was no railway in the Dooars?

A.—That is true. It is also true to say that the development of the remote parts of the Dooars has proceeded *pari passu* with the advance of the railway. In the remote parts very few gardens existed before the railway came in.

Q.—But there are railways now in most parts of Assam?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Why do you consider these legal props necessary for the support of the tea industry in Assam?

A.—I have not expressed this opinion.

Q.—Do you consider them necessary?

A.—The fact that less than half the coolies in Assam are under these agreements seems to suggest that they are not in every case necessary.

Q.—How do you know?

A.—I took the figures which I referred to from the Assam Government's recent letter to the Government of India.

Q.—How do the Dooars labour rules compare with the Assam labour rules?

A.—They are not so scrupulously observed as the Assam rules. They aim at achieving the same object but with less success.

Q.—Do they impose greater restrictions?

A.—The general principle is that if the coolies of another garden come to your garden you pay for them or turn them out. It is not very scrupulously observed, I am afraid, in some places.

Q.—Do you think the labour rules would be a sufficient protection to the employer in the absence of penal labour legislation such as Act XIII provides?

A.—My experience of the labour rules in the Dooars suggests that they are not very much protection to the employer. A certain number of men adhere loyally, but there are certain others who do not.

Q.—The same would be the case everywhere?

A.—Yes. They are not a very efficient substitute at all events.

Q.—Anyhow the Dooars people get on quite well without any penal legislation?

A.—They are very hard up for labour just now and they are clamouring.

Q.—Are they clamouring for penal legislation?

A.—No, not for penal legislation, but for labour.

Mr. Dawson :—Q.—Colonel Kennedy says :—“If possible, it would be better to do with ~~out~~ Act XIII.” He also says :—“My opinion is that new coolies should not be put under Act XIII”. This is Colonel Kennedy's letter. Generally speaking would you agree with the views expressed in that letter?

A.—Of course Colonel Kennedy spent his service in Assam. He was speaking from his experience as a district officer when he inspected many gardens. I mean to say he had behind him a tremendous lot of experience to base his own opinion on, whereas I have hardly gone beyond the stage of enquiry yet, and for me to contradict his opinion in any way or even to presume to endorse it will be only going beyond my experience.

Q.—I was looking through the Hailakandi cases and came across two or three cases by certain gardens applying for warrants against absconding coolies. They had taken agreements for 939 days in May 1920 and the advance they got was Rs. 4 each. The Magistrate issued warrants; they were arrested and released on bail. On the date fixed they did not appear but the Manager sent a letter saying that the coolies were now working satisfactorily. That is a case where the Magistrate follows a wrong procedure and so also the Manager?

A.—Yes.

Mr. McMorran :—Q.—I wonder if Mr. Milligan could give any information dealing with the prospects of recruitment for tea-gardens in the future on the basis of his experience and the enquiries made by him.

A.—Well, at present we are considering the shifting of some old centres to new places and the local information which I have gathered suggests that there is still a large field to be exploited and I am not at all pessimistic as to the prospects, especially with regard to the *jungli* type of coolie who are most in demand. One is apt to think that Chota Nagpur is ‘played out’ but when you look back 20 years you see the same thing was said then, *viz.*, that Chota Nagpur was exhausted. It revived again. So it is unwise to predict too much about that. I certainly think it would be a good thing if those gardens which have United Provinces connections would try to acquire better connections elsewhere. They would get a better class of coolie. With the exception of the Kols of Mirzapur and North Rewa the United Provinces labourer is not very suitable for Assam.

Srijut Siva Prasad Barua :—Q.—Before the coolies are sent up to Assam from the recruiting districts do the local agents explain the system of working to them?

A.—An attempt was made last year to send local agents round to learn more about the working of tea-gardens so as to be in a position to explain this. Previous to that many of them were never on tea-gardens and they can only explain what is put in the sardar's question sheet. That of course they do, but beyond that they have no knowledge. I strongly advocate the sending of every local agent for a certain time to the tea areas to acquire the necessary knowledge.

Q.—Coolies come with the idea that they will have to work on the tea-gardens I take it?

A.—They are all recruited by sardars whose business it is to tell them where he is taking them and the local agent sees that the sardars do tell them. If the sardars have deceived them in the matter of pay, it is the local agent's business to correct that misapprehension and to tell them what is the actual fact. Of course the sardars benefit directly by the numbers they recruit and they naturally tend to magnify the prospects as much as possible.

Q.—Most sardars recruit their relatives and friends, I suppose?

A.—That is the basic idea of sardari recruiting, but the law does not require that they shall confine themselves to their relations, except that they are to recruit from a definite locality and the smaller that locality is made the better it is for the preservation of the true character of sardari recruitment. The local agents sometimes get general instructions from Managers to the effect that they want relatives and fellow villagers of the sardars and not strangers.

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad :—Q.—Have you any idea as to how much the coolies earn in the Central Provinces in a day?

A.—I have not been all over the Central Provinces and have got no official figures on the subject.

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Q.—You mentioned 2 annas a day as an actual wage. For whom was that?

A.—For men. Last year that figure was quoted to me at Raipur and other places as being the wages they were getting locally. Most of the coolies come from the Feudatory States, and these are the type of coolies most wanted.

[Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad showed witness some printed figures wherein it appeared that the earnings of Central Provinces coolies were 4 annas a day.]

Witness:—Q.—Were these agricultural coolies?

Khan Sahib Wali Muhammad:—A.—No. Agricultural coolies get more than that.

Mr. Milligan:—The earnings of agricultural coolies fluctuate throughout the year, and persons earning a steady 4 annas a day would not, in general, emigrate.

Q.—As regards those who want to come to Assam, is it within your knowledge that such people are told that they will get anything between Rs. 10 and Rs. 15, men and women?

A.—It is not within my knowledge, but as I say the sardar is capable of saying anything merely to attract the coolie. But that is where the local agent comes in and it is his duty to correct such impressions.

Written statement submitted by MR. MILLIGAN subsequent to his oral evidence.

The impression I have gathered from perusing the Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee of 1906 and other papers is that the repeal of Chapter III and of Sections 118 to 121 of Act VI and the prohibition of labour contracts in the recruiting districts by notifications under Section 91 of the Act were not done by way of concessions to the tea industry but as remedies for a bad state of affairs and that the use of Act XIII on an extended scale was definitely anticipated. From this standpoint it does not appear to be a breach of faith to place newly imported coolies under agreement, though, in my opinion, it is bad policy to do so. As no agreement for a longer period than one year is now legal under Act XII it is most objectionable to put new coolies on longer agreements which they believe to be binding under Act XIII. The case of old coolies is somewhat different. Many of them have grown accustomed to working on long agreements and to the substantial bonus which usually accrues to them on signing a new agreement; and such coolies resent attempts to shorten the period of agreement and correspondingly reduce the bonus. Even if Act XIII were abolished I believe a number of gardens would be compelled by their coolies to continue the agreement system notwithstanding that such agreements would be legally valueless; and left to himself the coolie would in general loyally work out such agreements.

I stated in my oral evidence that I know very little about the working of Act XIII. If, however, the Act were used generally as a means of oppression, I would have been aware of it. The blame for cases of mal-administration of the Act lies primarily on such Magistrates as misapply or misconstrue its provisions. In this connection, I may say that it seems to me probable that no Magistrate's court in the whole of India, except perhaps the United Provinces, is supplied with a fully corrected and annotated copy of Act VI. The new Assam and Bengal Emigration Manuals will shortly be issued and will, I expect, be quickly followed by similar manuals in all other provinces.

I am of opinion that if Act XIII is abolished and the making of contracts of any kind with new coolies is prohibited some additional freedom in recruiting might reasonably be conceded with the object of reducing the expense of importing labour. I am not prepared to say at present how far the existing restrictions may safely be relaxed. The question would have to be carefully examined from every point of view. All other industries in India enjoy complete freedom in recruiting and if labour in Assam is to be made absolutely free, it seems reasonable to suggest that in recruiting Assam should be allowed to enjoy such a measure of freedom as will allow cheaper importation of labour while it prevents the recurrence of the old evils associated with the *arcutti* system. In my opinion there are available supplies of a better class of labour than much of what is now being recruited; but the present system makes it difficult to establish new connections, and I also believe that many labourers who at present go elsewhere would come to Assam if the recruiting restrictions imposed under Act VI were relaxed sufficiently to allow employers to get in touch with them.

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The question of wages is a very important one from the recruiting standpoint. The standard wage on many gardens very inadequately represents the real earnings of labourers, and it is very difficult to forecast *ticca* earnings, as the amount of work to be done on a garden is not unlimited as might be the case in a coal-mine or a factory. The larger the number of coolies on a garden who earn *ticca*, the smaller the amount of *ticca* available for each coolie must become. The unit system has the same limitation. In all agricultural operations where wages bear a direct relation to the amount of work done there is the same restriction of the earning power of the labourer even in the busiest seasons. On a tea-garden the coolie enjoys the privilege of earning a steady income all the year round which other forms of agricultural employment do not offer. Outside Assam the standard wage paid on the gardens is usually mistaken for the coolie's total earnings and the amount of work required to earn that wage is not known. Those who study Act VI get the idea that the coolie has a nine hour day for the bare wage. The clearest statement of wages on a tea-garden I ever encountered was a formula used by a Dooars Manager when recruiting in Ranchi. His custom was to give a four-hour morning task and a three-hour double in the afternoon, and he told all recruits "*Char gunta kam char anna paisa; sath gunta kam ath anna paisa; aisa roz roz milega*" (For four hours' work, 4 annas; for seven hours' work, 7 annas; you will get this daily). It would be a great help to recruiting if some cut-and-dried formula could be found to describe accurately the potential earnings of coolies on Assam gardens.

In attempting to arrive at an economic wage two questions have to be answered and the answers define the limits within which the attempt must be confined, namely, (1) what wage can the Industry afford to pay without becoming unremunerative and unattractive to capital, and (2) what wage is necessary to get and keep an adequate labour force. The answers to these questions vary enormously from district to district, and even from garden to garden in the same locality. The answer to question (1) could be stated with some degree of exactitude in most places; there is a maximum cost of production of a pound of tea on every garden which with a normal market must impose an absolute limit on wages payable if the garden is not to be shut down. It is not so easy to arrive at the answer to question (2) as many considerations, such as the condition of life of the coolies before emigration, competition in recruitment giving the coolies a choice of employments, the standard of living of different labourers, and classes of labour, enter into the problem. I am of opinion that in general the tea-garden coolies of Assam are better off than they were before they emigrated and that the remuneration offered them is sufficient to maintain them in health and reasonable comfort; in some recruiting districts and with some classes of labour, however, the wages offered by tea are insufficient to compete with other industries. I do not consider it necessary from a recruiting point of view for tea to attempt to outbid its competitors in the labour market, as the agricultural life will always attract many who are not to be lured from their customary mode of living by tempting wages; but in all cases where the earnings are below the level of health and reasonable comfort, they should be brought up to that level or else the labour should be free to go elsewhere.

J. A. MILLIGAN.

APPENDIX.

Dated Shillong, the 30th November 1921.

From—J. A. Dawson, Esq., I.C.S., Secretary, Assam Labour Enquiry Committee,

To—The Managers of Tea-gardens in ^{Assam Valley} ~~Surma Valley~~

On behalf of the Committee appointed to enquire into the conditions of tea-garden labour in Assam, I have the honour to append a list of questions, and should be glad if you would answer them as far as they relate to gardens under your control. Should you not be in a position to supply all the information asked for, the Committee would still be glad to be favoured with replies on those points on which you may be able to enlighten them. They would welcome any other facts or statistics illustrative of the economic conditions under which tea-garden coolies in Assam live and opinions as to whether any, and if so, what, remedial measures are required.

2. The terms of reference are:—

To enquire into conditions of coolie labour on tea-gardens in Assam and in particular—

(i) to enquire whether the remuneration in money payments together with the concessions received by the coolies in the way of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., is sufficient to maintain the labourers in health and reasonable comfort;

(ii) to enquire whether it is possible and desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the abovementioned concessions should be converted into an increase of money wages; and to make any recommendation which seems desirable for improving the conditions of labour.

3. The Committee regret that there has been some delay in framing the questions, but feel sure that you will, in the interests of the tea industry, treat the matter as urgent and will send the answers—it will suffice to quote the numbers of the questions—as soon as possible to the Secretary, Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, Shillong. I may say that the Committee intend to examine witnesses at convenient centres, and also to visit typical tea-gardens. If you would like to give evidence before the Committee, this fact may be communicated to the Secretary. The tour programme will be sent out as soon as it is finally settled. Provisionally, it is intended to visit Darrang in December, Sylhet and Cachar in January, and Sibsagar, Nowgong and Lakhimpur in February.

QUESTIONS.

I.—Labour Force.

1. What is the working population living on the garden—men, women, and children? Can you give the approximate percentage of the different classes of coolies in your garden—Oriyas, Santals, etc.?

2. How many coolies, not residing on the garden, do you usually employ—men, women, and children? Are they employed throughout the year or usually at a particular season?

3. What is the acreage of tea under cultivation and the average yield per acre? Is your labour force sufficient? If all your coolies worked 8 hours a day, how many approximately would you require to work your garden?

4. If you employ outside labour, would it be possible to have all the work done by your coolies residing in the garden? If so, can you give any reason why this is not done?

5. (a) What is the explanation of the difference between the total labour force on the books and the average daily working strength, which is in some cases considerable?

(b) How many hours' work is done per week on the average in a normal year by (1) your best coolies, (2) your average coolies, in (a) busy season and (b) slack season?

6. (a) How much have you spent in recruiting during the last five years? Trace the increase in your labour force as a result of recruiting.

(b) If the increase appears to be incommensurate with the expenditure how do you explain the unsatisfactory nett results?

(c) In the circumstances stated in (b), would it, in your opinion, have been more profitable to spend the bulk of the money devoted to recruiting on the coolies you already hold? If so, in what directions?

(d) If little or no recruiting has been done, can you explain how you have managed to maintain an adequate labour force with so little recruiting?

(e) Is it a fact that some gardens are more popular with labour than others? If so, please state what you consider to be the most important factors of such popularity?

7. Leaving out of consideration times of cholera and influenza epidemics, how does the birth-rate in your garden compare with the death-rate?

8. Is the type of coolie recruited at the present day as good as ten years ago? If inferior, in what respect?

II.—Organisation and Discipline.

9. State briefly but as fully as possible the customary duties of manager, assistants, and Indian staff on your garden.

10. What are the duties, powers and privileges of sardars and line chaukidars on your garden? On what principle are they selected? Are they popular in general with the labour force?

11. Have there been cases of abuse of power on the part of your staff (all grades) in your experience? Have these been common? What is the best way to avoid such abuses?

12. Do you consider it essential that the European staff on a garden should be thoroughly conversant with some vernacular understood by the coolies? In your experience is this always the case?

13. Do you have a system of fines? If so, what is it, *i.e.*, who have the power to fine and on what principles are they allowed to do so?

14. It is said that in some gardens everything is done for the old settled coolie and that on other gardens everything is done for the new coolie. Is it possible so to arrange matters as to keep the old coolies contented while in no way discouraging the new? If so, how is it done?

15. Is it a fact that there has been a widespread feeling of unrest among tea-garden labour during the past few years? If so, to what do you attribute it? State your own experience. Were you aware of a feeling of unrest apart from any caused by the efforts of political agitators and do you think that without these efforts the unrest would have manifested itself?

16. To what extent do you attribute recent disturbances among tea-garden labour to the incitement of agitators? If possible, give your own experience.

17. Have coolies had any real grievances—economic or personal of which agitators could make capital? If not, how do you account for the sporadic nature of the troubles that have occurred?

18. During the past few years of enhanced cost of living (1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920) has the remuneration of the staff, European and Indian, and of the labour force increased? If so, please give details. If not, were any other steps taken to mitigate the hardship of the increased cost of living?

19. What dividends did your garden or Company pay during the abovementioned five years?

20. Have you on any occasion during the past five years suggested to your agents or directors any measures for ameliorating the lot of your labour force? If so, with what results?

III.—Wages.

21. What is your system of payment, daily or monthly? What is the daily rate of wages (*hazira*) paid to men, women, and children living in the garden for a full task? If payment is according to a monthly rate, what is it for men, women, and children? If the daily or monthly rates have changed since 1913, please give details.

22. If different rates from above are given in the case of labour living outside the lines, please state them.

23. Have the cash earnings of coolies for work done on the garden increased since 1913? Can you give any figures to show the difference? The figures should include regular *haziras* and also *ticca* earnings, (*i.e.*, additional pay for work over and above the standard task).

24. What do you consider a decent living monthly wage for a working coolie—man and woman—not a mere subsistence allowance, but a wage that would suffice to keep them in health and reasonable comfort with a possibility of saving a little?

25. Can you give any idea of the extent of difference in the cost of living in 1913 and 1920?

26. (a) Taking into account all the earnings and concessions received by an average coolie, would you say that he gets enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort with the present price of necessities?

(b) Please state the total sanctioned provision for remuneration of labour in your garden budget year by year for 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, and 1921 and side by side with these figures please give the strength of your labour force in the same years.

(c) Please give in tabular form the actual earnings of a number of your best working coolies—men, women, and children—month by month for a year showing number of days' work done,—total *hazira* earned and total *ticca* earned—for the years abovementioned.

(d) Please state the average daily number turning out to work on your garden (1) during the period July to September inclusive and (2) during the period December to February inclusive. Also the average number of coolies who earned *ticca* during these periods. The figures should be for the years 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920, and 1921.

27. Can you give any idea of the indebtedness of coolies in your garden either to the garden or to outside *mahajans*? Can you give any idea of how many of your coolies are free of debt either to the garden or to the *mahajans*?

28. Can you say to what extent coolies in your garden remit money to their home districts?

29. To what extent do your coolies save money to buy cattle, buffaloes, land and the like? Do any of them lend money to other coolies.

30. Are payments made daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly for regular task work? What would the coolies prefer? When are *ticca* payments made?

31. Are payments made in cash or in tickets? If the latter, does the garden cash the tickets or the shopkeeper? Is there any reason to believe that the latter does not pay the coolie the full value of the tickets?

32. If rice or *dhan* is issued, is the cost or any part of it recovered? Please describe your system in detail.

33. Do you think the fixing of a standard wage is feasible for the district, for the sub-district, or for a group of gardens?

34. (a) Do you favour the idea of a provident fund for your Indian staff?

(b) Do you favour the idea of giving coolies a bonus proportionate to the prosperity of the garden year by year? If so, what form should it take?

35. Does the unit system exist in your garden, i.e., a system of remuneration based on small units of work, the coolies being paid in terms of multiples of such unit. If you have such a unit system, describe it. Is the coolie allowed to earn as much or as little as he chooses, both in busy and slack season, or is there a limit? Under the unit system does the coolie tend to sacrifice quality to quantity? If the unit system is not in force in your garden, would you be in favour of its introduction?

36. Is it the case that earnings are inadequate in the cold weather as compared with the rest of the year? Can this be remedied?

37. Are wages paid into the hands of the coolies by the Manager or Assistant Manager?

Is this an invariable rule in your garden?

38. In the case of your garden to what extent do coolies supplement their regular and *ticca* earnings by cultivation of paddy or other crops, sale of firewood, milk, fodder or vegetables, by rearing cattle, by hiring carts, or in other ways such as working on Government or Local Board roads?

39. In the case of a coolie living with his wife and children would you say, as a general rule, that his own total earnings are sufficient to maintain himself and his family in health and reasonable comfort?

40. Is it your experience that increased wages encourage labourers to work substantially longer hours?

41. How far do you think it true that any appreciable rise in the rate of wages would result in the coolie not earning more from the garden but in his doing less work for the same pay?

IV.—Tasks.

42. What is the task for plucking? Does it differ at different times of the year? Has it altered in recent years, say from 1913? If so, how? How many hours does it take the average woman to do the task?

43. Has fine plucking altered the task? With a reduced task for fine plucking is it possible for a coolie to earn as much in a given time as was the case when coarser plucking was the practice?

44. What is the *ticca* rate for plucking and how does it compare with the rate before the war? Granted that there is leaf to pluck, can a coolie earn as much *ticca* as he or she chooses or is there a limit? Can a coolie earn as much by *ticca* plucking now as during the war boom in tea?

45. In weighing leaf what deduction is made for the basket? Is the deduction always the same? What other deductions are made, e.g., for wet or stalky leaf or for factory charges? Suppose a plucker brings in 25 pounds of *actual* leaf in a basket weighing 5 pounds, the leaf being perfectly dry, for what weight of leaf will she get credit in your garden?

46. Is leaf weighment made in presence of the Manager or Assistant Manager? Is this the invariable rule?

47. What is the task for (a) light hoeing, (b) deep hoeing? Has it altered in recent years, say from 1913? If so, how?

48. Does the hoeing task differ at various times of the year or for different soils in the garden? How many hours does it take the average man to do the work?

49. What is the *ticca* rate for hoeing and how does it compare with the rate before the war? Can a coolie earn as much *ticca* in hoeing as she chooses, or is there a limit? Can he earn as much now by *ticca* hoeing as he could before the war?

50. How are hoeing measurements made? By a *nal* rod or by so many *galis* (rows) of bushes? Are the results identical? How many feet in your garden *nal*?

51. To what extent and in what circumstances are fractional *haziras* given in your garden?

V.—Concessions.

52. (a) To what extent have coolies in your garden got land for cultivation of paddy or other crops (1) within the garden grant, (2) outside? In the case of (1) can you say what amount of land is so held and by how many adult coolies? On what conditions do the coolies hold land inside the grant; if not on rent-free terms, what is the rate of rent? Are they liable to be turned out of their land, and for what reasons?

(b) What percentage of the adult male coolies in the garden have got land for cultivation either inside or outside the grant?

53. Is it your experience that coolies living in the garden who hold land inside or outside the estate do a reasonable amount of garden work, either by themselves or by other family members?

54. Have you still got land within the estate which the coolies could take up for cultivation? If so, is there any desire to take it up? If not, why not?

55. Is it your experience that new coolies are keen on taking up land for cultivation or only coolies who have been settled in the garden for some time?

56. Do you give facilities to new coolies to cultivate, or do you prefer to give this privilege only to those who have been for some time on the garden?

57. Is there much Government waste land in the neighbourhood of your garden suitable for cultivation which your coolies could take up?

58. Can you give any idea as to what extent coolies in your garden hold land outside the estate and whether as direct tenants of Government or as sub-tenants of others?

59. Does the coolie as a rule sell the produce of his land in the open market or to other coolies, or does he keep it chiefly for his own consumption?

60. Is the coolie in your garden allowed leave freely to cultivate his land or are restrictions placed?

61. Are the coolies housed in lines or houses built at garden expense? Or are they allowed to build their own houses? In the latter case, thus the garden supply materials and pay the coolies for a reasonable time while building them? Can you

give any idea of the money value of free housing? Do they prefer to build their own houses or to live in the houses built by the garden? Have they a plot for growing vegetables, etc.?

62. Is there free grazing land available in the garden? If so, does the garden provide cowherds?

63. Apart from agreement advances, does the garden lend money to the coolies for miscellaneous purposes? Is interest charged? How are the loans recovered? Does the borrower mortgage his cattle or any thing? If he takes the money to buy cattle, do you consider the cattle garden property until the advance is repaid?

64. Are many of these loans irrecoverable? On an average how much do you write off annually as irrecoverable?

65. Do the coolies have any difficulty in finding fuel within the estate? If so, is any help given to them?

66. On the occasion of festive days like the *Durga Pujas*, is anything given to the coolies?

67. Have you accommodation for in-door patients in your hospital and is it much used?

68. Do you supply clothing or blankets free or at a reduced rates, and in what cases?

69. What pregnant sick leave is given before and after birth? What sick pay, if any, is given during that time? Is any bonus given on the birth of a child? Are any arrangements made for nursing?

70. In the case of children or weakly coolies unable to work, are free meals or sick *haziras* given? In the case of the latter, what amounts? If men or women fall below *par* and are unable to earn sufficient to keep them in good health, do you do anything to assist them such as by feeding them till they are fit for work?

71. Have you a garden school and would you call it a success? If, in the past, you have had such a school which has now ceased to exist, can you give the reason for its abolition?

72. (a) When rice is dear, is it your practice to sell it to the coolies at concession rates? Taking the last 5 years or any other suitable period, what has been your loss by making this concession? What is your guiding principle in fixing the rate at which you sell rice to the coolie or have you a fixed rate? If you have a fixed rate, what is it?

(b) Is this concession of cheap rice granted over and above the full rates of pay, or do those who avail themselves of the cheap rice concession get less pay than those who do not? How much concession rice may a working coolie—man, woman, or child—purchase per week?

73. Is it possible and desirable that the indirect remuneration represented by the various concessions in the shape of free housing, medical attendance, cheap rice, clothing, garden land, etc., should be converted into an increase of money wages? The question may be considered from the points of view both of the garden and the coolie.

VI.—Contract.

74. (a) Do you put coolies in your garden under Act-XIII agreement? If so, what advance is given to men and women? Do you recover the advances? Do you put newly-recruited coolies under agreement as soon as they come up from their country?

(b) Has the amending Act XII of 1920 which restricts the term of agreement to one year, altered the amount you give as advance? How has your garden practice been altered as the result of this Act?

75. Do you think it necessary to put the coolie under contract at all? Probably many coolies put themselves under contract in order to get the advance. Would you be willing to make the present advances if the coolie was not put under contract? Would you be willing to give the coolie the money as a bonus at the expiry of a year's work?

76. Do you think the coolie would be more content if he was not under contract?

77. Do you file many cases under Act XIII against absconding coolies? If so, do they usually go back to the garden, refund the advance, or go to jail?

78. If it is the practice in your garden not to put coolies under contract, do you find that this is satisfactory? And do many coolies abscond?

VII.—General.

79. Is there a shop in the garden from which coolies can get supplies and are prices controlled by the management? Have the coolies any complaints against the shops?

80. Is it the custom to hold muster parade before the coolies go out to work in the morning? Is this necessary?

81. Do the coolies in your garden spend much money on liquor or on opium? In recent years the price of these commodities has increased, do you think that this has led to a decrease in consumption among your coolies? Where there has been an increase of wages, is there any reason to believe that much of this has gone in liquor or in opium? In the case of the heavy drinker or confirmed opium-eater, have these habits caused diminished earnings among these classes?

82. Is there any co-operative society in your garden where coolies can get goods at reasonable prices? Do you think there is any prospect of success if this is tried?

83. Do you think the coolie has more time to devote to his own pursuits at the present day than he used to have? Can you explain why?

84. In the case of disputes in your garden among the coolies themselves, do they prefer settlement by the manager to going to court?

85. What is your opinion about giving pensions to coolies who have done long and faithful service?

J. A. DAWSON,

30th November 1921.

Secretary, Assam Labour Enquiry Committee.