

## REVIEWS

**Amidst Heat and Noise.** Bagaram Tulpule. New Delhi, All India Management Association, 1977. 133p. Rs. 35.00

Unlike the floor-crossings indulged in by Indian politicians, Mr. Tulpule's stint of four-and-a-half years in the Durgapur Steel Plant was by no means mean opportunism. Firstly, the offer of General Managership of Durgapur Steel Plant was not of his own seeking. Secondly, to switch over from the established image of a recognised trade unionist to that of a Chief Executive must have been a traumatic trial for any conscientious person. Thirdly, we see Mr. Tulpule, in his own words, wending his way on a bicycle and on foot in the crowded market places of Durgapur doing his own shopping. Fourthly, he was not prepared to sacrifice his independence of functioning as General Manager (p. 4), although such an offer by itself might have softened up the spines of many a chivalrous men of public affairs.

In May 1971, when Mr. Tulpule took charge of Durgapur Steel Plant, it was a hot potato — especially on the industrial relations front. The late Mr. Mohan Kumaramangalam's decision to place Mr. Tulpule atop a simmering volcano must have been primarily motivated by a frantic search for someone who could at least arrest the rise in temperature, and then cool it down to normalcy. Presumably, it must have been reckoned with that a recognised trade union leader was more likely

to gain credibility and trust from the Durgapur Steel Plant employees. It was also perhaps thought — not in the Manichaeian, but in the Augustinian vein — that a trade unionist should know better the wiles and guiles of his fellow travellers, and that, therefore, the chances of defusing the tense atmosphere would be brighter. That such calculations were not altogether unrealistic in the end is borne out by the author's candid rendering in a compact book.

This reviewer began looking at the book with an initial assumption that it would deal almost exclusively with the labour, trade union, and industrial relations problems at Durgapur Steel Plant. But it certainly contains much more than that. It goes into the issues of maintenance and materials management, the functioning of HSL board, the SAIL-HSL relationships, the management of public sector units in general, and most poignantly perhaps into the Cinderella-like treatment given to the Durgapur Steel Plant. However, let us take a look first at the industrial relations matters discussed in the book — for they constitute the *raison-de-etre* of Mr. Tulpule being in Durgapur Steel Plant, and of his book.

On p. 11 the author argues that "it is necessary to view them (Durgapur Steel Plant's problems) in the perspective of the socio-economic and political conditions in West Bengal where Durgapur is situated". Yes, such a perspective explains a large part

of the riddle. In fact, such a perspective could be a valid one — with variations in degrees only — to judge the features of management and employer-employee relationships in Indian organisations of today. India is a country which gratefully (and gracefully!) accepts the label of a 'developing' economy. It also belongs to the 'third' world. One of the most prominent manifestations of industrialisation in these countries has been the creation overnight of mammoth organisations with such visible symbols of hierarchy and status separating the managers and workers, that both sets have been caught in a dangerous revolution of rising material expectations. Industrial labour in such plants as Durgapur, and its first line managers, come from families which still retain fairly strong elements of thriftiness, stoicism, and tolerance of privation in them. It has been a great folly on the part of policy-makers and planners of such plants to have planted such glaring differentiation in the habitat and other elements of material living of its senior management personnel and the rest. Most such managers must never have really known the taste of these standards. They have been spoiled by pampering. And the distinctions which they may never really have brought into mental reckoning, have been subtly reinforced and entrenched by such visible symbols. No wonder these have had a chain effect throughout the society surrounding such plants. This, to my mind, is one of the most important features of industrial labour in a developing economy. Mr. Tulpule rightly observes therefore, "It (labour) is *in* the society but not *of* it, and has no stake in the society in which it finds itself" (p. 12).

Another characteristic of industrial labour

in a developing economy with high unemployment — especially of educated youth — like India is that, our labour force is attracting an increasing proportion of highly educated middle-class youth. This would not be true of manpower-short economies of the West. Managing such a composition of labour force, as rightly pointed out by Mr. Tulpule, through unquestioning submission to superior's orders would be out of joint with the social reality (p. 14). And add to it the inexperience, in general, of India in handling large-sized labour force in organised industry, the latter being truly a phenomenon hardly three decades old. Our giants have sprung up almost overnight. They did not grow organically from humbler beginnings.

Yet another perplexing aspect of industrial labour in a developing economy like India is its irredeemable politicalisation. The strangle-hold of political parties on labour has been tightened by rising unemployment. I wonder whether such an unabashedly self-oriented politicalisation of the labour movement would have been possible to the extent seen today if our plans had been able to control and bring down unemployment. Hence, Mr. Tulpule's observation on "Bitter rivalries between HSWU (INTUC) and HSEU (CITU)" (p. 15), and on top management invariably surrendering before political pressures (p.17). A distinguishing feature about the loss of authority felt by the unions as well as by management over workers in India and in a country like the U. K., is that in the former it is mostly due to outside political parties, and in the latter it is due to inside shop-stewards. Mr. Tulpule might have done well to refer to this point and offer his thoughts to the readers. My own view is that the institution of shop

stewards will not grow in a type of industrial labour force that India possesses today, with the features outlined earlier. Further, I consider the role of internal shop-stewards to be less harmful as a whole than that of external political helmsmen.

I have mentioned earlier in this review that it might have been one underlying expectation that an ex-trade unionist General Manager should earn greater trust and confidence from Durgapur Steel Plant trade unions. Mr. Tulpule's initial manoeuvres seemed to belie such hopes. We see him writing, "It was difficult for me with my long trade union background to understand the reluctance of a trade union to accept the kind of proposals I had offered" (p. 24). Being methodically sporadic was more suited to the trade unions than being methodically systematic. But perhaps more disturbing was the fact that the trade union leaders lacked confidence in their ability to carry the entire workforce with them through systematic steps of bargaining and negotiation. It is obvious that trade union leaders with predominantly political aims were not models of behaviour which could inspire abiding loyalty and confidence in the majority of their following. This is yet another important characteristic of industrial labour force in a developing economy — it has indeed very few people to look up to, either in management or in trade unions, as models worthy of respect and emulation. As in our individual lives, so also with unions, militant postures are often struck as cover for inherent inferiority and weakness.

It is interesting to note from a mature trade union leader like Mr. Tulpule his views about

the role of government in industrial relations. He approached the state government "to try and induce it to play a more positive, constructive role in the situation and to act as a catalyst to bring about some change in the quality to labour-management interaction in Durgapur Steel Plant, rather than come into the picture only under pressure of crisis situations" (p. 27). There are conflicting views in India and elsewhere as to the desirable degree of involvement of government in industrial relations matters. One might, for instance, say that inviting formal and continuous government association in such matters would amount to a stamping of industrial relations with the insignia of immaturity without any reservation. Moreover, if politicalisation of trade unions is one of the banes in Indian industry, would not increasing government association as a third party only accentuate this trend? The assumption favouring such invitation, however, seems to be that the government would be ruled more by the broader social and economic imperatives, than merely by political expediency.

The three-tier dispute resolving machinery evolved during Mr. Tulpule's tenure was an important institutional landmark in Durgapur Steel Plant's history. There was a tri-partite State Level Council (SLC), followed by a bi-partite Plant Level Committee (PLC) in each plant, and ending in Floor Level Committees (FLC) in various sections or departments of each plant. While this machinery did bring together all feuding unions on to a single bargaining table, much to the author's disappointment, its top and bottom tiers never really came into operation. But he was quite happy with the slow but sure changes which the PLC brought about in the attitudes of

both the union men and managerial men. Workers began to realise that problems could genuinely be solved through dialogue and understanding. Managers also learnt to be patient and to see the utility of spending time on discussions alone (pp. 27-35).

Industrial relations apart, the SAIL-HSL relationships described in the book constitute another important dimension. Thus, the HSL board was given no intimation about the granting of Rs. 100/- per worker ex-gratia (to offset the repercussions of a 20% bonus declared by non-producing units) to Bhilai and Rourkela Steel Plant workers by SAIL (p. 39). Similarly, HSL turned out to be a body with statutory obligations without much effective authority (p. 44). The chairman of SAIL became invested with sweeping and exceptional powers regarding recruitments, appointments, transfers etc. (p. 45). While plants were not involved in SAIL's policy-making, they were closely controlled in their operations (p. 46). Labour negotiations dealt with offers from SAIL personnel director about which HSL Chairman or plants were kept in the dark (p. 47). In the words of the author: "Indeed, a highly centralised, authoritarian organisation had clearly come into being in the SAIL in sharp contrast to the open, participative, friendly culture of HSL" (p. 49 and 115). This is certainly as strong an indictment of the top man of SAIL, as it is a great ovation to the top man of HSL. Did the authoritarian style of those agonising years prove more productive for Indian Steel Industry, than the participative style? In fact, Mr. Tulpule's work shows this was not so. And he showers well-deserved praise on his Chairman, Mr. Bhaya at several other places in the book (p. 41, 77).

Tulpule also finds little use of agencies like the Bureau of Public Enterprises (p. 51), or of investigating bodies like the Committee on Public Undertakings (p. 53). One may not fully agree with him on such summary dismissal, although many a time such studies could be perfunctory, or based on frivolous issues. Improvements should be sought in the direction of proper homework by COPU before they sit on these studies. I have seen a few other COPU reports which do provide useful leads to enterprise managements.

It makes interesting reading that, while the production incentives system for workers devised by one consultant was found to be of little use (p. 20-21), behavioral sciences intervention by another consultant for top management team building proved effective (p. 60). Does it by any chance mean that it is easier to change attitudes and values, and to remove distrust and misunderstandings, than to do anything which is going to alter the pay packets? Or, does it mean technical people have high ego, and cannot easily accept the advice of other technical people. But a behavioral scientist treads an altogether different domain, and technical people feel more open to his interventions. Or, is it accounted for by the personal charisma of an interventionist?

And now to the woes of Cinderella inflicted upon DSP by the powers-that-be. DSP plant design was meant to be fed with specified blends of coal for the coke ovens to produce right kind of coke for right productivity of blast furnaces. Being located in the heart of the coal belt, no captive blending plant was built for DSP. But coal of the right quality was never supplied to DSP. The ash content averaged

always around 28 to 29%, as against the desired level of 22 to 23% (p. 8 and p. 70). While Bhilai and Bokaro got the relatively better coking coals, Rourkela and Durgapur got the poorer deal — the last one persistently getting the worst of all (p. 46 and p. 71) SAIL personnel directorate did little to help explain to the state government the bonafides of many of the steps taken by DSP ; on the other hand it questioned HSL Chairman regarding a token spending of Rs. 3000/- on sweets and small gifts to a section of stores department workers who had done some excellent work (pp. 48-49). The move to make all plants into separate companies, and name DSP alone as HSL reflected the same mentality (p. 50). (Although later on the whole idea was abandoned for other reasons). The source of limestone supply for DSP in Bihar was bought over by Bokaro Steel. No amount of pleading and reasoning with any quarter could guarantee some assured minimum flow of limestone to DSP. And DSP had no captive source of limestone supply unlike other steel plants (pp. 80-81). To quote a last instance, when DSP wanted to set up its own captive power plant to meet its whole requirement of power, DVC did not allow this saying it would supply all its needs. But then performance in DVC went downhill and DSP and ASP were helpless victims of their original folly (pp. 82-83). In a sense it is good that such forthright disclosures have come from a person of status not belonging to the state of West Bengal.

In the final Chapter Mr. Tulpule offers us his perceptions about public sector management (in India) in general. It is important to remember that it is a trade unionist-turned-manager who speaks thus. For instance, the

COPU's contribution is once again seriously questioned. Its contribution to policy are sterile, its brakes upon operational autonomy stifling (pp. 118-119). The concerned minister's perception of the nature of his responsibility to Parliament often leads the ministry too to useless meddling in details (pp. 119-120). Paradoxically, it appears that such ministerial involvement sometimes shields the unit and its management from direct cross-examination. At the same time it also aborts initiative and innovation within management (pp. 120-121). The author admits of undue pressure from the state government for compromise in industrial relations matters (p. 122). We have seen, however, earlier the author's advocacy of greater involvement of government in such matters. As a result, he might accentuate the tendency observed that the employees and union look to the state government and the ministry as real seats of authority (123). Although the author concedes the infiltration of governmental bureaucratic ethos into public enterprises due to historical compulsions, he does not agree that it necessarily blocks the initiative and creativity of those who wish to exercise them. Rather it provides a snug cover for the inactive, the mediocre and the apathetic (pp. 124-125). The roles of the CBI and CVC also come in for a good measure of chiding by the author. These agencies are blamed as a far greater inhibitor of initiative than any rules or procedures (127). The author feels that the public sector manager has outgrown his stereotype and is a lot more professionalised today. In the end, however, the rate of change in style of management in public enterprises will depend on the nature and speed of change in the interface between the enterprise on the one hand, and the government and parliament on the other (p. 133).

In fine, *Amidst Heat and Noise* is a different species of book in the genus of business or industrial literature. One thing is quite clear from the narrative style adopted by the author : when you manage any organisation, you face a common set of problems, and you tend to react (or proact ?) to them in the same way whether you are a trade-unionist turned manager, or otherwise. I recall having read Walter Citrine (later Lord Citrine) who was an arch-trade unionist, turned Chairman of the National Coal Board (U.K.), managing his massive organisation reacting much the same way as Mr. Tulpule. As a reviewer I missed the same candid elaboration in respect of the subjective side of Mr. Tulpule's taking on the mantle of a General Manager of DSP, shedding his trade unionist role. For good measure, he might have thrown some light on his own way of managing a trade union, and perhaps drawn some comparisons between the same and that of managing DSP.

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**A Guide to settlement of Industrial Disputes**, Third Edition, V. P. Arya. New Delhi, Law and Allied Publishers, 1977. 146 p. Rs. 40.00

The law governing labour-management relations is one of the most important branches of Law — a law which provides the legal basis on which a very large number of industrial workforce earn their living. But it would be wrong to say that law makes a significant contribution to the standard of living enjoyed by industrial workers. For example, the level of wages, whether nominal or real, which is an important issue over which the disputes

between labour and management frequently arise, can only be marginally influenced by legal rules and institutions. Though it has to be admitted that minimum wage legislation has made an attempt to help those at the bottom rungs of the ladder, particularly the labour in specified industries and some non-industrial sectors, its impact on the industrial worker is not so significant.

Nevertheless, in countries like India, legislations have been enacted with a view to providing the necessary benefit to or undertaking welfare activities for the labour and for providing machinery to resolve disputes or differences between labour and management.

The book under review which has entered into the third revised edition aims at providing guidance to one so that one can appreciate the statutory provisions and the principles and practices of settlement of industrial disputes. There is no doubt that a need is often felt for a book of its kind. The book has been rewritten to incorporate amendments to various statutes as well as to bring up-to-date references to the reported cases. Further the book contains the discussions on several new topics such as "Production bonus", "Workers' participation in management" and "Criteria for recognition of trade union" which the reader will find quite useful and relevant.

The book consists of two parts : part I concerns itself with machinery and methods for investigating and settlement of disputes which are the basic objectives of the industrial Disputes Act 1947 ( Hereinafter called the Act of 1947 ). The cornerstone on which the edifice of the law governing employment relationship between industrial workers and management has been built up, is the law of