

Communications

Nature & Causes of Disputes in Public and Private Enterprises in Kerala

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Introduction

The increasing complexity of modern factory system has widened the hiatus between those who manage the industry and those who work in it. This gives rise to conflicts in labour-management relations, resulting in strikes/lockouts and ultimately the loss of production and hardships to the society. There is no single cause for industrial disputes anywhere in the world and the causes of industrial disputes in India are of various categories which differ not only from state to state but also from industry to industry. Industrial dispute is not a personal dispute of one person and it affects a large number of workers having common interests. The ultimate manifestation of industrial conflicts is a strike on the part of workers and a lockout on the part of managers/employers. Industrial disputes are

symptoms of industrial unrest in the country. The present study has been made to assess the nature and causes of disputes in the public and private enterprises in Kerala. The assessment has been made on the basis of some well-defined variables, viz. causes of disputes, type of strikes, percentage of successful strikes, reasons for the success and failure of strikes.

Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. The data required for the study was collected from employees in the public and private enterprises in Kerala based on a structured interview schedule. The universe of the study consisted of all the 4251 employees in the selected public and private enterprises (medium and large) in the state. Of these, 1393 employees were in the public sector and 2858 were in the private sector. For the intensive study 140 employees (10 per cent) from the public enterprises and 286 (10 per cent) from the private enterprises were selected through a stratified random sampling method. Data analysis was done through weighted mean and percentages.

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Causes of Disputes

The causes of industrial disputes may be economic (i.e. demand for increase in wages, gratuity and other retirement benefits, bonus, house rent allowance, medical allowance, night shift allowance, conveyance allowance, paid holidays, reduction of working hours, better working conditions etc) political (i.e. vested interests of political parties rather than interests of labourers), personal (i.e. retrenchment, layoff, transfer, promotion, indiscipline and violence etc) and miscellaneous (i.e. modernisation of plant etc.). The

perceptions of the employees reveal ‘wages and allowances’ as the first cause of the disputes (Table I). Next to wages, bonus comes as the second cause in the private sector. But respondents in the public sector ranked ‘other factors’ as the second and ‘violation of agreement’ as the third cause of disputes. Meanwhile, employees in the private sector ranked ‘other factors’ as the fifth cause and ‘violation of agreement’ as the fourth. The above findings on the causes of disputes are in agreement with some earlier research findings by Bhango (1995), Jacob (2002) and Mathur (2003).

Table 1: Employees’ Perception of the Causes of Disputes

Causes of disputes	Public sector		Private sector	
	Weighted mean	Rank	Weighted mean	Rank
Wages and allowances	6.59	1	6.28	1
Workload	5.12	5	4.96	3
Retrenchment	4.00	6	-	-
Bonus	5.50	4	5.78	2
Violation of agreement	5.59	3	4.78	4
Others	6.29	2	3.85	5

Source: Survey data.

Type of Strikes

Workers and management in an industry resort to various forms of unrest to show their anger and disagreement regarding matters of employment. Industrial unrest takes an organised form when the working class make common cause of their grievance against the employer by way of strikes, demonstrations, picketing, morchas, gate meetings, gheraos etc. Strike is the most

spectacular sign of industrial discontent and it is an index of measuring the industrial peace in the economy. It is considered as the most powerful weapon in the hands of workers/trade unions for forcing the management to accept their demands. The strike may be of many types apart from primary and secondary strike, such as stay away strike, sit down and stay in strike, tools and pen down strike, token or protest strike, lightening or cat call strike, go slow, hunger strike,

sympathetic strike etc. The other forms of strikes are picketing, boycott and gheraos. The perceptions of the employees reveal that there is no unanimity among the employees in the public and private sectors regarding the

type of strikes (Table 2). Employees in the public sector ranked picketing as the main type of strikes where as employees in the private sector ranked stay away strike as the major type of strikes.

Table 2: Employees' Perception of the Type of Strikes

Type of strikes	Public sector		Private sector	
	Weighted mean	Rank	Weighted mean	Rank
Stay away strike	5.18	3	5.55	1
Go slow	4.0	5	4.94	3
Token strike	4.7	4	5.09	2
Picketing	5.65	1	3.04	5
Not known	4.0	5	4.0	4
Others	5.29	2	3.0	6

Source: Survey data.

Percentage of Successful Strikes

Usually all the strikes called by the employees may not be successful. 45.3 per cent of employees in the public sector and 57.7 per cent in the private

sector opined that 25 to 50 per cent of the strikes called were successful (Table 3). Meanwhile, 32.6 per cent in the public sector and 32.1 per cent in the private sector viewed that the percentage of success was below 25.

Table 3: Employees' Perception of the Percentage of Successful Strikes

Percentage of Success Rate (Percentage)	Public sector		Private sector	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Below 25	28	32.6	63	32.1
25-50	39	45.3	113	57.7
50-75	15	17.4	12	6.1
75-100	4	4.7	8	4.1
Total	86	100	196	100

Source: Survey data.

Reasons for Success of Strikes

Success of a strike depends on various reasons, viz. workers solidarity, co-operative management, capable and strong union leaders, reasonable

demands etc. The employees in the public sector reveal that unity of workers, cooperative management, reasonable demands and capable union leaders are the main reasons for the success of strikes (Table 4). They ranked

reasonable demand and unity of workers as the second and third reason. Contrary to the above view, the employees in the private sector ranked reasonable demand as the first reason for the success of strikes. They ranked unity of workers and cooperative management as the second and third reasons.

Table 4: Employees' Opinion of the Reasons for the Success of Strike

Reasons	Public sector		Private sector	
	Weighted mean	Rank	Weighted mean	Percentage
Unity of workers	3.56	2	4.48	1
Co-operative management	3.27	4	3.45	3
Reasonable demands	4.42	1	4.10	2
Capable union leaders	3.44	3	2.45	4
All of the above	2.00	5	-	-

Source: Survey data.

Reasons for the Failure of Strikes

Sometimes the strikes called by the workers/unions may fail. The failure may be due to disunity of workers, multiplicity of unions, militancy of management, absence of capable union leaders, unreasonable demands of the workers etc.

A majority of the employees opined that 50 per cent of the strikes called were a failure. In order of importance, non-cooperative management, disunity of workers, weak union leaders and unreasonable demands were the reasons for the failure (Table 5).

Table 5: Employees' View of the Reasons for the Failure of Strikes

Reasons	Public sector		Private sector	
	Weighted mean	Rank	Weighted mean	Percentage
Disunity of workers	3.98	2	3.81	2
Non-Co-operative management	4.21	1	4.76	1
Unreasonable demands	3.17	4	3.46	4
Weak union leaders	3.70	3	3.41	3
All of the above	3.13	5	2.69	5

Source: Survey data.

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, the following conclusions were arrived at :

1. The employees in both the public and private sectors unanimously

identified 'wages and allowances' as the main cause of disputes. But there was no unanimity among them as to the other causes. They perceived 'bonus', 'workload' and 'violation of agreement' as the other important causes in both these sectors.

2. The employees in the public sector opined that 'picketing' was the main type of strikes. Stay away strike, token strike and go-slow were the other types. Stay away strike and token strike were the important type of strikes generally used by the employees in the private sector.
3. More than 75 per cent of employees opined that the extent of successful strikes was below 50 per cent.
4. Reasonable demands and unity of workers were the most important reasons for the success of strikes in both the public and private sectors.
5. The employees in both the sectors opined that 'non-cooperative management' and 'disunity of workers' were the main reasons for the failure of strikes.

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