

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT

Shall India Proclaim Moratorium on Strikes, Lockouts, Bandhs?

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Abstract:

A conflict is constructive if it is task oriented and not a personal one. It focuses on execution of the task without losing objectivity of organizational betterment. Constructive conflicts emphasize task-completion, problem solving, creativity, exchange of ideas and also generate high-quality decisions in the workplace. Unlike this, a personal conflict is more of an ego game, hence destructive. Managed in the wrong way, real and legitimate differences between people can quickly spiral out of control, resulting in situations where co-operation breaks down and the team's mission is threatened. The fact that conflict exists, however, is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as it is resolved effectively, it can lead to personal and professional growth. The focus is on real-work situations and its problems and challenges in the workplace. This article will help to understand how to increase effectiveness in getting things done while building positive working relationships and avoiding aggressive or submissive behaviour patterns and hence improving workplace environment.

Keywords: *Temporary ban, Moratorium, Conflict environment, industrial bandhs*

1. Introduction

Strikes, lockouts, industrial bandhs, go-slow, work to rule etc, have functional value for achieving justice and equity. These are the final manifestations of industrial unrest and conflict. These safeguard labour and management's liberty in a democratic society. These rights are assumed which are statutorily restricted. But there is no statutory ban on strikes and lockouts excepting that there is declaration of Moratorium on it during emergency. Strikes and lockouts, reveal good as well as harmful results. Sometimes these become the sources through which socio-economic advances and upliftment are accrued.

2. The Industrial Relations Scenario in India

The trend of strikes and lockouts reveal the truth that there is significant increase of managerial militancy as well as worker's union militancy through industrial unrest. It is deteriorating very rapidly, demolishing and impeding socio-economic stability and development, putting the industrial sectors into a very complex and critical juncture. In such a movement the sky of industrial society has clouded with worries, anxieties and apprehensions due to mismanagement and non-cooperation of workers and unions, Management has to assume a greater burden of responsibility in this regard. It fails to deal with effective control by utilizing better its resources technical, financial, personnel etc. So ultimate outcome of mismanagement is managerial militancy which takes the situation from bad to worse. On the other hand, unions are ill-suited to meeting the needs of their workers or companies. They are becoming irrelevant and posing obstacle to companies' productivity and country's progress, as a result of which there is a radical decline in unionism. In this scene of turmoil workers are driven to the unions. It tends to union militancy. In this state of desperation, Government's decision for closure and privatization of the public sector undertakings which run in losses, is considered baseless and hence criticized by leftist trade unions and one-day strike was resorted to on 29th November, 1991. On 26th January, 1992, the President appealed for moratorium on strikes, all bandhs etc. .. for two years in his Republic Day--eve--address. This moratorium has its value due to widespread industrial unrest and conflict, etc. The magnitude of this phenomenon can properly be judged from the following tables for the year 1961-1990 in terms of strikes and lockouts, workers involvement in it and man days lost. The table given below provides some illuminating data which bears testimony to industrial unrest and conflict. The trend of strikes and lockouts in India since 1961 to 1990 in terms of strikes and lockouts, worker's involvement in it and man-days lost.

The table given below provides some illuminating data which bears testimony to the industrial unrest and conflict. The trend of strikes and lockouts in India since 1961 to 1990 reveals the facts as follows:-

In the first 15 years since 1961 to 1975, the number of man-days lost due to strikes has varied in the range of 60 to 84 percent of the total man-days lost, which indicate the continuous rise in worker's militancy. On the other hand, the incidence of lockout had increased from 16 to 40 per cent which also indicate continuous rise in employer's militancy. The causes are higher wages, dearness allowance, grievances against retrenchment and improvement of working conditions.

But the situation had taken a new turn in the year 1975, when the Congress (I) government came to power. It declared emergency. During this period the voice of the working classes was ruthlessly stifled which led immediately. to employer's militancy, in 1976, the

number of man-days lost due to lockout shot up to 9.9 million as against only 2.8 million man-days lost due to strikes. In the relative terms, the share of, lockout was as high as 78 percent in total man-days lost and that of strikes came down to only 22 per cent.

During 1977 and 1979, the scenario changed, when the Janata Party came to power. The largest trade union of the country INTUC encouraged workers' militancy. HMS, CITU and AITUC became silent supporters. The year 1979 witnessed a record of 35.8 million man-days lost due to strikes, as against lockouts which dwindled to a low figure of 8.1 million man-days, in comparative terms, strikes accounted for 82 per cent of total loss of man-days against lockouts coming down to 18 per cent.

In 1980, the Congress (I) government came to power which led to the trend being reversed again. The share of lockouts began to rise. Since that onwards the employer's militancy has been on the increase. During 1989 the share of lockout was 65 per cent where as the share of strike was 35 per cent.

The above statistics reveal the truth that the magnitude and intensity of man-days lost due to strikes and lockouts are entirely relatable to the changes in the Indian polity. Industrial Relations scenario in India is contaminated. The trend indicates reduced job pride and fall in the work ethics. The growing rate of militancy of management, workers and unions portray very crucial picture. Hence moratorium as a corrective pill to the present system has to be conceptualized.

| Year | No. of Disputes | | | No. of Workers involved | | | No. of Man-days lost ('000) | | |
|-------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------------------|--------------|-------|-----------------------------|-----------|--------|
| | Strikes | Lockout | Total | Strikes | Lockouts out | Total | Strikes | Lock outs | Total |
| 1961 | 1240 | 117 | 1357 | 432 | 80 | 512 | 2969 | 1950 | 4919 |
| 1962 | 1396 | 95 | 1491 | 575 | 130 | 705 | 5059 | 1062 | 6121 |
| 1963 | 1364 | 107 | 1471 | 491 | 72 | 563 | 2229 | 1040 | 3269 |
| 1964 | 1981 | 170 | 2151 | 876 | 127 | 1003 | 5724 | 2001 | 7725 |
| 1965 | 1697 | 138 | 1835 | 8s9 | 102 | 991 | 4617 | 1853 | 6470 |
| 1966 | 2353 | 203 | 2556 | 1262 | 148 | 1410 | 10377 | 3469 | 13846 |
| 1967 | 2433 | 382 | 2815 | 1340 | 151 | 1491 | 10565 | 6583 | 17148 |
| 1968 | 2451 | 325 | 2776 | 1465 | 204 | 1669 | 11078 | 6166 | 17244 |
| 1969 | 2344 | 283 | 2627 | 1687 | 140 | 1827 | 15477 | 3571 | 19048 |
| 1970 | 2598 | 291 | 1889 | 1552 | 278 | 1828 | 14749 | 5814 | 20563 |
| 1971 | 2478 | 274 | 2752 | 1476 | 139 | 1615 | 11803 | 4743 | 16546 |
| 1972 | 2857 | 386 | 3243 | 1457 | 262 | 1737 | 13748 | 6796 | 20544 |
| 1973 | 2958 | 412 | 3370 | 2358 | 187 | 2545 | 13862 | 6764 | 20626 |
| 1974 | 2510 | 428 | 2938 | 2710 | 145 | 2855 | 33643 | 6619 | 40262 |
| 1975 | 1644 | 299 | 1943 | 1032 | 111 | 1143 | 16706 | 5195 | 21901 |
| 1976 | 1241 | 218 | 1459 | 550 | 186 | 738 | 2799 | 9947 | 12748 |
| 1977 | 2691 | 426 | 3117 | 1912 | 281 | 2193 | 13410 | 11910 | 25320 |
| 1978 | 2762 | 425 | 3187 | 1690 | 226 | 1916 | 15423 | 12917 | 28340 |
| 1979 | 2708 | 340 | 3048 | 2714 | 159 | 2873 | 35804 | 8050 | 43854 |
| 1980 | 2501 | 355 | 2856 | 1661 | 239 | 1900 | 12018 | 9907 | 21925 |
| 1981 | 2245 | 344 | 2589 | 1261 | 327 | 1588 | 21208 | 15375 | 36583 |
| 1982 | 2029 | 454 | 2483 | 1191 | 278 | 1469 | 52113 | 22502 | 74615• |
| 1983 | 1993 | 495 | 2488 | 1167 | 294 | 1461 | 24921 | 21937 | 46858' |
| 1984 | 1689 | 405 | 2094 | 1726 | 223 | 1949 | 39957 | 16068 | 56025 |
| 1985 | 1355 | 400 | 1755 | 878 | 201 | 1079 | 11487 | 17753 | 29240 |
| 1986 | 1458 | 434 | 1892 | 1444 | 201 | 1645 | 18824 | 13925 | 32749 |
| 1987 | 1348 | 451 | 1799 | 1495 | 275 | 1770 | 14026 | 21332 | 35358 |
| 1988 | 1304 | 441 | 1745 | 937 | 254 | 1191 | 12530 | 21417 | 33947 |
| 1989(P) | 1408 | 358 | 1793 | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | 10650 | 19790 | 30440 |
| 1990(P) | 730 | 226 | 956 | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | 3560 | 4660 | 8220 |

Table 1: Industrial Disputes Classified by Strikes & Lockouts 1961 to 1990 (in Lakhs)

*Includes 41.40 and 13.38 million man-days lost due to Bombay Textile strike during 1982 and 1983 respectively; (p) Provisional.

- Source: Table-1, Presidential address by Professor Ruddar Dutt to the 33rd Annual Conference of the Indian Society of Labour Economics held on 24th December, 1991 at Osmania University, Hyderabad (A.P.)

2.1. Time-loss due to Industrial Disputes in 2011 and 2012

During the year 2012 as compared to 2011, the total time-loss (Central and State Sphere) due to Strikes and lockouts in Public and Private Sector combined registered a decrease of 10.52 per cent (1,521,243). However, at disaggregated level, it decreased by 39.47 per cent (1,853,731) in case of strikes and increased by 3.41 per cent (332,488) in case of Lockout. While in Central Sphere, the total time-loss due to Strikes in Public and Private Sector combined registered an increase of 125.48 per cent (841,298 man-days), it

registered a decline of 17.14 per cent (2,362,541 man-days) in State Sphere. However, at disaggregated level, in State Sphere, it experienced a decrease of 66.94 per cent in case of strikes and an increase of 3.41 per cent in case of lockouts. Average time-loss per dispute increased from 39,076 man-days in 2011 to 40,682 man-days in 2012. While in case of strikes it decreased from 26,239 to 21,377 and in Lockouts it increased from 51,106 man-days to 54,561 during the same period {Ref. Tables 2, and 3}.

| PUBLIC SECTOR | | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Sr. No. | Sphere | Strikes/ Lockouts | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | %increase/ decrease over the year 2011 |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| I | Central Sphere | Strikes % to Total | 1,499,497 (6.48) | 657,831 (4.55) | 1,450,942 (11.22) | 120.56 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | - | - | - | - |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 1,499,497 (6.48) | 657,831 (4.55) | 1,450,942 (11.22) | 120.56 |
| II | State Sphere | Strikes % to Total | 69,240 (0.30) | 113,656 (0.79) | 258,502 (2.00) | 127.44 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | - | - | - | - |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 69,240 (0.30) | 113,656 (0.79) | 258,502 (2.00) | 127.44 |
| III | Total (Central and State Sphere) | Strikes % to Total | 1,568,737 (6.78) | 771,487 (5.34) | 1,709,444 (13.21) | 121.58 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | - | - | - | - |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 1,568,737 (6.78) | 771,487 (5.34) | 1,709,444 (13.21) | 121.58 |
| PRIVATE SECTOR | | | | | | |
| I | Central Sphere | Strikes % to Total | 12,874 (0.06) | 12,656 (0.09) | 60,843 (0.47) | 380.74 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | - | - | - | - |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 12,874 (0.06) | 12,656 (0.09) | 60,843 (0.47) | 380.74 |
| II | State Sphere | Strikes % to Total | 11,569,217 (50.02) | 3,912,664 (27.06) | 1,072,789 (8.29) | -72.58 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | 9,979,699 (43.15) | 9,761,231 (67.51) | 10,093,719 (78.02) | 3.41 |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 21,548,916 (93.16) | 13,673,895 (94.58) | 11,166,508 (86.32) | -18.34 |
| III | Total (Central and State Sphere) | Strikes % to Total | 11,582,091 (50.07) | 3,925,320 (27.13) | 11,304,72 (8.74) | -71.20 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | 9,979,699 (43.15) | 9,761,231 (67.51) | 10,096,879 (78.05) | 3.44 |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 21,561,790 (93.22) | 13,686,551 (94.66) | 11,227,351 (86.79) | -17.97 |
| TOTAL | | | | | | |
| I | Central Sphere | Strikes % to Total | 1,512,371 (6.54) | 670,487 (4.64) | 1,511,785 (11.69) | 125.48 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | - | - | - | - |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 1,512,371 (6.54) | 670,487 (4.64) | 1,511,785 (11.69) | 125.48 |
| II | State Sphere | Strikes % to Total | 11,638,457 (50.32) | 4,026,320 (27.85) | 1,331,291 (10.29) | -66.94 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | 9,979,699 (43.15) | 9,761,231 (67.51) | 10,093,719 (78.02) | 3.41 |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 21,618,156 (93.46) | 13,787,551 (95.36) | 11,425,010 (88.31) | -17.14 |
| III | Total (Central and State Sphere) | Strikes % to Total | 13,150,828 (56.85) | 4,696,807 (32.49) | 2,843,076 (21.97) | -39.47 |
| | | Lockouts % to Total | 9,979,699 (43.15) | 9,761,231 (67.51) | 10,093,719 (78.02) | 3.41 |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts % to Total | 23,130,527 (100.00) | 14,458,038 (100.00) | 12,936,795 (100.00) | -10.52 |

Table 2: Time-loss (Number of Man-days Lost) by Sector/Sphere during 2010 to 2012
= Nil

Note: - Total of percentages may not necessarily tally due to rounding of figures.

| Sr. No. | Sphere | Strikes / Lockouts | PUBLIC SECTOR | | | PRIVATE SECTOR | | | TOTAL | | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|
| | | | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | |
| I | Central Sphere | Strikes | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % in sphere | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| | | % to Total | 95.6 | 85.3 | 84.9 | 0.06 | 0.1 | 0.54 | 6.5 | 4.6 | 11.7 | |
| | | Lockouts | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % in Sphere | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | | % to Total | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | | Strikes and Lockouts | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % in Sphere | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| % to Total | 95.6 | 85.3 | 84.9 | 0.06 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 6.5 | 4.6 | 11.7 | | | |
| II | State Sphere | Strikes | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % in Sphere | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 53.7 | 28.6 | 9.6 | 53.8 | 29.2 | 11.7 | |
| | | % to Total | 4.4 | 14.7 | 15.1 | 53.7 | 28.6 | 9.6 | 50.3 | 27.8 | 10.3 | |
| | | Lockouts | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % in Sphere | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 46.3 | 71.4 | 90.4 | 46.2 | 70.8 | 88.3 | |
| | | % to Total | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 46.3 | 71.3 | 89.9 | 28.9 | 67.5 | 78.0 | |
| | | Strikes & Lockouts | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % in Sphere | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |
| % to Total | 4.4 | 14.7 | 15.1 | 99.9 | 99.9 | 99.5 | 93.5 | 95.4 | 88.3 | | | |
| III | Total (Central and State Sphere) | Strikes | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % to Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 53.7 | 28.7 | 10.0 | 56.9 | 32.5 | 22.0 | |
| | | Lockouts | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | % to Total | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 46.3 | 71.3 | 90.0 | 43.1 | 67.5 | 78.0 | |
| Total | | Strikes & Lockouts | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 3: Percentage of Man-days Lost due to Strikes and Lockouts by Sector/Sphere during 2010 to 2012

0.0 = Less than 0.05 percent

Note: Total of percentage may not necessarily tally due to rounding of figures.

2.2. Implications of Moratorium on Strikes and Lockouts-Theoretical propositions

Moratorium; meaning "suspension of activity; a temporary ban on the use of production of something" (New Webster's Dictionary) in case of strikes, lockouts and other methods of industrial conflicts is meant to serve two co-equal causes. First the purpose is to minimize the severity of the conflict. Second, basing on this to promote organizational productivity and socio-economic betterment. Thus moratorium on strikes and lockouts is having negative-positive continuum meaning the depletion of negativism and fomenting positivism in industrial relations.

However, despite its temporary and may be voluntary nature, moratorium on strikes and lockouts may prompt advocates of equity and justice principles to be critical of it. They would tend to argue that moratorium is an unnecessary restraint on their otherwise reasonable and somewhat legitimate right. But, instead of viewing the entire scenario from the organizations and workers angle; when the society's stake in the economic welfare of its members is accepted as the main criterion, the moratorium on strikes and lockouts appears logical. In order to sustain the logic of moratorium a few ethical questions need to be clarified. Shall moratorium mean that, the organization and the workers' Unions cannot express their views, demands, and grievances? The answer would be an emphatic no. Ample scope should be offered to both the parties to express each of their views, demands and grievances in an atmosphere of mutual trust and faith. As a result of which the methods of settling any differences of opinion between take the shape of either strike or lockout and such other extreme conflict resolving strategy. So, what demands is a new dimension of industrial relations based on integrated and synthetic approach, an approach that appeals to democratic ethos by fostering mutually agreed upon strategies. The second question that crops up is that, shall moratorium be imposed by the Govt. or shall it be voluntary? Moratorium imposed by Govt, during emergencies have apparently worked but only temporarily. Once the emergency has been lifted and along with it the moratorium on strikes and lockouts, the situation has had worsened experiencing a spate of industrial conflicts. On the other hand, the appeal for moratorium on a voluntary basis may not generate the expected and desired enthusiastic responses. Needless to reiterate that, if voluntary moratorium works then it is an ideal situation.

An ideal situation would stand the test of time. But such situations are quite few and far between. So, in reality moratorium on strike and, lockout are imposed and that to for specific period. This provides a sense of deprivation to the right conscious workers and their unions as well as organizations. So the post-moratorium period witnesses unruly behaviour. So, there' should be a relatively permanent moratorium on strikes and lockouts and that to on a voluntary basis. As mutually agreed upon moral code of conduct, if moratorium is self imposed, then it may have better chances of success.

3. Attitudes of Workers, Unions, Management and Industrialists

The attitudes of workers, Unions, Management and Industrialists over the ideology of moratorium differ from one another.

The vital necessity of moratorium is ignored by workers and they are becoming ready to launch strikes. It is reflected in the indefinite strike of Jute Mills resorted to on 28th January 1992. The trade union leaders who are mostly outsiders are not responsibly behaving. Neither they are concerning about workers' interests, nor are they positively disposed towards industrial productivity. Yet, they regulate the Indian labour movement. The bargaining strategy is characterized by militancy and arrogance. The moratorium is strongly disapproved mostly by AITUC, CITU and other leftist unions. AITUC has criticized that the moratorium will not only freeze the right of the workers to strike for two years but also would disarm them against attacks on them by the employers and government. And the CIU deeply regretted to note that Government of India has stooped so low that even the presidential address is influenced by the IMF and World Bank. It also criticized that, moratorium is snatching the right of the working class because strike is the only instrument of workers against exploitation and oppression of the Management and the Government. Thus the Indian Trade Union leaders threaten to resort to a "Vigorous retaliatory movement" if the moratorium comes to be enforced.

The ideology of moratorium is accepted by the management. The increasing trend of lockouts indicates managerial militancy. Management apparently is ready to bridle on their militancy activities. But on the other hand the intellectual industrialists, both private and public sector undertakings, are going, on different ways. Many industrialists give very favorable opinions and say that the period of moratorium should be extended to at least one decade and other industrialists criticized it.

4. Concluding Remarks

Moratorium is a big boost and earnest measure to free from the shackles of industrial crisis engulfing Indian industries rapidly. In this state of affairs, it can yield very good consequences which is already experimented during 1962 and 1975, emergency periods. But government's piecemeal measures like workers-cooperative or joint venture will definitely shatter Indian industries into pieces and twist its fortune. These concepts contain the seeds of their own decay because of the growing rate of employer's and workers' militancy, gullibility, indolent and self-centered nature. Industrial conflict and unrest are innate in industrial settings, government's quest for harmony and the search for a rational synthesis becoming mirages in the vast desert of industrial unrest. But at this juncture implementation of moratorium is needed. President says "If we are to emerge from the crisis a moratorium should be declared voluntarily at the national level for at least two years on all bands, strikes.... or any other activity which impedes economic development". Moratorium is not the only panacea to cure financial sickness of the nation as a whole. Two years of moratorium cannot yield its expected results. One decade of moratorium is sought to enter into a period of industrial renaissance.

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