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OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES : 1

'Where cows eat coal on the sly'
EASTERN COALFIELDS LIMITED

A Fact Finding Report By Nagarik Mancha
20 November 1998

It was reported in the media that the Board of Directors, Eastern Coalfields Limited had decided to retrench 71,560 workers, employees & officers, beside closing down 64 mines.

Despite some primary information and reactions gathered from labour organisation representatives, it was not clear why the ECL authority suddenly came down so heavily on labour interest. Was there no advance indications about such a startling event ? Why is the accumulated loss of the company progressively deteriorating ? What is the situation of ECL as regards the primary indicators like market, demand, production, quality, price, profit and so on ?

In 1994, Nagarik Mancha had carried an investigative report in its the then annual publication *Aakranto Shramik* (in Bengali) *regarding plight of industry and workers in ECL.* It contained some information and discussions on the state of crisis dogging ECL at that point of time. It was decided in early November this year that a fact finding team was an urgent necessity.

On 14-15 November 1998, a 4-members team comprising of Prabal Roy, Prasanta Majumdar, Naba Dutta & Asim visited Asansol and the surrounding coal belt area in West Bengal and met workers, trade union leaders, officers association representatives, employees and citizens.

The main aspects on which the fact finding team concentrated are :

1. Why had the ECL never made profit since the time of nationalisation and what was *the role of government policies in this regard.*
2. The role of ECL authority regarding planning, investment and day to day management procedures visavis ample complaints and allegations of misplanning, mismanagement and corruption.
3. The role of workers and trade unions visavis the interest of the coal industry and its sickness.
4. The alternatives suggested by various quarters, to combat the present crisis.

PART A : GOVERNMENT POLICY

1. ECL — the loss making unit

Every single person who spoke two lines on ECL, invariably said "ECL has been making loss almost every year since nationalisation". Though it somewhat sounded as self justification, figures bear out such a statement.

Years	'76	'82	'92	'93	'95	'96	'97	'98
Annual loss (crores)	26	92	326	347	187	233	338	533

Since 'coal at any cost' was the motto, annual central subsidy was a part and parcel of the yearly budgets till 1992-93. Till '95-96 subsidy continued by way of Coal Price Regulation Account. From '84 to '96 the total amount of subsidy accumulated to Rs. 3,230 crores of which 467 was in '94-95 and 546 in '95-96. Hence actually a chronic crisis is currently being projected with a whole new dimension.

2. Import policy — deeper crisis

Till '93 import duty on coal was 85% which fell to 35% in '94, 20% in '96, 10% in '97 & & then rose to 14% in 1998. Significantly in 1993 coal was put on open general license removing all controls on imports. As a result, by way of example, Raniganj coal costs Rs. 2,600 per tonne at Chennai where Indonesian coal is available at Rs. 1,600 per tonne. South Africa and Australia have also found its way along the western & eastern coast of peninsular India resulting in a loss 6% of Coal India's market. China has reportedly taken away 70% of the hard coke market in India. It is estimated that by 2001 imported non-coking coal will cater to 15—20% of the market if present trend is not checked. International coal trading companies like Glencore, APR Ingwe, Masefield & Bulktrading are becoming familiar names in India.

3. Royalty & Cess — highest in West Bengal

The earnings of West Bengal Government on this account is given below :

Years	'95	'96	'97	'98
Royalty & Cess (crores)	442	492	684	720

47% tax is payable per metric tonne by the consumers which is deposited to State Government by ECL. This compares unevenly with 23-24% cess and/or royalty charged in all other coal producing states. As a result coal from ECL is selling at Rs. 291 more per metric tonne as compared to coal sold by other subsidiaries of Coal India.

ECL had moved the Calcutta High Court against the Government of West Bengal and obtained a favourable judgement. In response the state government has moved the Supreme Court of India and 4 years have since passed.

"In yesteryears even tyrannical jamindars used to waive taxes in face of droughts and floods — 72,000 workers are involved—would the Chief Minister review his decision ?" said Sri Sukumar Banerjee, President, INTUC affiliated Colliery Mazdoor Union, which has the largest number of members in its fold.

4. Buying machines — eroding net worth

'New machines lying unused' is a strikingly common complaint heard from critical workers at the ground level.

The procedure of many such purchases is mind boggling.

Global tenders contain some peculiar clauses. Like (a) whether machines are ready for delivery, (b) whether the concern exports machines, (c) how short is the delivery schedule, etc. These go against public sector units and most Indian companies manufacturing such machines. Multinational companies are awarded contracts. World Bank, on whose assistance such machines are purchased, often have investments in such companies too eg. Hardischfieger, completing the vicious cycle. Maintenance contracts of such machines are often as high as a whooping 201%.

"As a part of the peace pacts 180 tonne dumpers, which are useless in our soil conditions are dumped on us," said *Sri Sunil Sen*, President, *AITUC affiliated Colliery Mazdoor* Sabha revealing another aspect of machine deals which are adding to the woes of ECL.

PART B : ECL AUTHORITY

1. Planning & investment — faulty approach

"Wrong planning is responsible for the entire crisis", said a Hindi speaking worker at Ningah colliery preferring anonymity. Echoes were heard in almost so many words from most including top flight TU leaders.

Whereas Rs. 3,600 crores has been invested in new & mega projects to augment sagging coal production, during the last 10 years coal production figures in million tonnes are : 301, 245, 235, 245, 240, 226, 249, 278, 296, 274 (in '97-98). Badly matched investment productivity figures ! Of the Rs. 3,600 crores about Rs. 2,000 crores have been spent on the 5 mega projects at Sonepur Bazari, Rajmahal (both open cast) Khottadih, Jhanjra and Satgram (all long wall mines). Unadapted long wall technology has been stunning failures compared to news that China having appropriately adapted such technology applies it in 90% of its UG mines with remarkable success.

"After nationalisation almost no emphasis was laid on re-organisation / reconstruction of existing mines although most had production potentials. With very little investments, essential mine development work or replacement of old obsolete equipments, so essential not only for improving production but also for maintenance of existing level of production, could not be undertaken," said Sri Aniruddha Roy, Joint Secretary, HMS affiliated Colliery Mazdoor Congress.

Production in UG mines have fallen from 23.56 million tonnes in 1975-76 to 12.66 million tonnes in 1997-98 while in OC mines production has shot up from 2.62 to 14.78 million tonnes during the same period.

"What they understand by planning is increasing production in short time. Their farsight reaches the tip of their nose. UG mines or good quality coal has no place in their schemes— more open cast mines— more costly machines—more coal—this is what planning is all about," said a committeed supervisory staff of an UG mine.

"If investments are made in accordance with proper planning, most mines of the 6 areas under the axe can still become viable," said Sri Joydeb Banerjee in capacity as the Vice President, Coal Mine Officers Association of India (CMOAI-ECL). "We are working on a white paper on the revival proposals for ECL and plan to submit it with the CIL & ECL authority," he said. On the question of feasibility of opening new districts in these areas, Sri Banerjee said, "Actually we are under the burden of a legacy of sinking pits instead of adopting the incline method. Almost 70% of the coal seams in this entire Raniganj-Asansol coalfield area lies within the depth of 160 metres—perfectly suitable for inclines. This method involves less investment and lesser maintenance cost than the age old vertical pit sinking method. But previously private mine owners found labour intensive pits cheaper since wage was abysmally low and labour abundant. After all we are still working the same old mines and bearing labour cost which is coming to around 100% of the sale value." He iterated that "though land acquiring is a major problem, new districts can still be opened in even the areas where the so-called 'mines with different working conditions' exists by adopting incline method thereby producing more coal at less investment and running cost." It may be relevant to note that Sri Joydeb Banerjee in his official capacity is an 'old-timer' having joined service during the private-mine era and is presently the General Manager of one of the six mines under the axe.

2. Planning & management — complaints galore

Here they are, right from the horses mouth :

(i) Decorative concrete gates, fountains & so on at the cost of ECL, scattered around, built under various pressures.

(ii) Besides workmens quarters, water & electricity provided to adjoining villages, where even video parlours, lathe machines and other such business establishments flourish— all at ECL's cost.

(iii) Illegal tapping of electricity is rampant & go unchecked.

(iv) There is no coal depot at Asansol. The entire coal requirement of this second most populous city in West Bengal (7.64 lakhs in 1991) is dependant on pilfered coal from pit heads, illegal mining and quota of domestic coal issued to workers.

(v) Instances of Rs. 18 crore Coal Handling Plants installed which has remained unused and is presently being sold / stollen as scrap.

(vi) At mines, such as Dhemomen, thousands of tonnes of iron, scrappers & 1 crore worth dosco machines being steadily transformed into scrap.

(vii) After recently repairing an installation of J K Ropeways at a cost of Rs. 22 lakhs it is yet to start functioning. Non-functioning ropeways involve transportation of sand from river beds by trucks through contractors obviously at a much higher premium. Ningah Ropeways has recently been declared abondoned just after spending Rs. 16 lakhs by way of repair. Ajay–Kondaghat project is hardly delivering 1.5 tonne sand after an alleged investment of around 1.5 crores.

(viii) Routine plaster work on walls & ceiling, peel of, invariably within 6-8 months.

(ix) More often than not, Rs. 50 to 60 thousand is spent as a standard practice on the ~~bunglows of General~~ Managers as and when a new incumbent assumes office.

(x) In many places like Kajra, conveyor belts lying idle since installation, is being torn ~~down to pieces~~ at an expenditure of Rs. 1 lakh & then put up for auction.

(xi) Water tank build at the cost of Rs. 10-12 lakhs collapsed during test run—condemned since then.

(xii) A completed JK Ropeways project worth Rs. 80 lakhs near the area store at Kajra, lying in disuse owing to some change of planning.

(xiii) A road built at the cost of Rs. 16 crores for Jambad OCP is not serving its planned purpose since the OCP has been relocated.

(xiv) 10 collieries of Kajra area had been alloted conveyer belts— none had functioned— most are now being sold as scrap.

(xv) 2 coal cutting machines, a few haulage machines and a huge number of small machines are lying 300 feet under water at the now closed Sripur Colliery. Since 1970 no new machines had come to Sripur. Indenting machine would result in being given old repaired machines. Machines sent back after repair by contractors have been found to break down within hours of being sent down from the pit head

(xvi) While the colliery was under production the monthly electric bill was around Rs. 27 lakhs. Months after suspension of work (in April '98) the bill amounted to Rs. 18.85 lakhs in September 1998. In October '98 inspite of breakdown of a huge pump the bill mysteriously climbed upto Rs. 22.75 lakhs.

(xvii) Whereas wooden props cost Rs. 900, these have been replaced by steel props for UG operations costing Rs. 44,000 apiece, weighing over 1.5 quintals making it difficult for the 3 man team to handle it.

(xviii) Previously whereas 2 bags of lime and a labourer was sufficient to spray the face to be operated upon, presently 200 litre oil spray at Rs. 5,800 per tin is being unnecessarily supplied in truck loads.

(xix) Hose pipes for underground pumps freely available in the market at Rs. 2,600 a piece are guaranteed to last 3 months. Instead ample supply of Rs. 1,600 worth pipes are made readily available which do not last even 3 shifts, as experienced at Dalovan Colliery.

(xx) To make perforations on the coal face for detonators a machine can be used which is capable of drilling 12 or 13 holes in unit time. Instead of using these, 8 workers are deployed to manually work on 4-5 holes per head. SSI colliery is one such example.

(xxi) Colliery wise technical project reports to explore possible avenues to make them technically & commercially viable has not been attempted by ECL over the years despite mounting losses. Even without such inputs ECL is now deciding to close down arbitrarily many viable & profitable collieries among the 64.

(xxii) 180 tonne dumpers and long wall technologies dumped on ECL and consequent results suitably highlights the absence of appropriate research & development activities at ECL or CMRI or CMPDIL or other CSIR labs. Even the cry is unheard of.

(xxiii) Overreporting about produced coal was an open secret. This malady of top management in Areas & Collieries have been on the low these days. It was essential to overreport for preparing promotional channels.

(xxiv) An old adage in this area : Cows eat coal on the sly !

(xxv) The management dauntlessly declared at the last safety committee meeting that all but 10 mines would have to be closed down immediately if safety norms are implemented strictly.

PART C : WORKERS RELATED

1. Statistics & Trends

Total workforce in ECL during the last 10 years is as follows :

184,102 ; 178,704 ; 177,889 ; 175,595 ; 173,550 ; 171,727 ; 163,805 ; 161,675 ; 158,251 and 153,154 (as on 31.3.98).

Hence in 10 years there has been a reduction of about 31,000 amounting to 17% of the total workforce, during which time production has dropped by 8.7%

"We do not believe that ECL has any surplus staff. It is a question of improper deployment and under-utilisation of human skill. Contrary to claims the ECL will need more manpower if it plans to run the show as it should," says Sri Aniruddha Roy.

On the other hand ECL authority had in writing informed in early months of '98 that there was an surplus of about 16,000 in the company. Later from ICICI report it was learnt on 31.8.98 that ECL assess its surplus work force to be 12,580. However on 22.10.98 ECL decides to retrench 71,560 personnel in all.

2. VRS

The figure of those having taken VR is shown below

Years	'95-96	'96-97	'97-98
No of Persons	456	231	1231
Cost perhead (lakhs)	1.38	2.27	2.62

In all 1918 have been given VR at a total cost of Rs. 44 crores in the last 3 years, during which the total workforce of ECL has been found to have decreased by 8421.

As per projection in 5 years hence, ECL workforce will normally come down by 14% owing to overall reduction of about 22,000 of its workforce mainly resulting from superannuation. This will imply that from its level in 1989, ECL will be able to reduce its workforce by 30% in 15 years in the year 2003. All this without retrenchment or VRS.

"To retrench 72,000 PSU workers and officers the ECL may be needing anywhere between Rs. 20,000 to 30 000 crores ? Where will it get such an astounding amount ? With little over 5% of this amount invested in ECL on the basis of proper planning and monitored implementation, this company is sure to turn around and start generating profit in 5 years at the most," said a senior ECL executive unwilling to be quoted by name.

3 Output per man

Figures show that compared to 1975-76 figures, total production from ECL UG mines have fallen to just above 53% in 1997-98 (from 23.56 to 12.66 million tonnes).

As on *31.3.98* whereas each worker produces ***101.72*** tonnes per year from UG mines of ECL similar figures for UG mine in other subsidiaries are 106.01 in BCCL; 166.27 in WCL; 123.14 in CCL; 195.64 in MCL and 226.52 in SECL. Hence an ECL worker produces 22% to 125% less coal per head per year.

This might, on surface, seem to be of great concern but all the blame can hardly be transferred on the shoulders of workers.

(i) Most of the subsidiaries with higher value for output per man per year have relatively easier terrain to work on as compared to ECL. "They are licking butter from the platter. It's that easy. Once upon a time we did it too at Ranigunje !" said an old-timer sounding rather caustic.

(ii) "They work the inclines, we the pits. Being the mother mine our children are better off learning from our experiences and mistakes," said he, pointing out that the entire UG mining in WCL and SECL is done, without sinking any pit, through inclines, making productivity much higher & operational cost & labour requirements much lower.

(iii) Difficult mining conditions coupled with breakdown prone obsolete machines make a deadly combination and paves the way for idle man hours, reducing productivity at ECL.

(iv) "Yes we can definitely improve on production if management and workers co-operate with each other. And that's what we have done at Dalovan colliery in Pandaveshwar Area. Members of 8 trade unions and management respresentatives have been managing the shifts regularly after we heard about the decision regarding retrenchment and closures. From 650 tonnes of total production on 29.10.98 we improved to 1,080 tonnes on 7.11.98," said Sheikh Elias, a HMS activist. Before breaking this stunning and significant news he had complained about management inefficiency and about worker demotivation— the rules of the game— till they decided to take up the cudgel to work for and fight against the management in simultaneity. There has been a rise of 10-15% of production in most of the areas according to senior officials of ECL.

4. Workmen when needed

According to ECL figures the company lost 3% of production in 1994-95 and 2% in 1995-96 owing to absentism. Again over 12,000 workmen according to recent studies of ECL are surplus. This points out to the fact that the management has not been able to deploy staff where and when needed.

The above inference is lent credance by what Sri Joydeb Banerjee has to offer. "In UG mines for every 1 person employed on surface there should be ideally, 4 in the mines. The ratio has gone awry and had crept to 1:1 in some areas and 1:2 in others. This in itself is deadly."

5. Reactions in the labour front

(i) "Nobody is awake in this darkness—those who say they are awake are actually feigning—that 'the king is nude' there is no one to say."— Leader.

(ii) "We won't allow them to stay in their chairs if we loose our jobs. We will close down ECL."— Worker.

(iii) "Why are you politiking with workers with their backs against the wall ?"— Leader about other TU's.

(iv) "It is hard to believe they are really serious about the decision — the chances are fifty fifty."— Worker.

(v) "The leadership here is very experienced to fizzle out movements."— Social activist.

(vi) "Whatever comes out of the unity move—workers will fight unitedly."— Worker.

(vii) "Trade union unity is still very loose."— Leader.

(viii) "Trade unionism is narrow minded in practice here in West Bengal. The interests of labour and industry come low down in priority."— Employee.

(ix) "We are the only ones who are going to fight. The rest have surrendered to the management."— Leader.

(x) "TU's have opened shops — a worker hops from one to the other." — Employee.

(xi) "The two leaders of their TU are not human beings — I will not attend unity meetings in which they are present."— Leader.

(xii) "They will shut down some mines, retrench thousands of workers— but not as many as they are saying."— Worker.

(xiii) "The unity process is on. But you will find me and him in the leadership— since none other would be left."— Leader.

(xiv) "They live in the world of their illusions."— Worker about his respected leader.

(xv) "The general mood is that of surrender. 'Save our salary and job at any cost' is all they have to say."— Leader.

PART D : COLLECTION OF SOME PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

These proposals are being suggested by various quarters in ECL

CPRA : Subsidy on this account should be reintroduced.

Merger : Five subsidiary companies are cumulatively paying income related taxes to the tune of Rs. 1,200 crores, while ECL & BCCL are making losses. If like Steel Authority of India a merger takes place in Coal India, losses by ECL & BCCL will be wiped off & Coal India will save about Rs. 1,000 crores by way of taxes.

Surcharge : If Rs. 25 per tonne is charged on open cast operations in Coal India and the funds distributed amongst various UG mines Rs. 516 crores may accrue, of which ECL may find Rs. 121 crores coming its way.

Investments : Following the preparation of a mine-by-mine technical report, ECL should specify the amount of investment, on a time bound basis, required to make the company viable. On this basis the Central Government should mobilise funds.

Cess & Royalty : The West Bengal Government. should consider lowering the present rate to attain uniformity in all coal producing states in India.

ECL's revival proposal : i) Saving on LTC (with PNR No. only) —25 crores (ii) Issue of domestic coal to 50% of present level — 25 crores (iii) Wage freeze for next 3 years — 80 crores (v) 7 day working of mines & closing of 20 most uneconomic mines to increase production by 1 million tonnes — 60 crores (vi) Over-burden removal by hired HEMM and coal transportation through contractors and ex-servicemen in 0C mines — 100 crores (vii) Working of new patch deposits through hired HEMM (half million tonne) — 40 crores (viii) No premium on Sunday — 33 crores (ix) Misc. jobs presently done — on contract like, private security, maintenance etc. — 5 crores.

PART E : NAGARIK MANCHA ON THE PRESENT CRISIS

On the basis of our findings the Nagarik Mancha would like to put forward the following by way of primary reactions :

1 The question of merger of all the subsidiaries of Coal India

We feel that instead of laying ample stress on efforts to reduce the loss of the company, this alternative is primarily aimed at ornamental reforms of the profit and loss account of the ECL. Merger is proposed as a way of sharing the loss of ECL by other subsidiaries — a short term palliative by itself. To turn around a sick industry the question of planning, development and investment should invariably take the centre stage. As a short term measure this might lend some breathing space but without the orchestrated efforts to tackle a multidimensional problem such proposals smack of adoption of the path of least resistance.

Moreover such near manupulative exercises do not always augur well for the entire industry. Workmen and personnel in other profit making subsidiaries may not find it to be a fair deal. Motivation there, may very well take a dip.

After all, the entire loss of ECL cannot be writte off as inevitable. It is of utmost importance to identify and heal the active wounds which is bleeding the company white. It is for sure that without further investments the future looks grim ; but investments without plugging would be like pouring blood down the drain.

Even if the Coal India saves Rs. 1,000 crores by way of various taxes after the proposed merger — what part of this is going to be pumped into ECL is a very important question governing the efficacy of this proposal. And unless the question of merger and the question of such fresh investments for ECL is treated in conjunction, the merger will really remain an end in itself. And till a time ECL authority and all concerned buckle up and perform, fresh investment from Coal India of any tangible nature is hardly expected to be in the pipeline.

2 Reduction of cess by the Government of West Bengal

Even if 250 crores per year by way of cess has been recently written off by the State Government this is obviously not going to reduce the loss of ECL by 250 crores per annum This is actually going to reduce the burden on the consumers by about Rs. 400 per m.t. which may improve the demand position of ECL coal in face of stiff competition from both home and abroad. The conjectural improvement of sales might marginally reduce the net loss of ECL but it is not expected to reach anywhere near 250 crores per annum.

While it is true that such abnormally high rate of cess levied by the State Government was making even the high grade Raniganj coal non-competitive, it should also be borne in mind, that the projections that the root of the problem lies here, does not hold water.

However the entire scene will change if the ECL decides to hike the sale price of coal to a level which will include wholly or in part the 20% cess waived by the State Government, that which is already being borne by the customers. In that case some substantial portion of the 250 crore waiver will definetely lessen the yearly loss incurred by ECL. Whether such hike in its turn will allow the ECL to remain competitive and what effect it will have on the overall sales figure in the years to come, is again conjectural.

3 The social cost load on the ECL

ECL, inherently a sick industry, in every sense of the term has been made to bear a huge amount of cost in supplying water, electricity, coal and providing roads and other civil constructions in the sorrounding areas. Incurring such social costs for its employees is understandable — but doing the same for adjoining villages is a huge drain of already shrinking reserves further compounded by theft along channels of distribution of the same. This added to the fact that the ECL (through its consumers) is already bearing a huge social cost load by way of cess to take care of roads, education, health and other obvious social expenditures to be incurred by the State Government. Hence in certain geographical pockets the ECL is virtually paying twice for providing some social amenities.

Any State Government can very well expect a core-sector industry scattered over hundreds of square miles within its boundaries to provide for some infrastructureal expenses since the entire industrial activity does have a depreciating effect on existing infrastructure. But the same State Government is also expected to take active interest and provide support and sustenance in various ways as and when required. It has got to be a two-way process even though the industry is under central administration.

The State Government has since long side-stopped responsibilities or active interventions which indirectly could have helped in the state of sickness of the industry and instead treated ECL as a mere fund raiser. Such narrow political interests is bound to have detrimental effects on the industrial scenario.

Hence, like many other spheres, ECL authority should be helped by all to reduce the total social cost it is bearing over the years.

4 Planning, development & related investment

A core sector, and an old industry at that, demands much more than mere running costs. For the vast majority of the underground mines it seems that their death sentence has been pronounced — it is a period of wait for the execution.

Investments in thousands of crores have gone into open cast mines which are proving to be economically viable with raised OMS and total production and lower cost of production and employment.

Underground mines have been grossly neglected and burdened at times by faulty investments for in-appropriate technology. Planning if any has focused only on day to day production and namesake maintenance. Replacing defunct & back dated technology by indegenous, appropriate machines backed by rigourous research & development initiatives is a far cry. For all practical purposes these UG mines has perhaps been left by an uncaring production-profit oriented management to die its 'natural' death in absence of what should have been done.

To offset the blame regarding misplanning, the authority continues to blame it on low rate of production and non-viability of extraction. As if to justify its past inaction it is thriving to put a stamp of authority from organisations like ICICI — which is virtually black listing mines and areas and almost the entire procedure of extraction from UG mines.

Without a thorough change of attitude and perhaps management policies, all options might produce a nought in the long run, since we believe that misplanning has not come about as a series of accidents. It has emanated at some point of time as a deliberate policy — dictated by interests not wholly related to the coal industry.

5 Chronology of events

1) Transferring Rs. 1,179 crores worth of loans from CIL to equity in order to bring ECL out of BIFR in April '98.

2) Closing down 6 UG mines on 6.4.98 and averting a labour strike narrowly.

3) Constituting Core Group for revival of ECL and holding 3 meetings in May & June 1998.

4) Declaring achievement of target in July 1998.

5) Proposal for sacrificing 10% of salary & 50% of domestic coal quota in September '98

6) Decision to close 64 mines & retrench 71,560 personnel on 22.10.98.

A feeling gets generated that the proposed decision is more a result of a political decision rather than a techno-economic one at CIL/ECL level. The proposed Bill at the Parliament paving the way for privatisation of mines compounds the apprehensions.

6 Redeployment & Land Acquisition

It seems that about 5000 women workers have received employment on compassionate grounds over the years. Deploying them in UG operation being ruled out by practice, they have not been suitably deployed in productive process or service sectors where they too can become indispensible. Without that, a large portion of these worker are adding to the loss making process of ECL.

We believe in the proposal that with suitable training, good planning could result in them being put to jobs like basket making, manufacturing of petty spares in mine workshops ; in hospitals as health attendants, as social service personnel, as educators if possible and so on.

As compensation to families whose land is being acquired employment as an option has almost become a rule. All trade unions should consider this factor since in most such cases whosoever is employed find their way to the surface further adding to the non-productive dead weight.

The trade union should also consider whether the management could be given a more freer hand to redeploy personnel, if justified, from the surface to UG operations on a rational basis not tantamount to victimisation.

7 Production & Sales

We are of the belief that merely by trying to produce more and by it trying to minimise loss, the management cannot claim that they are planning for revival. What is needed is a more comprehensive approach. That the production can be geared up to a level 10% higher even without any fresh investment is perhaps true — but whether this level is sustainable for long is quite another point. To sustain it, a lot is to be done including investment and improvement of sales. With the onslaught of imported coal the market is steadily shrinking with promise for worse to come. With pithead reserves reaching 3-4% for various reasons harping on the old chord of higher production alone and blaming it all on the shabby work culture is hardly melodious. A new tune must be composed -- and that is what is challenging.

Suggested contribution : Rs. 10

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