

Indian Labour in Ceylon : The Effects of the Economic Crisis

An article on "Indian Labour in Ceylon" published in the *International Labour Review* for March 1931 gave an account of the methods of recruiting Indian workers for estates in Ceylon and of their conditions of labour.¹ That article described the situation as it existed up to 1929, at which time the fall in the price of rubber, and to a less extent of tea, had already commenced. Since 1929 the slump in rubber has been catastrophic, while the prices of other estate crops have also fallen very considerably. An analysis of the annual reports of the Controller of Labour of the Ceylon Government and of the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon² for the year 1931 and previous years makes it possible to trace the effects of the economic crisis upon estate labour in Ceylon.

The principal statistics as to prices of crops, area under cultivation, and labour migration for Ceylon since 1926 are grouped in the table on the following.³

The reduction in the acreage under rubber does not reveal the full extent of the decline in production. A considerable acreage has been left untapped and many estates are tapping only the best yielding trees.⁴ It is estimated that about a hundred thousand acres of rubber have been closed down.⁵

On tea estates about 95 per cent. of the labour, which is estimated to be required at the rate of about one labourer per acre, consists of immigrant Indian Tamil workers. On rubber estates, which require labour at the rate of about one labourer to three acres, the workers are also generally immigrant Indian Tamils, though in some cases Sinhalese work as tappers, etc. The comparative steadiness of the total acreage under tea since 1929 conceals the effects of the crisis. Mid-country and low-country estates have been most severely affected by the depression and have also been especially hit by a reduction, due to the lower purchasing power of the Australian pound, in the

¹ *International Labour Review*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, March 1931, pp. 369-387.

² *Administration Report of the Controller of Labour for 1931*. Colombo, Ceylon Government Press. *Report on the Working of the Indian Emigration Act, 1922 (VII of 1922), the Rules issued thereunder and of the Labour Ordinances of Ceylon during the year 1931, by the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon*. Calcutta, Government of India, Central Publications Branch. (These are referred to respectively as *Ceylon Controller's Report* and *Indian Agent's Report*.) Some reference has also been made to the *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of Ceylon, 1931*. Colonial Reports — Annual, No. 1611. London, H.M. Stationery Office. (Referred to as *Colonial Annual Report*.)

³ The annual average market prices of crops are taken from the *Colonial Annual Report, 1931*; other figures from the *Ceylon Controller's Report, 1931*.

⁴ *Ceylon Controller's Report, 1931*, p. 10.

⁵ *Indian Agent's Report, 1931*, p. 8.

Item	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931
Tea						
Acreage assessed	415,608	429,279	433,289	442,282	448,866	445,394
Price per lb. (rupees ¹)	0.99	0.94	0.85	0.81	0.75	0.57
Rubber						
Acreage assessed	309,445	324,283	318,595	315,187	299,782	231,392
Price per lb. (rupees)	1.21	0.95	0.55	0.52	0.27	0.14
Cacao						
Acreage assessed	11,012	9,869	10,087	8,659	8,131	7,084
Price per cwt. (rupees)	30.41	52.22	58.89	53.46	37.51	29.71
Cardamoms						
Acreage assessed	3,679	4,072	3,758	3,624	3,738	3,016
Price per lb. (rupees)	2.44	2.54	2.50	2.22	1.69	1.67
Estates						
Number assessed	1,705	1,778	1,756	1,745	1,635	1,492
Immigration						
Assisted estate labourers	101,746	159,398	133,712	105,095	91,442	68,337
Unassisted immigrants	114,421	125,739	138,157	133,046	114,669	100,854
Total	216,167	285,137	271,869	238,141	206,111	169,191
Emigration						
Estate labourers (approx.)	61,265	87,481	93,596	101,228	98,728	75,866
Not estate labourers (approx.)	121,083	123,581	122,465	140,744	142,488	119,639
Total (accurate)	182,348	211,062	216,061	241,972	241,216	195,505
Excess of immigration over emigration (+) or of emigration over immigration (—)						
Estate labourers	+ 40,481	+ 71,917	+ 40,116	+ 3,867	— 7,286	— 7,529
Not estate labourers	— 6,662	+ 2,158	+ 15,692	— 7,698	— 27,819	— 18,785
Total	+ 33,819	+ 74,075	+ 55,808	— 3,831	— 35,105	— 26,314

¹ 1 rupee = 100 cents = about 1s. 6d.

Australian demand, which in 1931 was only slightly more than 50 per cent. of the demand in 1930.¹ Recruiting for these estates was brought practically to a standstill in 1931. Even for high-grown tea, which remained unaffected by the depression, recruitment was reduced to the minimum.²

On cacao estates labourers are required at the rate of about one labourer for every two acres. Tamils generally form the bulk of the labour force but Sinhalese are also employed for lopping, etc. Cardamoms are generally cultivated by Ceylonese labour.

¹ *Colonial Annual Report*, 1931, p. 41.

² *Indian Agent's Report*, 1931, p. 9.

Coconut, which does not appear in the above table since it is not assessed to the Immigration Fund, is estimated to be planted on about a million acres, cultivation being on systematic lines on about 900,000 acres. The labour force required is about one worker for ten acres and is generally Sinhalese. On some estates, however, Tamils and Sinhalese are employed in about equal proportions and a small resident force of Tamils is often maintained for draining, manuring, and tillage work. During 1931 no coconut estate recruited Indian labour in India.

MIGRATION

These facts, notably the steep slump in rubber, have definitely changed the direction of the current of labour migration since 1929. A special scheme of repatriation to meet the depression in rubber and consequent unemployment among labourers was evolved in the closing months of 1930, and the number repatriated under this scheme in 1931 was 10,645. The number of repatriations under the normal arrangements was also higher in 1931 than in 1930, reaching 5,068 as against 3,277. The Agent of the Government of India states that it is surprising that more workers were not repatriated under the special scheme for the rubber industry. He points out, however, that there was no appreciable unemployment among Indian labourers, for although a rubber estate labourer is normally disinclined to work on tea, the movement of labour from rubber to tea had, under the stress of necessity, proved bigger than anticipated.¹

Slackness in the demand for labour in 1931 was however felt in all parts of Ceylon, and was due not only to the rubber slump but also to the large increase in immigration in previous years. It continued after that year and by 1933 all recruiting had been stopped, the only immigrants accepted being holders of certificates marked "Willing to re-employ" by former employers and certain close relations of workers in Ceylon.²

The reduction in the number of assisted immigrants has resulted in a rise in the proportion of immigrants who have previously worked in the Island from 41 per cent in 1924 and 57 per cent in 1929 to 66 per cent in 1931. The number of recruiting licences issued or re-issued to "Kanganies" has also dropped, from 20,883 in 1929 to only 5,723 in 1931.³

The Indian estate population (including unemployed dependants of Indian labourers) dropped considerably between 1929 and 1931, and the fall continued in 1932, the figures being as follows⁴:

Period	Men	Women	Children	Total
1929 (average)	240,005	232,095	260,178	732,278
1931 "	222,308	214,674	249,018	686,000
1932 (second half)	209,789	200,518	240,270	650,577

¹ *Indian Agent's Report*, 1931, p. 8.

² Ceylon Department of Labour Circular of 29 March 1933.

³ *Ceylon Controller's Report*, 1931, p. 15.

⁴ *Ceylon Controller's Report*, 1929 and 1931; *Ceylon Government Gazette*, 31 March 1933.

The depression has also, of course, affected the Indian Immigration Fund, expenditure having exceeded revenue in the year 1930-1931. The income and outgo of the Fund since 1928-1929 have been as follows :

Year	Revenue Rs.	Expenditure Rs.
1928-1929	2,885,667	2,764,003
1929-1930	2,311,554	2,269,900
1930-1931	1,456,359	1,825,435

It was decided in 1931 not to proceed with the proposal, which had been under consideration since 1929, to substitute assessment for contributions to the Fund on the basis of the number of labourers employed for assessment on an acreage basis. Estates with a scanty Indian labour force are, however, assessed on a *per capita* basis, and the rate per head was reduced from Rs. 8 in 1929-1930 to Rs. 4.50 in 1930-1931. At the end of 1931 there were 306 estates so assessed. The acreage fees levied on tea, which were Rs. 6 in 1927-1928 and Rs. 4.50 in 1928-1929, were only Rs. 2.25 in 1930-1931; the rates for rubber, cacao, and cardamoms were one-third of the rate for tea.

Moreover, on 26 June 1931 special modifications of the fees charged were introduced to meet the exceptional conditions on rubber estates. Areas being tapped continued to pay a standard fee of one-third of that paid for tea; areas which though untapped were still maintained paid only one-fifteenth of the rate for tea, that is, one-fifth of the normal; and areas in which only a negligible amount of labour was employed paid nothing. A further measure of relief has since been given by the exemption from the payment of acreage fees to the Fund for the period 1 April 1933 to 30 June 1933 of estates or portions of estates planted exclusively in rubber.¹ In addition to the reduction in income from acreage fees the Ceylon Government's contribution to the Immigration Fund was reduced from Rs. 100,000 to Rs. 50,000 from 1931-1932, corresponding with a reduction of the numbers employed by the Government.

On the expenditure side the recruitment allowance payable to estates was reduced on 27 June 1931 from Rs. 10 to Rs. 2.50 in order "to encourage local as opposed to coast recruiting".² The emigration fee payable to the Government of India was reduced from Rs. 2 to Rs. 1.50 per head. The cost, omitting non-recurring capital expenditure, of bringing all assisted labour to the Ceylon estates averaged Rs. 25.96 in the year 1930-1931, as compared with Rs. 21.37 in 1928-1929 and an average of Rs. 21.22 for the period 1923-1931.

For the year 1930-1931 the Fund showed a deficit of Rs. 98,809, entailing an encroachment for the first time for several years on the accumulated surplus, which at the end of the year stood at Rs. 969,376. The Controller of Labour feared that "increasing demands will have to be met by the surplus as the general deterioration in conditions of rubber and tea estates is likely to increase rather than diminish".

¹ *Ceylon Government Gazette*, 24 March 1933.

² *Indian Agent's Report*, 1931, p. 9.

WAGES

With the continuing fall in the price of crops some reaction upon wages was to be expected and the Minimum Wage Ordinance (the Indian Labour Ordinance, No. 27 of 1927), which came into effective operation on 1 January 1929, has been subjected to a severe strain. The procedure for fixing minimum wages is somewhat elaborate. Estate Wages Boards are set up in the various revenue districts, composed of a Government official as chairman, two employers of Indian labourers working on estates, and two persons selected to represent such labourers, who appear generally to be Head Kanganies. The decisions of these Boards are published and submitted to the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour, which consists of from nine to twelve persons, of whom two must be members of the Legislative Council (now the State Council). At the end of 1931 the Board was composed of the Controller of Labour as chairman, three other officials, five representatives of employers' interests, and three members of the State Council. The Board of Indian Immigrant Labour may also fix rates of wages of its own motion. The decisions of this Board, however, are not final but are subject to approval by the Governor in Executive Council, which, since the coming into operation of the new Constitution of Ceylon, entails consideration by the Minister and Executive Committee of Labour, Industry, and Commerce. In practice, the Government of Ceylon always acts in consultation with the Government of India.

The determination of minimum wages is complicated by the fact that the remuneration of labourers is not wholly in cash and by certain peculiarities in regard to the hours of work of some classes of labourers. In recent years there has been an additional complication in that the average number of persons dependent on estate labourers has substantially increased.

In addition to housing, provision for medical wants, and the issue of rice or, alternatively, a daily cooked meal of rice and curry for labourers' children under ten years of age—all of which are free—Indian estate labourers are entitled to purchase rice from the estates at a fixed maximum price. The amount is fixed at not less than seven-eighths of a bushel monthly for a man, six-eighths for a woman, and five-eighths for a child, provided that at least equivalent wages have been earned during the month.

The labourers engaged on ordinary field work on rubber estates are normally paid by the day but those engaged in tapping the trees are paid by the amount of latex brought to the factory. The latter were the best paid estate labourers before the depression set in and their work was essentially morning work, the labourer having his afternoon free.¹ Piece work is also general for plucking on tea estates.

¹ *Indian Agent's Report*, 1930, pp. 8-9.

The minimum rates of wages which came into force on 1 January 1929 were as follows :

Estates	Men Cts.	Women Cts.	Children Cts.
Up-country estates	54	43	32
Mid-country estates	52	41	31
Low-country estates	50	40	30

Issue price of rice : Rs. 6.40 per bushel.

These rates are fixed for a day of nine hours with an interval of not more than one hour for the midday meal. The rates for men apply to male labourers over sixteen years of age, for women to female labourers over fifteen years of age, and for children to children of either sex over the age of ten years, employment below that age being prohibited.

Both the Controller of Labour of the Ceylon Government and the Agent of the Indian Government in Ceylon recognised in their reports for 1929 that the obligation to pay these rates of wages was loyally respected by the planters, and that the operation of the Ordinance had not had the effect of making the minimum wage the standard wage. "Many of the better class of estates have, instead of sticking to the minimum rates for the good and the bad labourers alike, adopted a sliding scale of wages which is at once an incentive to the good workers and an example to the lazy ones." ¹

On the question whether the operation of the Ordinance resulted in an increase of remuneration, the Ceylon Controller reported that "many labourers have been benefited but none adversely affected". ² While the Agent of the Government of India was less definite, he stated that "the introduction of the minimum rates has not produced any revolutionary effects, good or bad". ³

The fall in price during 1930 necessitated rigid economies on rubber estates. The number of labourers engaged on field work was reduced to the minimum. Efforts to transfer rubber labourers to tea estates met with little success owing to the antipathy of the workers to the change, and the free repatriation of discharged labourers was not a complete panacea, many of them having only a sentimental attachment to their mother country. "Therefore the only alternative to extensive unemployment was to employ certain classes of labourers on less than six days a week, provided the latter were willing to forgo their statutory privilege of demanding six days' work in the week. This was a desperate remedy adopted to meet a desperate crisis. . . . It must be said to the credit of [estate] superintendents that there has been no tendency to abuse this concession." ⁴ As regards the tappers, certain estates insisted on their turning out for

¹ *Idem*, 1929, p. 8.

² *Ceylon Controller's Report*, 1929, p. 24.

³ *Indian Agent's Report*, 1929, p. 8.

⁴ *Idem*, 1930, p. 9.

a couple of hours' work in the afternoon in order that they might earn the full minimum wage. On many estates, however, there was not enough work to keep tappers employed in the afternoon and in one district an attempt was made to introduce a system of paying six-eighths of the minimum daily rate for six hours' work. The system was, however, abandoned, largely owing to the influence of the Planters' Association of the district, though it is not clear that the system was not revived in the following year.

The effects of the economic crisis made themselves felt, therefore, during 1930 in unemployment and in short time with consequent loss of remuneration, but the daily minimum rates of pay brought into force at the beginning of 1929 remained untouched.

In 1931 the depression affected tea as well as rubber. Tea grown on up-country and some mid-country estates still fetched good prices, but low-grown tea suffered a reduction of one-third in average price in 1931 as compared with 1930. At the same time, the cost of living had also fallen. There was thus a double argument in favour of a reduction of wages. When the rates were fixed the gross value of tea produced was approximately Rs. 201,235,000, whereas in 1931 the value fell to Rs. 138,656,000 : a reduction of approximately 30 per cent.¹ Moreover, when the wages were fixed the maximum issue price of rice was also fixed at Rs. 6.40 a bushel, whereas in 1931 it could be purchased at little more than half that price in the low-country districts and at a little less than Rs. 5 up-country.² Labourers therefore naturally tended to buy their rice elsewhere than from the estates and on some estates pressure was applied to prevent them from doing so. Remuneration in cash and kind, on which the original scale of rates was based, tended to become remuneration in cash only, so that "the burden of wages on estates grew considerably and showed every sign of rapid increase". The situation was met in May 1931, not by a formal alteration in the minimum rates, but by a decision after consultation with the Government of India to take no action against estates which reduced wages to correspond with an issue price for rice of Rs. 4.80 a bushel instead of Rs. 6.40. The adjusted rates adopted were as follows :

Estates	Men Cts.	Women Cts.	Children Cts.
Up-country estates	49	39	29
Mid-country estates	47	37	28
Low-country estates	45	36	27

Issue price of rice : Rs. 4.80 a bushel.

The reduction amounted to 5, 4, and 3 cents a day for men, women, and children, whereas "the arithmetical correction to put the rates exactly on the same basis of rice issued and same balance pay would have been approximately 6 cents a day for men, women, and children.

¹ *Ceylon Controllor's Report*, 1931, p. 32.

² *Indian Agent's Report*, 1931, p. 11.

Many estates maintained their rates intact and their price of rice unchanged owing to the change causing a loss to the estate".¹ The Ceylon Controller of Labour calculated that the new rates meant an actual increase in the labourer's balance cash wages, increasing with any reduction of the number of days worked in the month, provided that he drew the standard monthly allowance of seven-eighths of a bushel of rice. The Agent of the Government of India admitted that the change was unobjectionable so far as the labourers were concerned as it did not impair their standard of living.²

This readjustment of wages was insufficient to satisfy the planters and on 15 May 1931, at the request of the Planters' Association, the Estate Wages Boards were convened for the purpose of proposing new minimum rates. With one or two exceptions all the Boards recommended a reduction of 20 per cent. with rice at Rs. 4.80 a bushel. The Agent of the Government of India makes the following comment on the attitude of the representatives of the labourers on the Boards : " These recommendations demonstrated the doubtful suitability of Head Kanganies to be the labourers' representatives on the Wages Boards, for they unobtrusively supported a reduction of wages even on up-country estates, in spite of the fact that up-country estates could afford to pay well over the minimum rates of wages and that many of the up-country planters themselves looked askance at the proposals for reduction." ³ The reduction was assumed to correspond with the fall in the cost of living. The Director of Statistics of the Ceylon Government, after investigation, concluded that 20 per cent. could safely be taken as representing the fall, but the Agent of the Government of India, while admitting that there was certainly a fall, felt that its exact extent remained a matter of surmise. The Board of Indian Immigrant Labour decided to act on the basis that the fall was 15, 16, and 17 per cent. respectively in the up-country, mid-country, and low-country areas and to introduce a sliding scale so that the rates would vary according to the issue price of rice. The Board also decided to make complete provision for the greatly increased number of dependants, the proportion of children and other dependants to labourers having risen from 18 per cent. in 1925 to 28.8 per cent. in 1930. The new rates proposed by the Board were as follows :

Estates	Men Cts.	Women Cts.	Children Cts.
Up-country estates	45	36	27
Mid-country estates	43	35	25
Low-country estates	41	33	24

Issue price of rice : Rs. 4.80 a bushel.

After further discussion in the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour and the Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce,

¹ *Ceylon Controller's Report*, 1931, p. 32.

² *Indian Agent's Report*, 1931, p. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

the sliding-scale system was abandoned "as it was considered undesirable to restrict the labourers' freedom to buy rice from outside the estate".¹ The rates for up-country estates were left untouched and the new rates given above for mid-country and low-country estates were sanctioned on 20 December 1931 and came into force on 1 February 1932.²

The Ceylon Controller of Labour calls attention to the length of time taken to effect an alteration in wages—from 15 May 1931 to 1 February 1932. "The machinery", he says, "seems much too elaborate and more than the question demands. During this lengthy period of discussion facts alter and change, and it can easily be demonstrated that the reduced wage published on 1 February 1932 actually cost the industry as much as the rates current on 1 February 1931, the rise in the price of rice having more than equalled the saving due to the fall in the balance pay through the reduction in the money rates."³

In November 1932 proposals by Estate Wages Boards for further reductions were gazetted and subsequently the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour recommended the following new rates :

Estates	Men Cts.	Women Cts.	Children Cts.
Up-country estates	41	33	25
Mid-country estates	36	28	21
Low-country estates	33	25	20

Issue price of rice : Rs. 4.80 a bushel.

The Executive Committee of Labour, Industry and Commerce refused to sanction this scale and the Board on reconsideration decided to recommend the adoption of the scale with the issue price of rice reduced to Rs. 4.00 a bushel.⁴ Finally, in March 1933, the Government of India agreed to a reduction of wage rates to the following level :

Estates	Men Cts.	Women Cts.	Children Cts.
Up-country estates	41	33	25
Mid-country estates	37	30	21
Low-country estates	35	28	20

Issue price of rice : Rs. 4.00 a bushel.

These rates take effect as from 10 May 1933.

The Board of Indian Immigrant Labour had also recommended a further reduction of 2 cents in the case of 114 up-country estates, but to this the Government of India was unable to agree. It was also agreed between the two Governments that any labourer unwilling

¹ *Indian Agent's Report*, 1931, p. 14.

² *Ceylon Controller's Report*, 1931, pp. 32-33.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴ *The Hindu* (Madras), 7 Jan. 1933.

to accept the reduced rates of wages should be repatriated at the expense of the Immigration Fund within two months from the date on which the new rates came into force. ¹

Planters, however, remained dissatisfied. In December 1932 the Board of Indian Immigrant Labour had before it requests from planters' associations that the operation of the Minimum Wage Ordinance should be temporarily suspended ², and at a meeting of the Ceylon Planters' Association on 10 March 1933 the Chairman of the Association claimed that the Ordinance should be repealed on the ground that it had proved itself incapable of adaptation to the present conditions. The Governor of Ceylon in the course of an address to the Association uncompromisingly rejected this claim. "I am aware", he said, "that many of you are strongly of opinion that the Ordinance should be abrogated, or at least suspended, on the grounds that it is unsuited to present conditions. I must be perfectly frank with you and say that I am not prepared to give my support to what I should regard as a retrograde step. Whatever its defects may be, the Minimum Wage Ordinance is an important piece of social legislation designed to secure to the labourer a fair living wage. It is by no means as advanced as similar legislation in the Mother Country, and to remove it from the Statute Book, even temporarily, would in my opinion be a grave mistake and do more harm than good to the industry. Moreover, quite apart from the political difficulties which the suspension of the Ordinance would involve in Ceylon, which are quite insuperable, there would not be the slightest prospect of either the Indian or the Home Government agreeing to such a step." ³

The continuing effect of the economic crisis on the wages of Indian estate labourers in Ceylon may therefore be summarised thus :

Date	Issue price of rice per bushel	Minimum daily rates of wages								
		Up-country estates			Mid-country estates			Low-country estates		
		Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
	Rs.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.	Cts.
Jan. 1929	6.40	54	43	32	52	41	31	50	40	30
May 1931	4.80	49	39	29	47	37	28	45	36	27
Feb. 1932	4.80	49	39	29	43	35	25	41	33	24
May 1933	4.00	41	33	25	37	30	21	35	28	20

On the assumption that a labourer works 24 days a month and buys from the estate the standard allowance of rice, the fall in the cash balance wages of a male labourer from 1929 to 1933 was 13.9,

¹ *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 28 March 1933.

² *The Hindu* (Madras), 14 Dec. 1932.

³ *Idem*, 16 March 1933.

21.8, and 23.4 per cent. in the case of up-country, mid-country, and low-country estates respectively. The extent to which this reduction has been aggravated by short time or, on the other hand, offset by a reduction in the cost of living cannot be exactly estimated. Nor can the full amount of unemployment caused by the slump be measured. It is known that the labour force on rubber estates has been very substantially reduced, but the result has been repatriation and transfer rather than unemployment. The Ceylon Government reported for 1931 that :

“ The collapse in rubber has led to the discontinuance of probably not less than 100,000 labourers formerly in regular estate employment. A fraction of Indian labourers has chosen to be repatriated, but much larger numbers have been absorbed in tea estates. Ceylonese rubber estate employees have returned to their villages, naturally increasing the pressure on the village land. However, this pressure has led to a considerable increase in cultivation. Reduction in the labour forces on tea estates necessitated by low prices has been adjusted by their taking work on the less popular estates which have inadequate supplies of labour. Free repatriation to practically all Indian rubber estate labourers is given, but the necessity for this has not yet arisen in tea. ” ¹

On a general survey of the period since 1929 it seems clear, in view of the very heavy fall in the prices of estate crops and the demands of the Planters' Association, that the Minimum Wage Ordinance has proved a valuable safeguard of the standard of living of the Indian estate labourer. At the same time it seems clear also that the position of the Indian labourer would have been very much worse, and the strain to which the Ordinance has been subjected would have been very much more severe, if instead of two main products, rubber and tea, of which only one has been affected by a complete collapse in price, the Ceylon plantations had been devoted solely to rubber.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EDUCATION

There remains the question whether the economic crisis has detrimentally affected the welfare of Indian estate labourers in other respects than wages. The evidence furnished in the reports of the Ceylon Controller of Labour goes to show that the steady progress made in health and housing conditions in the years prior to the crisis has been continued without any apparent slowing down. The average number of labourers per room has fallen from 3.47 in 1929 to 3 in 1931, and in the same period the numbers of latrines, of rooms provided with pipe-borne and pipe-protected water supply, of estate hospitals, dispensaries, and lying-in rooms, and of Government hospitals and dispensaries in the planting districts have all increased. The mortality rates have doubtless been affected by the changes in the

¹ *Colonial Annual Report*, 1931, p. 47.

estate population, but they also show improvement, including a checking of the increase in maternal mortality. The figures are :

	1928	1929	1930	1931
Death rate per 1,000 of mean estate population	27.6	25.1	22.1	20.8
Infant mortality per 1,000 births registered	211	213	194	184
Maternal mortality per 1,000 births registered	19.5	20.6	22.9	20.4

Progress in the education of Indian children on estates, which has been very rapid — the Director of Education reported in 1929 that the attendance had been doubled within five years ¹—appears to have been only slightly affected by the depression. Estates are obliged by law to make provision for the education of the children of labourers between the ages of 6 and 10 years, to appoint competent teachers, and to set apart and keep in repair a suitable schoolroom. Estates may combine for this purpose. The number of estate schools and the percentage of children of school-going age attending them have in recent years increased as follows :

	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931
Number of estate schools	304	364	402	501	554
Attendance percentage	37	45.7	52.8	54.9	53.99

These figures indicate almost continuous progress, but the Director of Education reports that "this percentage cannot be regarded as satisfactory and the annual inspection reports for each school indicate that many children on the estate are still uneducated. Considerable difficulty is experienced by Superintendents in enforcing attendance". As to the effects of the economic crisis, the Director says : "The depression in the tea and other industries has retarded improvements in the provision of educational facilities, but many Superintendents, realising the importance of children attending school, are still ready to undertake improvements and to maintain their schools satisfactorily. However, a large number of schools on rubber estates have been closed owing to the reduction of the labour forces on these estates. It has also been found necessary on some rubber estates to defer consideration of the provision of educational facilities until the present financial situation improves. Such deferment has not been made indefinitely, but the position of the estate is brought under review in a year's time." ² The financial stringency experienced by the Ceylon Government has also led to some restriction of the number of new schools registered for the purposes of a State grant.

¹ *Ceylon Controller's Report*, 1929, p. 16.

² *Idem*, 1931, p. 23.