

Hard Bargaining for a Better Wage Agreement

The non-executive employees of BSNL are naturally restive and angry that their wage revision due from 01.01.2007 is yet not settled. The wage revision of ITS officers who are on deputation to BSNL and that of executives have been ordered and pay scales fixed and arrears drawn.

While in government, ITS, Gazetted Officers and non-gazetted employees were all getting pay revision at the same time as per recommendations of the pay commission accepted by govt. But in the Public Sector, including BSNL, the wage revision is separate for executives. The ITS officers who have not yet absorbed in BSNL got pay revision w.e.f. 01.01.2006 by November, 2008 as per recommendations of VI CPC. The executives wage revision was done by February, 2009 as per recommendations of the II Pay Review Committee for executives. This recommendation is applicable to the executive in all Central PSUs.

But for non-executives in Central PSUs, there is neither any Pay Commission as for Central Govt. employees nor any Pay Review Committee for executives. The wage revision for non-executives is done after negotiation and agreement with the recognized union/unions. In all the Central PSUs, the negotiation has started recently and in two or three PSUs only the wage settlement has reached so far.

But in BSNL, at the instance of BSNLEU, negotiation started earlier than in other PSUs. BSNLEU/United Forum submitted its Charter of Demands in August, 2008 itself and demanded discussion. Since there was delay in starting discussion, the United Forum gave a call for one day strike on 12th December, 2008. As per strike agreement, the negotiation started on 15th December, 2008, but based on the complaint of certain unions that wage negotiation should not be done during the period of membership verification, further discussion was postponed.

BSNLEU and United Forum demanded interim relief as the discussion was prolonging. Once again a call for 2 days strike was given for 19 – 20th May, 2009. As per strike agreement, six months pay was granted as advance as also revised rates of HRA w.e.f. February, 2009.

Instead of agreeing to the reasonable demands raised by the United Forum, the management took an adamant stand and wanted the unions that whatever they offered should be accepted by unions instead of bargaining and negotiating for better wages. The management even went to the extent of even issuing a circular to CGMs / GMs to tell the employees that the delay in settlement is due

to the adamant stand of the union. This line was echoed by certain unions which they used to exploit the anger of workers against the recognized union. They got signatures from the workers in a proforma that the pay scales recommended by II Pay Review Committee be paid to non-executives. The II Pay Review Committee was for executives and it had not recommended any pay scales to non-executives. The workers naturally rejected the proforma.

It was in this context that the United Forum gave call for 48 hours strike on 19 – 20 August, 2009 for a speedy settlement accepting the demands raised by the union. More than two lakh workers participated and made the strike a big success. Instead of settling the demands, the management wanted to punish the workers and cut two days salary of strikers.

Now the negotiation has restarted under the new chairman. During the discussion, certain progress has been made and further discussion is expected by the fourth week of October, 2009.

One of the main disputes is over the periodicity of agreement. The unions want five years periodicity as is being agreed in other PSUs. The unions in other PSUs are making agreement with 5 years periodicity even if the fitment is less than 30% since they know that two five year agreements of even 25% fitment will get them 50% fitment instead of 30% in ten years. But as far as BSNL employees are concerned we can not agree to less than 30% fitment as a large number of employees have retired and are going to be retired by 2012. Hence we cannot accept less than 30% fitment.

After hard bargaining, the management in the last meeting on 13th October has offered that a review can be made after 5 years but the periodicity of agreement is to be mentioned as ten years. 30% fitment on pay plus 68.8% IDA can be given as in the case of executives and increase from 68.8% to 78.2% can be negotiated for both. The unions wanted that the periodicity need not be mentioned as in the case of executives. But the official side doesn't agree and insists on mentioning a 10 years periodicity for non-executives since it is an agreement. We have demanded that periodicity should not be made. This will be further discussed in the next meeting.

Our efforts are for a better settlement early so that the workers will get the maximum benefit and we will spare no pains for the same.
