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WAGE DETERMINATION FOR SELF-EMPLOYED PERSONS: SOME METHODOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

By

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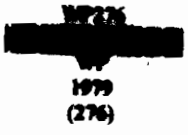

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WAGE DETERMINATION FOR SELF EMPLOYED PERSONS: SOME METHODOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS

1.0 Introduction

When a group of workers who are mainly self employed providing manual, skilled or semi-skilled services to a variety of customers, a question that often arises is "what is a fair economic value as a return for the services rendered?" Concepts of 'wages' and 'self-employment' are apparently self-contradictory, the former implies the existence of an employer whereas the latter, the existence of a 'customer' or 'client'. Nonetheless these very contradictory terms give rise to the methodological problems of determining a fair economic value to the self-employed, particularly if they are in the vulnerable section of the society. A test case of the interpretation of the self-employed as 'workers' with a right to form a trade union is that of SEWA, registered as a trade union in Ahmedabad. This Self Employed Women's Association is a union of over 10,000 workers who can be classified in this category of worker-self-employed.

1.1 The Problem

A person performing an activity useful to the society, as a means of livelihood is entitled to expect a fair return. In

monetised economy this represents the monetary earnings the person can expect. What constitutes a 'fair return' and how can we evolve a methodology for measuring it is a problem of concern.

1.2 Objectives

The objective of this note is to present some methodologies, discuss their appropriateness, and their inherent lacuna or advantages in the context of a specific group of self-employed workers. The methodologies are illustrated through empirical data. The group chosen is that of handcart pullers in Ahmedabad, who render transportation, carrying and stacking services to several market segments in Ahmedabad.

1.3 Research Design

In this preliminary exploration, the emphasis is on the theoretical approaches to wage determination and examination of the underlying assumptions in these approaches and study them in the light of realities in a specific context. Field work is done as a pilot study, only for obtaining illustrative data. No large scale statistical sampling has been attempted in this exploratory study. A copy of the questionnaire prepared is given in Appendix I.

1.4 The Group

Handcart pullers work in pairs (occasionally in trios) pulling a two-wheeled (or four-wheeled for vegetables) handcart, transporting goods from one place to another. They often provide additional services such as loading, unloading, stacking and so on. The location, the markets, the number of workers, the types of goods transported, unit loads, distances travelled, size and ownership of costs, nature of employment, wage rates and total earnings vary considerably within the city. A brief write up on the pilot study is given in Appendix II. The wages and earnings fluctuate widely not only among markets, but between individuals within a market and for the same individual over the seasons. What are the determinants of wages and what methodological approaches are possible?

2.0 Methodologies

For major approaches can be distinguished for wage determination.

I The Market Forces Approach

II The work content Approach (functional approach)

III The Cost function Approach

IV The subsistence level (living wages) approach

In the rest of this note we discuss each of these approaches.

2.1 Methodology I: The Market Forces Approach

The value of an economic resource is said to be a function of the demand for the resource and the supply including competition and the existence of alternate modes of meeting the demand. In our context, monopoly and monopsony are obviously ruled out. The persons who use the services of the handcart pullers presumably work out the economics of using other modes of transport such as three-wheeler tempos, small or large trucks, rickshaws and so forth. The wage rate they are willing to pay therefore would be determined by their economic considerations and the value they place on conveniences of using a specific mode. This would partly be a function of the unit value of the goods transferred (bale of cloth or empty kerosene barrels) and partly on the location of the customer's premises (non-accessibility to trucks is a major reason why handcarts may be the preferred mode).

On the supply side, the self-employed handcart puller assesses the value of his services in alternate employment opportunities, and thus by the mutual interaction of the supply and demand forces in the market, wages would be determined.

2.1.1 Assumptions of Market Forces Approach

The basic assumptions are (a) free market economy, (b) open access to opportunities and information, (c) existence of alternate opportunities and hence the existence of bargaining

power of the suppliers (or the customers) called the supply (or demand) forces and (d) non-existance of domination by one group.

2.1.2 Empirical Realities

Disguised or at times overt traces of feudalism are present which negate the first and fourth assumptions stated above. This was borne out by the pilot study. Some of the observations were:

a. Handcart pullers were normally "attached" to the same 'employer'.

b. They quite often rented their carts from cart owners.

c. They were paid after 'delivery' of goods - not after transportation. This meant that if the goods were not accepted after transporting them, they had to be brought back for which they were not always paid the full charges.

d. They were expected to load, unload and stack free i.e. without payment. Idling time (awaiting the acceptance of goods or arrival of goods) was also not paid for.

e. The earnings vary widely among markets and among workers. These observation lead us to believe that there are severe distortions in letting the market force determine the wages, as an acceptable methodology. Moreover, the handcart pullers are unaware of vulnerable and hence unaware of opportunities and bargaining strengths.

f. The rates paid for trucks which is an alternate mode for transportation were seemed to be higher than for the transport of an equivalent number by hand carts. The rate per barrel transported by trucks works out to Rs.1.20 which is paid only in the cases of long distances of 12 kms. or more for hand-cart pullers.

Table in Exhibit 2 gives the variations in rates. The unorganised nature of the market is very obvious from this table. As can be seen sometimes longer distances get paid less per piece than shorter distances.

Also there is no direct relationship between distance travelled and the rates paid. As the distance is increased the rates are increased only marginally in many cases. All these point to the urgent need of systematizing the rate structure. Following alternative is suggested as a feasible working plan. One could have 4 slabs.

Category	Distance in Kms.	Rate per barrel	Rate per tin
1	0 - 5 kms.	0.50	0.05
2	more than 5 but $\leq$ 10	0.75	0.07
3	more than $\leq$ 15	1.00	0.10
4	15 - 20	1.25	0.12

These rates are to be considered only for haulage and loading/unloading. If head-loading i.e. porterage is required or stacking is required additional rates have to be paid along the lines indicated in Exhibit 1. The waiting charges of 50 paise for each $\frac{1}{2}$ hour which is the standard porter waiting charges are also to be paid. These are tentative recommendation. The total picture that emerges from these marginal rationalisation would have to be examined in the light of other methodologies.

2.2 Methodology II: The Work Content Approach

In this approach, the total nature of job is decomposed into discrete elements and the individual elements worth is assessed, to determine the overall wages. The assumptions are that 'fair' wages are determinable for like job elements in the economy.

For the handcart pullers, the following functions were identified.

A. Transportation of goods : pulling the loaded cart from source to destination.

Here two factors are of importance - load and distance travelled. The common unit of measure would be kilogram-kilometers transported.

B. Empty Haulage : Unloaded return trip (kilometers travelled)

C. Loading/ Unloading : Per unit weight would be a determinant here.

D. Stacking : Per unit weight and the height upto which the goods are stacked is of importance.

E. Waiting Time

F. Providing Equipment : Providing the equipment (cart) for transportation.

G. Risk bearing : The responsibility of safe transfer of goods is that of the handcart pullers. Thus they provide insurance coverage free of charge.

These are the seven major functions performed by the hand-cart pullers for their customers. They get paid only for the first element (transporting) by and large. Their other functions, particularly C, D and E are distinct employment opportunities for which standard rates (see Exhibit 1) have been fixed by the authorities. Stacking at the warehouses is a recognised job. Functions E, F and G are recognised for other modes of transport, particularly for trucks. Standard waiting charges have been fixed for rickshaws and taxis.

For handcart pullers in Ahmedabad an average daily earning ranging from Rs.6 to 10 per worker seems to be the norm, judging from the pilot field enquiry. This is more or less on par with the prevailing rates of unskilled manual labour which does not include the F and G functions in the unorganised sector. Using this methodology therefore, in conjunction with 'fair wages' for like job elements prevalent in the economy we hypothesise on the basis of the pilot study that the hand-cart pullers are not obtaining a fair return for their efforts.

2.3 Methodology III: The Cost Function Approach

The provision of goods and services in an economy entails 'costs'. The supplier therefore works out his costs and returns on investment in order to determine the 'price' at which the goods or services would be provided.

The major component of handcart pullers' contri is their labour. However, there are items of cash out which they incur or have to insure against. These have identified as follows:

Equipment cost: Rs.900 to Rs.1,000 investment with a life of about 5 years until major rehauling needed. Alternately the equipment is hired for rents ranging from Rs.40 - 50 per month.

The cost elements are given below (per year):

	Owned	Rented
Rental value	(Capital recovery) Rs.1000 x .26379* = Rs.264	(Rent) Rs.40 pm x 10 mths = Rs.400
Axle grease, minor repairs Rs. 10 pm	100	-
Licence fee (renewal) for two workers	15	15
Incidentals (to obtain licence)	10	10
Fines (for traffic violations+ (excluding lost days for court appearances)	50	50
	439	475

say an average of Rs.450/- per year.

*At 10% return, 5 year period.

+Traffic violations are mostly for overloading. Interviewed handcart pullers stated that they resort to overloading because of low per unit rates they get. (If they work strictly within the legal limits they state that their earnings decrease by about 40%).

The cash outflow averages to Rs.45 p.m. (10 months of employment). Against this the average earnings range from Rs.200 to Rs.450 per month per household. (This figures are highly tentative and need to be further studied). Leaving a margin of Rs.155 to Rs.405 per ten months or an annual earning of Rs.1550 to Rs.4000 per household (say, an average of Rs.2800). Sizes of households varied from 4 to 11 (average is 6). The average per capita income would then be around Rs.467 per year, well below the poverty line. From this income they have to meet further business expenses such as possible thefts or damage to goods, loss of income due to illness, pregnancy and court appearances, enforced idleness and so on. Thus we see that this methodology also indicates the lack of 'fair returns' to the handcart pullers.

2.4 The Subsistence Approach

The minimum needs approach of at least Rs.2 per capita per day for subsistence would mean an income of Rs.730 per capita per year. For a family of 6, a net earnings of Rs.4,380 per year would be needed. This means that over 10 months, gross earnings should be around Rs.5,000 per household which means, for a team, of two workers an income of Rs.500 need to be ensured. For 20 days working, the minimum rate would thus be Rs.25 per day. The variations for days of employment, energy output needed etc. would have to be used for appropriate adjustments.

3.0 Conclusion

The problems inherent in using market force approach have been identified. This leaves us to consider the other 3 approaches of job content, cost function and living wages. Applying these methodologies one concludes (on the basis of the pilot enquiry) that there is an urgent need to determine a fair wage to the handcart pullers and this would entail an upward revision of the prevailing rates in all market segments.

Based on a well designed full scale survey, we need to determine the

(a) Nature of employment - days of employment in a year and the intensity of employment - number of trips per day and load per trip;

(b) Costs both fixed and variable which the handcart pullers have to incur, including lost earnings for licence renewal, occasional court appearances and waiting time;

and (c) The minimum needs of their families.

Based on these we need to determine

(i) The appropriate wage rates per cartload (or fraction thereof) transported per km. cartload being defined as the legal limits allowed; standard charts for common distances and commodities, and

(ii) Modes of ensuring the appropriate wage rates determined would be enforced.

As an interim measure, pending full scale investigation, following wage rationalisation as was discussed in Section 2.1.2 are recommended.

Recommended wage structure

Category	Distance in Kms.	Rate per barrel	Rate per tin
1	0 - 5 kms.	0.50	0.05
2	more than 5 but ≤ 10	0.75	0.07
3	more than 10 but ≤ 15	1.00	0.10
4	15 - 20	1.25	0.12

These rates are to be considered only for haulage and loading/unloading. If head-loading i.e. porterage is required or stacking is required additional rates have to be paid along the lines indicated in Exhibit 1. The waiting charges of 50 paise for each $\frac{1}{2}$ hour which is the standard porter waiting charges are also to be paid. These are tentative recommendation. The total picture that emerges from these marginal rationalisation would have to be examined in the light of other methodologies.

In this preliminary note methodological issues have been discussed and based on evidence collected a case for upward revision of rates has been made. Haulage and loading/unloading rates have been recommended as an interim measure. It is urged however, that a minimum earning of Rs.25 per day per team of two workers is to be ensured as an absolute minimum.

EXHIBIT 1

Porterage & Porter waiting charges at Railway station, Ahmedabad

Re.1.00 per head load upto 37½ kg. per trip.

Rs.1.50 per luggage weighed upto 80 kg. carried on a two-wheeled barrow per trip.

Rs.2.50 for luggage weighed upto 180 kgs. carried on a four-wheeled barrow per trip.

First 30 minutes free & next half hour as under:

Re.0.50 per each half hour or part thereof.

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EXHIBIT 2

Rates paid to Handcart pullers

S.No.	From place to	Charges for one		Unit of each item		Distance in Kms.	Time (hours)
		Barrel (in rupee)	Tin	Barrel	Tin		
1	Saraspur to Kankaria	0.40	0.04	30-35	550-600	4	2
2	Saraspur to Asarwa	0.35	0.04	"	"	4	2
3	Saraspur to Kathwada	0.70	-	"	"	7	5
4	Saraspur to Anil Starch	0.50	-	"	"	6	4
5	Saraspur to Vatava	1.00	-	"	"	15	6
6	Saraspur to Naroda	1.00	0.07	"	"	15	4
7	Saraspur to Dani Limda	0.60	0.04	"	"	8/9	3
8	Saraspur to Every Textile	0.50	-	"	"		6
9	Saraspur to Usha Talkies	0.30	0.04	"	"	4	1
10	Saraspur to Rakhial	0.35	-	"	"	3	1½
11	Saraspur to Chakudia Mahadev	0.35	-	"	"	5	1
12	Bapunagar to Kathwada	0.60	-	"	"	8	5
13	Bapunagar to Kankaria	0.60	-	"	"	8	3
14	Bapunagar to Naroda	1.00	-	"	"	12	4
15	Bapunagar to Vatawa	1.25	-	"	"	17	7
16	Bapunagar to Anil Starch	0.60	-	"	"	3	4
17	Bapunagar to Dani Limda	0.80	-	"	"	8/9	5
18	Kankaria to Usha Talkies	0.40	0.04	"	"	5	3
19	Asarwa to Usha Talkies	0.50	0.05	"	"	6	4

The merchants are ready to pay more remuneration to the truck people but they are not ready to pay full fees to hand-cart pullers.

The charge for 100 Barrels in truck	-	Rs. 100.00
Loading/unloading fees	-	Rs. 20.00
Total charges for 100 Barrels in truck	-	Rs. 120.00

Source: SEWA

APPENDIX - I

Indian Institute of Management
Ahmedabad

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JOB/WAGE STUDY IN UNORGANISED SECTOR

1. Job Category (tick off one)

(a) Hand-cart Puller, Ahmedabad

(b) Dock worker, Bombay

(c) Mazdoor in grain market, Ahmedabad

(d) Mazdoor in vegetable market, Ahmedabad

(e) Unskilled worker in textiles mill, Ahmedabad

(f) Loaders at Railway yards

(g) Any other relevant category (specify)

The following questionnaire has to be filled (one each) for each of the above categories.

Distribution of nature of item and load (peak season):

Item	Weight range, kg/unit of each item					
	<10	>10-20	>20-30	>30-40	>40-50	>50
Baskets						
Bags						
Bales						
Wooden crates						
Cardboard cartons						
Barrels						
Other (specify)						

Explanation: If on a typical day, a dock worker handles 50 bags in the weight range of 30-40 kg. per day and 15 bales in the range of 40-50 kgs. per bale then, enter in the row 'bags' the number 50 under the column 30-40 and 15 in the next row (Bales) under the column 40-50.

Average units and weight lifted/day

Item	Average wt./unit (kgs)	No. of units lifted	Total weight
Baskets			
Bags			
Bales			
Wooden crates			
Cardboard cartons			
Barrels			
Others (specify)			
		Total weight	

Distribution of distance transported (peak season):
(not for loading/unloading/stacking)

Kgs./trip	No. of trips/month	Total weight of load (transported per trip)		
		Low*	Med.*	Max.*
0 - 2				
2 - 5				
5 - 10				
10 - 15				
15 - 20				
20				
Total trips/month				

If this pattern varies considerably from season to season, fill the above table for each season.

*Also specify what may be reasonably considered as a low load or a medium load and a maximum load in kgs. or tonnes.

4.1 Distribution of time (peak season):

Item	Average weight/ unit	No. of units per load	Loading/ unloading time per load	Stacking time/ load
Baskets				
Barrels				
Bags				
Bales				
Wooden crates				
Cardboard Cartons				
Barrels				
Others (specify)				

4.2 Transportation Time

Distance (Kms.)	Low load	Med. load	High load
0 - 2			
2 - 5			
5 - 10			
10 - 15			
15 - 20			
> 20			

5. Distribution of Employment (peak season)

No. of hours employed/day	No. of days employed/month
0	
0 - 2	
2 - 4	
4 - 6	
6 - 8	
8 - 10	
10 - 12	
> 12	

1. Proportion of day-time work _____ %

2. Proportion of night-time work _____ %

6. Distribution of Trips (Applicable only where transportation from one area to another is involved)

No. of hours per trip	No. of trips per month	No. of trips/month without making the delivery
1		
1 - 2		
2 - 4		
4 - 6		
6 - 8		
> 8		

• Seasonality in Employment

1. Peak season from _____ to _____;

   no. of months _____.

2. Lean season from _____ to _____;

   no. of months _____.

3. Without employment from _____ to _____;

   no. of months _____.

8. Earnings

	Peak Season Rs.	Lean Season Rs.
Av. rate/hour		
Av. earnings/day		
Av. earnings/month		

9. Expenses: 1. Equipment required _____

2. Cost of equipment Rs. _____

3. Maintenance of equipment:

Nature	Frequency	Cost
1		
2		
3		
4		

10. 4. Expected life of equipment _____ years.

5. Source of money _____ interest rate _____%

11. Family Details

	Employed Yes No	Active working Life		
		Age from	Age to	years (No.)
H				
W				
S_1				
S_2				
D_1				
D_2				

12. Miscellaneous

A. Average idle time while "employed" _____%

B. Average payments to be made for theft/damage to goods

Rs. _____ / year

C. Details of Health Hazards.

13. Any other relevant information _____

APPENDIX II

A NOTE ON EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS OF HAND-CART PULLERS IN AHMEDABAD CITY: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

1.0 Introduction

The location of hand-cart pullers, their number, the nature of employment, the wage rates, earnings, the types of goods transported, size of carts, ownership pattern and so on vary from situation to situation within the city. In order to understand the dimensions of earnings and employment, a pilot study was undertaken at 5 markets in Ahmedabad. The first was in the grain market, second in the New Cloth Market, the 3rd in the railway goods yard, fourth at the vegetable market and the fifth at the timber yards. The data was obtained through interviews with handcart pullers in these locations. The observations are mainly indicative and we believe that they are fairly representative of the situation.

2.0 Handcart pullers in the grain market

The units are bags of 100 kgs. of grains. The handcart pullers take from 1 to 15 bags for delivery. It could be to houses in the city or to retail traders. The peak season is generally during Holi and Diwali just after the harvest season. Lean season is the rainy season where there is hardly any work. Besides transportation they also do loading and unloading operations and at times stacking also. Generally one or two persons are engaged per trip and mostly one or two trips are undertaken per day. As many as four trips are also feasible if the distances are not too long. The loading and transportation time varies depending on the distances. In the peak season the handcart pullers work about 22 days a month. Average earning per day varies depending on the distance travelled and the number of bags transported - 60 paise per bag for short distances. For a distance of $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 kms. from the grain market Rs.3/- per bag is the normal rate. The average earnings per month, when there is work comes to between Rs.300 - 350 a month for a team of two workers. The wage rates vary from 60 paise to as much as Rs.5/- per bag in rare cases where the bags have to be delivered on the first floor or second floor. The carts are generally hired by the handcart pullers from the cart owners, for a rent of Rs.2/- per day. The average family consists of 6-8 members with one or two working members. Normally 1 to 3 people work with each cart depending on the number of bags loaded. Mostly it is 1 or 2. The risk in all cases is born by the handcart pullers, if any theft or damage occurs to the goods. If there is any damage to the cart, the owner is expected to repair the same.

To conclude, during peak seasons, the monthly earnings are around Rs.350/- for a team of two handcart pullers. Considering the lean seasons and unemployment the average monthly income can range from Rs.200 to Rs.250 per month.

3.0 Handcart pullers in the New Cloth Market

The earnings are similar in the New Cloth Market to that of the grain market. In terms it works out to Rs.15/- per day for 2 people. Generally there are 8 bales per trip. There are 8 trips per day. Each bale weighs about 40-120 kgs. December to February is the peak season, when they work 7 days a week. March is the lean month. So also the rainy season. A handcart puller is also expected to load/unload the goods besides transportation. Wage rate is the same as in the grain market. The handcart pullers are normally not paid for return trips and if for some reason delivery is not made they are expected to return the goods to the sender for which they are not paid. The number of trips without delivery could amount to 2 per week on an average. The transportation time involved is about 2 kms. per hour. On a working day they put in about 11 hours of time. They incur an expense of Rs.11/- per week for hire charges. Family members are about 9 on an average with 2 working members. There are more men than women handcart pullers in the New Cloth Market. We were also told that there is a Hand-Lori association in the New Cloth Market with the textile division having about 350 carts. The average earnings works out to be around Rs.400/- a month during peak season.

4.0 Railway goods yard

We talked to a few handcart pullers who load goods in the carts from the wagons and transport them to the grain market. There are approximately 1000 handcarts in the yard. They load from 13 to 15 bags per trip and 2 to 3 people transport it to the grain market. They get employment only for 3 or 4 days per week and except for Diwali, which is the peak season they do seem to have year-round employment for 3 to 4 days a week. It takes 20 to 25 minutes for one cart to load and similar time for unloading. The team of 2 earns about Rs.30/- per day for man and wife team. The rent per cart comes to Rs.45/- per month. If the wagon arrival is delayed there is considerable delay and idle time which results in sometime only one trip a day or at times no trip. The average earnings per month comes to Rs.320/- after deducting the rental charges.

5.0 Vegetable Market

As a comparison for the loading and unloading, we talked to a few labourers in the vegetable market loading baskets and bags in tempos and trucks. There are two types of labourers here. The first type are those who are employed directly by the truck owners and on a daily wage basis and are paid Rs.13/- per day. The second type - casual labourers are paid on a piece rate basis approximately 35 paise per unit. Their employment is not guaranteed. Generally, each tempo requires about 70 units either for loading or unloading and about 4 people are employed for each trip. There could be 3 to 5 trips a day during the vegetable season and for the casual workers 6 months of the year there will not be any work. They work on a 6-day a week basis. Their family size varies from 10 to 15 with 1 to 2 working members. Per person the labourers make Rs.10/- per day when there is work.

6.0 Lathi Bazar (Timber yards)

On an average 2 - 4 trips are undertaken per day over a distance of about 5 kms. per trip. When firewood is transported, buyers pay the handcart pullers 3 to 5 Rs. depending on location) per load. Gross earnings are about Rs.400 per month. Earnings per team of two workers range from Rs.15 to 20 per day. Cart owners reported expenses during the year towards repairs (including punctures repaired Rs.80), Tubes and tyres (Rs.500). A new licence costs Rs.15 whereas renewal costs Rs.7.50. They also claim that incidental expenses of Rs.10 they would have to incur for renewals besides losing a day or two of employment.

7.0 General Observations

We have interviewed persons whose household income ranges between Rs.125 to Rs.175 per month. But these are not the majority. The modal income is around Rs.300 per month. Most workers admit to overloading the cart and getting caught two to three times a month paying fines (Rs. 2 or 3) each time. They also have lost employment due to court appearances. They claim that the legal limits are too low for them to survive. For instance they are allowed to carry 300 tins and they load upto 600 or more. They are allowed carry 20 barrels for which they obtain 35 paise per barrel, yielding per trip Rs.7/- for two workers. They load upto 35 barrels trying to increase the earnings to Rs.12.50 per team, per trip. They realise that traffic safety rules are violated but claim that economic necessity forces them to do so.

APPENDIX II (contd.)

We also observed that there are quite a few Rajasthani handcart pullers who are male workers coming to Ahmedabad for a few months in a year returning to their villages during the rainy season. The man and wife team are permanent residents in the city. Most of the handcart pullers we talked to seem to hire the cart from the owners and mostly as labourers. In all the cases, the risk of damage or theft to the goods handled was to be born by the workers. In the Railway yard, they did not mention any expenses due to fines or traffic violations or thefts ofcourse, and so on. They all seem to agree that thefts do not occur with high frequency, though they cannot be ruled out.

When there is employment the handcart pullers on an average work 10 to 11 hours a day which include waiting time, loading time, transportation and delivery. The handcart pullers, besides loading and unloading also do the stacking at the railway yards.

In the grain market an informal group of the handcart pullers has been operating who deal with the grain dealers and try to obtain for its own members as many trips as feasible. They also allocate their trips and charge informal rates. They seem to believe that they get more trips through such an arrangement.

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