

To, All Members

Long Live Glorious Traditions of May Day

We extend revolutionary greetings to all employees and their family members on the occasion of May Day – the day of international solidarity of the working class. On this day it is our bounden duty to remember the sacrifices made by working class all over the world. It is a day to remind ourselves that it is due to the selfless sacrifices of countless workers that we are enjoying our present benefits and privileges. We must not forget that whatever rights and benefits we are enjoying today have not come as a charity from our rulers, these are the fruits of hard struggle of our ancestors. We must understand that had there been no sacrifices in the past, the present would not have been what it is today. We cannot and must not forget the glorious traditions of the May Day.

“Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep and eight hours for what we will do” – these words still reverberate in our mind. In the late 19th century, the working class was in constant struggle to gain the eight-hour working day. Working conditions were very severe then; it was pretty much usual for the workers to slog 10-15 hours a day in absolutely unsafe conditions. Death and injury at the workplaces were a recurrent feature. Exploitation of workers was commonplace. Workers were afraid of protesting. Fear of losing their jobs and earning the wrath of their employers constantly haunted them. Often, protests of workers were being ruthlessly attacked by private armies of the employers like the Pinkerton Gang. During this time the idea of Socialism had started taking roots. Many of the workers were drawn towards the socialist ideology of working class control over the production and distribution of wealth. The demand of Eight Hour working day started gathering momentum. The Federation of Organised Trades and Labour Unions (which later became the American Federation of Labour) proclaimed in its national convention in Chicago in 1884 that “eight hours shall constitute a legal day’s labour from and after May 1, 1886”.

On May 1, 1886 more than 300,000 workers in 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs in the first ever May Day celebration. Chicago was the epicentre of the Eight-hour agitation where 40,000 workers went out on strike and many more joined them subsequently. On May 3, 1886 violence broke out at the McCormick Reaper Works between police and the workers. In the police brutality that ensued, at least two strikers were killed and many were injured. This incident enraged the workers and galvanised them into action. A public meeting was called the following day at Hay Market Square to discuss the police brutality. As the police began to disperse the crowd, a bomb was thrown into the police ranks. What followed thereafter was virtual mayhem. Exact number of those killed or wounded have not been determined till date. Till date, interestingly, nobody knows who threw the bomb. But what is certain is that no worker was involved. An agent provocateur working for the police is believed to have thrown the bomb. But eight leaders of the demonstration – Albert Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Oscar Neebe, Michael Schwabe, George Engel, Adolf Fischer and Louis Lingg – were arrested and convicted of murder. In a classic case of mockery of justice, on November 11, 1887 Parsons, Spies, Engel and Fischer were hung to death. Louis Lingg, as a mark of protest against the crass injustice, took his own life with an explosive device in his mouth.

In December 1888 from the Conference of the American Federation of Labour held at St. Louis, it was decided that from May 1, 1890 May Day would be observed by the working class throughout the U.S.A. The first Congress of the Second International in Paris in 1889 called upon the working class throughout the world to observe May 1 as the May Day. The Zurich Congress of the Second International in 1893 declared that May Day should be observed not only to voice the demand for an eight-hour working day, but it should be turned into a day for mobilizing the working class to destroy class divisions by bringing about social change. Since that time May Day is being observed every year by the working class with the avowed objective of destroying capitalism and ushering in a social change in favour of the toiling people.

As we set out to celebrate May Day 2018, we find that imperialist forces led by US imperialism have bared their fangs all over the world. Imperialist interventions in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq and elsewhere are going on apace. There are also attempts to undermine the left and progressive governments and forces in Latin America. Imperialist driven globalisation has wrought havoc on the life and living of millions of people. Unfortunately, right wing and reactionary forces have successfully utilised the sufferings of the people and have acquired political power in many parts of the world.

In India today, the working people are confronted with the challenges of aggressive pursuit of neo liberal economic policies, a relentless sharpening of the communal polarisation and authoritarian assaults on all sorts of constitutional authorities. Privatisation of public sector units has become the new mantra. Public sector New India Assurance and GIC Re have already been disinvested. Day in and day out vicious campaigns are being carried out against the LIC. The twin attacks of demonetisation and goods and services tax have crippled the Indian economy beyond repair. The result has been large scale unemployment and huge inequality in the Indian society. While the working class has been groaning under the burden of increasing inequality, huge concessions are being given to the rich and super rich. The less said about the peasantry the better. The peasants have been saddled with huge debts and are committing suicides in large numbers. A government having no qualms about doling huge tax concessions to the rich corporates is averse to giving any relief to the poor farmers. The growing popular anger and angst is being sought to be neutralised by sharp communal polarisation. Attacks on students, Dalits, rational and progressive intellectuals is increasing by leaps and bounds. Whatever little rights the working class have are sought to be taken away in the name of 'labour reforms'. 'Ease of doing business' has replaced 'Ease of living a decent life' as guiding principle of state policy.

This may Day beckons all of us to rise up against all forms of exploitation and develop broader unity with all sections of toiling people to ward off the dangers lurking in the horizon.

With Revolutionary Greetings,

Comradely Yours

Shreekanth Mishra

General Secretary