

MAY DAY 2019

We extend warm greetings to all employees, their family members and the entire working class of India on the occasion of May Day 2019. This is the day of international solidarity of the working class. This day reminds us of the heroic struggle of the working class to secure an eight-hour working day. More than that, this day can be said to be a testimony to labour's die-hard determination to fight inhuman exploitation of the capitalist order.

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. Ever since, this day is being celebrated all over the world. The demand that has been central to May Day celebrations is "Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep and eight hours for what we will do". Today this demand may appear to be somewhat out of place to those who are in the organised sector enjoying all the privileges of a safe and secure workplace. But, for the countless millions in the unorganised sector working day in and day out in sub human conditions this day still resonates with historic significance. The advocates of globalisation say that class struggle of the working class has become irrelevant today. For them what is important, instead, is identity. It is said today that workers should not organise themselves as a class. Rather, people belonging to a common identity – whether race, caste, ethnicity or religion – should come together, put forth their demands and assert their rights. The apologists of identity politics say that oppression can be understood and experienced only by people having the same identity; others are excluded from the fight against that oppression. We must understand that finance capital encourages identity politics because it is convenient to deal with people fragmented on the basis of multiple identities. The divisions and fragmentations make it easier for the capitalist forces to penetrate into the market and make profits at the cost of workers. It is therefore the bounden duty of workers in the organised sector to join hands with workers in the unorganised sector and celebrate May Day by espousing its lofty ideals.

The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) has rightly given a call to observe May Day 2019 with the slogan 'The Wealth Belongs To Those Who Produce It'. The world was never as unequal as it is today. A recent report of Oxfam says that the wealth of the world's billionaires increased \$900 billion in the last year, at a rate of \$2.5 billion a day. The report also states that last year 26 people owned the same wealth as the 3.8 billion people who

make up the poorest half of humanity. Giving a grim picture of rising inequality all over the world, the report says that everyday 10,000 people die because they lack access to affordable healthcare. Commenting on inequality in India, the report says that India's top 1% of the population holds 73% of the wealth while 67 crore citizens comprising the country's poorest half, saw their wealth rise by just 1%. A recent report titled "State of Working India", prepared by Azim Premji University's Centre for Sustainable Employment says that 82% male workers and 92% female workers in India earn less than Rs.10,000 in a month. In addition to this, a huge unemployment problem stares Indian workers in the face.

The workers are fully aware that they are being exploited. They are angry over their exploitation. And this anger is festering gradually. This festering anger could turn into aggression. It could threaten the lives of the rich. It could set their empires afire. But that is not happening! The reasons are obvious.

Like the fascists of the last century – Adolph Hitler of Germany, Benito Mussolini of Italy, Francisco Franco of Spain, Hideki Tojo of Japan and Antonio de Oliveira Salazar of Portugal – we have a new breed of rulers to silence the workers. These rulers do not wear the uniform of the military. They also do not take the help of the military to silence the workers. They simply tell the workers and the unemployed not to be angry with the rich. They say that the rich have earned their wealth by ingenuity and hard work. They say that it is not the business of the workers and the unemployed to worry about the rich. They try to silence the workers by saying that it is neither the rich nor the state apparatus that are to blame for their wretchedness and humiliation. The new ruling classes advise the workers not to target the rich. They advise the workers to turn their guns against the socially marginal. The ire of the workers is made to be directed not at the rich and powerful exploiting classes but towards the vulnerable and weak. Mostly it is the migrant. It is said that it is the migrant who is taking away the jobs from the workers and the unemployed workers. The new rulers would have us believe that the migrant must suffer for the plight of workers and the unemployed. We are made to agree that the migrant has to pay a price for the failure of capitalism! If it is not the migrant, then it is some other social group – the minorities or the drug dealer or the terrorists. And it is not only the police that has to take charge, militia groups also emerge to intimidate society into silence. One must remember therefore that the attacks on migrant Bihari workers in Gujarat is closely linked to the lynching's of Dalits and Muslims in many parts of India and to the murder of supposed drug dealers in the Philippines and to the shooting of black men and women by police officers in the United States.

This contempt and hatred have given rise to an acerbic form of nationalism – a nationalism not rooted in love of fellow human beings but in hatred of the so-called outsiders. The basis of the new nationalism is not 'love' but 'hatred'. The new nationalism is not inclusive, it is exclusive in nature. This is not the nationalism invoked by Gandhi during India's struggle for

freedom, this is the nationalism invoked by Hitler in Germany. Patriotism is reduced to the hatred of the migrant worker, the minorities, the socially marginalised groups. So much so that the attention of the workers is turned away from their real problems; from the problem of low wages, from the problem of unacceptably long and inhuman working conditions, from the problems of unemployment and underemployment, from the problems of starvation, from the problems of education and health care etc. Workers' attention is diverted away from real to bogus issues. Eminent historian Vijay Prashad notes, "It is one thing to be patriotic about flags and anthems. But it is another thing to be patriotic against starvation and hopelessness."

This May Day beckons all of us to draw inspiration from the sacrifices of the martyrs and sensitise the working class to their real issues. We must sensitise the working class to the problems of joblessness, of unemployment, of hunger and malnutrition and above all of their exploitation. We must sensitise them to develop a class struggle by enhancing their class consciousness against the exploitative and inhuman nature of the capitalist system. The solidarity between workers and peasants that we have witnessed in India in recent times, the historic struggle of the peasantry and the huge success of the 8-9 January two-day nationwide strike are pointers to the possibility of a 'new awakening' on the eve of this May Day.

With Revolutionary May Day Greetings,

Comradely Yours

Shreekanth Mishra

General Secretary