

Editorial

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When the 'Day' of the working class people comes

People across the world will be observing 'May Day' tomorrow. Left, Right or Central ideologue groups - all observed the May Day. The only differences is that - there is a clear distinction on how the left wing group observed the day when compares with the way that the Right Wing group observed. The observance of May Day in different parts of the World too varies. In India, people in heartland states observed the day announcing better livelihood for the labour community. But when it comes to the state like Manipur, Kasmir, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Telengana etc., many people observed the day crying for justice of the working class people where their rights have been deprived.

The left leaned civil bodies, on the other hand observed the day with anti fascist agenda.

Last year, some left wing bodies observed that day by organizing Anti-Fascist slogans and also with demand for justice and equality for the working class people.

On the other hand the state government celebrates the May Day as a grant function with the launching of Chief Minister, N. Biren Singh ambitious project Go to Village Mission last year.

When one recalled the origin of observing May Day, it is known to everyone that, the exploitation of the labour community by capitalist regime that prompted the uprising of the labour community in Western countries in 1886 is the root for observing the day. The demand for limited working hours was the demand that time. But as time changes the kind of exploitations faced by the labourers are multiple these days. And definitely 'May Day' is known as the day that the problem being faced by the labourer is being discussed and highlighted.

It is known fact that working class people in India particularly the farmers are facing various problems due to aggression by the fascist regime.

On the other hand, we often notice the working people being suppressed by capitalist class from time to time through various draconian laws. As for the working class people of Manipur and Jammu and Kashmire it is the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) that have been suppressing the people, while in case of the states like West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Telengana etc. the was that the lower class people are being suppressed is different. People are rape, killed and torture for the cause of muti national company owners and such event are concealed by the state authority using every means.

When it comes to Manipur, worth mentioning is the uprising of the Manipuri mothers in the backdrop of the rape and murder of Thangjam Monorama gives every down trodden community across the globe an inspiration and we too will follow what the mothers of Manipur had done against the colonial security force of the country run by the fascist regime.

In general the kind of exploitation to lower working class group by capitalist group is same in all the country across the globe. In the state of Manipur when one ponder on how the capitalist groups are using the lower class people should be understood by all.

First this capitalist group looted the working class people, then they make them hungry and later they feed them so that the working class people become their slaves. The truth is that they are making these groups as slave with things of their own.

The constructing big dams, exploration natural gas, etc. are not good signed for improvement of the working class people.

It is time that people of the state make meaningful observance of the May Day.

May Day born in the United States

By :- Sh. Ajit

The origin of May Day is indissolubly bound up with the struggle for the shorter workday - a demand of major political significance for the working class. This struggle is manifest almost from the beginning of the factory system in the United States.

Although the demand for higher wages appears to be the most prevalent cause for the early strikes in this country, the question of shorter hours and the right to organize were always kept in the foreground when workers formulated their demands against the bosses and the government. As exploitation was becoming intensified and workers were feeling more and more the strain of inhumanly long working hours, the demand for an appreciable reduction of hours became more pronounced. Already at the opening of the 19th century workers in the United States made known their grievances against working from "sunrise to sunset," the then prevailing workday. Fourteen, sixteen and even eighteen hours a day were not uncommon. During the conspiracy trial against the leaders of striking cordwainers in 1806, it was brought out that workers were employed as long as nineteen and twenty hours a day.

The twenties and thirties are replete with strikes for reduction of hours of work and definite demands for a 10-hour day were put forward in many industrial centers. The organization of what is considered as the first trade union in the world, the Mechanics' Union of Philadelphia, preceding by two years the one formed by workers in England, can be definitely ascribed to a strike of building trade workers in Philadelphia in 1827 for the 10-hour day. During the bakers' strike in New York in 1834 the Workingmen's Advocate reported that "journeymen employed in the loaf bread business have for years been suffering worse than Egyptian bondage. They have had to labor on an average of eighteen to twenty hours out of the twenty-four."

The demand in those localities for a 10-hour day soon grew into a movement, which, although impeded by the crisis of 1837, led the federal government under President Van Buren to decree the 10-hour day for all those employed on government work.

The struggle for the universality of the 10-hour day, however, continued during the next decades. No sooner had this demand been secured in a number of industries than the workers began to raise the slogan for an 8-hour day. The feverish activity in organizing labor unions during the fifties gave this new demand an impetus which, however, was checked by the crisis of 1857. The demand was, however, won in a well-organized trades before the crisis. That the movement for a shorter workday was not only peculiar to the United States, but was prevalent wherever workers were exploited under the rising capitalist system, can be seen from the fact that even in far away Australia the building trade workers raised the slogan "8 hours work, 8 hours recreation and 8 hours rest" and were successful in securing this demand in 1856.

Eight-Hour Movement Started in America
The 8-hour day movement which directly gave birth to May Day, must, however, be traced to the general movement initiated in the United States in 1884. However, a generation before a national labor organization, which at first gave great promise of developing into a militant organizing center of the American working class, took up the question of a shorter workday and proposed to organize a broad movement in its behalf. The first years of the Civil War 1861-1862, saw the disappearance of the few national trade unions which had

been formed just before the war began, especially the Molders' Union and the Machinists' and Blacksmiths' Union. The years immediately following, however, witnessed the unification on a national scale of a number of local labor organizations, and the urge for a national federation of all these unions became apparent. On August 20, 1866, there gathered in Baltimore delegates from three scores of trade unions who formed the National Labor Union. The movement for the national organization was led by William H. Sylvis, the leader of the reconstructed Molders' Union, who, although a young man, was the outstanding figure in the labor movement of those years. Sylvis was in correspondence with the leaders of the First International in London and helped to influence the National Labor Union to establish relations with the General Council of the International.

It was at the founding convention of the National Labor Union in 1866 that the following resolution was passed dealing with the shorter workday:

The first and great necessity of the present, to free labor of this country from capitalist slavery, is the passing of a law by which 8 hours shall be the normal working day in all states in the American Union. We are resolved to put forth all our strength until this glorious result is attained. The same convention voted for independent political action in connection with the securing of the legal enactment of the 8-hour day and the election of men pledged to sustain and represent the interests of the industrial classes."

The program and policies of the early labor movement, although primitive and not always sound, were based, nevertheless, on healthy proletarian instinct and could have served as starting points for the development of a genuine revolutionary labor movement in this country were it not for the reformist misleaders and capitalist politicians who later infested the labor organizations and directed them in wrong channels. Thus 65 years ago, the national organization of American labor, the N. L. U., expressed itself against "capitalist slavery" and for independent political action.

Eight-hour leagues were formed as a result of the agitation of the National Labor Union; and through the political activity which the organization developed, several state governments adopted the 8-hour day on public work and the U. S. Congress enacted a similar law in 1868.

Sylvis continued to keep in touch with the International in London. Due to his influence as president of the organization, the National Labor Union voted at its convention in 1867 to cooperate with the international working class movement and in 1869 it voted to accept the invitation of the General Council and send a delegate to the Basle Congress of the International. Unfortunately Sylvis died just before the N. L. U. convention, and A. C. Cameron, the editor of the Workingmen's Advocate, published in Chicago, was sent as delegate in his stead. In a special resolution the General Council mourned the death of this promising young American labor leader. "The eyes of all were turned upon Sylvis, who, as a general of the proletarian army, had an experience of ten years, outside of his great abilities - and Sylvis is dead." The passing of Sylvis was one of the contributing causes of the decay which soon set in and led to the disappearance of the National Labor Union.

First International Adopts the Eight-Hour Day

The decision for the 8-hour day was made by the National Labor Union in August, 1866. In September of the same year the Geneva Congress of

the First International went on record for the same demand in the following words:

The legal limitation of the working day is a preliminary condition without which all further attempts at improvements and emancipation of the working class must prove abortive... The Congress proposes 8 hours as the legal limit of the working day.

Marx on the Eight-Hour Movement In the chapter on "The Working Day" in the first volume of Capital, published in 1867, Marx calls attention to the inauguration of the 8-hour movement by the National Labor Union. In the passage, famous especially because it contains Marx's telling reference to the solidarity of class interests between the Negro and white workers, he wrote:

In the United States of America, any sort of independent labor movement was paralyzed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labor with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labor with a black skin is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new vigorous life sprang. The first fruit of the Civil War was an agitation for the 8-hour day - a movement which ran with express speed from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California.

Marx calls attention to how almost simultaneously, in fact within two weeks of each other, a workers' convention meeting in Baltimore voted for the 8-hour day, and an international congress meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, adopted a similar decision. "Thus on both sides of the Atlantic did the working class movement, spontaneous outgrowth of the conditions of production," endorse the same movement of the limitation of hours of labor and concretize it in the demand for the 8-hour day.

That the decision of the Geneva Congress was prompted by the American decision can be seen from the following portion of the resolution: "As this limitation represents the general demand of the workers of the North-American United States, the Congress transforms this demand into the general platform of the workers of the whole world."

A similar influence of the American labor movement upon an international congress and in behalf of the same cause was exerted more profoundly 23 years later.

The First International ceased to exist as an international organization in 1872, when its headquarters were removed from London to New York, although it was not officially disbanded till 1876. It was at the first congress of the reconstituted International, later known as the Second International, held at Paris in 1889, that May First was set aside as a day upon which the workers of the world, organized in their political parties and trade unions, were to fight for the important political demand: the 8-hour day.

The Paris decision was influenced by a decision made at Chicago five years earlier by delegates of a young American labor organization - the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, later known under the abbreviated name, American Federation of Labor. At the Fourth Convention of this organization, October 7, 1884, the following resolution was passed:

Resolved by the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, that eight hours shall constitute legal day's labor from May First, 1886, and that we recommend to labor organizations throughout their jurisdiction that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution by the time named.

Although nothing was said in the resolution about the methods by which the Federation expected to establish the 8-hour day, it is self-evident that an organization which at that time commanded an adherence of not more than 50,000 members

could not declare "that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's work" without putting up a fight for it in the shops, mills, and mines where its members were employed, and without attempting to draw into the struggle for the 8-hour day still larger numbers of workers. The provision in the resolution that the unions affiliated to the Federation "so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution" referred to the matter of paying strike benefits to their members who were expected to strike on May First, 1886, for the 8-hour day, and would probably have to stay out long enough to need assistance from the union. As this strike action was to be national in scope and involve all the affiliated organizations, the unions, according to their by-laws, had to secure the endorsement of the strike by their members, particularly since that would involve the expenditure of funds, etc. It must be remembered that the Federation, just as the A. F. of L. today, was organized on a voluntary, federation basis, and decisions of a national convention could be binding upon affiliated unions only if those unions endorsed these decisions.

May Day Becomes International
On July 14, 1889, the hundredth anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, there assembled in Paris leaders from organized revolutionary proletarian movements of many lands, to form once more an international organization of workers, patterned after the one formed 25 years earlier by their great teacher, Karl Marx. Those assembled at the foundation meeting of what was to become the Second International heard from the American delegates about the struggle in America for the 8-hour day during 1884-1886, and the recent rejuvenation of the movement. Inspired by the example of the American workers, the Paris Congress adopted the following resolution:

The Congress decides to organize a great international demonstration, so that in all countries and in all cities on one appointed day the toiling masses shall demand of the state authorities the legal reduction of the working day to eight hours, as well as the carrying out of other decisions of the Paris Congress. Since a similar demonstration has already been decided upon for May 1, 1890, by the American Federation of Labor at its Convention in St. Louis, December, 1888, this day is accepted for the international demonstration. The workers of the various countries must organize this demonstration according to conditions prevailing in each country.

The clause in the resolution which speaks of the organization of the demonstration with regard to the objective conditions prevailing in each country gave some parties, particularly the British movement, an opportunity to interpret the resolution as not mandatory upon all countries. Thus at the very formation of the Second International, there were parties who looked upon it as merely a consultative body, functioning only during Congresses for the exchange of information and opinions, but not as a centralized organization, a revolutionary world proletarian party, such as Marx had tried to make the First International a generation before. When Engels wrote to his friend Serge in 1874, before the First International was officially disbanded in America, "I think that the next International, formed after the teachings of Marx, will have become widely known during the next years, will be a purely Communist International," he did not foresee that at the very launching of the rejuvenated International there would be present reformist elements who viewed it as a voluntary federation of Socialist parties, independent of each other and each a law unto itself.

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