

Europe Trampling the Rights of Working Class

In the later half of the 19th century and in 20th century, the working class of Europe by waging bitter struggles of untold sacrifices against the exploitation of its labour power by the capitalist system – particularly in the form of abnormal working hours – had won the eight-hour working day besides many democratic rights.

But the neo-liberal economics of capitalist system that came to rule the entire globe has been making every effort to do away with the rights won by the working class touting various attractive slogans such as “reforms”, “growth and development”, “competition”, “flexibility of doing business” etc.

To cover up the failures in bringing out affluence to all the people, to cover up the adverse impact of its policies on the entire globe in the form of ever widening inequalities and joblessness and social strife brought by it, the neo-liberal capitalist system has cunningly chosen the divisive social agenda and is skilfully channelizing the anger of the disaffected sections of people with each other by fuelling racism, anti-immigrant hate on pretext of fighting terrorism etc. Thus by only diverting the attention of working class against capitalist exploitation the system has been imposing itself as the uncontested ruler over the globe.

These machinations of capitalist neo-liberal economic system which were already practiced during the period of great depression are clearly visible in the present day Europe, where every measure is being taken by the ruling classes and their governments to perpetually enslave the working class and exploit it as was done in the dark ages.

The governments in European countries have started a new round of attacks on the working class in various forms at the behest of the imperialist financial institutions – World Bank and IMF.

The President of France Macron of the Republic on March Party (LRM) decreed many labour laws to the detriment of the rights of working class. These decrees permitted mass sackings of workers and evisceration of social rights established by generations of workers struggles.

The Macron decrees gave official stamp to the transformation of trade unions into organs of the capitalist state. The trade unions are largely financially subsidised and controlled by the employers. They help plan and provide legal sanction to mass lay-offs, referendums on whether to accept pay cuts to keep plants open and other attacks on their own trade union members.

In the wake of Macron’s decrees, the automaker PSA Peugeot-Citroën announced that it is preparing to deregulated mass sackings. It is the second largest automaker in Europe.

During the time of financial crisis in 2008, the French state paid billions of Euros to bail-out PSA. Now it is preparing to sack workers to pocket billions of Euros in wealth created by the working class. Tens of thousands of PSA jobs across Europe are threatened. After the bailout, PSA slashed the wages of newly hired workers by half. Now goal is to impose speed up, increase flexibility of working times and transition to a work force largely made up of temporary workers, who are being paid little over 9 Euros per hour.

Since the approval for the mass sackings is required according to Macron’s decrees, PSA began talks with the official trade union.

Macron’s decree of unregulated mass sackings allows firms to sack workers even if they are highly profitable and to deny sacked workers any training benefits or rehiring privileges even if the firm’s financial position improves. Now PSA is using this provision to sack the workers.

Already in 2012 the PSA management had obtained as massive concessional deal from the official trade union at the Sevelnord PSA plant in northern France. In 2013, its plant at Aulnoy was closed. The trade union leader who had overseen the closure of this plant is presently in discussions with the PSA management on behalf of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) in the matter of preparation of the management for deregulated mass sackings.

Already in the scenario of globally coordinated production, the autoworkers with lower wages are unable to live with decent lives. If the PSA succeeds in obtaining approval from CGT for deregulated mass sackings, the autoworkers in Europe will be thrown into further distress.

But the workers in Europe are not meekly accepting these attacks by the managements on them. Strikes and protests of autoworkers in Serbia and Romania are erupting and workers of Siemens in Germany are agitating against onslaught on their rights and entitlements.

While such has been the form of attacks on working class in France, the government and ruling classes in Austria have started attacks on the rights of workers in another form, viz., to increase the working hours from 8 to 12 per day.

The recently formed coalition government of far right Freedom Party (FPO) and conservative People's Party (OVP) in Austria headed by Sebastian Kurz of OVP is planning to increase the daily maximum working hours from 8 to 12. Such an increase is mooted to satisfy a long pending demand from Corporations.

The irony is in the elections in which the FPO postured itself as the saviour of working class interests by voicing slogans that immigrants are looting the jobs and many workers voted it to power. Now the FPO is heading the key posts of police, army and intelligence in the Austrian government.

The coalition government is now implementing the same pro-market economic policies which it blamed the previous government for. Chanting the neo-liberal slogans of globalisation like, "bureaucracy will be reduced", "working hours shall fit more in to practice", "the state must not be in the way of corporations" and in the name of increasing labour flexibility, the Austrian government is planning to increase the working hours.

By this plan many workers from lower-working class will be hit badly. Thus the working class is targeted by the self-styled saviours of workers.

Enraged with such a treacherous plan the working class in Austria are protesting against the government stating that they did not vote for him (FPO) "to see that happen" or "to be enslaved".

While the Scandinavian country Sweden introduced six-hour working day and some of the European countries are intending to reduce weekly working hours from 40 to 30, Austria wants to increase them to 60 hours (5 days of 12 hours) to facilitate the corporations to exploit labour power more.

Until now in Austria the payment of overtime is used to be limited with minimum wages governed by collective agreements. The present government's proposal leaves the matter to the will of the individual company, thus the compensation option will be eliminated by a mandatory minimum wage.

This policy of "flexibility of working hours" adopted by the neo-liberal capitalism to increase the working hours is frustrating the aspirations and gains by the "MAY DAY" spirit, and reaffirmed and confirmed the accurate correctness of the theory of "surplus value" created by the working class and exploited by the capitalists propounded by Karl Marx. It once again warns the working class that it shall fight against capitalist rule by taking up its historical task of class struggle over throwing the capitalist system and establishing its own system of dictatorship of the proletariat to end the exploitation and inequalities – economic and social – forever.
