

Agenda of the Exploiting Class: Push for 70 Hours Work-Week, Convert it into Surplus Value

- *Pratap*

Recently, an Indian industrialist suggested that our workers should work 70 hours a week in order to make our companies compete with European and American companies. Even our prime minister said that our workers should work 12 hours a day (i.e. 72 hours a week) to achieve ease of doing business. By saying so he has once again shown his devotion to the industrialists. In fact, what they are all talking about and teaching now is preparing mainstream employees to make 70-hour work a part of their lifestyle. They are looting the labor of workers and employees in the name of new economic and industrial policies or export oriented economic and industrial policies. From wage slavery they are pushing towards vetti slavery. The exploitation of labor in the unorganized sector is already at 14 to 16 hours a day in many areas.

The eight-hour working day and many other labor welfare measures, which the working class had achieved after fighting for decades, are being abolished and reduced into four labor codes at the orders of imperialists and finance capital, increasing the oppression and exploitation on the workers. The working class is increasingly agitating on these conditions, questioning how much profit they will squeeze from their labour.

It is known that 90 percent of the workers in the country are working in the unorganized sector, and only 10 percent are working in the organized sector. People's conditions are made so deprived that they are ready to work in the unorganized sector without access to proper wages, proper working conditions, a safe and healthy workplace environment, job security, medical facilities, etc. The agrarian crisis and ever-increasing unemployment are forcing the unemployed youths to rush to the factory gates, ready to work under any level of low wages and working conditions. By creating such conditions, the industrial capitalist class is able to exploit and extract more labor time, converting it into super profits. Let us consider the example of Maruti in the organized sector.

In the second half of the 1970s, at the instigation of Sanjay Gandhi, 297.3 acres were allocated by the state government in the Gurgaon district of Haryana state; 157 acres belonging to the Ministry of Defense, 140 acres acquired after evicting out 15,000 local farmers were allocated to the Maruti car factory in 1977. The first model produced was the Maruti Suzuki 800 with an 800CC CF& B engine. By 1988 its production capacity was 38 cars per worker per year, which increased to 77 cars by 1995 and 107 cars by 1999-2000.

In 2002, when Vajpayee was the Prime Minister, the then government decided to give up the ownership of Maruti Suzuki and sold it for Rs 439 crore in 2003. From then on, it has been

running under the name Maruti Suzuki India Limited as an affiliate of Suzuki Motor Corporation of Japan.

Since then, the working conditions of the workers have started deteriorating. They are increasing automation and the use of robots. It seems 2,500 robots are operational in the Manesar unit alone and 5,000 robots in the Gurgaon factory in 2017. The workers have to spend most of their working hours competing with robots. The more the workers expend additional labor time to achieve this type of productivity, apart from the labor time expended to earn their wages, the more surplus value is created for the capitalist owners. The Great Marx had said that the surplus value created in this way is what the capitalist class accumulates as endless profits; that these profits will be spent not on improving the working conditions of workers but on increasing technology. Today, the exploitation of labor has increased many fold; Inhumanity has increased. This inhumanity is called 'Karachi' in Japanese. It means dying from overwork. The 70 hour work week proposals should be seriously examined from this point of view.

In Maruti Suzuki, production of cars has increased from 13 lakh cars in 2001 to 41 lakh by 2012. With this, India has become the sixth largest producer of passenger cars and commercial vehicles in the world. But we must see the darker side behind the bright slogans of development given by the ruling class. So let's take a look at the production sequence in this factory:

In the engine workshop, a worker has to complete 18 types of work in two minutes. They are

- Lifting a block or crankshaft weighing about 30 kg.
- Installing 4 bolts by hand out of 16 bolts.
- Checking 16 bolts.
- Tightening and turning all the bolts.
- Turning the block backwards.
- Fitting the pin to the crankshaft.
- Putting the stopper.
- Properly placing the 8 kg flywheel at the center of the pin.
- Pressing the bearing after doing the fly wheel alignment .
- fixing 6 bolts.
- Tightening the 6 bolts.
- Checking all bolts and marking as checked.
- Mounting the clutch and pressure plate on the flywheel.
- Aligning the plate and rotating it again.

- Making the block straight again.
- Removing the center stopper.
- Blowing a bolt.
- Lifting the block with the help of crane and placing it in its designated position.

A worker has to complete 18 such tasks every two minutes.

A car is made every 46 seconds at the Maruti factory. It is the fastest car manufacturing plant, not only in India but also in Asia. Japan is also in the continent of Asia. The Indian plant is a branch of the Japanese plant. Yet, this much production won't happen in Japan.

Each worker is assigned a specific work area. They have to complete their assigned work within the stipulated time. Workers have to lift heavy parts and place them in an appropriate position within the fast moving box. From the beginning to the end, the box moves in 46 seconds. Each worker has 46 seconds. Making a car in 46 seconds means doing different types of work at different stages at the same time in unison.

Workers are given two tea breaks in a shift. The tea break duration is 7:30 minutes. A Siren sounds for tea break. Break time counts from then on. The worker has to conclude the work in his hand. It will take 10 to 20 seconds. Each tool has a specific place. Tools should be put in their designated places. The helmet should be taken off. Gloves should be removed. Take off the apron. Place them on a shelf 10 to 15 feet away. Go to the locker, open it and take a glass for tea. Join the queue which already has 25 to 35 people. The trolley with snacks will be ready. Pour tea in a glass with one hand and take samosa/bread/pakoda/sandwich and jam/butter with other hand. Also, go to the bathroom and urinate with a glass of tea in one hand and a samosa in the other. After having tea, wash your hands and come back to work. Open the locker, put the glass in it, lock it and reach the same place, put on the gloves, put on the helmet, take the tools and start working. All these should be completed in seven and a half minutes. Moreover, the toilets and canteen are far away from the work place. If you are late, the production line that has already started running stops at the latecomers. The superior will know immediately where the work has stopped. Action will be taken against the concerned worker. This is how productivity is achieved in the factory.

A worker of the Maruti-Suzuki said in an interview that "wherever I sit after finishing my duty hours, be it a bus, a tea hotel, or anything else, I automatically fall asleep without realizing it. No matter how hard I try, I can't open my eyes. After joining here, I came to know that the work here is very oppressive. I am not lazy. I have a hard working mentality. It is not just a problem but fatal if I am not able to drink even a sip of water when thirsty, even if the water bottle is next to me. Can't even lift the bottle next to me because another car will come whose parts have to be fixed. Workers are not treated as human beings here".

It is not surprising that accidents and deaths occur in such workplaces. According to the report given by the Director General of the Factory Advice Service and Labor Institute in 2021, a total of 32,413 accidents were reported in various industries in 2020. 50 people died in it.

3282 people were injured. But these are under-reported numbers because only 22 percent of the registered factories and 35 percent of the dangerous factories were inspected. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which contribute 33 percent to the country's GDP, do not have any labor protection regulations.

Naturally, workers struggle with the management in various ways to improve these conditions. After the 2011 strike at the Maruti factory, the management had to agree to increase the tea time from 7 ½ minutes to 15 minutes and reduce the speed of assembling a car to 60 seconds from 46 seconds. It is unthinkable that working conditions in factories located in the same area can be more miserable in one place but better in another. It depends on the products produced, with only slight differences.

Since 2009, the country's automobile industry workers have taken to a series of strikes demanding better living wages and better working conditions. Workers at Mahendra in Nashik, Sunbeam Auto in Gurgaon, Bosch Chassis in Pune, Honda Motorcycles in Manesar, Rico Auto in Gurgaon, Pricol in Coimbatore, Volvo in Hoskote (Karnataka), General Motors in Halol (Gujarat), Bosch in Bengaluru, Dunlop in Hooghly (Bengal), Caparoin Sri Perambadur (Tamil Nadu), Dunlop in Ambattur (Tamil Nadu), M.R.F Tyres, Hyundai in Chennai and other companies are frequently going on strike. Despite all these efforts, the ruling classes are trying to damage the organized power of the labor unions by changing the order of production and canceling the labor laws. On the one hand rejection, injustice, depression and frustration are making the working class divert to some extent. On the other hand, the same working class is shaking with anger. That alone is not enough. They have to unite with the vast number of wealth creators in India, the peasants. They have to move forward with true working-class consciousness.

During the reconstruction efforts during the Second World War workers worked for 15, 16 hours a day to rebuild the homes and industries that were razed to the ground. But that is a special situation. It should not be compared to normal working conditions. At present, workers in Germany work only 34 hours a week and in Japan, 37 hours; in our neighboring countries, 47 hours in Pakistan, 47 hours in Bangladesh, 51 hours in Bhutan, 36 hours in Sri Lanka, 40 hours in Nepal, but 48 hours in India. Therefore, there is no such thing as a 70-hour work week in developed countries like Germany and Japan or in developing countries in our neighbourhood.

A 70-hour work week means 11 ½ hours a day for 6 days and 14 hours a day if it is a 5-day working week. At least two hours of travel time have to be added to it i.e., 13.5 to 16 hours a day. Moreover, the recent Periodic Labor Force Survey reported that men spend 41 minutes and women spend 5 hours and 30 minutes on household work after reaching home. So how much time is available to rest? Doesn't a restless work culture lead to lifestyle diseases? What about their health security?

Whether it is the landlord class in the villages or the industrial class in the towns, they want the workers to work for long hours, want to increase working periods during work, and squeeze as much labor as possible. No matter how much work the workers do, the

exploiting class wont be content. They do not care about the welfare of the workers. Their aim is to move one more step ahead on the rich list by getting more profits. Governments support the capitalist class, and the imperialists sing paeans to them. They make policies to guarantee their profits. The only development now is that they are pushing bitter pills through the hands of those who promote themselves as good corporates; but the form of exploitation is the same.

The working class should not be complacent with the rights it has already achieved and should not be careless under reformist illusions, as the exploiters are waiting for any opportunity to reclaim even these minimum rights. The working class should always be vigilant. It must be prepared by all means to fulfill its historical duty of bringing about social change.