

The Neo-Liberal Capitalism and its Lackeys are Attempting to Renege the Standard Eight Hour Working Day!

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The standard eight-hour working day established by legal enactment was not due to the mercy or charity of capitalist industrialists. But it was won by many in the bitter struggle of the working class throughout the world.

Initially, the demand for an eight-hour working day was raised by the Chicago convention of the American Federation of Labour (AFL) on October 7th, 1884, giving the governments of USA and Canada two years to implement the demand. It also gave them an ultimatum that if the demand was not acceded and implemented within the stipulated time, there would be a total strike. AFL sent the message of this demand to the fraternal trade unions in the world.

By that time, the working class of Australia had adopted the slogan 'a day of 8 hours of work, 8 hours of recreation, and 8 hours of rest'.

Since the capitalist-industrialists had not conceded the demand put forth by the proletariat, on May 1st, 1886, the strike was started throughout the USA. 13,000 industries were shut down. 40,000 workers joined the strike in Chicago alone. They staged processions along with their wives and children, demanding an eight-hour working day. By May 3rd, the procession that started from Hay Market had arrived Mc Carmic Reaper Works. Police brutally fired on the protesting workers, killing six and wounding hundreds of others. On May 4th, 1886, the workers conducted a protest public meeting at Hay Market in the evening. While the last speaker, August Spice, was speaking, police entered the scene and started lathi-charging the workers. Precisely at the same time, a bomb was hurled on the workers by an unknown person. The police and the workers fought each other fiercely, resulting in the deaths of eight workers and seven policemen. Hay Market was drenched in the blood of workers. 15 leaders were arrested, and eight of them were branded as anarchists. In the subsequent fake trial, eight were imposed with life imprisonment and seven were imposed with capital punishment. At the end of 1886, four leaders were hanged. One leader detonated himself in the jail itself. Due to a severe outcry and protest against the jury, three leaders were pardoned and released after six years.

This was the first struggle of workers demanding an 8-hour working day.

The Geneva Congress of International in 1866 proclaimed the demand for the establishment of the standard eight-hour working day by legal enactment. The Paris Workers Congress in 1899 made the same proclamation, and it also made a most notable

decision by calling on the workers of all lands to celebrate May First each year as the international festival of the working class.

By May 1890, the European and American proletariat mobilised as one army under one flag with one immediate aim: the standard eight-hour working day to be established by legal enactment.

In our Country, India, the May Day on May 1st, 1923, was celebrated for the first time at Madras by Com. Singaravelu Chettiar – the first communist in India. On the very day, he inaugurated the Hindustan Labour Kisan Party. The manifesto of that party raised the slogan and demand for an 8-hour working day in our country.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No.1, the hours of work (industry) Convention 1919, benchmarked an eight-hour average working day. The working hours of eight hours a day and 48 hours a week set by the ILO were ratified by India.

The Indian Factories Act, 1948, has specifically mandated that in a 9-hour working day, 30 minutes of rest time shall be included, making the workers work for eight hours a day. It also mandated that in a week the workers would not be made to work more than 50 to 60 hours, including the overtime, which should be paid with double the wages.

This is the long history of workers, including those in India, that have achieved and established the standard eight-hour working day by legal enactment.

Neo-liberal capitalism has been touting for the past four decades that through the implementation of its neo-liberal economic reforms of liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation, the entire world economy would be developed and bring about the well-being of people in all countries, uplifting their conditions. It is also harping that the unheard of technical development in the 21st century world brings much happiness to the lives of humankind around the entire globe.

But it introduced the so-called labour reforms, which caused much harm to the interests of the entire working class in the world. The pension reforms of flexible work hours, and working time, etc. it introduced have been indirectly causing harm to the interests of workers. Neo-liberal capitalism has been insistently forcing governments to amend their labour laws and dilute the rights of workers, to the detriment of their interests. In the name of becoming globally competitive with increased exports by reducing unit labour costs, the local governments have been actively implementing the reforms (labour) prescribed by neo-liberal capitalism with much zeal.

In the experience of people around the world and in reality, the tall claims made by neo-liberal capitalism proved to be false. The well-being of people has not at all been uplifted or improved. On the contrary, the well-being of toiling people throughout the world is deteriorated and degraded. World unemployment had considerably increased. Poverty is increasing. Economic inequality has been increasing in gigantic proportions. Very few rich people have been amassing the wealth created by workers throughout the world. Workers

are being ruthlessly exploited for their labour by neo-liberal capitalism, besides looting the natural resources of the entire world. Right-wing and extreme right-wing politics are raising their heads in the entire world, including the developed countries, and are gaining governmental power in many countries. These reactionary forces have been encouraging racism, communal caste, and regional hatred. On the other hand, neo-liberal capitalism is seeping into economic crises regularly. In order to come out of these crises, the neo-liberal capitalism is propping up local wars like the Russia-Ukraine war and the aggressive and arrogant war of Israel against Palestinians. On the other hand, neo-liberal capitalism encourages the tsarist type of rule in various countries, despite its tall talk about democracy and human rights. Under the direction of American imperialism, neo-liberal capitalism is making every effort to squeeze much more labour power from workers in the entire world and accumulate its wealth through inhuman exploitation of workers, directly in the name of increasing productivity through its minors, lackeys, and subservient rulers in various countries.

The ruling classes and the rulers of our country are subservient to imperialism and neo-liberal capitalism and have been competing to implement neo-liberal economic policies more effectively. As a result of this, India has a severe job crisis. 89% of the workforce is engaged in informal employment; unemployment reached its peak. Social and economic inequalities have considerably increased. The contract labour system has become the norm of the day. Lower wages than the minimum wage, a lack of job security, a lack of any legal rights or laws of protection, and a lack of safety during the job are ruling the working conditions of workers. The contract workers in all fields of work, including industrial manufacturing, are made to work more than 10 hours per day without any payment of overtime wages. The big industry, including multi-national companies and industries, has been extracting work from the workers by considerably increasing the work load in the name of production targets, disallowing the workers to take any rest. Even automation and developed technology did not come to the rescue of workers. On the contrary, by increasing the speed of machines, the workload is increasing. The workers in the service sector, particularly gig workers, are the worst exploited for that labour power.

The governments, instead of coming to the rescue of workers, have taken up the interests of industry in the name of creating a good and easy business environment at the cost of workers. The existing labour laws are not being implemented. On the other hand, the rulers have been amending the labour laws to suit the interests of employers and industrial managements. The judiciary and courts that are supposed to uphold the rights of workers have been looking the other way, as we have witnessed in the cases of Nokia and Maruti Suzuki.

The BJP government of Modi wants to go a step further and, in the name of codifying labour laws, making 44 labour laws into 4 labour codes, removed all the legal rights and protections of the workers, achieved by many valiant struggles.

While this is the pathetic scenario of the workers and toiling masses, the neo-liberal capitalism is not yet satisfied with its exploitation of the labour power of the workers in our country and intends to resort to further exploitation of the labour power of the workers in our country.

This is the class nature of the capitalist system, and the development of technology, and mechanisation and modernisation would further increase the exploitation of labour power by workers, which reality was warned by Karl Marx and F. Engels in the "Manifesto of Communist Party" in 1848 itself:

".....In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, is proportions as the use of machinery (automation) and division of labour increases, in the same proportion, the burden of toil increases; whether by prolongation of the working hours, by increasing the amount of work extracted in a given time or by increasing speed of the machinery, etc. (Manifesto of Communist Party, emphasis mine)

Now that is exactly what is happening in this epoch of imperialist, neo-liberal globalisation. In the name of increasing productivity, it is mooted to renege on the established eight-hour working day and to make workers work 70 hrs a week, or 14 hours a day, in a 5- day week or 11.5 hrs in a 6-day week, and thus extract much more labour power from workers without any betterment in the existing working conditions, wages, or legal rights and entitlements of workers.

Very long ago, the capitalist system of industrial management invented and evolved a method called "work study." This work study is done to assess the quantity of production done by workers within a stipulated time, and thus the productivity is measured. In this method of 'work study', the working and living conditions of the workers that have an impact on their productive capacity will not be taken into consideration. The time spent on the actual production of the goods is calculated without taking into account the time spent by the worker in preparation for work and subsidiary work required for production. With such a mechanistic view, the 'work study' is conducted, and based on that, the volume of work (production) is decided, and the average production of the total workers is decided to be the base production. Even then, this base production is not taken into account as 100% base production but as less than that percentage. Then the workers are made to work to reach 100% of production, luring them with production incentives if they produce more than 100% of production. With such false management tricks and production incentive bonus schemes, with disproportionate wages for the extra work performed, the workers are made to work with an extra workload. Even with the promised incentive bonus, after reaching the required percentage as per the scheme, the workers are not paid properly with the due incentive bonus. The management insures and ensures their productivity targets with the condition that if any strike was conducted in that particular month, if the production had stopped due to non-availability of power or electricity, if the production had stopped due to any natural calamity for some days, or if the worker had been absent from work for more than the decided days on leave of sickness, the workers would not be paid the production

incentive bonus in that month, even though they had given more production than the base production. With such unfair incentive schemes, the labour power of workers is looted, making them liable for unavoidable oddities that hamper continuous regular production due to conditions beyond the control of workers.

More over, the capitalist system justifies this unfair method of extracting more labour power from the workers, claiming that its management methods are scientific. They also point out that even in socialist countries, such themes of incentives were introduced, hiding the fact that while in socialist countries, workers work for their own state ruled by their own class—the proletarian class – for the betterment of their society, in capitalist countries, workers are made to work for the profit of capitalists – the ruling classes– and for their private benefit but not for the benefit of society and people under the rule of the capitalist system.

In the system (social, political, and economic) of our country, presently ruled by the bourgeoisie and feudal classes combine, in subservience to imperialism, the increase in productivity will benefit the capitalist classes but not at all the workers and toiling masses. On the contrary, it pushes them into further misery.

The Modi government has been grandly proclaiming that its aim is to reach a \$ 5 trillion (50 lakh crores of dollars) economy soon. To achieve this aim, the Modi government intends to raise productivity at the cost of workers without increasing wages and entitlements, without enforcing any labour laws, without formalising the workforce, and without bringing out any improvement in the working and living conditions of workers. All this is being done at the behest of neo-liberal capitalism and its imperialist economic policies of looting and exploitation. Due to the increase in working hours per day, the wages of the workers are reduced to the proportion of increased hours, and the workload is increased to that proportion.

On one occasion, P.M. Modi stated that workers should work for 72 hours a week and increase productivity. The Indian labour ministry has already made a law in the parliament that these shall be a workday of 12 working hours.

Now it seems that the lackeys and parasites thriving on the exploitation of the labour power had taken up the cue from their imperialist masters and taken up the 'pious' task of canvassing for a 12-hour work day against the long-established 8-hour work days by legislation and renege it.

Such a person Narayana Murty, the co-founder of Infosys, has taken on such a 'pious' task. He is not an industrial capitalist who creates wealth by producing any goods. He is merely a service contractor of IT services to clients in developed countries through the I.T. company Infosys, which he co-founded, and receives the service charges for the service rendered by his company, which is thriving in the business by exploiting the labour power of the I.T. employees working in that company. His attempted wealth is a national wealth calculated based on the share value' of the shares of the company in the speculative stock-market. In many class-action suits in the USA, he is notorious for his company violating many of the

labour regulations of that country and exploiting IT professionals. Infosys settled them by paying huge sums as compensation and penalties. Such has been the eminence of his parasitic nature.

Now, in the garb of a gentleman successful in his enterprise, he has 'safety' pontificated that "youngsters shall take a pledge to work 70 hours a week" in order to make the country competitive with countries like China and that the workers should work like the workers of Japan and Germany in the aftermath of the Second World War. Thus, he placed the burden of increasing productivity on the shoulders of workers. His pontification met with support from several members of Indian Inc.

He has not explained why we should compete with China and other countries and for whose benefit. Already young, particularly the educated young, are facing severe unemployment problems, lacking any avenue of employment. Then how could a 12-hour working day resolve the problem of unemployment without accentuating and increasing the unemployment problem?

Already, the workers and employees are suffering from mental tension and fatigue to reach their production targets.

ILO, through its working time and work-life balance around the world concept, has been reminding that "working hours and the organisations of work and rest periods can have a profound influence on the physical and mental health and well-being of the workers and warning that "the decision on working issues can also have repercussions for the broader health of the economy".

On the other hand, research underscores the importance of a work-life balance, mental health, and physical exercise. It indicates diminishing returns to extended work-hours.

Many studies have revealed that the level of productivity of a country depends on the strength of its innovation and that introducing technology could enhance worker efficiency. By increasing capital investment, the worker productivity can be boosted.

More over India is currently negotiating with the EU and UK to make Free Trade Agreements in which the international Labour Standard (ILS) is inclusive.

India is also a member of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework Countries (IPEF), and ILS is central to the implementation of IPEF. IPEF members forged an agreement relating to supply chain resilience, seeking "to promote supply chains in which labour rights are respected and create market demand for sustainable and responsible sources of supply".

But all these clauses to respect labour rights and to implement International Labour Standards seem to have been intended to hoodwink the people by neo-liberal capitalism. We have already seen how the highly touted CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is a hoax to pull the wool over the eyes of workers, toiling the masses and society.

Presently, we are witnessing how the internationally reputed brands are looking the other-way in the garment industry of Bangladesh, where the workers are forced to work in sweatshop conditions with paltry wages. We have seen how the giant Apple Corporation did not come to the rescue of workers of FOXCONN, its supplier chain, which has been treating and exploiting workers inhumanely. Such has been the hypocrisy of neo-liberal capitalism. On one hand, it chants sermons, and on the other hand, it continues its treacherous merciless exploitation and loss. Such is the nature of capitalism.

In this very course of exploitation of labour power of workers, lackeys like Narayana Murty have taken up the 'pious' cause of neo-liberal capitalism to renege the established 8-hour work-day by legislation, which has to be resisted by the workers of our country without any compromise.

They must unitedly mobilise into a single army to realise their immediate demands of 'formalisations of jobs', fair wages, strict implementation of labour laws, and statutory entitlements with job protection. An effective workers' movement has to be organised to safeguard the interests of the workers of our country!