

Talking Solidarity

IT IS SOMETHING THAT WORKERS OWE TO THEMSELVES. IT IS A DUTY that they owe to internationalism, and it is also a duty that they owe to the toilers in general in the fields, in the forests and in the hills. But it is so ritualistic these days that nobody takes it seriously—May Day call to develop working class solidarity. Instead of uniting the forces that can be united against neo-liberal onslaught across the globe red flags of all shades are too sensitive to fight their own fellow travellers to the advantage of the corporate world. All are trying to assess the nature and the significance of the Occupy Wall Street protests or the indignant movement in Spain. It is not only about economics but also about politics. Given the turmoil throughout the world marking May Day makes little sense unless there emerges a long-term strategic action plan to create conditions to face the globalised world system.

For one thing labour movement in India has never been able to translate May Day spirit into reality even when communist orientation was not that splintered on ideological grounds as it is now. Call of unity, rather united struggle against employers never crossed the premises of factory gates. One reason labour in this part of the globe has always been on the defensive is the calculated move of the leadership to keep the movement apolitical. They are more interested in sectarian gains in the bargain while remaining passive when it is the question of confronting any broader perspective. Labour is divided and it will remain so for decades to come because of party-controlled trade union organising. Today central trade unions affiliated to different political parties, left and right alike, are more like fiefdoms of party bosses with all the niceties of feudal culture. In more ways than one they are fighting for space domination killing the basic idea of unity or unity in action.

International spirit of May Day now survives in organising meetings in air-conditioned halls and issuing harmless statements against exploitation and super profits while routinely highlighting the historic inevitability of working class hegemony. But the very definition of working class deserves scrutiny as it is nowhere a homogeneous entity taking on the power of the corporates and it is more so in a third world country like India. The class itself is divided into so many sub-classes working all the time with cross-purposes, that their approach to unity becomes a mockery of class-solidarity.

Despite common target to fight out, labour unions even with leftist tag, do hardly get united on any issue of national importance. Barring sectarian economic demands they never raise human rights issues that affect all sections of the society. Trade Union rights and human rights, otherwise guaranteed by law, are interrelated. How to build solidarity movement against systematic curtailment of rights has been a thorny issue ever since the introduction of labour laws on the eve of World War II. And a paradigm shift taking place in this bizarre scenario is unlikely because talking unity is fine so long as it remains on paper. Without a common rallying

point to think of broad-based solidarity movement is next to impossible. As for common rallying point perception varies and there ends the matter.

All communist parties—revisionist, extremist, moderate—claim themselves to be the vanguards of workers. And yet they are in no position to stand unitedly against state repression, police atrocities and corporates, planned action to further marginalise the marginalised. Junglemahal is burning but one of the vanguard parties of the working class that is in the forefront of subaltern protest, is so isolated from toilers in general that workers find no reason to support their cause. In the name of combating the ‘maoist menace’ both the Centre and State Governments resorted to unprecedented repressive measures to execute their anti-people policies but workers even under the sway of left unions never thought it wise to down tools for an hour or two in protest. Then they have no problem in issuing call for unity on May Day. In truth a nation-wide industrial strike by workers against police high-handedness could make Chidambaram shiver despite so much fire-power at his disposal. It is unlikely to happen though workers are supposed to play vanguard role and lead revolution, at least theoretically. The corporate world understands only one language—the language of production stoppage and loss of profit.

Eviction of tribals from their ancestral lands is intricately related to mining industry. But miners in Chattisgarh and Jharkhand never showed any inclination to discuss future mining projects that would be disastrous for a large number of people. They won't go to strike to support those who are resisting the advent of global and domestic mining giants. And yet they have no problem in echoing solidarity and unity call on May Day. If CPI (Maoist) is on the defensive in the Chattisgarh region it is because of their total absence among mining workers who make the wheels of industry in Bhilai and its neighbourhood move. Now the miners of Dalli-Rajhara and elsewhere in Chattisgarh observe May Day without recognising the agony of their brethren living under the iron heels of the state. What matters in the real world of politic is action, not words—charged with fervour of internationalism and solidarity. □□□