

Trade union debate around climate change

Some days back I saw news at broad sheet national dailies that hundreds of kgs garbage has been collected from Mt. Everest area. Similar story we are witnessing the day by day.

Last year in winter Kathmandu saw snow fall; many people said it was happened after more than 6 decades!

Some 32 years back I entered to Kathmandu valley for education; I rejoiced and thrived while drinking tap-water in Kathmandu's artistic DhungeDharas, (the stone carved tap)! Major two rivers in Kathmandu- the Bagmati and Bishnumati were too clean. I had good argument with some companions from Eastern and Western Nepal- "whose river was largest?!" Looking at deep flowing fierce local rivers; and being totally unknown- "how big were the other famous rivers in Nepal, I tried to compare the rivers from my native place- Trishuli, and Bagmati&Bishnumati at Kathmandu with the incomparable big rivers- like Koshi-Gandkai and the Karnali!"

Gone are those days now; you cannot see single tap stand as such as explain above now in Kathmandu. Aryagaht lost its purity and Bagmati has been dumped with garbage & drainage these days! "

In Kathmandu, I always used to cover by a blanket while sleeping at all seasons. Mosquitoes never dare to enter here. A saying-"Green dark forest is the wealth of Nation" was so popular.

What happened these days? Why is Kathmandu incomparably hot in summer or why is unbelievably cold in winter! Why summer is not like summer and why we have been compelled to welcome unwanted monsoon at winter?

I have been informed by my comrade's en-expedition profession that the icy-range of our Himalayas is lowering down and subsequently the altitude of base-camps is ascending its height. Even one of the famous climbers in Nepal sadly explains after his record breaking summit; the Mt. Everest owns No snow at all in its top- it is now grey!!

I am not much familiar with the natural science; however I have heard many words such as- global warming, ozone layer, green house emission & carbon discharge etc.

All these stories, as I understand, related to the climate change; the issues what we are going to talk now!

Interestingly, these weeks in Nepal, we are witnessing numbers of events; and everyone from school children to the prime minister is getting involved. From today onward we unionists have also lined-up ourselves in this campaign. Though it might be a token initiative; however, it is an initiative on the right direction I think.

The climate change represents one of the greatest environmental, social and economic threats facing the planet. Though we Nepalis are the least responsible however, we are among the most vulnerable.

Climate change is also a part of a broader political context. And as the trade unionist we have to face up the effects of climate change now.

“We should look at the structure of society to find solutions.”

I agree with this statement of other colleagues in the international trade union movement who also argue necessity of to be proactive to deal with the consequences of climate change. Thus, for this, we are ready to work with others, especially environmental organisations.

Some are arguing that climate change offers many possibilities: new green jobs, less market competition etc.

ITUC General Secretary, Bro. Guy Ryder and the ILO Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia, in a joint statement said:

“Meeting the challenge of climate change will require a new development model that combines reduced emissions with a better future for the vast majority of people and the opportunity to earn a living in a decent job.” They refer role played by green jobs “vital in reducing the environmental footprint of economies and promoting sustainable production and consumption patterns.”

If it is the case, let us act now to seize these changes and let us make this a positive step for workers.

To conclude this brief address, I would like to share special resolution which reflects GEFONT’s position adopted by its 5th National Congress held on this year:

“Different forms of pollution, imbalance of human being with nature caused by high population growth and climate change are the serious problem of the world community. Trade Union movement and trade union organisation cannot be indifferent with these problems which affect adversely the lives of the working population.

Deforestation, drinking water problem, flood, global warming, climate change and various epidemics victimise the working people first.”

The Congress urge to the working class to be careful and aware of increasing adversities on their lives, employment and health caused by environmental crisis; and urge to the state and political parties to launch researches on environmental problems and climate change and initiate necessary steps in time to minimise the ill-effects.

I Thank to the organisers, and especially thank the LO Denmark and Sustainlabour for the invitation and organising this seminar.

Let me wish a successful and fruitful Seminar!

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(Speech delivered at inaguration of GEFONT, NTUC-I, Lo-Denmark and Sustainlabour seminar entitled -"Trade union debate around climate change" Septmber 01, 2009 Kathmandu Nepal.)