

Change: By Building Workers' Power!

Comrades, colleagues and friends!

There are almost 360,000 fatal occupational accidents in any year, and almost two million fatal work-related diseases.

Every day, more than 960,000 workers are injured and on average 5,330 workers die because of work-related diseases.

The World Health Organisation's July 2010 factsheet estimates asbestos claims 107,000 lives worldwide every year. That means that at even this conservative estimate every five minutes around the clock a person dies of asbestos-related disease. < <http://www.ituc-csi.org/april-28-health-and-safety-at-work?lang=en>>

Let us see an example published in the media in our country from where about 1500 Nepalese head for abroad employment daily out of which seven workers in average are packed in the coffin each day.

Therefore, today I should not be limited only with the Haymarket- martyrs of the global labour movement who were hanged & imprisoned for demanding *Eight-hour* working day at Chicago in 1886. I would like to put forward my opinion by paying tributes to all those victimised workers all over the world.

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Comrades,

There is a long list of the tormented workers who have been victimised by the *unchecked runs for corporate greed* of the Bosses. I would like to pay homage to more than 300 Bangladeshi workers who were buried en-mass due to collapse of factory last week and the hundreds of Pakistani workers who were immolated alive some months ago.

The trade unionists who are paying the ultimate price for their commitment to social justice from Colombia to Guatemala and facing extreme judicial repression for standing up for the rights in Turkey are in my heart and memory while extending solidarity on the behalf of Nepali working class! My tribute goes to the struggling workers of the Arab world who are like 'out of frying pan into the fire' in the struggle of abolishing the dictatorship to establish democracy in their respective countries.

Whether they are the European workers who were shattered with the fake dream of economic liberalization or the African workers victimized by the neo-colonial plunder and corruptions, I would like to extend solidarity on the behalf of you on May Day 2013.

While celebrating the May Day 2013, we also do not have a remarkable story to tell the rest of the world. We are also suffered with the chronic side effects of the

elongated political transition. We have been forced to accept the rule of criminals of the people's movement as our decision-maker.

Let us view over the political-economy where lowest 40% poor people have less per-capita-income than of 1977. Upper 10% rich have been maintained their privileged whereas middle 50% whimsical middle class are continuously progressing. If we look at the indices, our society is unequal and unjust like of 35 years ago.

So, what is the solution? We have proposed some agenda of building workers' power on this May Day. As a plan of decent work, we focused on:

- A fair income that ensures a decent livelihood;
- A job with equal treatment and opportunities for all;
- A workplace with good working conditions which ensures health and safety
- An environment with freedom of organization & expression, where both women and men are able to participate in decision making that affect their own lives;
- A State with mechanism for social protection for weak, sick, aged workers

Internalising these points, we have coined the theme of May Day 2013—**Change: By Building Workers Power!**

- Building workers power in our context is providing Social Security for all!
- Building workers power in our context is to Increase wages & benefits for all workers!
- Building workers power in our context is to ensure 10% workers representation in all elected body!
- Building workers power in our context is to introduce job-led investment policy!

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And to achieve these we need to end prolonged political transition! And to end the political transition we need to set new date of election for CA now!

Dear comrades, 1st May is also the New Year for the unionists like us. This is the day of commitment of works for the current year and evaluation of the works of the previous year. I would like to clarify that the main points of the commitment for the current year underlie the issues involved in our Theme. I also would like to recall what GEFONT did last year in brief:

- Before the CA getting dissolved with conspiracy, be it unpopular, we jointly became active to enshrine our rights in the draft-statute through the dissolved CA. On the previous May Day, with a hope of getting new constitution through the CA operated amid disorder and chaos and with a hope to get our rights as well, we had asked, 'Where is our space?' The issue raised as a question is now turned to our demand. Our struggle is going on.

- In order to form the appropriate labour legislations by amending the existing laws for providing social security to all, we were busy round-the-clock throughout the year. We have been updating you about its periodic progress. We have reached into a conclusion that the Social Security Fund Act, the draft prepared by tri-partite understanding, should be issued through Ordinance. The legal struggle is still going on regarding the issue. We expect the solidarity of the political parties, especially our party CPN-UML on this issue.
- The well-equipped Rapid Action Team (GEFONT-RAT) of the senior leaders was mobilised from the central level in your work place for four months. About 50 thousand activists from more than 1175 committees of 31 districts were directly called on. I would like to graciously declare that the ongoing campaign of building the workers' power will go on.
- With the formation of Jute, Textile, Garment and Carpet Workers' Union, Nepal (JTG-CWUN), we have already launched the campaign of strengthening the affiliates. We are planning to form the leadership of new generation in our movement after merging 3 unions of industrial sector by next month.
- Out of 15 CBA elections held under regular process, we have had the victory in 12 elections. I would like to proudly congratulate the respective unions for having the victory.
- We have been able to solve the complicated labour disputes of various enterprises like Thai Airlines, Bhrikuti Pulp and Paper, Swavlamwan Bikash Bank and Butwal Power Company. The struggle is going on in many other workplaces.
- In association with *Jan-sangeet Manch* we organised workers concert amid thousands of people for the first time as a new process of mass education. I would like to extend thankfulness for *Jan-sangeet Manch* for entering into the cooperation.
- Various natures of welfare programmes run within our organisation have been unremittingly going on. Hundreds of friends have been benefitted with the medical treatments of hundreds of thousands rupees under the cooperation with Helping Hand Community Hospital. Thank you Helping Hands!
- GEFONT has held the participatory gender audit for the first time in its history. As a regular aspect of the works carried out with an objective to make the union gender friendly, the fifth national women workers' conference was held among 700 women workers which reinforced the need to bring about a balance between work and life. Along with endorsing the Codes of Conducts on Violence against Women, the slogan, "It's A Crime! Do not commit or tolerate – Attack on Violence against Women!" was designed through the Conference.
- Our joint campaign is going on. Ruling out the splitting tendency of the workers who plead for the unity of the workers all over the world, we strengthen the workers power through the method of 'Single Issue: Different Places'
- We have a plan of operating a *regular trade union school* with a view to strengthening the workers power by next year.

- I would like to publish the decision of providing Madhav Neupane Memorial Award of the year to *Bed Kumar Khatiwada*, a unionist working in Malaysia for organising the migrant workers; Nuru Wangxu Memorial Award to *Sarkiman Tamang*, the former president of UNITRAV; Gangadevi Memorial Sholarship to *Sunita Danuwar* and Gangadevi Memorial Health Assistance to *Parashu Ram Ghimire* of Jhapa District.
- Finally, I would like to repeat the priorities fixed for the year to materialize the **'Change: By Building Workers' Power'**:
 - ✓ Increase of wage and Benefits for each worker
 - ✓ Collective bargaining agreements across the country at a time
 - ✓ Operation of social security fund
 - ✓ Amendment of labour legislation to guarantee the formation of Labour inspection System, National Labour Commission and systematic system on sectoral collective bargaining.
 - ✓ Guarantee of organisational freedom for the workers and the guarantee of workers' rights as fundamental rights in the constitution itself
 - ✓ Election of the Constituent Assembly as soon as possible for the sake of drafting to ensure welfare State with the pro-labour and pro-socialist constitution.
 - ✓ Employment Summit for the strategy focused to employment
 - ✓ 10% representation of the workers in the elected representative bodies of the state so as to make the policy and programmes of the state in the favour of the workers.
 - ✓ Protection and guarantee of the franchise rights and benefits of the migrant workers.

Best wishes of May Day, 2013

Thank You!

Keynote of GEFONT President **Bishnu Rimal**
 on **May Day Workers Mass meeting**
1st May, 2013, Kathmandu