

## GEFONT Manifesto May Day-2002

Today entire working masses are celebrating May 1st movement throughout the world. This movement has established a principal since 116 years, initiated by the workers of Chicago, popularly known as "Demands of Three 8". Production-Entertainment-Rest the three vital elements necessary to human being has been addressed through this slogan. We on behalf of Nepali working class would like to salute the movement from the country of Mt. Everest. On the occasion, we would like to extend our hearty best wishes to entire toiling population. The General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) pays tribute to all of the martyrs who laid their valuable life for the betterment of working masses.

We would like to extend sincere gratitude to the Guests of Honour- the dignitaries who have consented to be with us today amidst yours hefty schedule. Your solidarity has encouraged us and has added more strength towards our unified goals. On behalf of Nepali working class, the GEFONT and 113th May Day Celebration Committee as well, I here by would to extend hearty welcome you, all of the guests, entrepreneurs and employers, media persons and the friends and comrades.

The history of May Day has engraved with flesh and blood of martyrs; and inflamed by their immortal sacrifices. Indeed, their sacrifices have been inspiring all hardworking humankind from North to South or East to West of the globe. This is replicating continuously and will continue generation to generation.

The bloodshed of Chicago has been proven as our proud and Ideal. However, presently ongoing bloodshed in our country is destroying our hope and has caused us to bend our heads.

Large numbers of workers have been victimised in previous year. In the name of "liberation" around 5 dozen schoolteachers like Dalit Gupta Bahadur B.K. who were involved in spreading up of the light of education in various remote villages were brutally assassinated in inhuman manner. With extreme cruelty many have been put in such a suffering where they felt no difference between life and death. In March of this year innocent passengers with in the bus were brunt alive, but the poor driver was helpless at the moment. In early April, Mahendra Shrestha- a transport worker driving a night coach has been shot dead with no reason at all. Moreover, extreme damage to the development infrastructure has created more hardship to the working masses in addition to the continuous loss of life.

The year 2058 B.S [2001AD] witnessed extreme hardship. Moreover, labour market turned into chaos by the anarchy of extremist forces from the beginning of the year. In such a society where trade union movement is understood as strike-protest-picketing only, the activity of some employers ignoring the legitimate mechanism and obeying the underground directives has badly shocked the established mechanism of social dialogue developed after the hard endeavour of the decade.

It was not the end against unionism. Lock-outs, retrenchment, fire from the job, Lay-off, Pay-off, closure and compulsory leaves created a situation of more and more loss of employment to the workers. Facts indicate- 10,142 workers lost their jobs only from 33 garment, 4 textile and 2 Pashmina Factories during the previous year. If we take an example of only 4 hotels, the number of workers put to lay-off exceeds 1,000 and more than 3,000 workers have been found compelled to go for compulsory leave. Large numbers of workers forced to compromise with deduction in facilities been enjoyed during the previous years. In addition, the numbers of the workers under displacement is considerably large in comparison to the previous years in manufacturing, construction and carpet industries.

These challenges urged for integrated efforts of the nation. The solution was to be found out through the interaction among social partners. But the labour side has been victimised by the state instead of sympathy, security and protection. The Essential Services Act-1956 has been continued as being imposed in 11 services including transport and tourism. Undemocratic measures were continuously adopted to suppress

workers discontent instead of digging out solution through social dialogue.

The series of attack Against Freedom of Association have been pulled on and on. There was no effort to understand the reality that the unionisation and mobilisation of workers in agriculture, production and services would give high productive results. Moreover, service oriented public sector has been restricted on union involvement of workers by dividing and putting a bar of official ranks between workers and workers against spirit of Labour Laws. The policy of 'Single Employees Association' has been declared in civil service, and now the net is being knitted in order to design-"Civil Service with no existence of Union". In addition, the political rights of schoolteachers have been denied though the Education Regulation. In the present contest of expel of civil rights under the State of Emergency, we have witnessed some events, even some of the employers have tried to mis-utilise the provision against workers in the concerned enterprises.

Here in the occasion of May 1st Celebration, let me extract the statement of President of FNCCI recently delivered in the inaugural session of the Commercial Day-"Labour Market should be made more flexible if we need creation of more and more employment opportunities in the economy, I would like to request our trade union colleagues for social dialogue and co-operation." Now the question comes- what are the expected co-operation by Business Community from the union movement? What is 'flexibility and rigidity' in our contest? What are the employer's concrete agendas?

The experience of the past year indicates that the Employers' agendas are neither systematic nor reflecting national interest. We feel the demands of the employers on labour law amendment and formulation of national policies are intermingled with their own small caucus concerning their own individual commodity and enterprises.

We are sorry to say that even the renowned and full of intellect entrepreneurs are not fully aware of the existing labour laws. For instance; one of the appointed MP with PhD Degree from USA and renowned industrialist of the country expressed in Upper House of Parliament on 3rd of April, 2002 during his 'Statement on Public Concern'- "We should remove the "wrong provision" of compulsory affiliation with political Parties for registration of unions and the union

registration with out any political party affiliation should be made possible." According to provision of Trade Union Act-1992, the local registrar should register a union if it fulfils the condition of 25% membership of total workers in the concerned enterprises, where more than 10 workers are in employment. In such unions in enterprise level only those citizens can be elected as office bearers of the unions who are involved continuously for 1 year. In such a clear legal framework where our honourable Member of Parliament has visualised the "wrong provision" of political party affiliation?

Here we have the counter-arguments on the arguments of business world that unions are over politicised. Why the label of party-politicisation is being imposed on the labour issues raised by the unions? Instead of creative dialogue with the concerned union during the labour dispute in the enterprise, why politics is being blurred and mixed by knocking the doors of political parties on the basis of individual beliefs of leaders and members of the union? Let us rethink over it, who did the exercise of moving door-to-door of political parties to divert the movement to odd corner instead of having positive dialogue with union representatives during the 10% service charge movement covering all hotel workers of diverse ideology among us? Is not this example sufficient with regards to the employer's behaviours? Let us put a humble question-how long we will continue such an unfair-culture? Does not the expression in the written statement of an Industrialist-MP exhibit poor awareness of Nepali employers?

It is also relevant in this context to discuss about the blames on workers and unions. One of the blame is that workers are not productive. We simply counter it- why the agricultural workers of Nepal have been accepted as most productive in neighbouring states of India? Why do they get wage 4-fold higher than in Nepali labour market? Why the 'unskilled non-working' thousands and thousands of Nepali youths have been considered as 'diamond piece' in Gulf countries? Why the unemployed crowd of Nepal have been preferred in Malaysia and South-East Asia in comparison to workers of other South Asian countries? Why those Nepali have not been considered capable to construct Karnali Bridge who have constructed the Ching-ma Bridge of Hong Kong? Why do the young unemployed excluded from Nepali electronics world are successful to get high-yielding employment in 'Silicon Valley'? We must re-examine where the screws and knot and bolts of our labour market and industrial relation have been loosened?

We admit, the present day need of the country is not sweet and unrealistic statement but concrete and fruitful work. But it is strange sometimes when we receive 'concrete proposals' of some employers. One proposal-"present necessity is not of job security but of employment of unemployed ones!" We are very much confused- what does it mean? Is not there any relation between security of hand to mouth and the job to unemployed? One industrialist has proposed-"300,000 job seekers enter the labour market every year. So every enterprise should create employment by retrenchment of one-fourth the workers every half annum and hiring the same number from unemployed crowd". Is it the concept of 'flexibility'? Do we ask for social dialogue for adoption of such proposal? Such proposals can be compared with a quote of Jakarta Post in 1998 in connection with financial crisis of Indonesia-"The number of the people living below the poverty line would decrease 'simply because they will be wiped out by death."

In this background, we would like to extract the sentiment of FNCCI president delivered during the ceremony of Commercial Day. "If we consider private sector as the engine of development, it is the time for study and analysis of parts and way of operation of the engine. Similarly, it is the time for assessment and evaluation of the movement, direction and destination of the engine."

We are very close to this acceptance of FNCCI president. Definitely it is the time for self-evaluation if we are determined to dig out the high way of Nation building through the track of social dialogue. It is much delayed to wash out the backward mentality of working class and feudal culture of the employers. Once Mahatma Gandhi has expressed-"The Earth has enough for everyone's need, but not for everyone's greed". We are ready to join hand with other social partners-let us move ahead with collective spirit of 'we' and 'ours' not 'me' and 'mine'.

While talking about social dialogue, it is relevant to discuss the role of the state. Unions do claim, among the two investors of labour and Capital, Capital investors are taken as 'favourable' and labour investors are considered as 'trouble creator'. Working people are the builder of the world! But how does our government go on towards capital formation while ignoring the labour investors? Why the state judgement is so much imbalanced?

With regard to Employment promotion and industrialisation, we are also in favour of blueprint of joint, concrete and broad formulation and its implementation. What and what not should we trade unions do? What minimum standards should be implemented by employers in their establishments? The corporate ethics being recently discussed how to be determined and in what standards? And how government should play its role as a facilitator, a model employer and a good monitor in labour and working population related issues? We hereby declare- The demarcation line determined by the collective discussion will not be crossed by the trade union side.

We think that the joint recommendation presented by GEFONT and NTUC during the National Consultation on Decent Work for Poverty Reduction organised by ILO may be a base point for moving ahead. We are optimistic for expected achievements if we could go on in a systematic, balanced and institutional manner. No doubt the coordination between capital of employers and our Labour will produce targeted result. For the purpose there is no need of destruction, rampant damages, violence and assassination. The urgent need is of strong political will and progressive reforms based on courage, understanding, dialogue and tolerance.

On this auspicious occasion of May 1st celebration, we would like to reaffirm the continuation of Campaign for unified trade union movement initiated from the previous years. We stand in favour of working in action-based, issue-based multi-dimensional unified campaign. The joint declaration issued by GEFONT Chairperson and NTUC president just 2 days ago (April 29), will be our common programme for the coming year. The programme set by the TUC-GEP (Trade Union Committee on Gender Equality and Promotion), established 2 years ago through a coordination among all three confederations will be the joint campaign as well. Our involvement will be further effective in the activities of IFBWW affiliates committee in Nepal. Moreover, the coordination among Nepali affiliates of ICEM- another Global Union Federation of energy chemical, mining and allied sector will be continued with more stress.

We have developed 17-point programme for May 1st 2002 to April 30, 2003. We will be involved in the Global report preparation to be presented in International Labour Conference on Occupational Discrimination against dalit Community. Considering the surplus labour

situation in Nepal, we will conduct a study on situation and extent of Guest workers in Nepal in order to achieve the goal of "Nepal's Job for Nepali first". Under our working schedule of the year related to the issues of social concern, we will join hands in partnership basis with the political parties for the end of present crisis and adequate political way-out. Our programme will be concentrated on multidimensional activities for the interest and upliftment of working class of Nepal.

We extend our best wishes in favour of result-oriented unity among the different walks of life of society who favour working class and peace and prosperity of the nation. On this occasion, our best wishes are due to political parties, business class, media and civil society to act collectively in a balanced manner for the expected achievement in the days to come.

Workers of the world-Unite! Long Live May Day!! One Union-One Voice!!!

*(Prepared by Bishnu Rimal and presented at May Day Celebration Programme;  
Royal Nepal Academy Hall, May 1, 2002, Kathmandu, Nepal)*