

# ALL INDIA BANK OFFICERS' CONFEDERATION

(Registered under the Trade Unions Act 1926, Registration No.:3427/Delhi)



C/o Bank of India, Parliament Street Branch  
PTI Building, 4, Parliament Street, New Delhi: 110001  
Phone: 011-23730096 Tel/Fax 23719431  
E-Mail: aiboc.sectt@gmail.com

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## To All Affiliates/State Units/Members

Dear Comrades,

***"It is labour indeed that put the difference on everything"***

### **CELEBRATING - LABOUR DAY AS DEMAND DAY FOR 'REGULATED WORKING HOURS'**

May 1<sup>st</sup> the Labour Day is a day of special significance in the lives of working class. Our members are aware that many parts of the world observe it as an annual holiday to celebrate the achievements of workers and has its origins in the labour union movement, specifically the eight-hour day movement, which advocated eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation, and eight hours for rest. Some of the nations celebrate the Labour Day on different dates, often coinciding with special significance for the labour movement in that country. The senior comrades of ours are well aware of the history of this date. We wish to apprise our younger generation about the background, long drawn struggle and sacrifices made by millions of people for getting the due justice and recognition of contribution by the labour class to the world.

In the late nineteenth century, the working class was in constant struggle to gain the 8-hour work day. As early as the 1860s, working people agitated to shorten the workday without a cut in pay, but it was not until the late 1880s that organized Labour was able to garner enough strength to declare the 8-hour workday. At its national convention in Chicago, held in 1884, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labour Unions (which later became the American Federation of LABOUR), proclaimed that "eight hours shall constitute a legal day's Labour from and after May 1, 1886." This proclamation was without consent of employers, yet demanded by many of the working class.

An estimated quarter million workers in the Chicago area became directly involved in the crusade to implement the eight hour work day. On May 1, 1886, more than 3,00,000 workers in 13,000 businesses across the United States walked off their jobs on the first May Day celebration in history. In Chicago, the epicenter for the 8-hour day agitators, nearly one lac workers observed a peaceful strike. Two days later on May 3, 1886, violence broke out at the McCormick Reaper Works between police and strikers. During a speech near the McCormick plant, some two hundred demonstrators joined the steelworkers on the picket line. Beatings by the police enraged the strikers who resorted to rock throwing, and police responded with gunfire. At least two strikers were killed and an unknown number were wounded. Full of rage, a public meeting was called by some of the leaders for the following day in Haymarket Square to discuss the police brutality. Due to bad weather and short notice, only about 3000 of people showed up from the day before, which included families with children and the mayor of Chicago himself. During the meeting, a bomb thrown by some unknown person enraged the police and it fired into the crowd. The exact number of civilians killed or wounded was never determined, but an estimated seven or eight civilians died, and up to forty were wounded. Later evidence indicated that it was the police, not the workers, who perpetrated the violence. Eight leaders were arrested and convicted of murder, despite the fact that only three of them were present at Haymarket and those three were in full view of all when the bombing occurred. In a gross mockery of justice, in their trial, the jury comprising of business leaders, eight organizers were convicted. The conviction was evidently not for their actions as all were innocent, but for their political and social beliefs. On November 11, 1887, after many failed appeals, one of them, in protest, took his own life and four of them were hung to death while the remaining three were pardoned six years later by the Governor. Today we see tens of thousands of activists embracing the ideals of the Haymarket Martyrs and those who established May Day as an International Workers' Day. Ironically, May Day is an official holiday in 66 countries and unofficially celebrated in many more, but rarely is it recognized in the country where it began.

In 1889, the first congress of the Second International, meeting in Paris for the centennial of the French Revolution and the Exposition Universelle, called for international demonstrations on the

1890 anniversary of the Chicago protests. On May 1, 1890, in accordance with the decision to commemorate these Haymarket martyrs, mass demonstrations and strikes were held throughout Europe and America. The workers put forward the demands for an 8 hour working day, better health conditions, and further demands set forth by the International Association of Workers. The red flag was created as the symbol that would always remind us of the blood that the working-class has bled, and continues to bleed, under the oppressive reign of capitalism. May Day was formally recognized as an annual event at the International's second congress in 1891. From that day onwards (starting from 1891 in Russia, by 1920 in China and from 1923 in India) workers throughout the world began to celebrate the first of May as a day of international proletarian solidarity, fighting for the right of freedom to celebrate their past and build their future without the oppression and exploitation of the capitalist state.

In many countries, the working classes sought to make May Day an official holiday, and their efforts largely succeeded. May Day has long been a focal point for demonstrations by various socialist, communist and labour groups. May Day has been an important official holiday in countries such as the People's Republic of China, North Korea, Cuba and the former Soviet Union. May Day celebrations typically feature elaborate popular and military parades in these countries.

It is really very unfortunate that though our country is one of the founder member of International Labour Organisation (ILO), but it has not ratified many of the conventions and treaties prescribed by it, which are essential for a healthy work environment, leave apart 8 hours working. The first May Day celebration in India was organised in Madras (Since named Chennai) by the Labour Kisan Party of Hindustan on 1 May 1923. This was also the first time the red flag was used in India. The party leader Singaravelu Chettiar made arrangements to celebrate May Day in two places in 1923. One meeting was held at the beach opposite to the Madras High Court; the other one at the Triplicane beach. A resolution was passed stating that the government should declare May Day as a holiday. It was emphasized that workers of the world must unite to achieve independence. On this day, banks and other public organizations in Assam, Bihar, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Pondicherry, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, West Bengal and Orissa observe a holiday.

Let it be our collective endeavour to carry forward the torch of this movement which despite witnessing so many sacrifices and being more than a century old has not seen the light of the day. We should consolidate our movement also to get the recognition to the contribution of labour class by demanding a public holiday in all parts of the country for 1st May, the International Labour Day.

Let us once again show our solidarity and strength by commemorating historic May Day all over the country in a splendid manner by observing it as a 'Demand day' as we had done last year for all our demands which are relevant to the purpose of May Day celebrations, e.g. regulated working hours, implementing five day a week, Trade Union rights to all officers irrespective of their scales, implementation of I.L.O conventions 87 and 98 for wider definition of workers and coverage under I.D. act etc.

We are sure that the State Units having holiday in their states must already have chalked out the programmes for holding rallies. We request all other State Units, where it is a working day to ensure that no officer works beyond prescribed hours, which is normally up to 5 p.m. in the evening, on this day to emphasize and highlight the seriousness of one of our main demand of regulated working hours to the Management, public, Government and all concerned. We exhort all not to work beyond 5 pm on 1<sup>st</sup> May, and join the rallies/ public meetings organized in their vicinity.

Let us all ensure that rallies and public gathering are held in all parts of the country in massive manner by mobilizing the staff.

With revolutionary greetings and Red salutations,

Yours comradely,



(HARVINDER SINGH)  
**GENERAL SECRETARY**

**LONG LIVE OUR UNITY ! LONG LIVE WORKERS' UNITY !!**