

NLD Statement 63/2000:

National League for Democracy
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Statement 63 (5/00) (translation)

1. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the capitalists brought many countries under their control by colonial expansion and exploited the workers treating them as slaves. However, with the advent of the industrial revolution, the position and status of workers was completely changed and defined.
2. During the 19th century in the United States of America, employees had to work from 19 to 20 hours a day for their employers who treated them as slaves and servants. The government of one state in America enacted a law in 1840 stipulating 10 working hours per day as the legal limit. Due to loud demands by the workers this was reduced to 8 hours in 1850. In 1863, 300 Workers Unions were formed as commercial activities increased and in 1884 the American Workers Convention demanded the adoption of the 8-hour working day for all. On the 1st of May 1886, over six hundred thousand workers in all the large cities of America went on strike causing the shut down of workplaces. Police used force against the demonstrators and workers blood was shed.
3. Workers demand for 8 hours work, 8 hours rest and 8 hours recreation was just and acceptable to all workers worldwide. It became the goal towards which workers set their sights. Finally victory was gained and employers and governments gave in and the 8-hour working day was established.
4. In 1889, the 2nd convention of the World Workers (Central) Organisation was held in Paris (France) where it was decided to commemorate the 1st of May every year as Labor Day because workers blood had been shed for the cause. Since 1890, the 1st of May has been marked worldwide as May Day (Labor Day) and all government offices are closed.
5. On the 1st of May 1938, during the colonial period, workers who participated in the Oil Strike commemorated Labor Day at Yennangyaung. During the war years (1942 - 1945) this was neglected but revived in 1946.
6. After the first world war (1914-1918), workers experienced great problems with unemployment. The allies (Great Britain, France and the United States of America) formed The League of Nations to promote social justice and peace and the International Labor Organization (ILO) was created to resolve workers problems. The following slogan was born: "Labor is not a commodity for sale. Poverty, no matter where, is a danger to the rich".
7. The ILO is not just a place that prescribes working hours, conditions of work and safety standards at work places. It is a venue where employers and employees can meet face to face and discuss issues and resolve conflicts amicably.
8. In the period of the Second World War (1941- 1946), the ILO remained stable. In accordance with the terms of the Dumberton Oak Agreement, the ILO was made a special independent unit of the United Nations.
9. Our country gained independence from the British in 1948 and became an independent sovereign country. The Union of Burma became a member state of the United Nations. In the same year it joined the ILO and cooperated with it and signed the 19 provisions embodied in that constitution.
10. Because Burma was familiar with the principles of the ILO from the time of the colonial period, when independence was gained we could participate in the ILO annual conferences held annually in June and discuss labour issues. Measures adopted at the convention could then be put before the democratic government in parliament and suitable laws for the workers were passed.
11. Those laws contained provisions relating to workers rights, wages, workplace rules and regulations, social security, unions etc. From 1948-62 workers organized and formed Unions and

Union Representatives could negotiate with employers and the government. Burma earned a good reputation in the eyes of the world as far as commerce and social welfare were concerned.

12. In 1962, the Tatmadaw (military) seized state power from the democratically elected government. Ministers were taken into custody and the constitution was abrogated. ILO provisions regarding workers rights were ignored. In 1964 the Workers Basic Rights and Responsibilities Law was passed by them and Workers Affairs was placed directly under the central command. From that point on, ILO Convention (No. 87) relating to the right to freely form unions was abolished. Though the 1981 ILO resolution called for the adherence to Convention No. 87, it was completely ignored.

13. In 1988 the entire nation revolted and demanded that democracy be restored. But the Tatmadaw only removed the Burmese Way to Socialism government and the constitution and assumed state power. Though the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) assumed power no action was taken against the previous government and Burmese Way to Socialism Party for reducing the country to poverty and disaster but it responded violently to those who cried out for democracy in demonstrations. Thousands of workers, cultivators, students and monks were felled down and blood was spilled.

Furthermore harsh penalties were imposed on those workers, civil servants and students who participated in the demonstrations. In the history of the Tatmadaw, this must be regarded as its wickedest operation.

14. Now, though SLORC/SPDC have indicated that a multiparty democratic system will be established they have not only refused to convene a parliament that should have followed the May 27 General Elections but have extinguished some political parties that participated in those elections. Those successful political parties that were successful are being harassed and persecuted in various ways to make them dysfunctional. They have picked on NLD parliamentarians and by illegal means accused them and held them in prisons and or in military custody. Members of the NLD and NLD organising committees at all levels have been falsely accused and imprisoned, their offices and paraphernalia removed and destroyed by violent means and falsehoods.

15. This government of military anashins (dictators) illegally seized power and not sparing cultivators, workers, children, women, young and old have forced the masses to give "voluntary" labor, to work as porters in the front line, and used them as human mine sweepers. In the townships, wards and villages this "forced labor" is required of every household at its own expense and for considerably long periods of time. Daily beatings at work without any provision for medical treatment when one falls ill. Even when life is gone, funeral expenses are not given. This is the greatest tragedy. Those who are incapable of providing this "voluntary labor" have to pay cash as demanded while those who have to provide "voluntary labor" receive no payment whatsoever.

16. Those villages that are situated in battle zones, or where roads, bridges and canals are to be constructed, are burnt down, destroyed and the people are evicted and forced to move out. Ethnic nationals who are in the frontline of military operations have to flee across borders and take refuge in foreign lands for years on end and are regarded as "displaced" people. Their numbers have risen to hundreds of thousands. It is shameful that these people are completely dependent for their existence on the UNHCR.

17. In June 1999, at the 87th Conference of the ILO held in Geneva, Switzerland the widespread and continued use of "forced labour" by SLORC now SPDC was condemned. Though for many years resolutions were passed calling on them to abide by the terms of the 29th Central Workers Convention and Convention No. 87 prescribing the right to freely form Unions there was no compliance. Therefore the Conference decided that:-

(a) The Burmese government's attitude and behaviour were entirely incompatible with the principles governing membership in the ILO.

(b) To halt all technical advice, expertise and aid to Burmese government apart from those urgent recommendations in the Inquiry Commission Report.

(c) From now on the Burmese government will not be invited to attend any ILO meetings, seminars or discussion groups except those relating to the meetings to discuss the urgent issues set out in the Inquiry Commission Report.

These decisions will remain until such time as the military anashins (dictators) have fully complied with the recommendations set out in the Inquiry Commission Report.

18. The SPDC has declared that it will not comply with ILO Convention 87 for formation of Unions because of the above decisions taken at the conference.

19. Because the SPDC government has rejected the ILO decision as stated above, because of the Inquiry Commission Findings and because "forced labour" is being used more than ever before, the ILO governing body will ask the ILO general body at its June 2000 meeting to take action and penalties of the severest nature against the Burmese government. In the 80 years of its history with a membership of 170 countries, there has never been any occasion for taking drastic action because of workers rights violations as practiced in Burma today. Burma will be the example country against which drastic measures will be taken.

20. On 18 April, this year (2000), at the 56 Session of the United Nations Human Rights Conference held in Geneva, Burma was condemned for the human rights violations the government systematically practices and resolution was taken to recommend strong action against Burma at the UN General Assembly meeting.

21. After Burma gained independence in 1948 her international stature rose steadily in politics, commerce, foreign affairs, societal affairs, workers and farmers rights. But since 1962 when the military anashins (dictators) ruled and to this day, human rights and democracy have been lost and the country has sunk to the lowest level of poorest country in the world suffering most distressing circumstances. All this is the outcome of the power-mad, power-hungry characteristics of the military anashins. Entire responsibility lies squarely on the shoulders of the State Peace and Development Council (the military anashin dictators).

22. For the birth and development of a new and genuine democratic Union of Burma the SPDC should abide by the resolution of the United Nations to honor the results of the 1990 general elections and convene a Pyithu Hluttaw (parliament)

· In conformity with ILO Convention 29, stop the practice of "forced voluntary labor"

· In conformity with ILO Convention 87 permit the workers to freely form unions.

We call on the authorities and urge them to immediately take steps to put in place the said recommendations.

Central Executive Committee
National League for Democracy

Rangoon
1 May 2000.