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## MAY DAY 2014 WORKERS OR SLAVES?

The TPLF/regime which took power in 1991 made it its priority task to dismantle workers' organizations, Teachers, students and women's unions. A draconian Labor Law deprived workers of their rights and activist union leaders were arrested or forced into exile. The same happened with the other unions and the regime set up its own satellite unions like all totalitarian powers that stand against the civic society and its autonomous organizations.

It is no exaggeration if we declare that Ethiopian workers have been reduced to a status of modern slaves. They have no right to strike, more than a decade has passed since they were denied any wage increase to cope up with the high cost of living (35% inflation). There is no minimum salary set and most work long hours for a pitiful pay. Child labor is rampant and women in the work area are not paid equal to men and are subjected to discrimination. Most workers can ill afford to eat one lean meal per day as most food items are beyond their purchasing power. The regime has opened up the country to foreign multi nationals, selling fertile land the size of Belgium to Chinese, Indians and Arabs. Chinese employers have been given the right to beat allegedly lazy or recalcitrant workers. Denied the right to strike, Ethiopian workers who dare to call for better working conditions are mistreated and fired from their work. Recently, one thousand workers who called for better working conditions were removed from their jobs by none other than their employer World Vision. Ethiopia is a living hell for all working people.

Ethiopian workers had to struggle and sacrifice a lot to have their unions under the Haile Sellasie regime which later brought foreign unions like the AFL-CIO to control them and make them docile. We remember Abera Gemu and other leaders and activists who were killed during that time. However, workers were in the forefront during the February 1974 Revolution and their general strike intensified the popular struggle. However, the revolution was hijacked by military officers who soon allied themselves to the Soviet Union, set up a totalitarian State, killed worker leaders (Markos Hagos and others), decreed terror on militant workers and eventually set up their own controlled and ineffective unions.

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Even observing May Day, outside of the military regime's diktat, was considered criminal and at one May Day celebration at least a thousand EPRP members, students, worker activists were slaughtered in Addis Abeba on that day alone. Still today workers cannot come out with their own slogans and demands to observe May Day.

The reports of economic progress in Ethiopia being false and meaningless statistics (the country is the poorest in the world just above Niger), workers are the primary victims of the poverty and the lack of rights. Exploitation is rife and as the economy is dominated by the ruling State/front (through a conglomeration of companies under EFFORT), workers are not allowed to ask for better working conditions and right. They are thus undeclared slaves, modern slaves like their compatriots trafficked to the Middle Eastern countries.

On May Day 2014 Ethiopian workers have little to celebrate and do not even have the right to formally observe their day.

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