

8-Hour Day and Minimum Wage for All

8-Hour Day – A Basic Workers’ Rights

In this period of global attack on workers’ rights, we need to go back to the roots of the historic struggle for the most basic and universal of workers’ rights – the 8-hour day. We should remember the bitter struggles in the USA in 1886 for the 8-hour working day. The 8-hour day that remains the standard till today as a fair measure of how much a worker should have to work. However, along with all other standards of fair working conditions – a decent living wage; security of tenure at work; payment of overtime for extra work; social security benefits to all workers; safe working conditions – the basic 8-hour day is also under severe attack.

Today in India, the 8-hour working day norm, along with other forms of regulation of work, is applicable to only around one in every twenty workers, working in the so-called organised sector. So-called, because the organised sector is already facing a blatant attack on its rights, despite the legal protection and regulation it is supposed to have. The capitalist offensive, aided by the government, strives to remove regulation of work even for this small minority of workers. In countries the world over, in the name of globalisation and competitiveness, the drive is for ‘labour flexibility’, which means removing all regulations on how capital can use labour.

The universality of the 8-hour day is not limited to the organised sector. This is a norm for all sectors of employment, and defines the limits of decent working standards. This should form the measure of the work required to be done by any worker in any sector in India – in agriculture, construction, mining, fishing and forestry, or contract labour in industry – in order to get an adequate wage to support a family at a decent living standard.

Minimum Wage – How Much Does a Worker Need?

"Har haath ko kaam do, kaam ka poora daam do "

The Minimum Wage Act in India was passed as early as in 1948. In 1957, The 15th Indian Labour Conference defined the basic parameters of the Minimum Wage. These were subsequently modified and enhanced by various Court judgments, up to the level of the Supreme Court. As per the parameters of the 15th Indian Labour Conference, the Minimum Wage for an urban worker in the country should be around Rs.6000 per month (Rs.200 per day). It should be around Rs.4000 - 5000 per month (Rs.150 per day) in the countryside. The reality is that for most sectors of employment the statutory Minimum Wage is not even half this amount. And for most workers even this statutory wage is just a distant dream.

So how does the Indian working class family survive? By working way beyond the 8-hour norm – for 12, even 16 hours a day. By both the husband and wife going to work,

and forcing the older children, particularly girls at home to mind the house work and by sending children to work. This is not free employment it is forced labour.

The Government in laying down the statutory Minimum Wage allows a condition of the “capacity to pay” of the industry; this is illegal as per Court rulings. However, with globalisation, the supremacy of the market is accepted by all sections of the ruling classes, including the political parties. This has to be opposed. Only a united working class coming together to bargain for its basic rights can do this.

NTUI commits itself to work for the unity of all trade unions to achieve these basic rights.

We demand:

- Acceptance of the ***8-hour day as the standard*** for all workers in all categories of work.
- Any work beyond the 8-hour norm should be with the free acceptance of the worker and compensated as overtime work.
- A fair statutory Minimum Wage based on parameters of the 15th Indian Labour Conference, that allows one worker working 8-hours per day to support his/ her family.
- The statutory Minimum Wage at current process should be ***at least Rs.200 per day for urban work, and Rs.150 per day for rural work.***