

MAY DAY CELEBRATION BY LAWYERS AT TIS HAZARI

May Day is International Workers' Day in commemoration of the martyrs staging protest in May 1886 for eight-hour workaday at Haymarket Square in Chicago. On May 2, 2016, to commemorate the day in a solemn manner about 200 lawyers, trade union and human rights activists, university professors and journalists gathered at the premises of Tis Hazari Courts over a modest lunch, to celebrate International Workers' Day. It is first of its kind in India, fifth year since 2011, where lawyers are organizing May Day in solidarity with the working class.

Visually impaired youths drawn from National Blind Youth Association (NBYA) and university students belonging to Krantikari Yuva Sangathan (KYS) enthralled the gathering and welcomed them with patriotic and revolutionary songs, like '*Hum honge kamayab*', '*Sara Jahan se acchha*', '*Sarfaroshi ki tamanna ab hamare dil mein hain*' etc.



Songs of hope by the visually impaired, with Adv. Prem Bhushan Dewan, chairing the meeting

Organised by May Day Committee of Lawyers comprising of Prem Bhushan Dewan, Devraj Singh, Gurjeet Kaur, Vinod Khera, Mohammad Farooqui, TR Garg, SU Khan, Aurobindo Ghose and others. Lawyers in the May Day celebration were joined by journalists, academicians, human rights and trade union activists. Among those who participated were Nandita Narain, DUTA President, John Dayal, a veteran journalist and an avid campaigner for minority rights, Gandhian Ramesh Chand Sharma, Harish Khanna, Raj Kumar Jain, DN Kalia, Vasant Sharma and Sapna Chamadia, Delhi University teachers and activists, journalists Anil Chamadia and Tarun Kanti Bose. Active and well known trade union functionaries

such as KK Niyogi, Prem, Rakesh Bhadoria and Devendra Bharti squeezed time from their May Day celebration to participate in this unique event at Tis Hazari. Senior lawyers like Satish Tamta, Dr. Naipaul Singh, Arun Maji, BS Gahlaut, MK Dwivedi, TA Francis, Ajay Gaur, JP Gupta, Rajender Sethi Yashbir Sigh, Vishal and Vikas Mehan, Sagar, Saroj Bakshi, Shalu Nigam, Kalpana Sonkat, RS Kansotttia and ND Pancholi, a human rights activist too, participated in the May Day programme. A marked feature of this May Day celebration was the not insignificant participation of women, who besides the above-mentioned included Dipali Ghose and Ruby Ganguly Bose.



Nandita Narain, DUTA President addressing the gathering

Presiding over the programme, Prem Bhushan Dewan, a senior lawyer and activist with long experience, called upon Nandita Narain, who has been in the news for last few years for defending the rights of the students, teachers and karamcharies. While taking the centre stage she highlighted the problems of the ad-hoc university teachers, research scholars and the university students. She narrated how they are at the receiving end of the whims and fancies of university administrators in tandem with UGC and HRD Ministry creating a resource crunch by withholding funds at the same time going whole hog for privatisation of higher education. She emphatically called for unity of different section of the society such as lawyers, teachers, students and workers. This set up a tone for further deliberations. Nandita Narain, quite appropriate to the occasion, concluded her speech with '*Inquilab Zindabad!*'



Anil Chamadia is emphatic about the need for unity

Anil Chamadia welcomed the present joint celebration of May Day by different sections of the working people together, for only then is Democracy strengthened in the face of persistent onslaughts on the people's rights and working conditions..

While agreeing with the need for unity, he cautioned the lawyers that once foreign legal firms are allowed to enter, the days of independent legal practice will be over and like industrial workers; lawyers will also become cogs in the wheel.

While the May Day symbolises the victory of the workers to obtain 8 hour working day, both Anil Chamadia and senior labour lawyer MK Dwivedi drew attention to the danger of this statutory right of 8 hour working day being snatched away and 12 to 14 hours of working day being imposed in the private sector be it in firms, companies or call centres. Advocate Dwivedi also drew attention to the denial of pensions to the working class in the days to come.



Advocate MK Dwivedi

Former ADJ, Dr. Naipal Singh traced the history of the evolution and implementation of labour laws in India and observed that labour laws are neither fair nor properly implemented by the Courts.



Former ADJ, Dr. Naipal Singh traces the history of labour laws

While addressing the gathering, John Dayal observed that it is good to be in Tis Hazari Courts compound to celebrate May Day with concerned and committed lawyers. It is good to see that at least a section of the justice system believes in the rights of the worker as a commitment, as part of the spirit of justice, and the letter of the law. At the end if it all May Day is really about Human Rights. It acknowledges that the worker is a human being, not a vassal, not a machine, not property. He and she need rest, need food, shadow, and sleep and time to strive for happiness. We, reporters, editors and writers, once celebrated May Day because we were employees of newspapers and news agencies, and thought of ourselves as members of the working class – not poor, perhaps but not rich. We believed in collective bargaining for better wages and working conditions, for end to discrimination. The contractor raj ended that. And the journalist as a contract worker is not a free or independent journalist. He or she is perpetually in fear of losing employment, of being jobless, of starving. That in effect is also the end of a free press. With the erosion of a free media and freedom of expression, there is no vigilance and scrutiny of human rights. The cascading impact is terrible, and we see it in our own country. The final, major victims are the tribals, the *Dalits*, the religious minorities. Who will watch over their interests, their very lives, but for

the fast vanishing free media May Day means much to these people – these *Dalits*, minorities, and tribals.



John Dayal points to the significance of May Day for *Dalits*, *adivasis* and minorities

University professors Harish Khanna and Raj Kumar Jain appreciated the concept of a May Day lunch to bring together different sections of society on a common platform.



Professors Harish Khanna & Raj Kumar Jain liked the idea of May Day lunch

Advocate Gurjeet Kaur highlighted problems faced by women lawyers and gave a call for ending gender discrimination in courts and elsewhere in society.



Advocate Gurjeet Kaur highlighting the problems of women lawyers

Vinod Khera, a core member of the May Day Committee, presented a paper highlighting the problems faced by the lawyers arising out of Bifurcation. It has changed the way, the advocates had been working. With so many courts to attend, from Dwarka to Karkardooma, from Rohini to Saket and from Tis Hazari to Patiala House, apart from High Court, Supreme Court, other Courts, Forums and Tribunals and considering the distance and traffic of Delhi, the life of an advocate has become very difficult. While appreciating the Government's efforts towards computerisation and digitalisation, Khera pointed out the inadequacies relating to causelists, daily orders, judges on leave, case status and case history on the District Court website. Rules vary from court to court regarding the timings for moving applications for inspection and inspecting the court file. The recording of evidence is not downloaded on the website uniformly Khera concluded his spirited speech with the exhortation to his colleagues: “ So let's fight for making life easier for the lawyers who have to toil hard to get justice for their clients but have to toil harder for getting justice for themselves.”



Advocate Vinod Kherra addressing the gathering

The gathering felicitated Satish Tamta, with a bouquet of flowers, for having been designated as Senior Advocate. Expressing his happiness he said, “Though I have become a senior advocate, the character has not changed. I continue to be a daily wager.”



Satish Tamta felicitated for being designated as Senior Advocate

The May Day Celebration ended with a vote of thanks by Advocate Prem Bhushan Dewan appreciating the keen interest of those gathered for the occasion in the sweltering summer.

Report prepared by:
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On behalf of May Day Committee