

## **1. ADDRESS BY WFTU GENERAL SECRETARY**

The General Secretary of WFTU, comrade George Mavrikos could not attend the congress and below is an address that was given on his behalf;

I am deeply honoured and highly privileged to attend your 10<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the NEHAWU and to represent WFTU in your conference. I know that NEHAWU is a very strong, united and militant trade union in South Africa and is a proud member of the WFTU family. That is why I feel happy to participate in your Congress.

At the outset, on behalf of the World Federation of Trade Unions and also on behalf of the TUI, Banking and Finance, I bring to you all our revolutionary greetings on the occasion of your 10<sup>th</sup> national congress and extend our warm greetings for the glorious success of this congress.

You will be aware that World Federation of Trade Unions is the oldest international trade union organisation in the world having been founded 68 years ago in 1945. Even today, it is the only genuine class oriented international trade union organisation in the world. Today WFTU has over 86 million members and has unions in 120 countries all over the world in all the continents and regions. In South Africa, we are very happy that NEHAWU is playing a very leading and significant role in strengthening the forces of WFTU. And with COSATU being with us, WFTU is further strengthened.

I am highly impressed with the large participation of the delegates to this Congress and the enthusiastic response of all of you. No wonder NEHAWU is a very vibrant trade union organisation. My red salute to NEHAWU.

Your Congress is meeting at a time when on the one hand the forces of capitalism are trying to have their way in every possible way and at the same time, there is also unprecedented crisis in their camp. Consequently, country after country is getting into crisis and deeper crisis. Economies in various countries are facing difficulties. People in these countries are facing acute problems for their sustenance, survival and livelihood. Human life is getting degraded. Basic needs are being denied and deprived. But the capitalists are busy in increasing their wealth and profits.

No one can deny that in every country there is some progress and development. But the tragedy is that the benefit of this growth and progress is not reaching the common people and workers. It is nakedly clear that the benefits of progress are monopolised and cornered by the capitalists. That is why people continue to be poor.

It is shocking and agonising to read statistical information about the present-day world. Just the top rich people who constitute hardly 15% of the total world population command and control 80% of the wealth produced in the world and the remaining 85% of the population have just 20% of the wealth to be shared amongst them. This is leading to a huge disparity between people and results in wide economic gap between the rich and the poor. This gap and disparity is widening. This is the barbarity of the exploitation and capitalism is so cruel that it does not spare anyone.

Concentration of wealth is the only motive under capitalism. Welfare of the people has no place at all. That is why it is a fallacy to believe in rhetorics like Capitalism with a human face or benevolent capitalism, people-oriented capitalism, etc. Capitalism means exploitation and capitalism thrives on exploitation of the masses and workers. Capitalism is always inhuman. That is why we see ugly manifestations of this cruelty in the form of under-development, malnutrition, poverty, etc. See the world around us today.

Today, according to a Report of the UNO's Food and Agriculture Organisation, (FAO), 870 million people in the world are under-nourished. Out of this, 850 million are from developing and poor countries. But even in the developed countries, the number of people suffering from mal-nutrition has gone up in the recent years from 14 million to 20 million. In Africa, people suffering from hunger have increased from 175 million to 240 million in the recent years. Each year 5 million children die due to poor nutrition.

Health sector is a serious casualty. 11,000 people die every day due to HIV, malaria, tuberculosis, etc. Two thirds of them are from Sub Saharan Africa. Every minute one woman dies due to complications of pregnancy or child birth due to anaemia and malnutrition or lack of minimum health facilities. 2.4 billion people are so poor that their income is less than 2 US Dollars a day. Out of this 1.4 billion people have less than one US dollar a day to make their living.

According to FAO, food production has gone up and there is enough food for all but hungry people are increasing because they cannot purchase food. They have no jobs and have no money for food. Food production has gone up but per capita consumption of food has come down and hence hunger and starvation will further increase.

Similarly, billions of people have no access to safe drinking water. Many have no access to basic health protection. People suffer from lack of protection at old age. There is also increasing lack of safety for women and children. We cannot discount these socio-economic maladies as a curse or fate because these are deliberately created and are the results of the capitalists' policies.

According to an ILO Report, more than 200 million people are officially unemployed worldwide, including nearly 80 million young women and men eager to secure their first job. This is only the tip of the iceberg. More than 1.5 billion workers are vulnerably employed. This is about half of the total labour force in the world. The employers, capitalists and various Governments are claiming growth but there is no growth in employment and job opportunities. Unemployment is alarming.

Workers produce everything in the world. But their condition is miserable. They suffer from under-payments, denial of due wages, lack of compensation against price rise, inhuman job conditions, inadequate post-retirement benefits, lack of safety standards at work places, etc. The women workers suffer all the more. Women are commodified.

While the conditions of the people and the workers are so deplorable, the Governments in various countries are also abetting and pursuing policies that will benefit the capitalists and affect the workers. There is increasing collaboration between capitalists and the Governments.

But despite all the support from the Governments, the capitalism is facing serious crisis. It is in this context that trade unions have to take a proper assessment. No doubt they have to fight for better wages and improvement in their economic conditions. But their job does and cannot end there. The situation is much more complex.

Firstly, all of us know that there is a crisis. We also know who are responsible for this crisis. In fact, our enemies, the capitalists also concede that there is a crisis. They are no longer able to hide it. They even concede that their own wrong policies were responsible for the crisis.

But the point is that they are the authors and perpetrators of the crisis and hence they must pay for the same. They must take the consequent suffering. But what is happening is that

they are conveniently passing on the burden of the crisis on the shoulders of the innocent workers and common people who are already suffering. The Governments in various countries are also supporting this crime. It is a combined offensive on the working class. Workers are made to suffer for no fault of theirs.

Secondly, it is not merely shifting the burden of the crisis on the heads of the workers. It is not merely a capitalist offensive that we experience. Increasingly we observe arbitrary interventions of the imperialists' forces in order to expand their control over the wealth of the various nations. What we see in Syria, Libya, Iran, etc. are the recent crude examples of the direct interventions of USA and other imperialist forces. Hence it is not merely fighting against capitalism or fighting for more wages and trade union rights. The challenge is much larger and deeper. We must bear this mind in our struggles.

Thirdly, we also find that more and more people are getting realised about these attacks. Struggles, resistance, opposition are increasing in one form or the other. People are fighting with whatever strength they have. People are fighting against injustice and exploitation. People are fighting for democracy. Workers are fighting everywhere. There are struggles in various countries and in various sectors. Struggles are on the increase. There is a mood everywhere to fight back.

For example, what we have seen in the Occupy Wall Street agitation. The protest was spontaneous because people have experienced the suffering and feel cheated. Some of the slogans and posters used in this agitation like "Why bail out for the Corporates and Sell out for the workers?", "We are the 99% but why that 1% should be protected", "Why punish us for their mistakes", etc. have very important connotations though spontaneous.

The important point is – there is a crisis – the burden of the crisis is sought to be forced on the workers – workers condition have deteriorated – it is intolerable – people are no longer willing to tolerate it – they are fighting back.

But in this fight, we need strong unity of the workers. More and more workers have to be mobilised under trade unions. We have to build strong organisations in every workplace, factory, establishment or office. This is a very important task. Without mobilising the workers at the grass-roots, we cannot meet the offensives. This way, your congress has given the right call to build more and more workplace organisations.

Our experience shows that employers and capitalists move together as a class. They move concertedly against the workers. They are also being supported by the Governmental administrations and policies. Hence, it is not only necessary to build strong trade unions, but it is equally important to move together as a class, as working class. Trade unions have to become more class conscious and imbibe this orientation in the minds of the workers also. Workers have to be prepared for more struggles and also equipped ideologically. Here also, I am happy that your Congress has given the clarion call for enhancing the class consciousness of the workers. It is the need of the hour. Workers cannot shy away from political ideology. They have to realise the need for proper policies that will benefit the workers. Denying the rights of workers is the politics of the capitalists. Hence fighting against capitalism has to be the politics of the workers.

Further, trade unions have to realise that the fountain head of exploitation is the capitalist policies and socialism is the only answer and guarantee to stop the exploitation. Hence fighting for socialism has to be an integral part of trade union struggles. It cannot be separated.

We also have to bear in mind that even though we believe in the slogan of Karl Marx "Workers of the world unite", we are still far away from this task. But we find that the capitalists move globally. Today multinational corporations have become so powerful that they are mightier than even some of the nations.

If Wall Mart is to be a nation, its revenues are on par with the GDP of the 25<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world by surpassing 157 smaller countries. Financially, it is stronger than Norway. McDonald's revenue of \$ 25 billion is higher than the GDP of Latvia at \$ 24 billion. Pepsi's revenue of \$ 58 billion is more than the GDP of Oman. Apple's revenue of \$ 65 billion is more than the GDP of Ecuador. Microsoft's revenue of \$ 63 billion is more than the GDP of Croatia.

Revenue of Proctor & Gamble at \$ 80 billion is more than the GDP of Libya. Bank of America with revenue of \$ 135 billion will be more than the GDP of Vietnam. General Motor's revenue of \$135 Billion is more than the GDP of Bangladesh. General Electric Company - GEC's revenue of \$ 150 billion is more than the GDP of New Zealand. Thus, fighting these multinationals needs much more strength and we need to be internationally together as a class. NEHAWU's slogan, *An Injury to One is an Injury to All*, explains everything.

We are a part of the international working class. We have to be more united globally. We have to be class conscious. We have to be politically oriented. We must develop international solidarity. We may act locally but we must move internationally with more unity and solidarity.

Unless we unite and fight, we will be overtaken. Workers produce everything. Hence workers deserve a better deal. But this is being denied. For this we have to struggle much more. We have to fight for change of the political policies and even Governments where necessary. We have to fight for a change in the social order to get social justice. We have to fight for a better society.

As our great leader Com. Lenin said that this change or revolution is not like apple to fall automatically from the tree. We must work hard and organise the struggles. We must take initiatives everywhere. We have to fight for the same. When we are hit, we must hit back. And hit as hard as possible. They are harsh on us. We cannot be soft on them.

Everyone knows that a world without workers is not possible. But a world without exploitation is possible. Let us come together and fight for a better world. WFTU believes it is possible to fight back. We need forces in this struggle. WFTU is proud that NEHAWU is part of this army. We need to strengthen WFTU. This is also your task.

For an effective trade union organisation, three requirements are there. We need unity, militancy and proper leadership. Because, Unity without militancy would be useless. Again, Militancy without unity could be an adventure. Further, Unity and militancy without proper leadership could be a disaster. We are happy that NEHWU has unity, militancy and proper leadership. That is why you deserve special congratulations. Keep it up and march ahead.

Trade Union is a university. It teaches us the need for unity. It teaches how to fight. It teaches how to move forward. Strengthen the union. Strengthen the working class. Workers must move as a class. There is every hope that tomorrow would be ours and would belong to the working class.

Our best wishes for the success of your congress.