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Japan

May Day - fighting for denuclearisation

- IV Online magazine - 2011 - IV436 - May 2011 -

Publication date: Monday 30 May 2011

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While the official unions in Japan argued that May Day mobilisations should not go ahead, as a tribute to those who died in the earthquake and tsunami, a number of radical unions took the opposite stance, calling for denuclearisation as a response to the man-made Fukushima disaster. Below we publish an article about the demonstration in Onahama near Fukushima and two trade union appeals supporting denuclearisation.

In Onahama on May Day 350 workers participated in the demonstration in the rehabilitation struggle from the damage of the earthquake and tsunami. Onahama is the southeastern industrialized port area of Iwaki city, which is located at the southeastern coastal part of Fukushima prefecture, and Onahama area is 50km south of the Fukushima No.1 nuclear plant.

The rally of the “2nd Onahama Mayday in the Rehabilitation Struggle” was held under the sponsorship of the Onahama branch of Zenkouwan (All Japan Harbor Workers Union: AJHWU) and unions of the Onahama Area Council of Unions at the Onahama Yokomachi Park on May 1, and 350 workers, including stevedores and transport workers of the port, gathered at the rally.

At the ad hoc Mayday committee, there was a proposal to refrain from the rally, demonstration and barbecue event voluntarily due to the earthquake/tsunami and the nuke disaster, but the committee agreed to go ahead with the rally and demonstration, affirming the absolute necessity of workers’ struggle for their own and popular causes in dealing with the earthquake/tsunami disasters, nuke crisis and radiation threat, and unemployment problems.

Mayday rally paid a silent tribute to all the victims of the disasters at its outset.

Mr. Niizuma, president of the Onahama branch of Zenkouwan (AJHWU), gave a speech to the rally in the name of the Mayday committee, and he asserted: “Let’s press the firms and administrative bodies. And the first step is nothing other than the unity and solidarity of workers.”

Mr. Matsumoto, general secretary of the AJHWU, took the podium as an invited participant, and he said: “Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation: JTUC) can do nothing. It is dominated by the unions of nuke-related businesses, and it has just adopted a pro-nuke resolution. But the Onahama Mayday rally here is held under the banner of denuclearization. Major construction firms are said to have begun their collusions to grab the rehabilitation concessions. Rehabilitation of workers’ ordinary lives is the real rehabilitation: there will not be the real rehabilitation without workers’ active interventions.”

Mr. Yutaka Suzuki, president of the Onahama Area Council of Unions, presented his relative’s serious state of damages, and said: “my cousin of fisherman is still missing. These are our actual situation, from which we have to start our rehabilitation efforts.”

Mr. Ryou’ichi Hattori, lower-house deputy of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), took the podium and stated: “We stand for no-Nuke energy policy. We will work for denuclearization together with you.”

After the solidarity messages of the SDP and JCP representatives, a representative of a Zenkoku-Ippan (National Union of General Workers: NUGW) union presented various resolutions to the rally, and he reported that his union set up its labor-counselling desk immediately after the earthquake/tsunami, that a lot of workers visited the desk for

its counselling, which showed that there were numerous cases of labor-standard violations and wrongful dismissals under the pretext of the disasters. He also reported on a nuke-plant worker's case: the worker was asked to go to the workplace, although he himself was much reluctant to do so. Finally, he concluded his speech, asserting that the worst disasters were job losses and radiation-exposed labor.

At the rally, Ox-Tiger Brigade, a disaster-relief group of the metropolitan area, gave its ardent solidarity message, and a member of the group sang a song for rehabilitation efforts.

Finally, the rally adopted the proposed resolutions, and the participants marched through the streets of Onahama.

Japan: Let's defend our lives and employment through the unity and solidarity among workers! Let's steer for a denuclearized society!

NUGW Iwaki Freedom Union of Workers

Having survived the two natural disasters of earthquake and tsunami, lost family members, dwellings and household goods, we are now confronted with the two human disasters of radiation exposure and unemployment.

The radiation is wrecking local communities and depriving workers of their means of living.

The tsunami devastated the whole coastal area, and the Onahama port got crushing damages, too.

Immediately after the earthquake/tsunami, dismissal begun to spread at the port, and Iwaki Tuh'un, a transport company which has many subcontracting firms, forced all its subcontractors to dismiss their workers even without severance pays.

Dismissed workers came to our labor counselling desk, and our union and fellow unions waged their protest/resistance campaigns against the dismissals. In the end, we have been successful in realizing the continuation of employment at all the subcontracting firms with making use of the public subsidy to defray the costs to layoffs.

The similar activities are spreading among the unions of the Onahama Area Council of Unions, and this public subsidy machinery has become an important means to prevent dismissals.

Opportunistic, piggybacking nonpayment of wages and dismissal of workers are spreading in the disaster-stricken areas. It is only the power of workers union, unity and solidarity among workers that can confront with those anti-worker practices of business firms. Especially the unity and solidarity among those workers who rallied to the Onahama Mayday actions should be our start line.

Workers should unite!

We should fight for defense of those workers who have suffered their worst disaster of dismissal.

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Let's wage our struggle against outrageous offensive dismissals!

Let's press the government and Tepco to guarantee the money to live on for all the workers!

Workers should unite!

Let's press the government and Tepco to accept their duty to finance the rehabilitation of local communities, industries, agriculture and fishery!

We cannot accept any rehabilitation without employment!

Let's secure jobs for the unemployed workers through rehabilitation projects!

Eliminate the special interest groups, and establish workers and disaster-sufferers' monitoring over the rehabilitation projects!

Workers should unite!

Let's demand public and lifetime healthcare for those who are engaged in the radiation-exposure labor!

The present system of society is premised on victimization of workers' health, as is clear from the radiation-exposed labor at the site of nuke disaster: let's change the very social system!

Let's demand decommission of all the nukes!

Let's steer for denuclearization and demand a thorough and radical review of the energy policy!

Let's press the Rengo (JTUC) to retract its pro-nuke resolution!

Let's fight together for decommission of nukes!

Workers of the world, unite! Long live the Mayday! Let's fight together!

NUGW Iwaki Freedom Union of Workers is an autonomous collective of workers, which is engaged in some interior-decoration works as it's earning activities for the membership, and this collective is also a constituent union of the NUGW (National Union of General Workers) and it carries out the labor-counselling activities. The Freedom Union of Workers was founded originally by those workers, who occupied their workplace and waged their self-management struggle in opposition to the close-down attack by the management in the 1990s.

Solidarity Message to the May Day Rallies

Northeastern NTUC

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Task Force on Big Earthquake Disaster in Eastern Japan, Northeastern ZENROKYO

We would like to extend our solidarity message from Northeastern region of Japan, to all the workers in the May 1 rallies.

Last March 11 the big earthquake and tsunami attacked the Pacific coast of the Northeastern region, and destroyed the vast areas. It is allegedly caused by extensive crustal movement which was 500 kilometers broad from north to south, and 200 kilometers from east to west. The death and missing toll has reached almost 30,000, and is increasing day by day. 130,000 sufferers still live in the evacuation centers.

The weak people in the stricken areas, like hospitalized patients, in-home patients, and people in the nursing homes, now live in extreme anxiety under rampant aftershocks and suffer from the continuous "second damage." Not only sooner relief and recovery of living conditions, but revitalized hope, solidarity, and symbiosis to survive are required as well. Along the coast areas which used to be one of the most abundant fishing ground in Japan, countless houses, together with fishing industry, marine-product industry, agriculture were destroyed, and so many public institutions were lost that local government faculty was vastly damaged.

Further, the violent quake and huge tsunami hit the nuclear power plants built on the coasts of Northeastern and Northern Kantoh regions, northeastern part of Japan. The Fukushima No.1 nuke power plant was severely damaged. Owing to the misjudgment and mishandling by the TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Corporation), Nuclear Safety Commission, Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), and the Japanese government, it was declared to be under serious nuclear crisis at level 7. The DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan)-led Kan administration failed to order timely evacuation, to cope with radioactive pollution, and to work out with local governments, which has put residents in despair and anger. We hence demand the DPJ government to tackle with its all might and solve the nuke plant disaster as soon as possible.

It is obvious that the pro-nuke position of the previous successive LDP(Liberal Democratic Party) administrations and the business elites, should be condemned. The president of Japan Business Federation had praised the Japanese nuke plants, saying that *Japanese nuke plants are so excellent that they can survive the tsunami,' and, after the disaster, the president is quoted as saying that the safety standard of the government was too loose' and that the government should take responsibility for the compensation of the nuke plant disaster': he is protecting TEPCO and radioactive industry and defending the nuke-energy policy. The truth is that there have been researchers who cautioned against danger of the big earthquake and tsunami, and, in particular, the danger of the Fukushima No.1 Power Plant have been pointed out by many people. We should not allow the politicians, business circle, and commentators to evade the responsibility on the pretext that the disaster was beyond anticipation.'*

Hence, let's confront and contain the business circle, electric power industry, nuke-plant-related industry, METI (The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry), university/academy, mass media which have been promoted nuke power plants. In solidarity with people of the world over, let's set to change the society into one without nuke power plants.

Let's not allow the politically motivated move to take advantage of the *rehabilitation' process. We should counter those proposals which seek to 'take this chance to change the agriculture of the Northeastern region in accordance with U.S.-led TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) frame' or 'reconsolidate the current local governmental system of prefectures and municipalities into larger administrative units.'* Let's advance various kind of activities to protect livings and jobs of workers who are exposed to massive dismissal by rampant shutdown, bankruptcy in the stricken region, and increasing arbitrary dismissal by the excuse of the disaster nationwide. Lastly, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to plenty of encouragement and support from Japan and the world over. We know it will take long time and much effort from now on, but

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the people in the stricken areas have risen up in the ruin and started to rebuild their livings, labor, industries and communities. We Northeastern-ZENROKYO share the sense of despair and hope with stricken residents and will proceed onward. In sincere hope for successful May 1 Rally and Unity of the Workers of the World.'

The first two pieces are translated from the May-16 issue of the Kakehashi, JRCL/NCIW joint weekly. The third, Northeastern NTUC - is a slightly edited version of the original English text at: <http://nugw.kir.jp/2011/archives201...>