

This year, Lalit celebrated Labour Day in Mauritius just one month after the devastating floods in Port Louis

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This year, Labour Day in Mauritius was celebrated, just one month after the devastating floods in Port Louis.

LALIT celebrated the day in an appropriate way: members and supporters and their families met at the building we share with LPT at Grand River North West.

The event was chaired by Alain Ah-Vee and Anne-Marie Sophie-Joly, in a packed hall.

The day began with over 200 photos projected on to a screen and showing the human effort involved in removing three inches of mud from inside a building that had been 3'6" under muddy water, and shoveling some 8 inches of mud out of the yard and verandah, the loving care in salvaging bits of furniture, and in painstakingly examining how many of the unique primary sources on post-Independence struggles could conceivably be prized apart and placed between two sheets of dry absorbent paper and thus saved. All the work was being done by people completely covered in mud, as though Lalit had become some fancy spa for "mud-cures". The exhibition of wonderful Yves Pitchen photographs was accompanied by musicians doing instrumentals, music that was both sad and strong, both poignant and vibrant, first by Mark Joseph and Bernard on guitars and then by Rajni Lallah on the piano keyboard. Then there were photographs taken by Ram Seegobin of the "cause" of the bad flooding in and around the Lalit building: the grotesque re-enforced concrete wall built by the Government around the still-unoccupied Gender Equality Ministry's Centre, which blocked a natural drain through which flood-waters had in the past always rushed on their way to the nearby sea. Photographs taken a few days later also showed how the Public Infrastructure Ministry had finally capitulated and drilled a 2meter by 2 meter hole through the offending wall.

Then members one-by-one spoke of their personal experience of the floods and the human effort in restoring the Lalit building. Laval told how he came the next day expecting water to have risen, but had not pictured the thickness of the mud that came along with it and then stayed afterwards. He said how much work was needed to remove it. Marday described in detail how hard it was, that same day, to just walk to the door, so thick was the mud; he had to move across to the neighbour's wall and hold on to it, in order to walk without falling over. Sadna described how when she arrived the first day and met the three members there before her, she had had to wade through brown muddy water up to her armpits just to get to the door. She described how her son was rightly concerned about the poor Lalit dog having been traumatised. I then said how when I arrived by foot, Ram Seegobin staying in the car in total a traffic jam on the road in to Port Louis, and how I was the first to arrive, there was so much water everywhere covered in a thick layer of black debris, and that this was disorientating. It was a scene of desolation. I said how dangerous it was to try to walk through the water which was up to my waist, the mud kept grabbing hold of my ankles. So I waited for others to arrive. Inside the building, it was pandemonium. Computers had all floated off their tables and were hanging by their electric cables into the water next to the tables. Every chair was, for some reason, upside down. The floodwaters had ripped the floor up.

Ragini Kistnasamy described the role foisted upon her by circumstances whereby she was confined to keeping telephone contact with different members who were trying to get to the scene of the flood.

She said that after I had told her water was at one point beginning to pour out of the Lalit building under pressure (which was unbelievable but true, as the water outside in the yard gradually found a circuitous way to the sea, its level became lower than that inside the Lalit building), that when she repeated this bit of information to other members, they said, "What on earth are you talking about!" "Zot kriy ar mwa, zot dir 'Ki to pe koze?" And of course she, herself, could not picture it either. She said the wonderful help of so many people was, in itself, a rich experience, teaching us all how to act together in an emergency, an emergency which lasted for days. And which is still not completely over, as everyone can see for themselves today. She said she had renewed political courage from the courage shown by all those who helped recover the building.

Rajni Lallah described the wonderful hidden talents people have. Someone whom she named who she knew writes good documents for Lalit turned out to be able to manual work with a determination and capacity that she could not believe. Just as another man, a trade union delegate, who she had thought was more capable on the "clerical" side of work, turned out to be outstanding with tools, just like a proper skilled workman. She described how she could not bear to look at the ruined archives, so she joined the team removing mud by the bucketful from inside cupboards and filing cabinets. She said she was inspired by the strength of human effort, and that on a Labour Day, this was what, in a way, we were rejoicing.

Other members described their experiences on different days.

Ram Seegobin's Lalit speech, which lasted an hour was riveting. He relied on his talent for explaining difficult political realities in a simple way, using a structure resembling "concentric circles" to explain each idea until it is clear to people from different backgrounds and with different degrees of understanding of the situation who were present, without ever repeating himself. He told how the 2008 Employment Rights Act and Employment Relations Act were enacted at a time of working class weakness, just as the Industrial Relations Act and Labour Act of 1973 and 1975, which the 2008 laws were re-placing, were enacted so as to codify a balance of class forces that had been forged by a State of Emergency. And in so doing, he outlined the bankruptcy of the trade union bureaucracies that have fragmented the entire trade union movement in their own interests. Everyone afterwards wanted to know if it had been recorded, but of course, all our equipment, as Ram mentioned at the beginning of his speech was ruined, and we are only gradually re-constituting these "activists' tools", he said. Ram Seegobin had also described how branches were functioning well, in a decentralized way, as the centre was re-constituting its wealth of tools, including intellectual tools, like documents.

Alain Ah-Vee, from the Chair, then gave rendezvous to members and supporters for our next week's "inter-trade union grassroots" meeting, and new political education courses. He also gave dates for the editorial board meetings for the next Lalit Magazine (Revi Lalit), and for the next Lekol de Kad, or cadre school.

Messages from organizations abroad were read by Cindy and Emilie, who gave details of how we relate to these organizations: parties in Australia and France and Britain, political groups in Nigeria, Kenya, Swaziland and Namibia; union organizations and individuals in the USA. Some have already put parcels of books into the post, to help restore the Lalit theoretical shelves; others are putting together piles of books to send.

Marlene Joseph then sang "Cry me a River" in a jazz mode, both "bluesie" and a take-it-or-leave-it

style.

Everyone sang the Internationale, fists raised.

Afterwards, everyone shared food that they had brought, a rich and varied cuisine as always, spread out on tables for everyone to eat together, drinking juice and laughing together.

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