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Pakistan

# October 14 and the Sparks of Workers' Movement in Pakistan

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**Thousands of workers, government employees and pensioners from more than 61 labour organizations, trade unions and pensioners' associations united under the umbrella of "All Pakistan Employees Labour and Pensioners Movement" marched towards the Parliament House, Islamabad on 14 October.**

The march was planned on parliament but their way was blocked at the point where rulers and their spokespersons felt that they were getting too close for comfort. A day before the march, Islamabad administration and police sealed off the so called 'Red Zone' and strict monitoring was placed at all entry points to the capital. The state resorted towards dirty tactics to sabotage march and stop convoys. To prevent participation, leaders of various trade unions were threatened with serious consequences. On the morning of 14 October various roads were blocked across Pakistan, at various points hurdles were placed to stop the convoys from arriving at the planned protest point. At many places the protestors had to push their way through the police blockades towards Islamabad.

Chaotic scenes were also reported at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government offices, where police and paramilitary force, rangers, were deployed to stop employees from leaving. Through notices published in local newspapers, the Government asked the public sector employees to call off their strike action and not to leave their work places. Due to these hurdles, many convoys had to leave their vehicles at roads and joined protest rally on foot or by motorbikes. Comrades, militants of International Socialist League and activists and labour leaders from the different parts of the world expressed solidarity with protesting workers of Pakistan.

Despite all hurdles and threats, thousands converged on the Parliament House. One group led by APCA (All Pakistan Clerks Association) was able to get into the Parliament House Avenue. The Police and paramilitary forces manhandled many protestors and resorted to using of force to push back them. At this time, it was decided to have a sit-in at D-Chowk near Parliament House.

D-Chowk got famous during Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (current ruling party's) 126 days sit-in or *dharna* against Nawaz Sharif in 2014. Now tables have turned, at the same place where Imran Khan, the current Prime Minister of Pakistan, used to deliver furious speeches against his political opponents the workers were protesting against his regime's IMF dictated policies. The sit-in on October 14 at D-Chowk turned into an important event in the history of Pakistan when for the first time clerks, young doctors, Railways workers, Steel Mills workers, Civil Aviation Authority and Pakistan International Airlines employees, OGDCL (Oil and gas) workers and large numbers of employees from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Employees Coordinating Council, WAPDA Hydro Union, State Bank of Pakistan, NADRA, Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation, Radio Pakistan, PTV, Post Office, Teachers, Class Four Employees, Lecturers and Professors, Municipal Corporations, Health Department, Lady Health Workers, Paramedics, Wildlife Department, Fisheries Department, Forest Department, Department of Industries, Government Printing Press Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Department of Social Welfare, Department of Population Welfare, Department of Mines and Minerals, Department of C&W, Department of Higher Education, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Judiciary, Department of Archives and Libraries, Department of Sports, Department of Technical Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Text Book Board, Provincial Health Services Academy Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated in large numbers. Pensioners from PTCL, PTV, Railways and others also participated and workers belonging to mining, hoteling, sports, chemical and glass industries also joined.

The capitalist crisis is unleashing new attacks on the working class and taking everything back which was won over centuries-old struggles. To silence the workers at the start of pandemic, Essential Services Act was promulgated in many public sector institutions including PIA, Utility Stores and others. At the same time, Pakistan's courts are repeatedly issuing orders against the Unions. Using the pandemic as an excuse, laws are used to curb workers

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voices. In this background, Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign (PTUDC) took to the task of uniting all working-class forces against neoliberal policies of IMF and capitalism.

As a step towards workers' unity, major unions and labour organizations of Pakistan like PTUDC, Peoples Unity PIA, Employees Unity CAA, Trade Union Alliance Pakistan Steel Mills, APCA, Government Employees Federation of Pakistan, Paramedical Staff Association, PTCL Workers Ittihad Federation CBA, PTDC Employees Union, Punjab Professors & Lecturer Association, Punjab Teachers Union, Rail Mazdoor Ittihad, All Pakistan Pensioners Association, PTV Workers, Radio Pakistan Workers, Pakistan Medical Association, Hotels Unions and other 61 unions came together at Lahore on 21st of July to discuss the formation of nationwide alliance against privatization and IMF policies, on 23rd July at a Rawalpindi meeting, an alliance was formed as "All Pakistan Employees, Pensioners & Labour Movement". The total membership strength comprising all unions is more than four million.

14 October *Dharna* was an expression of class solidarity and is a strong message to the ruling class of Pakistan that workers are united against draconian IMF imposed austerity. At first mainstream media tried to hide the news of dharna but due to pressure, they were forced to give space to workers' demands. Daily *DAWN*, leading newspaper of Pakistan, wrote in its editorial on 17 October:

It is difficult to recall the last time Islamabad drew this kind of crowd. Thousands of discontented individuals, working for various departments of the Pakistan government and hailing from trade unions and other groups, assembled on Wednesday to protest the scourge of inflation. They planned to march on parliament but their way was blocked at the point where rulers and their spokespersons felt that they were getting too close for comfort. Quite often, these government employees are overshadowed by big files flashed on media, although they have been pressing for reasonable compensation in these times of soaring expenses across the country.

At this moment there are two parallel movements in Pakistan, one in the shape of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) which composed of bourgeois political parties and the other is in the form of "All Pakistan Employees, Pensioners & Labour Movement" which is composed of the working class. Even PDM leaders in their speeches and press conferences talked about the "14th October Dharna" and urged their supporters to follow workers' example. The government through its policies and actions, has alienated both its political workers and ordinary masses. The militant participation of Revolutionary Students Front (RSF) and Jammu Kashmir National Students Federation (JKNSF) activists with red flags and furious slogans charged the participants and manifested the great unity of workers and youth and students.

After Government's assurance to accept the demand of workers, the sit-in was called off. A committee presided by Prime Minister Imran Khan is formed to resolve grievances of working-class and rounds of negotiations continue. However, we believe the government and this system has left no room for the reforms and have nothing to give to workers and struggle must be continued. This movement has given a tremendous push to working-class movement and for the first-time the scattered demands of the workers from all across the country were presented in shape of a common charter of demands. As a vanguard of this movement, the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign (PTUDC) will continue to fight for all the workers. Whatever the outcome of the negotiations, the labour movement will continue. 14 October is only the beginning of the joint struggle that continues till the overthrow of capitalism in the region.

### Charter of Demands presented to the Government of Pakistan

- The annual increment should not be abolished.
- The retirement age should not be reduced or increased.

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- Pakistan Medical Commission and MTI Acts to be abolished and PMDC to be restored
- Pension should not be abolished, the salary of government servants should be increased by 150 per cent.
- The Government organizations such as OGDCL, CAA, PIA, Pakistan Steel mills, House Finance Development Corporation and others should not be privatized, downsized or segregated.
- Ad hoc relief should be merged in basic pay and pay should increase/adjusted with current inflation
- Pay disparity between different departments should be removed.
- House rent ceiling should be abolished and shall be fixed as 50% of the current pay.
- The medical allowance has not been increased since 2010, thus, the same needs to be increased and Health cards shall be issued to the government servants. And conveyance allowance shall also be increased as the same has not been increased since 2010.
- The Allama Iqbal Open University dismissed employees to be restored. Similarly, issues of IUU and QAU employees may be resolved at the earliest.
- The time scale promotion formula shall be started.
- The quota in service shall be reserved up to 50% for sons/daughters of grade 1-22 government servants.
- WAPDA should be restored in its original form and IPPs should be discouraged.
- Announcement and acceptance of Allied/Paramedical Health council. COVID allowance should be taken up by concerned authorities.
- New boards should be constituted for GP fund insurance etc.
- Minimum wage should be fixed as Rs. 30,000.
- The contract/daily wage servants should be regularized.
- PTCL pensioners should be paid their pending dues since July 2010.
- CDA shall consider the issues related regularization of 786 employees.
- The issues faced by employees of PTDC should be resolved speedily.
- Up-gradation of class IV employees is needed and the same should be looked into.
- Pakistan Steel Mills 9350 employees' issues need to be resolved.
- Utility Store corporation employees' service-related matters need to be taken up and need to be resolved
- PTDC servants' issues need to be resolved
- Up-gradation of clerical staff (UDCs/LDCs and others) should be done.

Source [Asian Marxist Review](#).

PS:

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