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Pakistan

"Raise our wages and pension!"

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The rally, organised by Labour Party Pakistan, was attended by over 2000 activists of different trade unions and Left organisation including most of the Left organisations in Lahore. The rally participants at Charing Cross started a sit in (Dharna) for over three hours. Labour leaders speaking at Charing Cross in front of Punjab Assembly demanded a wage and pension increase of 100 percent in the forthcoming budget. They also demanded that a minimum wage of Rupees 15000 be fixed by the government for all government and non government workers for eight hours a day work.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/May_24_nine.jpg]

Speaking on the occasion, Irshad Ahmad, president of the powerful All Pakistan Clerical Staff Association (APCA) representing over 2 million clerical staff, warned the government of a total strike at government offices by the clerical staff if the wage is not increased. He also announced a massive Dharna in Islamabad on 28th May 2011.

Zafar Iqbal, president of National Organisation of Postal Employees (NOPE) representing over 20,000 postal workers in Pakistan, spoke against the proposed privatization of the postal services. "We will not accept any form of privatization, the government is trying to sell this most economical form of postal service in Pakistan available to the people and hand over to the multi national companies who are eyeing on the buildings of post offices at prime places of Pakistan" he said. We will fight together with Labour Party Pakistan and other organisation to defeat the government, he said.

Hasan Rana, general secretary Pakistan Telecommunication Employees union CBA, spoke about the termination of all PTCL main workers leaders because of their fight for better wages. "the privatization of PTCL meant massive job losses, termination of trade union activities, and lowering of the wages" Rana said.

Mukhtar Bukhari, president of the Workers' Action Committee of the privatized Habib Bank, demanded from the Chief Justice of Pakistan to hear the pending case against the privatization of the Bank. He said that 2300 workers of Habib Bank are fighting against termination of their services from the bank.

Zafar Iqbal Chitta, president of the All Pakistan Para Medical Staff Federation, representing over 80,000 para medical staff, explained the worsening conditions of the workers in the hospitals. "The lower staff is been totally ignored in the recent package of Rupees five billion for the doctors and nurses" he said. "there is no trade union rights for the health workers in Pakistan, the administration of different hospitals issued termination notices to the employees if they join this rally" he told the gathering. " we have defied these orders to join our brothers and sisters.

Riffat Maqsood, general secretary of the Women Workers' Help Line, spoke about the worsening condition of the people living in shanty towns. She criticized the recent so called anti encroachment campaign by Punjab government and said that this has laid many thousands workers out of their jobs and petty business. She explained the situation of the women workers and said we are proud that over 500 women workers are participating this rally of the Labour Party Pakistan.

Mushtaq Aasi, president of the Sweepers' Union, Lahore, spoke against the privatization of the sanitation system of Lahore. "Sweepers are worst paid workers and they are not treated with dignity. we are workers and demand dignity like all other workers, he speaking on behalf of over 10,000 workers mainly from Christian community.

"Raise our wages and pension!"

Latif Insari, senior vice president of Labour Qaumi Movement Faisalabad, told the gathering of the continued imprisonment of the four labour leaders. "We have been sitting in a protest camp for the last 24 days in front of the jail in Faisalabad. On 1st of June massive protest rally will be taken out in Faisalabad against the arrest of the four," he told the gathering.

Dr Lal Khan, head of Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, editor of Asian Marxist Review and the main leader of the International Marxist Tendency, spoke about the solidarity of the working class in Pakistan and said that capitalism has failed to solve any of the basic problems of the people of Pakistan. "We are united in our fight against privatization and we will lend full support for this campaign of better wages and pension," he said.

Comrade Irfan, one of the main leaders of Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party, demanded an acceptance of the demands or face the music of the working class.

Khalid Mehmood, director of the Labour Education Foundation, spoke of the need of radical programme for the trade unions and need for more education and study circles for the unions to enable them to understand their rights and a way out to fight for workers rights.

Niaz Khan, general secretary of the Itehad Carpet Workers Union and general secretary of the National Trade Union Federation, said, "We have brought over 30 trade unions together for this sit in. This is a historic step forward in the unity of the working class and Left forces in Lahore."

Yousaf Baluch, Chairman National Trade Union Federation, congratulated every one on this fine expression of the unity of the trade unions in Lahore. "The NTUF will play its role along Labour Party Pakistan and other Left wing forces to bring all the fighting trade unions under one platform."

Mustansar Javed, president of the Railway Workers Union Workshop division representing over 20,000 workers, demanded an end of contract system and permanent jobs for all employees.

I spoke about the need to cut military expenditures, non-payment of foreign loans to enable the government to pay more for the working class and condemned the attitude of the Punjab administration for their anti-worker tendencies and said we are ending this Dharna, but not our struggle, "There will be more such events in Lahore, this is the beginning of the labour movement along with Left forces in the city." I thanked all the Left wing groups to join this rally and particularly the trade unions who opted to protest under the banner of a political party. This is beginning of a new era of class struggle. There will be more dharnas in Islamabad on 27th and 28th May.

The rally ended on a good note after three hours. Most of the electronic and print media was there including five live coverage wagons of GEO, Dunia, Express, Samma and ARY. The rally and Dharna will force the government to listen what the workers are demanding at present. I refused to meet the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly planned for 25th May and said the finance minister should come and speak to us. We ended the Dharna on our own and decided to continue the struggle in coming days and weeks.

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