

Trade Union Leaders Heavily Sentenced in Pakistan: Urgent Finance appeal for “Faisalabad 6”

Sunday 13 November 2011, by [ABDUL QAYUM Mian](#), [KHAN Niaz](#), [MAHMOOD Khalid](#), [SHAH Nisar](#) (Date first published: 11 November 2011).

We are publishing below an urgent financial appeal to support the defense campaign of the six trade union leaders condemned to jail sentences amounting to 597 years (!) in Faisalabad industrial center of Pakistan.

Our association, Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF) fully supports this call.

Six labor leaders from Faisalabad have been handed jail sentences of 597 years in total [1]. Their only crime was to lead a peaceful strike for an increase in minimum wages as announced by the government. They are Akbar Ali Kamboh, Babar Shafiq Randhawa, Fazal Elahi, Rana Riaz Ahmed Muhammad Aslam Malik and Asghar Ali Ansari. Four of them were arrested in July 2010 while the other two were arrested in July 2011 on the same charges.

All of them are leaders of a power looms works organization called, Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM) in Faisalabad, the third largest city of Pakistan. LQM is a community based labour organization fighting for the rights of the textile workers since 2004. It has a mass base among textile workers of the city and surrounding areas.

An anti-terrorist court judge on November 1, 2011, sentenced six leaders under terrorism charges in Faisalabad. As is frequently observed that Terrorists are set free by these courts and workers leaders are charged under terrorist laws in Pakistan

They were accused of burning down a factory during the strike. This is a fabricated charge. The facts are that on the day of strike, July 20, 2010, gangsters in the pay of the factory owner in Thekri Wala started shooting at the workers who were leaving the factory to demand better wages. Some workers dared to go inside the factory and forced the gangsters to stop firing. Some of them were beaten up by the angry workers.

During the trial, the workers' advocate asked if the factory had been burned down then how was it able to be operating again three days later.

More than 100,000 power loom workers in Faisalabad district went on strike on July 20, 2010, for an increase of wages that had been announced by the government during the presentation of budget 2010-11. The government announced 17 percent rise in the minimum wage for the private sector workers. The LQM in Faisalabad, Jhang and other districts had been in negotiations with power loom owners for three weeks before the strike.

The incident happened in Sudhar area, an industrial suburb of Faisalabad where a big number of power loom factories are located. This area had been a battle ground between workers and owners for three years as the workers organised themselves effectively in huge numbers there.

The long term jail sentences of these workers leaders has been a devastating blow to the workers movement in Faisalabad, and indeed across the country. That the court could hand out such a draconian anti-labor judgment was beyond anyone's expectations, especially since this judiciary itself had been restored through the support of a powerful people's movement. Yet, the anti-terrorist court chose to give a verdict with the sole aim of damaging the power loom workers movement which was slowly becoming a symbol of working class militancy all over the country.

One of the principal methods of disciplining labor under capitalism is to push them to the point where they are only left with an option of negotiating with the bosses on the latter's terms. This is done either through brute state force or by financially crushing the working class so that they only have the option of compromising in order to survive within the system.

The bosses have used the latter tactic to ensure that these labor leaders become examples for anyone who dares to raise his/her voice against the injustices meted out to the workers. All of our jailed comrades are married and were the primary breadwinners of their families. Their families have been pushed to the brink of a financial catastrophe. The families are contemplating removing children from the schools since they are unable to even buy enough groceries.

Knowing that this is part of the political strategy of the bosses to subjugate the workers, and that it is having severe consequences for the families of the jailed leaders, the Labour Party Pakistan, the Labour Qaumi Movement, the National Trade Union Federation and the Labour Education Foundation are launching a finance appeal to support the families of our jailed comrades.

These leaders have shown tremendous courage and steadfastness in refusing to compromise with the authorities and instead suffer the consequences of speaking the truth. These families deserve our generous support not only because these comrades are suffering due to their involvement with a working class movement. But also, because the outcome of this movement, and our ability to extend solidarity and support to our comrades in difficult conditions, will dictate whether this particular event will deter working class militancy (as wished by the bosses) or act as a shining example of working class solidarity against the hideous tactics of the ruling classes.

Anti-terrorist laws are frequently used against protesting industrial workers in Punjab. Thirteen trade union leaders are facing such charges of terrorism. Their real crime is fighting for a better life for their members and demanding higher wages. The Punjab government is all out to crush any trade union movement in factories which is challenging their authority.

On behalf of the LQM, NTUF, the LPP and the LEF, we urge you to donate generously for the families of these victims of state-terrorism. These families are in dire need of financial support and we can only sustain them with a collective effort. The bank details are given below.

If you wish to transfer funds, below are details of the account for sending money to this finance appeal,

Please send motions and/or messages of solidarity to the Labour Education Foundation: Ground Floor, 25-A Davis Road, Lahore, Pakistan. Tel: 92-42-36303808 Fax: 92-42-36271149 Email: lef@lef.org.pk Website: www.lef.org.pk

1- Khalid Mehmood, director Labour Education Foundation (kahlid@lef.org.pk)

2- Mian Abdul Qayum, Chairman Labour Qaumi Movement

3- Nisar Shah, general secretary Labour Party Pakistan (rednisar[at]hotmail.com)

4- Niaz Khan, General Secretary National Trade Union Federation (Punjab)

DIRECT TRANSFER TO PAKISTAN

A/C Title: Labour Education Foundation

A/C Number: 01801876

Route: Please advise and pay to Citi Bank, New York, USA Swift CITI US 33 for onward transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., KARACHI, PAKISTAN A/C No. 36087144 and for final transfer to BANK ALFALAH LTD., LDA PLAZA, KASHMIR ROAD, LAHORE, PAKISTAN Swift: ALFHPKKALDA for A/C No. 01801876 OF LABOUR EDUCATION FOUNDATION.

THROUGH ESSF ACCOUNT

It is also possible to send checks in euro or to transfer donations through ESSF account. Specify "Pakistan" on the back of your cheques or transfer orders.

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 23303), [597 years jail sentences in total to six labour leaders of Pakistan](#).