

Pakistan: Political gimmicks over the death of 300 workers

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Today, a smiling Asif Zardari, emerged from his caravan at Mao Hospital Lahore waving hands to his sycophants, when he came to enquire the health of the five injured workers during a fire in a shoe factory while 27 died on 11th September 2012. Till today, no Pakistan People's Party leader visited the factory or went to see the families of those who had died.

The 10 minutes visit to the hospital by the president of Pakistan who is also co chairperson of PPP was an immediate response to the visit of Mian Nawaz Sharif to a Karachi factory where over 300 had died on the same day in a similar incident. He announced Rupees 300,000 compensation for every worker killed in the incident on behalf of Punjab government while according to commercial media report; President Zardari offered flowers to the five injured workers.

Punjab is ruled by Muslim League Nawaz while the provincial government in Sindh is of PPP. During the last three days after the worst industrial incident of Pakistan history, a routine message of sorrow by these two leaders were printed and broadcasted by the commercial media. Once Mian Nawaz Sharif decided to go to Sindh, President Zardari decided to visit Lahore.

The both sides accused each other for negligence in providing all the health and safety measures to the workers in the factories. The fact is that during the last four years of the power of PPP and PMLN in Sindh and Punjab, no factory inspection took place and the factories literary became the concentration camps. It was general Musharaf handpicked Punjab chief minister Pervaiz Ilahi, who put a ban on labour inspection of the factories across the province.

The PPP and PMLN government did not lift this ban until an earlier shocking incident at the pharmaceutical factory in Lahore that killed 27 workers on 4th January 2012. The Punjab government did announced lifting of the ban on factory inspection but no practical steps were taken by the labour department in this regard.

Ironically, Pervaiz Ilahi of Pakistan Muslim League Q is at present deputy prime minister of Pakistan and was accompanying the president during today's hospital visit.

On the instruction of the Punjab government, it was decided that no official will be able to visit any factory without the permission of the district labour officer (DLO). The DLO will not give that permission and hence no labour inspection took place in Punjab. It was worst in Sindh where PPP and MQM were in power and there was a complete ban on factory inspection.

The worst incident in the history of Pakistan leaving over 325 workers dead in one day was a routine for the ruling class for the last three days. The PPP leaders invited by the commercial media to debate with PMLN leaders during this time accused Punjab government for negligence and PMLN accused the other. It was blame game and a political gimmick.

Had 300 capitalists died in any incident or accident, the whole commercial media, the ruling class and all those who are putting a mum on their lips would have declared a national tragedy, a great

loss and would have declared a national day off, at the least. The 300 deaths of the workers were like a routine matter, “a message of solidarity, a compensation of 200,000 Rupees, a promise to provide job to the relatives and may be a visit to the families of the dead” that is it. It shows a complete collapse of morality of the ruling capitalist class in Pakistan.

The interior minister, Rehman Malik, a real joker, went further than every ones guess; he hinted that it might be an act of terrorism. What non sense. That shows the thinking pattern of the ministers. They want to link every incident to their war on terror so they could prove to the Americans that they are the victims of the war on terror and the Americans should give them more money.

Some of the anchor persons tried to divert attention from this grave incident by spreading rumors that the owners were threatened by some gangsters to pinch money and they might have started the fire. Although, it was dam bloody clear to everyone that a total negligence towards the environment within the factories led to these two incidents where state has failed to play any role. And this 9/11 of Pakistan was not an isolated incident, it is happening every now and then.

Apart from the rich ruling politicians who have always protracted the capitalist class, now judiciary has once again came to the rescue the class they are protecting. The three owners of the factory went to Sindh High Court Larkana bench and got so-called protective bail for eight days.

The real class based prejudice of the judiciary can be seen from the fact that those “Faisalabad 6” textile workers who are accused of burning a factory front room with no life damage are given 590 years of total jail terms and were not granted bail for a single day. While here in this case, a factory owner responsible for 300 deaths is granted a bail. It is no accident that the owners went to Larkana bench, the home town of Bhuttos family, instead of Karachi.

The Faisalabad six are facing anti terrorist laws while no life was lost during the strike in July 2010 for wage increase despite some incidents of violence from both sides, and here three factory owners responsible for 300 deaths are not charged under anti terrorist laws. There are other Karachi textile workers facing anti terrorist laws just for the crime of raising voices for better wages and conditions.

Ordinary people of Pakistan are in real shock over the incident. There is great sympathy for the workers who have lost their lives. On the contrary, this incident is a political gimmick for the ruling politicians. We must reject this rough politics. We must build a genuine movement of solidarity by fighting for decent age and working conditions for the industrial working class. It is wake call once again for all of us.

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