

Self-Presentation

# The Labour Education Foundation (LEF), Pakistan

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**We are reproducing here the self-presentation of the LEF, taken from their website on October 26, 2005.**

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## Profile

- Education Foundation [now Labour Education Foundation] has been engaged in trade union training activities including 'summer school' classes, as well as regular staff and project staff training since 1993.

- 28 organizations are affiliated with Education Foundation (EF), all related to trade unions/associations. 120,000 individual members are estimated to have altogether with these organizations.

- Education Foundation had played pivotal role to bring together the trade unions, and as a result, some of them had joined Pakistan Workers Confederation, (PWC), which is the main federation of the workers in Pakistan.

- On the initiative of the Foundation, some of its affiliates had become members of international trade union organizations;

- The Education Foundation is not a traditional non-governmental organisation but it is rather linked closely with the trade union movement. It is operated and controlled by experienced trade union activists in Pakistan for the benefit and in the name of Pakistan's working class movement.

- One of its publications, The Weekly Mazdoor Jeddohud (The Workers' Struggle) was established in Netherlands by some Pakistani exiled trade union activists and university students in 1980; and since 1989, the paper has been publishing in Pakistan with out any break.

- With the financial assistance of Olof Palme International Center, The Workers' Struggle took a step forward in 1997, when it became the first weekly paper of the trade union movement in Pakistan. The paper had self-sustained even after the financial assistance ended in 1999. At present, it is the most regular vocal publication of the trade union movement in Pakistan.
- Due to its pro democratic stance, the paper had experienced many times the police and military raids.
- The Weekly has maintained the policy to remain editorially independent, relying mainly on revenue from the sales rather than on advertising;
- The Workers' Struggle has five regular offices and five sub-offices all over the Pakistan;
- The EF has successfully sustained a fully equipped printing project, "Pakistan Trade Unions Resource Center". The project was started with the financial assistance of Swedish Graphic Workers Union in 1993.
- Education Foundation had established three union schools for working children with altogether nine teachers and with coordinating and administrative staff in 1993 to 2000 with help of Swedish Teachers Union Gothenburg;
- More than 3,000 students had got education from these schools;
- 10 % of them had continued education in mainstream schools;
- Approximately half of the students were girls;
- 10 adult literacy centers for trade unions members were also established by the EF for the education of illiterate activists of trade unions.
- 700 workers had attended the nine-month courses in the union school;
- In 1997, the supporters of EF helped to establish the Labour Party of Pakistan with the coordination of many other trade unions and political activists.
- LPP was one of the very few political parties which opposed the military take over in October 1999;
- LPP has been fighting for the restoration of democratic rights in Pakistan; gradually became the fastest grown progressive party.
- A Campaign For A Peaceful Pakistan had been launched in year 2000 by the EF with the help of Olof Palme International Center Sweden.
- During the period 1993-1999, Swedish contributions amounted to 50-82 per cent of Education Foundation total costs;
- The Foundation had a comprehensive network within Pakistan as well as in Sweden and the Netherlands.
- EF is a registered non-governmental organisation under the Societies Act of 1860 of Government of Pakistan.

## **Aims and Objectives**

- To assist the development and organization of establishment trade unions working in various industrial and semi-industrial sectors all over Pakistan.
- To assist unorganized workers in establishment trade unions in un-unionized sector.
- To play a role as a monitoring institute that trade unions remain under the democratic control of members.
- To combat child labour and struggle to improve opportunities available to working class children.
- For the empowerment of women by assisting them working in trade unions as well as developing women workers organizations.
- We are also with the aim and objective to be an active practitioner of peace initiatives and strengthen the struggle of anti-nuke movement in Pakistan.
- To be a front line organization, active in the field of developing democratic Pakistan by participating against every measure of dictator regime.
- To develop organized workers adult literacy centers making them more productive and effective for themselves as well as for trade union movement.
- To develop a trade union resource center including a reference section as well as printing facilities to the trade unions.

## **Education Foundation - Achievements**

- Education Foundation Achieved the hall mark victory by bringing major trade unions together and as well as a result made them part of Pakistan Workers Confederation (PWC), which is the main Confederation in Pakistan.
- On the initiative of EF some of its affiliates have become member of international trade union organizations.
- EF itself has been affiliated with International Federation of Workers Education Association (IFWEA) in 2001.
- There is another area of achievement of EF, which is to materialize the initiative of scatted cottage industry workers of printing and graphic industry and built Pakistan Printing and Graphic Workers Union in 2001.
- Regarding child labour, EF took the initiative to develop three Union Schools for working children in working class area of Lahore and educated more than 3000 students in a span of five years (1996-2000)
- Regarding women's struggle of emancipation, EF develops Women Workers Help Line (WWHL), which is one of the most effective women issue oriented organization working in Pakistan since 2000.
- The main achievement of WWHL is to settle the day to day grievance regarding discrimination in

factories and domestic violence.

- WWHL has been organized demonstrations on different issues related to women in Pakistan. It has also organized several workshops and seminars for problems identification and awareness of working women.

- Regarding establishment of Pakistan Trade Union Resource Centre, EF has developed a physical structure for a reference section as well as printing unit containing three presses and has printed posters, booklets and other publicity materials for trade unions, which is indeed an initiative taken first time in Pakistan for trade union struggle.

- Regular Publication of Weekly paper MAZDOOR JEDDOJUHD ([www.jeddojuhd.org](http://www.jeddojuhd.org)) for last six years till now, as a sustainable activity in the area of enlighten of trade union activists all over Pakistan is an other achievement of EF.

- Making Ittehad Labour Union Carpet Industries Pakistan, an effective trade union by providing it with capacity building, communication and management facilities, was one of the early achievements by Education Foundation regarding its trade unions development objectives.

## **EF staff Profiles**

Khalid Mahmood,  
Secretary, Education Foundation

Ulfat Tanvir Bukhari,  
Project Coordinator for Adult Literacy Centers in Lahore.

Zar Khan  
Computer Administrator

Jalvat Ali,  
Project Coordinator for Democratic Development Pakistan

Talat Rubab,  
Office and Projects Assistant

## **Projects**

### **On going projects**

- Campaign for a peaceful Pakistan.
- Democratic Development Pakistan
- Adult Literacy Program
- Formation of Pakistan Printing and Graphic Workers Union

### **Projects completed**

- Pakistan Trade Union Resource Center (PTURC)
- Union Scholls for Working Children
- Weekly Workers Struggle

## **Sustainability**

Education Foundation is operating two of its main endeavors without Swedish economic support, since January 2000, namely The Weekly Workers' Struggle and Pakistan Trade Unions Resource Centre- PTURC.

The Workers' Struggle has mainly survived because of various campaigns launched by the Foundation, including subscription and donations.

From its first issue published in 1980 until 1993, when the Olof Palme International Center started to support the paper, it had been printed without subsidies, but by raising funds from individuals and by selling the paper.

PTURC has been able to continue its operations by combining commercial printing work with mainly non-commercial trade union printing work, as planned from the beginning.

Apparently, trade unions are not organised to raise funds in a proper manner, but rather collecting money on an ad hoc-basis, when the need arises, e.g. In an emergency situation when a demonstration has been decided upon and there is a need to print posters or pamphlets. Hence, it was extremely difficult for Education Foundation to collect funds on a regular basis from trade unions.

In the mid nineties, Education Foundation realized it had the illusion that it would be possible to operate Unions' Schools for Working Children by raising the consciousness of trade unions to donate funds. However, a continued economic crisis in the country with less income for workers led to more unemployment and decreased trade union membership. Hence, it became more and more difficult for trade unions to survive on present limited financial resources. The only option felt by many was to raise additional funds from members. Trade union member organisations were supporting Education Foundation economically by purchasing the Workers' Struggle, and by bringing business to PTURC. In 1999, it was felt that it is not be feasible that the Foundation's member organisations would be able financially to contribute to the operations of Unions' Schools for Working Children. Hence, the Unions' Schools for Working Children terminate its operation from June 2000.

## **Trade Unions in Pakistan**

Pakistan is not a highly industrialized country. It is largely an agricultural economy with a large peasant population, mostly living on a subsistence existence. Since the industrial base is quite small, the working class is not large. However, the working class has great potential that needs to be channelised.

Unfortunately, only a small section of the working class is organised in trade unions. Hardly six per cent workers are unionised. According to an estimate, there are only five million trade union members in a country of 150 million people.

Pakistan has only been an independent country since 1947. During half of its independent life, it has been ruled by military dictatorships. These regimes have been extremely hostile to any trade union organisation or working class movements. Members and activists faced incarceration, torture and even death at the hands of their oppressors and many fled the country for the fear of reprisals. In such a climate of fear, the trade unions do not develop and recruit at a normal pace. Since October 1999, a military regime is again in power and the trade union movement has to fight back, once again, for a democratic setup.

In the absence of a working class party and a strong trade union movement, even the more recent democratic governments have sided with the bosses and created hurdles in the development of trade unions and trade union rights.

Currently, there are very few women active in trade union movement despite a big women work force. The women are employed mainly in ununionised sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals and packaging industries. In addition, a big chunk of the women work force is employed by the agriculture sector as well as cottage industry. The cottage industry is seldom unionised.

A special recruitment drive is essential for the feminisation of the trade union movement and for improving the workingwomen status. Any such initiative would, however, require considerable resources and commitment by the entire trade union movement to overcome social and cultural barriers impeding women's recruitment and participation.

One of the main tasks facing the trade unions in Pakistan is to establish genuine workers' or labour party to safeguard the interests of the working people in Pakistan. To address this question, supporters of the Education Foundation helped form the Labor Party Pakistan (LPP). The LPP established in 1997, is fast becoming the party of trade unions' activists in Pakistan.

Back in 1994, seven major federations of the trade unions in Pakistan formed a confederation called Pakistan Workers' Confederation (PWC). Some of the Education Foundation members were very active in the formation of PWC. The confederation meets regularly to discuss issues of common concern, to organise joint campaigns and demonstrations.