

Pakistan: PC workers on strike against redundancies

Tuesday 22 June 2010, by [Correspondent\(s\)](#) (Date first published: 1 July 2010).

Hotel's labor practices have been so exploitative that they have been condemned by ILO. The workers' protest ended July 1, 2010 on acceptance of demand.

Hotel workers from a five-star hotel in Rawalpindi are on a hunger strike entering its 14th day after the hotel management summarily sacked 350 employees and rejected negotiations with the workers' union. The Hashoo group, which owns the Pearl Continental Hotel (PC), refuses to recognize the employees union although it is legally recognized by Pakistan's courts.

Union representative Ghulam Mehboob said that the "health of several workers wasn't good" following the hunger strike. Eleven protestors including the union president, Sher Ahmed, have been taken to the hospital.

The central issue is the conversion of temporary employees, who comprise a significant share of the PC workforce, into permanent workers. The PC union's charter of demands, a standard document submitted annually by a union to its employer, included a request to turn these workers—most of whom have worked at the PC for at least 7 years—into permanent labor, making them eligible for pay raises and benefits. These workers are currently only paid an average of Rs. 10,000 (about 120 dollars) per month.

Following tense negotiations, PC's Human Resources Director Major Nadeem agreed to the demand—only to be promptly fired by the hotel. His successor, Colonel Zulfikar, declared his refusal to negotiate with the union at the employees' teatime gathering. "A few people began to raise slogans then and there," says Mehboob. Perhaps fearing that workers would occupy the hotel as had happened in the PC's Karachi branch three months earlier, the hotel management called in an estimated 250 policemen and the DCO. They reportedly told the workers that the hotel was being "sealed". Employees were immediately kicked off the premises and subsequently fired. Most of those sacked are classified as temporary labor. These events are the latest chapter in the Hashoo Group's long history of exploitative labor practices. Earlier this year, workers occupied the basement of the PC Karachi after union activists were fired and their demands unmet. That struggle ended when the PC conceded and hired those workers back.

As early as 2001, the Hashoo Group had begun cutting salaries and pension funds and firing workers who protested. In fact, the hotel's labor practices have been so exploitative that they have been condemned by the UN's International Labor Organization (ILO). An investigation by the organization concluded that "grave violations of union rights had been committed by the hotel management and local authorities." The ILO called on the government to conduct a thorough investigation.

The hotel's policies are part of a growing trend in Pakistan, one that has led to increased inequality between the working poor and westernized elites. At the same moment that the World Food Program is warning of deepening food security in the country, Pakistan has had its first entry in the most

recent Forbes' list of the world's billionaires.

The Hashoo Group has now also filed charges against 120 of the fired employees accusing them of attempting to burn down the hotel. For the workers, none of this is new. Management has used this tactic before against union activists who were locked up for months in a secret prison in Karachi before being acquitted in court.

In addition to demanding the conversion of temporary labour to permanent employees, the protesting workers are demanding their jobs back, fair wages, and the return of their pension funds, a significant portion of which the Hashoo Group has reportedly seized. Although the workers' have set up their protest camp next to Geo television's headquarters in Islamabad, the strike has yet to receive coverage from mainstream media outlets. "They have a hold on everything," says Mehboob, "but we're fighting."

M.T.

UPDATE: PC Rawalpindi workers ended protest on acceptance of demand

Today noon more than three hundred workers of Pearl Continental Hotel Rawalpindi ended their 31 days protest campaign on acceptance of all their demands including withdrawal of all FIRs registered in different police stations against them and their union leaders and reinstatement of 300 illegally retrenched workers.

These sacked workers had been in protest camp since 15 May 2010 the day they were terminated from their job with out any legal procedure.

Nasir Mansoor
Deputy General Secretary
National Trade Union Federation, Pakistan

P.S.

* From Viewpoint:

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/fullstory.php?t=PC%20workers%20on%20strike%20against%20redundancies&f=full-13-june-18.php&y=2010&m=june>