



Trade Union Rights Campaign - Pakistan

Emergency solidarity appeal Support the struggle for democratic and trade union rights



Benazir Bhutto was killed in a suicide attack after addressing a public rally in Rawalpindi, Pakistan on 27 December 2007. Her tragic death has once again exposed the volatile situation that exists in the country. Despite this, and the violence which followed it, national elections are scheduled to take place on 16 January 2008. However, ordinary workers in Pakistan are threatened with repression and the elections will be far from free or fair; indeed, the opposite is the case.

In this dangerous situation, there are courageous workers and trade union activists who are fighting for the political, trade union and economic rights of the working class. The Trade Union Rights Campaign - Pakistan (TURC-P) is coordinating this kind of work on the ground, in the face of a

brutal anti-working class regime. Over 100 Pakistani Trade Union groups are affiliated to the TURC-P and they are engaged in the pioneering work of both rebuilding the labour & trade union movement and organising in previously unorganised areas of the Pakistani economy.

Anti-Privatisation Alliance

The military regime of Musharraf, during its eight years in power, has carried out vicious attacks on the conditions of workers in Pakistan. At the behest of the IMF, World Bank and other financial institutions, policies have been carried out which have imposed mass redundancies, declining real wages, increased working hours and even worsened conditions of work. The root of many of these attacks has been large-scale privatisation.

These privatisations have also seen an unprecedented rise in living costs for ordinary people, with prices of food and utilities rising by 200% - 300% over the last few years! In the face of this, the TURC-P launched the Anti-Privatisation Alliance, which has campaigned against further privatisation, for the renationalisation of privatised utilities and against the price rises.

Anti-Trade Union Laws

Over the last eight years, more anti-Trade Union laws have been put onto the statute books than in the preceding 53 years of Pakistan's history. In terms of attacking workers' rights, Musharraf leaves Thatcher, and the anti-TU legislation she implemented in Britain, in the dust! Due to these viciously imposed anti-TU laws, only 3% of the

workforce in Pakistan is organised in officially recognised Trade Unions. This figure rises to over 20% if you include those who are members of Trade Unions that the government and employers refuse to recognise.

The law states that Trade Unions will only be recognised where a work-force is over 50. To get round this already undemocratic legislation, big employers will officially have 6 or 7 workers under permanent contract and then employ hundreds or even thousands as 'temporary' workers who are unprotected by labour laws and receive no social security coverage! Conversely, in the public sector over 80% of the workforce is unionised. However, here these workers are barred from entering any political party and standing or campaigning in elections. The TURC-P is fighting both to organise in the 'informal' sector and for the rights of public sector workers to have a political voice.

Know Your Rights at Work

Over the past year, the TURC-P has organised a number of meetings and seminars to inform workers of the labour rights that they currently have and to organise them in the fight to implement and further these. Three national and four regional Trade Unions have been established from this work. As well as this, the TURC-P has been playing a vital role in strengthening existing unions. In recent months, it has

produced thousands of posters and leaflets against privatisation, downsizing and anti-union laws. Finances permitting, the TURC-P aims to produce a pamphlet informing workers' of their rights as part of this campaign.

International Support Needed

Right from the early days of the workers' movement, one of the best traditions has been an internationalist outlook. The maxim of 'an injury to one is an injury to all' is true whatever part of the world workers who are being attacked might live in. Currently, repression has decreased slightly in the run-up to the elections, but following those elections it could increase.

We are appealing to all Trade Unions - on a local regional or national level - to pass resolutions in support of the TURC-P and the struggle for democratic and workers' rights in Pakistan and distribute them to the addresses below, to make sure that the Pakistani regime knows the eyes of the international working class are watching them and that they cannot get away with further repression.

We are also asking for financial assistance so that we can continue the vital but dangerous work that we are engaged in. The TURC-P currently pays £50 per month rent for its national office and a further £12 per month for each of its regional offices. These 'offices' are merely single rooms!

Workers in Pakistan are faced with a Gargantuan task and have only the most meagre of resources. Currently the TURC-P offices are staffed by volunteers, with one worker employed full-time by the campaign. This full-timer exists on a mere £60 per month.

All of the funds for the campaign come from donations from individual workers and from Trade Union branches. If you or your union branch could afford to donate even just a small amount, as a one-off donation or as a regular contribution, it would make a material difference to the work that the TURC-P is able to do.

Further information about the campaign will be distributed in the run-up to and following the elections. To be added onto the e-bulletin list and kept up-to-date with developments in the campaign, e-mail turcpakistan@yahoo.com.

Thank you in advance for your solidarity and support.



What you can do to support the struggle for workers' rights in Pakistan

- Pass a resolution in your Trade Union branch in support of the Trade Union Rights Campaign - Pakistan and condemning the repression of workers' rights by the Pakistani regime.
- Circulate resolutions and letters of protest to the Head of Chancery, High Commission for Pakistan, 34-36 Lowndes Square, London SW1X 9JN or via email at hoc@phclondon.org. Please send copies of resolutions and protest letters to turcpakistan@yahoo.com
- Make a donation or a regular contribution to the campaign funds of the TURC-P. Make cheques payable to 'TURCP' and send them to: TURC-P, PO Box 52135, London E9 5WR. Alternatively, you can donate via a bank transfer or standing order to: TURC-P Account Number: 00574699, Sort Code: 30-95-03 Lloyds TSB, 797-799, High Road Leytonstone, London

Please keep us informed of protests, donations, solidarity, etc via turcpakistan@yahoo.com and we will keep you informed of developments in the workers' movement in Pakistan.