

Remembering Jan Hodann and his contributions to labour movement in Pakistan

Saturday 6 February 2021, by [TARIO Farooq](#)

I was introduced to Roland Ekbohm, a official of the Swedish Teachers Union, by my teacher and friend Max Babri. Roland was visiting Pakistan from Goteborg. The year was 1992.

Roland, in turn, introduced me to the Olof Palme International Centre (OPC) and it's Asia head Jan Hodann. Jan Hodann gave us the initial support to buy a computer and a video camera for our monthly paper 'Jeddojehad' (Struggle).

Jan Hodann also invited me to Stockholm and to address a press conference. This was in autumn 1993. At the press conference, I was introduced to several trade unionist from Sweden including Goran Sunderland and his colleague Louise Fourcade, an Argentine exile based in Sweden.

We jointly built the first Pakistan Trade Union Resource Centre. The printing machinery came from Sweden.

In Lahore, we registered Education Foundation as a non government organisation in 1995 which later became Labour Education Foundation (LEF). I resigned from the board of Education Foundation in 2004, once for all, to do more political work.

The OPC gave us support to print weekly paper 'Mazdoor Jeddojehad' (Workers Struggle) for two years 1997-99. Jan Hodann and Goran Sunderland along a few others, visited Lahore.

The LEF, meantime, had produced a video documentary 'Trade Unions For a Brighter Tomorrow', established Gulzar Labour Hall, Pakistan Trade Unions Resource Centre, Trade Unions Schools for Working Children with help of OPC, Swedish Teachers Union, Swedish Printing Union and also LO/TCO.

During 1996, We heard the news of the tragic death of Goran Sunderland, Luice Fourcade, Goran's wife and daughter in a plane crash in Latin America. I had my best days in Goran Sunderland's company during my two visits in Stockholm. Roland Ekbohm, Jan Hodann Goran Sunderland, Leif Larsson, Kent Sund and myself became friends and comrades but had professional relationship with regard to the development and trade union work.

Jan Hodann did not extend the OPC support to weekly 'Workers Struggle' after two years and asked me to fulfil my promise to sustain it without Swedish support. We did it for the next 13 years. We printed the weekly till 2012 when we had to close down the paper. Now it is printed as daily Jeddojehad online (Struggle on line), with a staff of three paid from individual donations.

The Labour Education Foundation (LEF) Women Workers Help Line, Itehad Carpet Union, Pakistan Printing and Graphic union and several other initiatives were taken and sustained with Swedish

labour movement's help. These initiatives brought significant changes in the lives of hundreds of thousands. Jan Hodann was the mover and shaker of these projects.

The LEF is at present considered the second largest labour organisation in Pakistan which has won several international awards. Although, the OPC stopped supporting LEF in 2010.

At every critical junctures, Jan Hodan was there to help, guide and coordinate our work in Pakistan.

Over the years, we have lost Goran Sunderland, Roland Ekblom, Luce Fourcade, Lief Larsson and now our dearest Jan Hodann, but we have not lost the will to change the society and contribute accordingly to build the labour movement.

We also founded the Labour Party Pakistan in 1997, which merged to establish Awami Workers Party in 2012. I was elected founding general secretary of both these political projects. I resigned from AWP in 2019 to do more social and labour movement work.

At present, I am general secretary of Pakistan Peasants Coordination Committee (PKRC), one of the largest network of peasant organisations in Pakistan and involved in several social and political formations including our latest Haqooq Khalq Movement (Peoples Rights Movement).

Jan Hodann was always interested in our activities in Pakistan and would always encourage. Most importantly: always concerned about our safety and well-being given the situation in Pakistan.

Jan Hodann was a great initiator of the new organisations and movement. He was always coming forward to support. He would develop you in a way that you do not realise that some one is guiding and shaping you. He was my teacher and friend. He was good at developing personal and professional relationship.

Jan Hodann was somehow an adventurer as well like me. During one of the visits to Pakistan, we both decided to intervene in Iran and to make the initial visit. It was good luck that Iranian consulate in Lahore did not granted a visa to Jan Hodann but agreed to stamp my passport. Had he been granted a visa, we both might have visited Tehran to meet my close underground contacts there and we might have ended up in jail for long time.

He was known as Mr. Burma, for his support to Burmese democratic struggle against military dictators and helped the anti-apartheid movement of South Africa with his secret visits.

I was his guest at home in Stockholm several times. He was a good cook.

For the last several years, our only contact was Facebook likes to each other's posts.

What a great lover of horses. We visited stables in Lahore and he bought his long leather shoes from Lahore.

I recently tried to contact him for providing contacts in Sweden who could support Asia Europe Peoples Forum (AEPF), however, that could not materialise. I am part of the leadership team of AEPF at present.

Jan Hodann played an important part in shaping my political and social initiatives. We will not forget this great friend of Pakistan Labour Movement.

Jan, you had a restless life and Rest in Peace Now. Your friends not merely in Pakistan but all over three continents will continue your work.

Farooq Tariq

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