

# **Union busting at Inter Wood Furniture Factory; Union members on hunger strike in Lahore**

Tuesday 14 July 2009, by [Correspondent\(s\)](#) (Date first published: 16 May 2009).

## **- Office Bearers of Union Sacked from Jobs**

- More than 800 workers are stopped from working

In a recent move, the notorious bosses of Inter Wood Furniture Factory in Lahore ordered closure of factory on morning of 15<sup>th</sup> May to break the will of workers who have organized the Inter Wood Workers Ittehad Union. Union office bearers have also been sacked from jobs and they have been intimidated this by sending letters to their homes. On Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> May when more than 800 workers reached factory in morning as usual, they saw heavy contingent of police on the gate. There was a notice pasted on the gate that factory has been closed for uncertain time. On the same day Union office bearers received letters at their homes that they have been sacked from jobs. All this is happening only due the reason that the workers of this factory have organized union. The formation of the union was opposed not only by the bosses, but by many of the high profile company clients. They included politicians from rich parties, Military Generals and top bureaucrats. Anyhow, one good officer at the Labour Department played a crucial role in registration of the union despite all the pressure. This was the first ever union at the factory.

Today, 16<sup>th</sup> May more than 300 workers of the factory are sitting in hunger strike camp at Shimla Hill in Lahore. They are demanding immediate opening of the factory, reinstatement of the union office bearers and acceptance of union by bosses.

Inter Wood is one of the most known furniture company in Pakistan. Most of the furniture for the army generals, bureaucrats and rich people are made by Inter Wood. Over a 1000 workers are employed by the owners. Since early 1980s, there was no union. With the help of Labour Education Foundation, a union was formed in March 2009 by the workers at the factory in Lahore.

The bosses of the Inter Wood tried to harass the union leaders by bringing in private thugs. This did not work as the young union leaders made it clear that they will go to the courts against such tactics. They demanded that no armed men who are not employed at the factory should enter the factory. The boss has to accept it reluctantly.

The owner then went to National Industrial Relation Commission (NIRC) against the union that it should not be allowed the trade union activities within the surroundings of the factory. This was a plea on the basis that the union is registered but not yet declared as Collective Bargaining Agents (CBA). Although, the fact is that it is the only union at the factory. The NIRC ruled in favour of the bosses.

In another attempt, the owner played a dirty trick and the union leaders were asked to speak to "labour department officials". The union leader went to the administration office at the factory. They were not labour department officials but were deceiving the union leaders. The union leaders were

trapped and were asked to sign blank papers and hand over the copies of their identity cards.

When they contacted the LEF, and it was found that this was a deception and the blank papers dully signed by the union leaders would be used by the administration against the workers. After some investigation by the union, they found the person involved. The union went to police to register a case of deception against the person involved. The police at Baghbanpura police station is reluctant to register the case.

On 13<sup>th</sup> May, over 500 workers protested in front of the police station. The National Trade Union Federation leaders Yousaf Baluch, Moeen Nawaz Punno, Niaz Khan and Mehmood Butt participated in the demonstration along side with the union. The police is reluctant to register the case. They say that we have to take an advice from our legal department. This is just an excuse not to register the case. We are putting pressure on the police not to side with the union leaders.

On 14<sup>th</sup> May the Labour Minister of Punjab, Ashraf Sohna also called a meeting with Union and NTUF leaders and labour department officials. When union leaders went to the meeting they saw a PPP leader Haider Khan Kharal sitting there to negotiate with union leaders on behalf of the bosses. This was an attempt to take time for closure of factory and sacking of union leaders.

Now the Union has decided to continue the hunger strike camp till the demands are accepted. Inter Wood Workers Ittehad Union needs your support. Union activists and civil society activists in Lahore, please visit the hunger strike camp at Shimla Hill, near Lahore Press Club to show solidarity with union.

---

**P.S.**

\* From <http://www.laborpakistan.org/news2.htm>