

# **Pakistan: Unilever Lipton Management/Contractors Instigate Violent Attacks On Khanewal Action Committee Members**

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Faced with the possibility of losing the highly lucrative labour supply contracts that have underpinned the disposable jobs regime at Unilever Pakistan's Lipton tea factory for two decades, contractors are colluding with factory management to instigate violent attacks on the workers campaigning for the right to direct, permanent jobs. The provocations follow on the public call by the UK National Contact Point of the OECD for government-mediated talks to reach a negotiated resolution to the IUF's complaint to the OECD that Unilever's massive use of casual labour at Khanewal violates the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises.

During the night shift on 31 August, three workers were injured when relatives of Riaz Ahmad & Brothers, one of the main labour contractors at Unilever Khanewal, organized a violent attack on Action Committee members. Abdul Aziz was hospitalized after suffering head injuries and Shahzad Kaleem sustained a fractured thumb, while Khizr Hayat escaped with minor injuries.

This violent attack on Action Committee members occurs in the context of a surge in new hiring by the contractors in collusion with the Lipton factory management earlier this year. As Unilever came under pressure from the global Casual-T campaign, the factory management encouraged the contractors to hire as many of their relatives as possible to create a group of workers opposed to the campaign.

This surge in new workers recruited from the home villages and extended families of the contractors had two immediate consequences:

First, it enabled management to retaliate against action committee members by cutting their workdays and reallocating work to the new contract workers. As competition over work days intensified, blatant discrimination was applied in the allocation of work and even wage rates in favour of the new hirees (documented in our 5-part 'Working at Lipton Casual-T' series on our site). This punishment pushes workers fighting for the right to job security into even deeper poverty, indebtedness and insecurity.

Second, by creating a group of newly hired workers whose interests are closely aligned with the contractors, management could defend the disposable jobs regime that keeps over 90% of the workforce in perpetual insecurity.

This was the context in which the IUF publicly warned on June 16 that "new casual workers are being employed as Unilever deliberately foments divisions through intensified competition for poverty wages, perhaps hoping to foment a violent incident which would serve as a pretext for a frontal attack on the Action Committee...."

The August 31 provocation is precisely the kind of violent incident that management has been carefully brewing at the Casual-T factory. The Action Committee has emphatically urged its members to refrain from responding to all provocation. But as the situation deteriorates and emotions run high, with continued discrimination against action committee members and tensions between the two groups of workers rising, the situation is potentially explosive. Unilever management, in collusion with the contractors, is desperately fighting to maintain a lucrative system based on discrimination and poverty by provoking and discrediting the Action Committee to pre-empt change through negotiation

The IUF holds Unilever directly accountable for violence at the Lipton tea factory in Khanewal.

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\* Posted to the IUF website 08-Sep-2009.