

Faisalabad: Strike to continue

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It was a day of workers in Faisalabad. All efforts of police and the bosses to fail the strike and rallies were stymied by brave and courageous action of the virgin proletariat. The bosses fired at workers. They pelted stones. Police used a record number of tear gas shells and baton charge. When this did not work to prevent workers coming on the streets in thousands, police also started throwing stones on the workers. Section 144 that prevents public gathering was just a piece of paper.

The end result was a partial victory for the power looms workers. They were part of the main news in all the private and public television channels in Pakistan. Most of the media reports were accurate and presented a very fair account of the events. They all reported that violence was started by the bosses and their security guards and also by police. What was the violence: a factory was burnt down, a police motor cycle was set on fire and that is all. The media reported that the owner of the factory fired at the workers injuring several. Workers in retaliation went to teach a lesson to the boss and burnt the factory. When police started firing tear gas shell in Ghulam Mohammed Abad area, workers retaliated and police ran away leaving their motor cycle behind and it got fire.

For most of the day, Faisalabad saw some glimpse of the 1970s when the workers controlled the city. Today the whole city witnessed the power of the working class once they move in action. They were everywhere and police was unable to control them. The media reported that Faisalabad was a city of war between power looms bosses, police and the workers. Women came in the fore front to confront the police as well. The youth played the leading role.

The media blamed the administration of not listening the LQM demands in time. Today after the whole day of confrontation where workers had the upper hand, the administration assured the leaders of Labour Qaumi Movement that all their demands will be met once the workers are off the roads. The LQM leadership has all that in the past. They negotiated and told the administration that strike will not be over until the demands are met.

Over 100,000 workers took part in a strike at more than 20,000 power looms factories in the city. The call was given by LQM leadership on 16th July at a public rally in Jhang where workers are already on strike for 15 days. Police and the bosses did not take this warning seriously. Today they must be regretting of this opportunity given by LQM leadership. They miscalculated. They would have thought that the two leaders of LQM murdered on 6th July in their office by some 10 gangsters must have a demoralizing effect on the will of the working class to act.

The demands of the workers were simple. They said implement on the wage increase fixed by the government. This was mere 17 percent. Public sector workers have got 50 percent this year. The year saw one of the most known expensive years in the history of Pakistan. The Pakistan Peoples Party Government have withdrawn all subsidies and increased the prices of electricity, gas, petroleum and almost all the house hold items. It was an IMF agenda. The price hike was ten folds. Every single family was affected. A mere 17 percent: that was all the workers were demanding.

However, the Punjab government had other plans. They brought one of the notorious police officer to head the department, Mr. Aftab Cheema known for fake police encounters and killings the criminals. He was eager to show to the leaders that he is Aftab Cheema. Yesterday, almost all the

main leadership of LQM was threatened by police inspectors. Today, police from six different districts were called in to Faisalabad. This was all to stop the peaceful action of the working class. They could not do that in front of the might force of the working class once they came in action.

Police firing actions were live telecasted by all the news channels and they also showed that workers fighting back. The power looms workers revived the Intifada movement. Stone pelting youth in front of rifles and guns were the most common scene on all the television channels broad casting the actions oriented events of Faisalabad.

The will of the working class to change their situation can never be defeated. I will address a press conference tomorrow at 3pm at Lahore Press Club along with the main leaders of LQM to tell that the movement will go on and will be spread to other districts as well.

Labour Party Pakistan leading members met in Lahore today to chalk out a strategy to support the movement. It was decided that National Trade Union Federation will organize a massive rally in Lahore on 6th August in solidarity with the power looms workers and to demand an immediate implementation of minimum wage in all the private institutions. A Workers Solidarity Conference will be organizing in Lahore by labour Party Pakistan in the second week of August. All the trade unions and social movements will be contacted for these actions.