

Pakistan: Round Table Conference against Privatization of national Assets

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Islamabad, 2nd January 2011 - Scores of trade unionists, political workers, teachers, students and ordinary citizens vowed at a special roundtable conference Sunday to resist the privatization of state enterprises and agreed on the need to formulate an alternative economic policy paradigm to that being forced upon Pakistan by the international financial institutions (IFIs). The conference was organized by the Anti-Privatization Alliance at the National Press Club Islamabad and featured the participation of a broad cross-section of representative workers and students organizations. The conference resolved to resort to a general strike call in coming months if the government continued to toe the line of the IFIs and push further privatizations.

In his introductory remarks, Aasim Sajjad of the Worker's Party Pakistan (WPP) said that for the past two decades successive governments have adopted neo-liberal policies at the behest of international donors and have succeeded in pushing Pakistan's working people into a state of economic and social misery. He focused specifically on the policy of privatization and noted that around the world 'experts' have asserted that the state should withdraw from the economic sphere and leave allocation of resources to the market. However, this philosophy ignores the fact that the private sector does not cater to the needs of working people and the result has been increased joblessness, deteriorating access to basic amenities such as health and education, and general economic decline for Third World Countries such as Pakistan.

Khawaja Sarmad of the Awami Jamhoori Forum provided detailed figures of privatization in Pakistan since the early 1990s. He noted that more than 160 public enterprises had been sold into private hands and the majority had subsequently shut down or were operating even more inefficiently than earlier. He talked at length about the debacle of PTCL's privatization, noting that 40,000 workers of the enterprise had been shunted out from their jobs while the share price had plummeted from Rs. 70 to Rs. 19. He said that the scandalous performance of PTCL after privatization proves that the claims of neo-liberal ideologues about the greatness of the market are totally false.

Nisar Shah Advocate General secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan spoke extensively on the upcoming privatizations of Pakistan Post and IESCO and also warned that OGDC is once again on the chopping block after a move to privatize it was successfully repealed in late 2008.

He also slammed the government's plan to privatize at least 26 educational institutions in Punjab and said that the government policy on education is resulting exponential increases in fees and a growing class divide in society.

Among others who spoke were Rana Hassan, Malik Maqbool and Azad Qadri of PTCL, Aqleem Khan of OGDC, Malik Fateh of WAPDA, Moazzam Khan of Pakistan Post, Zahoor Awan of the Pakistan Worker's Federation, Nazir Javed of PWD, Raja Altaf of the Railway Workers Union, Dr. Saghir Alam of the Punjab Teacher's Union, Jameel Engineer of communist party of Pakistan and Alia Amir ali of the National Students Federation.

The conference unanimously passed resolutions demanding the rescinding of PTCL's privatization, reinstatement of fired employees in ZTBL, the immediate suspension of all plans to privatize further state enterprises, and new labour legislation that protects the rights of workers to assemble, organize and strike. The conference also resolved to participate fully in the rally call against privatization that has been issued by the Pakistan Worker's Federation for January 4.
