

Pakistan: Jailed unionists speak on workers' rights, demand freedom

Tuesday 17 April 2012, by [AHMED Rana Riaz](#), [ELAHI Fazal](#), [ILTIS Tony](#), [KAMBOH Akbar Ali](#) (Date first published: 3 April 2012).

Power loom workers in Faisalabad, a big industrial centre in central Pakistan, launched a series of strikes and demonstrations in mid-2010. Six leaders of the organisation of power loom workers, the Labour Qaumi Movement (LQM), were arrested by the police.

The six were charged under anti-terror laws and sentenced to a total of almost 490 years' jail (served concurrently). The jailed LQM leaders are also members of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP).

Three of the six spoke from jail with Rana Aslam and Tony Iltis. Translated by Sher Ali Khan.



Rana Riaz Ahmed, Akbar Ali Kamboh and Fazal Elahi outside Faisalabad court house, April 3, 2012. Photo by Mian Abdul Qayyum.

Rana Riaz Ahmed:

We've been struggling for the past two years for the rights of workers and peasants in our area.

The factory owners and capitalists have filed fake cases against us in the anti-terrorism courts, for which we've been arrested. We've been in jail since then.

The case against us is a lie — these are fake cases. We were only protesting for better wages for the factory workers. For quite some time we've been speaking to the district authorities, who agreed — but despite this no-one took notice and nothing was solved.

As a result, we've been part of a long-term struggle. There have been many protests and rallies. We've been on hunger strike. Our supporters have set up camps in front of the jail.

But despite all this, nothing has been solved. Our comrades meet us and bring us food in jail. But as we stand right now we have no hope that the government will help solve our case.

Our LQM comrades have been at the forefront of the struggle for this issue to be resolved. God willing it will be solved quickly: it's been two years.

Akbar Ali Kamboh:

The government had issued a directive for wage rises by 17%. For two months, we had been waiting. We had been meeting with the factory owners, but when we saw that wage rises would never occur, they provoked a strike.

The factory owners responded to the workers with weapons and force. They ended up creating a fake situation by burning their own factory building. They filed a case against us under the anti-terrorism act.

The biggest role [in our case] was that of the Punjab government, particularly Punjab law minister Rana Sanaullah. As a result we got long sentences.

Fazal Elahi:

At the scene of the protests, the police chiefs were there. We told them that firing should not have occurred. When the state started to oppress us, they had given us assurances that the oppression from the factory would not lead to our arrests. But this is precisely what happened.

Afterward, so many promises were made about getting us released. But none of those things have been fulfilled. The politicians are all people with interests.

The Pakistan People's Party have not done anything, even though they say they are a workers' party. They talk about God and religion but when the time comes, because we are from the working class, not from a feudal background, we have not been released.

Vested interests are not allowing for a compromise to be made. The parties that brought the charges against us are now ready to settle, but it is this feudal class that is not allowing for any resolution to take place. The LQM has been giving its all for our freedom.

Tony Iltis, Faisalabad

For ways to support the six jailed unionists, visit these pages:

Farooq Tariq, [Labour Party Pakistan under attack, Help us to fight back](#)

Faisalabad key word: [Faisalabad](#)

ESSF, [Financial update of the 2011 Pakistan Solidarity Campaign](#) (to be updated)

P.S.

* <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/50718>

* Green left Weekly's Tony Iltis is travelling in Pakistan. You can read his blog here:
<http://schlegel2012.blogspot.com.au/>