

# Workers strike back: Textile workers observed a 24 hours strike at Faisalabad

Monday 3 December 2007, by [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 3 December 2007).

80 percent of half a million textile workers at Faisalabad district observed a 24 hours strike today on 3<sup>rd</sup> December. The workers were demanding social protection and an end of emergency in Pakistan. The strike was called by Labour Qaumi Movemnet (LQM), a textile and power looms workers organization in the district. This is the first major strike of the textile workers in a decade.

Over 2000 workers assembled at Faisalabad Press Club building despite blockade of the roads by the police. This was the same place where over 20 journalists were injured by police baton charge when they try to bring out a demonstration for freedom of press a week ago.

Today, workers leaders including Mian Abdul Qayum, Aslam Meraj and Rana Tahir warned the workers of police brutalities and asked if there should be rally to the office of the district mayor? It was a unanimous decision of the workers to take pout rally despite a real threat of arrests and baton charge.

The LQM leaders spoke against the military dictatorship and said the workers will not accept this emergency and will side by the advocates and journalists. They demanded an immediate end of the emergency and release of all the political prisoners. The meeting inside the Press Club went on from 11am till 2pm.

The workers leaders were told by many area leaders of a complete strike at the workplaces and no power loom unit functioning on the day. It was reported at the meeting that over 80 percent of half a million workers are on strike today. Many could not come to the rallying point during the strike because of emergency and police blockade.

Workers brought the rally in a very militant mood, but police officers had changed their minds already after listening to the determined speeches of the workers leaders. Perhaps they did not want to open a new front. The police did not intervene to stop the rally despite similar rallies of political activists had been brutally suppressed under the new emergency laws. It was an illegal rally with an eye to eye contact with police.

The rally took over the office of the mayor of Faisalabad and demanded the labour director to come and talk to the LQM leaders. The director after talks with the leadership announced to accept the main demand and told the workers that the social security cards will be issued to workers within one week.

Faisalabad is the third largest city of Pakistan after Karachi and Lahore. It is known as Manchester of Pakistan because majority of textile factories and power looms are based here. The textile industry is totally in private hands thus there are no real unions at factory level. LQM started its work in year 2004 and has become the organization of the textile workers. It had organized several demonstrations, rallies, hunger strike camps, occupation of labour departments and other militant actions during the last three years. The main leadership of LQM is member of Labour Party Pakistan.

The strike call on 3<sup>rd</sup> of December was announced in beginning of November 2007 just before the announcement of the emergency on 3<sup>rd</sup> November. It wrote letters to the Labour department and to the Association of bosses. The main demand was to register the industrial unit and the labour at the government social security department.

There are over 12500 small power looms unit in the city with more than half a million workers. Majority of the units have contract labour and the bosses have not registered the labour at the social security department.

Bosses have to pay not more than two US Dollars a month to register a worker at the social security department. In return, the workers can have free health facilities at some of the hospitals and some minor other concessions.

Posters and stickers to announce the strike were printed with the help of Labour Education Foundation, a radical labour organization, and were fly posted all over the city. The LQM warned in the posters that if demands are not met, there will be strike for 24 hours all over the city.

The LQM leadership organized a series of internal meeting and with the workers to chart out the strategy of the strike. They decided that they will not force any unit to close down but will try to convince the workers to come on strike voluntarily. Majority of the strike action in Pakistan during the past were not successful because of violence by the state and by workers themselves to make the day a success.

During the suppression of journalists and lawyers, the LQM leadership was closely associated with the movement and participated in all the demonstrations and so on. This was built solidarity among the workers of the city and to fight the military dictatorship of General Musharaf.

Today, after the blockade and announcement of the Labour director, the rally and the strike ended on a positive note. There were two workers who were injured during an attack by bosses' gangsters and LQM leadership is busy after the rally to register a police case against the bosses.

LQM leadership has also put up two candidates to contest the general election that is to be held on 8<sup>th</sup> January. The two will contest as Labour Party Pakistan candidate. Labour Party Pakistan has decided in principle to boycott the general elections and demanded an immediate lifting of emergency and restoration of top judges.

The two candidates have filed the papers and their nomination papers are accepted already the returning officer. The date to take back the paper is yet to be finalized by LPP and all the candidates of LPP will take back their nomination papers to strengthen the opposition movement for the overthrow of the dictatorship.

---

Farooq Tariq

general secretary

Labour Party Pakistan

40-Abbot Road Lahore, Pakistan

Tel: 92 42 6315162 Fax: 92 42 6271149 Mobile: 92 300 8411945

labour\_party yahoo.com [www.laborpakistan.org](http://www.laborpakistan.org) [www.jeddojuhd.com](http://www.jeddojuhd.com)