

Pakistan: Workers take over Sugar Mill in Sind

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Over 1600 workers from Alnoor Sugar Mill Moro, Sind took over the factory today on 12 March 2008. They occupied all the administration departments of the Mill and asked the General Manager (GM) of the Mill to sit on the floor. The GM was a retired army brigadier. The GM was then forced to tour around the factory under workers control.

The occupation ended at 5pm when the local Member of Parliament from Pakistan Peoples Party assured the workers that their demands would be met within next 48 hours.

Their union called Mahnatkash Labour Union Alnoor Sugar Mill led the workers. The union was recently registered after an interval of 8 years of non-unionization of the factory. There was a terror of this GM at the factory. Most of the concessions of the workers were taken back under the military rule of general Musharaf. The demand notice of the union was ignored.

The workers were demanding the reinstatement of their 28 workers back to their jobs and their demand notice to be met by the administration. They were demanding better wages, more house rent, at least government recommended minimum wages and a bonus to all the workers.

At present, the factory was running in full capacity and the mill owner was unable to afford that the Mill should be stopped for a single minute. It was a workers day at the factory.

It all started at 11am when the union leaders went to meet the GM at his office. The union asked him to accept the demands. He categorically refused to accept any demand. He had misjudged the mood of the workers leaders. The union leadership immediately took over the office and asked him to leave his office and come with them to the union office. He was forced to accept the workers orders. At the union office, the retired army brigadier, who has ruled the factory under his terror, was asked not to sit on a chair but on the floor. His face was colored and then some workers torn apart his cloths as well.

He was then asked to round the factory where workers humiliated him as he did with the workers for eight years. With a colored face, the GM was begging the workers to spare him and that he will accept all the demands. It was a "Gherao" and occupation at the same time.

In the mean time, all the gates of the factory were closed and the local police could not enter the Mill to rescue the GM. It became news for some private television channel and they broadcasted the news about Mill occupation.

The local MP from PPP arrived at 4pm and asked the workers to let the GM go and that he will guarantee that all the demands will be met. He told the workers, that there will no victimization and no police case registered if they listen to him. On his guarantee, the workers handed over the factory to the administration and let the GM go free.

This is the first incident of such kind. There is no civil government yet but the workers have come forward to have a go on those who had exploited them all the eight years under military rule.

Labour Party Pakistan has a strong group at Moro. Eight years ago, the factory was under the control of Labour Party Pakistan local leadership. They were thrown out of the factory and there was none of LPP activists inside. However, the new union was working under the close relationship of Local LPP leadership. Today after the occupation, the LPP leadership in Sind gave a full support to the union action.

It seemed that the mill administration will register a case against the workers leaders and there will be more trouble tomorrow.

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