

# Bulletin

English Edition

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## Pakistan's workers unite amidst unprecedented economic crisis

Pakistan is currently grappling with an unprecedented crisis that encompasses its economy, society, and politics. This crisis, which is the most severe in the nation's 76-year history, has pushed the country to the brink of default. The repercussions are evident as inflation has soared to a staggering 47%, and the Pakistani rupee has depreciated by over 150% against the US dollar in the past five years. Widespread industry closures have also resulted in millions of workers losing their jobs. In response to the crisis, the burden has

been unfairly shifted onto the shoulders of the working class, with the government following the instructions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Citizens are now faced with a multitude of indirect taxes, reduced public subsidies, and decreased government expenditure on essential public utilities. Furthermore, a significant portion of the public sector has been privatized, leading to massive job losses due to downsizing.

Surprisingly, mainstream political parties, the military, and the judiciary have united behind these actions despite their internal



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## Textile industry crisis in Pakistan

### Exploitation, Layoffs, and the Need for Unions to Protect Workers' Rights

The textile industry in Pakistan is currently facing multiple crises, resulting in the closure of many companies and leaving millions of workers unemployed. Approximately 7 million workers have lost their jobs in this sector, affecting 7 million families who rely on a single income.



With an inflation rate of 35 to 40%, the situation is worsening. Unfortunately, most of the affected workers are women, who already face exploitation and sexual harassment. The primary reason for the factory closures is the flood that occurred last year, destroying cotton crops and forcing companies to import cotton at higher costs. Additionally, the

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## Street theatre "Machine" sheds light on exploitation and the need for organised struggle

Progressive Youth Alliance (PYA) of Pakistan recently organized an impactful open street theatre performance of the play "Machine" in the industrial area of Gajju-Matta, near Lahore. The play, originally written by Safdar Hashmi, a courageous worker who met a tragic end, sheds light on the plight of workers within companies and emphasizes the necessity of collective struggle against various forms of oppression from their employers. The street theatre event served as a platform to convey the struggles faced by workers in their workplaces, includ-

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## Economic crisis .... Continued

conflicts. Amidst these dire conditions, the workers of Pakistan celebrated May Day 2023. Throughout the country, protests, rallies, and seminars were organized in 21 cities, including Karachi, Hyderabad, Quetta, Multan, Lahore, Faisalabad, Peshawar, and even remote areas like Gilgit, Kashmir, and war-torn Waziristan. Both public and private sector workers actively participated, with the largest turnout observed in Karachi's Landhi Korangi industrial areas. The May Day events primarily focused on pressing demands, including wage increases in line with the soaring inflation rate, a ban on privatization and downsizing, job security, and unrestricted freedom for trade union activities. The possibility of a national general strike was also discussed, along with conversations

about the international labor movement and the economic, social, and political aspects of a socialist alternative. Preparations for May Day were extensive and aimed at mobilizing workers across the country. This included the distribution of 5,000 posters in public sector enterprises and industrial areas nationwide, organizing study circles and meetings with workers, and launching a robust social media campaign featuring regular labor reports and short documentary films. One noteworthy event was a street theater performance in Lahore, which effectively criticized the current economic system for perpetuating inequality and garnered a positive response from workers. As the crisis in Pakistan deepens, the struggles of the working class have become more pronounced. The

events focused on demands for wage increases in line with inflation, a ban on privatization and downsizing, lifelong employment, and full freedom for trade union activities. The possibility of a national general strike was raised, along with discussions on the international labor movement and the economic, social, and political aspects of a socialist alternative. Preparations for May Day included the distribution of 5,000 posters in public sector enterprises and industrial areas nationwide, study circles and meetings with workers, and a robust social media campaign featuring regular labor reports and short documentary films. In Lahore, a street theater performance criticising the current economic system creating inequalities, was particularly well-received by workers.

## Street play.... Continued

ing exploitation, health and safety concerns, low wages, bullying, and harassment. Through powerful performances by talented actors, the play vividly depicted the harsh reality confronted by workers daily. Towards the climax, the play delivered a resounding message of victory achieved solely through unity and collective organization. It highlighted the fact that workers can overcome exploitation and secure their rights only by joining forces and fighting against all forms of oppression. In Pakistan, trade unions have faced a ban for an extended period, and even after the ban was lifted, the government has been hesitant to register workplace trade unions. Consequently, workers are left vulnerable to attacks by management, resulting in deteriorating living and work-

ing conditions. The play "Machine" proved to be an inspiration for the workers who attended the performance, as it instilled in them a sense of solidarity and



the importance of organizing within their workplaces. Given the current circumstances faced by workers in Pakistan, the only viable solution lies in collective ac-

tion, forming strong organizations that can effectively advocate for their demands and put an end to all forms of exploitation prevalent in workplaces.

Performing arts, such as this open-air play, play a crucial role in raising the consciousness and fortitude of workers. By providing a creative medium to explore and address workers' issues, the play effectively engages audiences and encourages them to take action. The Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity (PTUS) stands in full support of PYA's open-air play and vows to continue extending assistance in every possible way. Recognizing the profound impact of performing arts on the working class, PTUS acknowledges the significance of initiatives like these empowerment workers to fight for their rights.

## Textile industry.... Continued

government's mismanagement of the economy has led to the devaluation of the rupee and increased import bills. To address the crisis, the government has imposed bans on imports, further damaging the textile industry's infrastructure and machinery. The global economic crisis has also reduced the de-

mand for textile products as consumers have less disposable income. Factory owners blame the lack of access to affordable raw materials, infrastructure, and machinery. However, they have received subsidies for decades to improve their operations, which were often misused for non-productive investments or passed on to buyers by reducing prices. The burden of the crisis

falls on the workers, with mass layoffs and delayed salaries. Meanwhile, factory owners continue to accumulate wealth. In Faisalabad, a worker disclosed earning a monthly salary of 16,000 Pakistani rupees (\$57). Legitimate trade unions are absent, and any attempts to organize result in immediate termination. Instead, "yellow associations" sponsored by bosses exist on

paper to fulfil international compliance requirements. These "yellow unions" suppress workers' demands and in cohort with bosses, victimise workers those who try to organise in workplaces. Women face the worst exploitation, denied fair pay and a safe work environment. Filing complaints often lead to immediate dismissal. No political party or authority supports workers' rights in Pakistan. Workers struggle with low salaries, union restrictions, and the fear of job loss. They need better organisation and leadership. Unions are crucial, especially in the textile sector, to pro-

tect workers' rights. The Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity Campaign (PTUS) supports textile workers in their fight for better wages, safety, redundancies and women's oppression. International workers' organisations and unions are urged to support Pakistani textile workers. PTUS will help establish unions and workplace organisations to defend workers' rights against management attacks.



## Healthcare workers protest in Tharparker

Tharparker, Pakistan - Healthcare workers, including midwives, have been engaged in a resolute protest outside the Department of Health for the past three months. Their demonstrations are driven by three key demands: the conversion of short-term contractual positions into permanent ones, the release of withheld salaries, and the restoration of risk allowances. Unfortunately, the management has responded to these peaceful protests with heavy-handed tactics aimed at silencing the voices of the employees. Reports have surfaced of threats of redundancies and other forms of intimidation, further escalating the already tense situation. The healthcare workers'

plight is exacerbated by the country's staggering inflation rate, which has reached an alarming 50%. Consequently, these dedicated professionals find it increasingly difficult to sustain their daily lives. Many endure sleepless nights due to hunger, while others struggle to meet their children's tuition fees, rent, and utility bills. What compounds the issue is that while health workers face dire cir-

cumstances, higher management continues to enjoy numerous privileges, including hefty salaries and bonuses. This stark disparity has left the health workers with no option but to resort to strike action in a bid to secure their basic rights and

firmly believe that this is a shared struggle that resonates with healthcare professionals across the globe. It is crucial for us to unite in support of the health workers in Tharparker and ensure they receive the rights they deserve. PTUS

has pledged to convey the message of solidarity from the health workers' struggle to the international workers and trade union movement. Through this, we aim to garner support and secure the rights that health workers in Pakistan have long been deprived of. In the face of daunting challenges, the midwives and other health workers in Tharparker continue their fight for justice, their voices re-



improve their working conditions. Amidst these struggles, the Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity (PTUS) campaign has thrown its weight behind the health workers' cause and their demands. Recognizing the universal nature of the challenges faced by healthcare workers worldwide, PTUS calls for strong international solidarity to bolster the efforts of the health workers in Tharparker. We

verberating through the streets. It is now incumbent upon the international community to stand in solidarity with them and ensure that their dedicated service to the community is met with the dignity and fairness they rightfully deserve. Amidst these struggles, the Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity (PTUS) campaign has lent its support to the health workers' cause and their demands.

## Master Tiles Gujranwala: Bosses refused to pay 5 months wages – workers striking

The Master Group of Industries in Pakistan is a prime example of the exploitative nature of bosses. These billionaires are making billions of rupees from their businesses while their workers are struggling to make ends meet. One of their businesses is the Master Tiles Factory, where workers have been denied their wages for the last five months. This is happening when the current inflation rate in Pakistan is at its highest since 1974, reaching around 31%. The workers of the ceramic factories have been protesting for days, demanding their rightful wages. However, the bosses and executives of the Master Group have turned a deaf ear to their demands. Instead of paying their workers, they have resorted to brutal tactics to end the strike, including calling the police to harass striking workers. The workers are chanting slogans against the corrupt management of the Master Group, who have spent billions on lavish events like their son's wedding while denying their workers their basic rights. The bosses and management have tried to deceive the workers by offering them only a month's salary instead of the several months they are owed, citing a slowdown in business activity. The workers have refused to be

fooled by their bosses' lies and have gone back to striking. The Commissioner, who is the Head of Gujranwala District Administration, has tried to intervene and force the workers to end the strike by offering them a mere Rs10,000 (\$35), which is just 40% of one month's salary on a minimum wage. This is an insult to the workers who have been denied their wages for the last five months. It has been several days since the Commissioner's promise, and the workers have still not received the Rs10,000(\$35) they were promised. This shows that the

bosses and executives of the Master Group have no intention of paying their workers what they are owed. The workers are not backing down, and they plan to continue their struggle after the Eid festive season holidays until their demands are met. It is time for workers to unite against the exploitative nature of bosses like the Master Group. PTUS stands in complete solidarity with the Master Group workers and will raise the voice of their struggle to international workers for solidarity.



### Support Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity Campaign

Please provide your details and support.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Trade union / organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Suggested contributions

National Trade Union:	UK £500	USA \$1,000
Regional Bodies:	UK £250	USA \$500
Branches:	UK £100	USA \$200
Individual Waged:	UK £10	USA \$20
Individual Unwaged:	UK £5	USA \$10

#### Campaign Account

Account Name: Pakistan Trade Union Solidarity  
Account No: 77669468 ; Sort Code: 30-64-42  
IBAN: GB52LOYD30644277669468; BIC: LOYDGB21670

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