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Pakistan

Brick kiln workers strike for higher wages, against bonded labour

- News from around the world -

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Hundreds of ultra-exploited brick kiln workers are on strike in the Neshro Feroz district of Sindh province - for better wages, and against the bonded labour servitude- near slavery - which many brick kiln workers suffer. The workers of the brick factories (Bhattas) started the strike on 31 March. They workers set up a strike camp which was visited by hundreds of workers every day. On the promise of the district administration for negotiations with the bosses, the camp was removed on 8th April. On the promise of the district administration for negotiations with the bosses, the camp was removed on 8th April.

On 11th April, the Bhatta bosses did not turn up for a scheduled meeting with the strikers' union leaders. The meeting was organized by the district administration and it was the second time that the bosses failed to show up. They are stalling for time, hoping to starve the workers into submission.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/bhatta2-2.jpg>]

Addressing a press conference on 11th April at Moro press Club, Younas Rahu, national president of the kiln workers union, threatened to go on hunger strike until death alongside hundreds of workers.

In the meantime, the bosses have used police to harass the main leaders of the union. On 7th April, a false police case was registered against Younas Rahu, Shabir Sagar and five others. The allegations were that they had injured some college students, which is a completely trumped-up charge. There was a dispute at the college but Younas and the union had nothing to do with that.

Police raided houses of Younas and Shabir on 8th April but both escaped the arrest. A national campaign was immediately started to put pressure on the local police chief. Hundreds of SMS and telephone calls were made to District Police Officer's (DPO) mobile number. The DPO promised not to take any action against the union leaders.

Harassment stopped in the afternoon after this immediate pressure put up by Labour Party Pakistan supporters and union leaders across Pakistan.

The Bhatta workers are demanding an end of bonded labour and better wages. Over 10,000 workers are taking part in this first strike in the district. The strike is limited to one district only but it is already making news across the whole province.

Earlier on 31st March 2007, hundreds of Bhatta workers marched out of their factories to join a rally at the main road of district Neshro Feroz. The main road was blocked for over two hours by this rally. This was the beginning of the first strike in the district. Addressing the rally, Younas said that "we can not live on a hundred rupees a day (\$1.80) while the bosses earn hundred time more. We demand at least Rupees 350 for making 1000 bricks and not 110 to 190, the rate that is given at present." He said that we are totally against bonded labour and we want no more slave labour at the Bhattas.

Please help the union to win the fight - send messages of protest to:

District Coordination Officer (DCO) Neshro Feroz

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Mr. Nazar Mohammed Kalhoro

Fax: 00 92 242448881

Send an sms also to 00 92 3002515475

Please send a copy to the union email address : bhattunion@yahoo.com