

Bulletin

English Edition

Volume No. 3 Issue No. 2, 2019

Privatisation of healthcare in Pakistan **Workers organised and braced for retaliation**

In May 2019, all affiliated organisations of Health workers formed a Grand Health Alliance (GHA) and conducted its first general meeting in Lahore. The organisations in the alliance include Punjab Young Doctors Association, Grade 4 Para Medical Association, Health Professional Alliance, Young Nurses Association, Health Support Staff Association and many more. The alliance was in response to government's MTI Act that is related to organisational change in hospitals and healthcare centres in the whole country. Ac-

cording to the law, hospitals and healthcare centres all across Pakistan are handed over to private profiteer-

ing individuals who will control them through a board. Hospitals are made into profit-making entities ra-

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Increasing workplace deaths **Electricity companies ignoring the scale**



In the last two weeks of July 2019, about five incidents happened in electricity companies in which workers were dead. Despite all verbal promises by government authorities and electricity company administrative heads, the lives of workers are still in danger. The deadly incident happened in electricity companies that are handed over to the private sector, and they badly failed in securing safe workplaces for

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Factory closures and unemployment crisis in Pakistan

Each day, the economic crisis in Pakistan is becoming severe, and it is impacting every industrial sector and households. The decline in general economic condition is accelerated by an increase in foreign loans by the government, increasing current account deficit and continuous decline in value of the currency. The clouds of hyperinflation have devastated the vast majority of the population, making them unable to purchase items

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Healthcare Continued

ther than public service organisations. Private contractors and companies are allowed to leach into the healthcare system through different mini and micro and mega contracts within hospitals. All hospital employees are to be transferred from the status of public sector employee to the hospital company employee status, losing the status of their permanent job and getting a short fixed-term contract subject to renewal at the whim of the bosses. The MTI Act is already implemented in KPK province in Pakistan, and there is a huge movement of doctors already underway. There is a massive resistance against this MTI

Act and all over the country. Fearing the resistance, senior government healthcare officials in cohort with private companies are using all tactics to create divisions within the healthcare workers. The main slogan in the first meeting of the GHA was an overall blanket rejection of the MTI Act. Furthermore, all participants unanimously decided to reject the privatisation of the healthcare system. Two days after the general meeting, the local bodies of GHA in all hospitals organise general workplace meetings and ratified the decisions of the central GHA leadership, which was primarily based on the

rejection of MTI Act and against privatisation of hospitals. It is very important that the militant struggle of Young Doctors Association should be revived and a proactive collaboration should be made with all workers in different organisations in the country including other public sector workers, school teachers and professors, administrative staff associations, railway workers, PIA workers, electricity workers and others. Furthermore, the struggle should be connected with international healthcare workers, as they are also facing immense challenges due to the healthcare privatisations going on around the world.

Factory closures Continued

to maintain a decent living. The population is constantly being pushed into destitution, and there is a constant fight going on against this menace. Despite all these problems, the wealth of the rich is increasing at a double-digit rate every year. The super-rich in Pakistan is enjoying the best of lifestyle, unimaginable by anybody in the world. You will see huge mansions, the most expensive cars, ownerships of buildings and posh flats in London, Dubai and New York owned by these Pakistani rich people. The overreliance of the government on IMF loans is considered important by all politicians and government functionaries. Evidence suggests that all these loans end into the pocket of the rich. Ordinary people of Pakistan are left to pay back these loans on very strict conditions. Conditions such as austerity in public services, privatisation of public ser-

vices, ending government subsidies on gas and electricity etc. The economic crisis has affected the industrial sector to the worse. The industrial growth is continuously on the decline. Thousands of industrial units are closing down triggering massive unemployment. Pakistani government and business owners are incapable of addressing these challenges to ensure employment generation and maintain living standards. The Chinese CPEC project, once considered as a golden opportunity for Pakistan, has now become a social, economic and environmental challenge. The heavy inflow of cheap product manufactured in slavery-ridden factories in China is being dumped in Pakistani markets. This is closing down local manufacturing as they are unable to compete with maintaining decent working conditions. Hence there is a continuous pressure to drive down the general living of the people to the point

of extinction. There is no solution by any economists and experts who are advising the government on matters of the industry. All intellectuals and media experts keep on criticising government policies but offer no solutions to the crisis. Pakistani workers are feeling the heat with their lives and families suffering from the crisis. All hopes from the government and all politicians are lost hence the general contempt against the status quo. Mainstream politicians are fighting with each other on issues that have zero relevance on improving living and working conditions of workers. The only way forward for workers is to organise themselves and defend their rights inside and outside of the workplaces. Workers once organised would never be defeated. International workers are facing the same challenges as Pakistani workers with varied level of intensities. Therefore, strong solidarity is the need of time.

Workplace deaths Continued

their workers. The working condition of workers working on high-voltage lines and distributions is miserable. They are working in an extremely high-temperature environment, and the equipment they are provided is obsolete and dangerous to the extent

that it is unable to shield them from high-voltage shocks. Apart from this, there is a massive understaffing leading to overwork and mental stress. There is a general environment of bullying and harassment in these electricity companies. Bosses are hell-bent on increasing profits at the expense of working and living condi-

tions of their employees. No new proper equipment is purchased, instead of old, rusted and damaged equipment are repaired continuously. There are no purpose-built vehicles to transport workers to correct different line problems. Electricity workers are often seen carrying a heavy load of equipment along with stairs

upon their head on a simple motorcycle. Work pressure is so high that often supervisors and bosses deliberately force workers to forgo safety measures. So far, the trade unions active in electricity companies are rendered toothless by stringent laws and regulations placed upon their activities barring them from addressing any problem in a collective manner. The blame of every death of electricity worker is placed upon colleagues giving the impression that colleagues are incompetent enough in taking care of their peers. This

practice is going on for years and years by the company bosses to divide the workers by putting the blame on deadly incidents on to each other, rather than questioning the general unsafe environment and the responsibility of bosses. Bosses usually consort to health and safety training and seminars immediately after a disaster. Trade unions organise a mini protest outside the workplace for an hour or two. These are often the standard operating procedures after an on-duty worker is killed by an unsafe workplace. How-

ever, these actions had never able to stop deadly incidents. A whole structural change is required and a general approach that includes making workers safety at workplaces more important than any other concern of the organisation. This can only be achieved by strengthening workers organisations and listening and acting to workers demands, which they often place time after time to ensure a safe working environment within the electricity company.

Kashmir Continued

demands were met by the government. However, the revision of teaching grades is still pending. Other demonstrations include the contract employees of the Police Department. The contractual, technical staff of the Provincial Works Department PWD also called for a strike recently. The strike that started when the President of technical staff association of the PWD was victimised and fired from his job, it is still

ongoing. Most of the employees of PWD are working from 6000 PKR - 8000 PKR (30 GBP - 40 GBP) per month, and for the last 10 months, about 1200 employees haven't been paid their salaries. The clerics association is also on strike demanding pay rise in line with the rising inflation. The national government, as well as the government of Kashmir, is turning a deaf ear upon the demands of workers. Workers are realising that the only way forward is

to join all the worker's struggles going on in different organisations and public sector bodies together in the form of a unified struggle for their rights from the government. The formation of Employees Joint Action Committee (Mulazmeen Ittehaad Action Committee) is great news for workers of Kashmir, which is an initial step for workers to raise their demands.

Punjab Engineers won their rights through immense struggle

All engineers working in Punjab province public sector organisations initiated a province -wise campaign to demand technical allowance in April 2019. They staged a massive protest in front of Punjab Secretariat and Punjab Assembly building. The participants were undeterred by all threats of the government and police and continued their struggle. There are many ups and downs in the struggle, but engineers were committed that unless and until their demands are not met, they want to move back. In the end, their heroic struggle was successful and the government that their demands. This is an exemplary movement in which engineers not only struggled by themselves but also reached out to the workers and employees of other organisations who joined engineers rallies and protests to show solidarity. It is important to draw correct lessons from engineers struggle. Several senior engineers are saying that their demands are met

because of some kind-hearted politicians and government officials realised their mistake and made concessions. However, this is totally wrong. Engineers on their rights due to the immense struggle. If there are enough kind-hearted people in the government, why they had not acted years before when the same demands were placed before them, furthermore, similar demands are being made by workers in all public sector organisations and departments, but still, they

are totally ignored. Punjab engineers got motivated by KPK province engineers who did a similar struggle and won their rights several months before. There is a general understanding among public sector engineers in Punjab that only undeterred struggle and solidarity with the struggling workers of other organisations, one can win. This is against the narrative that concessions are possible due to someone sitting at the top.



Reports

Mining disasters in Baluchistan

In July 2019, 11 miners who were stuck during a disaster in a coal mine located in the region of Degari Baluchistan, nine of them were announced dead, and two were in a serious condition. Three of the miners who were rescued earlier, among them, only two survived. Poisonous gas filled the mining chamber that led to the disaster. A gross violation of health and safety regulations in the mining sector in Baluchistan is the norm. Mine contractors, in collaboration with the provincial government through corruption, depart from basic health and safety measures that are important to avoid such disasters. Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation PMDC a semi-government authority responsible for overseeing, administering and managing all mining operations in Pakistan. PMDC board comprises of people from the private sector whose basic aim is profit rather than workers safety.

There are embroiled in massive corrupt practices with mine contractors. In the event of the Degari Baluchistan incident, workers were stuck in the mine, and no significant efforts were made by the PMDC and local authorities to pull them out for many hours. It is important to note that on January 2019, a similar incident happened whereby poisonous gas was filled in a chamber in the mine in which two miners lost their lives, and 3 were critically unconscious. In the same month, a blast occurred in a mine in Chalmank Baluchistan killing 4 miners and critically injuring one. In 2018 a blast in Marwar Baluchistan killed 4 miners. The miners are furious about the rising incidence of mine disasters in Baluchistan and are trying to organise to demand better health and safety measures in mines and compensations for the families of miners killed and injured in disasters.



According to the sources, between 100 and 200 miners die on an average in coal mine accidents every year in the whole country. Miners in Baluchistan are seeking international support and solidarity from international workers in mines and other related sectors to support them so that they can ensure better health and safety at workplaces from the provincial government, Provincial Disaster Management Authority and the PMDC.

Rising worker movements in Kashmir

Due to the global economic crisis started a decade back, the situation of Kashmir has become extremely bad for its workers. Massive inflation is affecting all households. The national and the regional government is imposing massive austerity on all public services. In recent days, a

massive youth and workers movement in Kashmir was observed. Workers in every department and public sector organisation are going on strike, day after day, raising slogans of their demands. Recently para-medical staffs, doctors and nurses went on strike and organised several ral-

lies across the region. Lady health visitors are also campaigning through organising rallies against contractual employment. Teachers in Kashmir also initiated a region-wide strike and boycotted classes on pay and working conditions. Few of the teacher's

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Branches:	UK £100	USA \$200
Individual Waged:	UK £10	USA \$20
Individual Unwaged:	UK £5	USA \$10

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Account No: 77669468 ; Sort Code: 30-64-42
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