



Pakistan: Factory collapses near Lahore ? 51 workers killed

Martin Suchanek Tue, 24/11/2015 - 09:01

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Capitalism kills, in the literal sense of the word. On November 5, a factory in Sunder Estate near Lahore collapsed, leaving at least 51 dead and more than 100 injured.

The media and the government in Pakistan seek to lay the blame for the tragedy on the earthquake in late October but, whilst that may have been the trigger, there are more fundamental, social reasons behind this human catastrophe.

Safety

For a long time before the building collapsed, workers had complained about the lack of inspection and safety, pointing to the weak construction of the building. The owner not only ignored these complaints and added a third floor but a fourth was under construction at the time of the disaster. It is still unclear whether the owner himself died or is now in hiding.

In any case, this is only one example of the neglect of safety in factories and construction sites by the capitalists of the country. What happened in Sunder Estate is only the latest example of workers being killed as a result of structural failures, fires and neglect of basic safety standards.

There are 450 other factories in the same district. In most, there are no trade unions and so the workers are virtually powerless. In the few cases where unions do exist, they are often effectively controlled by the factory owners.

In the last four years, in Lahore alone, workers have died because of fires and boiler explosions. Only a few days after the collapse in the Sunder Estate, another five workers were killed in Lahore in another 'accident?'. Some months ago, 28 workers were killed in Gujranwala and three years ago several hundred were killed in Karachi.

This time, however, the blatant disregard of safety regulations sparked demonstrations protesting against the purely cosmetic character of 'inspections?' and the failure to enforce even existing safety standards, not only in Lahore but also in other cities.

The key demands were:

- * Inspection of factories with (real) trade union involvement, safety measures need to be implemented with the consent of workers. Normally, the state and bosses agree on what is 'safe?' and the workers have no say, let alone any right to determine what is and what is not 'safe?'.
* Compensation for workers' families. Some demonstrations demanded that there should be compensation to the families of the dead workers of €25,000.

The supporters of the League for the Fifth International in Pakistan, around the monthly paper 'Revolutionary Socialist?', participated in the demonstrations, as did members of the Awami Workers' Party and the International Marxist Tendency.

Very importantly, workers from the state-owned electricity generating company, WAPDA, staging a one-day strike and

demonstrations in each of major cities against the proposed privatisation of their industry, called for solidarity and compensation for the killed workers when news reached them of the tragedy. In Lahore alone, 5000 WAPDA workers participated in these actions.

Our comrades took part in a number of demonstrations and actions and visited the area and met with workers' families. In a statement distributed as a leaflet, we demanded:

- * compensation for dead workers' families
 - * trade union inspection of factories
 - * workers' committees in industrial areas and factories to decide on safety
 - * the expropriation without compensation of owners who refuse to implement safety regulations
 - * nationalisation of such enterprises under the control of workers' committees.
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