

The following is a very short and somewhat scrappy report about the labour movement and trade union activities in Eastern Pakistan, especially.

As martial law was imposed on Pakistan and the constitution of the country scrapped in October 1958, trade union activities were declared illegal. The first victims were 15 workers of the Spinning department of Dhakeswari Cotton Mills No. I of Narayanganj who were jailed for 3 months by the Martial Law Court as they stopped work for some hours when the mill authorities did not fulfill their promise of giving Puja Bonus to their workers, which they had been giving regularly for the last few years. These workers were also dismissed by the Mill authorities. After this, about a dozen workers of Adamjee Jute Mills, Narayanganj, were convicted for various long terms of imprisonment, one for six years, and also flogging, as they struck work when the mill authorities failed to keep their repeated promises that staggering weekly holiday system continuing there for some months would be stopped and all workers would enjoy holiday on the same day.

Since this strike in the Adamjee Jute Mills in the later part of 1958, a permanent military camp has been established in the mill area with a platoon of soldiers under a Colonel. There are also a police camp and an office of the Intelligence Branch there. The military Colonel advised by the police and I. B. people manages the labour of the Adamjee Jute Mills directly and labour of other mills (Dhakeswari Cotton etc.) and factories in the area in an indirect way.

Such is the condition of Labour under Martial Law administration in the Narayanganj-Dacca Mill area. The condition in Chittagong and Khulna, two other important labour areas of East Pakistan, is no better though there are no direct military management in those areas. The Colonel's management in the Adamjees at Narayanganj is the ideal for all civil administrators and the police in tackling labour in every factory and mill of the province.

Of late, the Martial Law authorities have fixed minimum wages (including D. A.) for jute and cotton textile workers, the minimum being Rs.53/- respectively. How much below the subsistence level these minimums are may be imagined from the fact that since the Martial Law rule, at different times of the year rice sells between Rs.25/- and Rs.40/- a maund in East Pakistan and an ordinary coarse cotton saree between Rs.10/- and Rs.12/- and an ordinary lungi between Rs.5/- and Rs.6/-. None of the persons employed by the Government at different times to recommend on minimum wages considered anything below Rs.100/- a month as the minimum subsistence level.

After the conviction of the Adamjee workers to long terms of imprisonment and flogging for participation in a strike, there was some sort of advice by the ICFU people to the Government and they withdrew their previous order declaring all T.U. activities and strikes illegal. But this withdrawal was not genuine. The East Pakistan Mazdur Federation, the only genuine and democratic T.U. organisation in East Pakistan, remains banned and its office sealed, its leaders are yet in jail or have to avoid arrest, all meetings (including mass T. U. meetings) and demonstrations are prohibited throughout the country and besides the Adamjee Jute Mills where the Commander of the Military camp has started a "Workers' Union" under

under him and when no trade union worker of any sort is allowed to enter, in other mills and factories only people connected with Messrs. Aftab Ali and Faiz Ahmed of East Pakistan Federation of Labour (connected with ICF TU) generally hated and discarded by the ~~the~~ labourers, are allowed to form unions if they can. These E.P.F. of L people have no day to day activities and the Govt~~x~~ too do not allow such activities as workers' gate meetings etc. Only Messrs. Aftab Ali, Faiz Ahmed and few other such people are permitted to address workers from time to time. The situation can be appreciated from a single example. After the last severe cyclone in Noakhali and Chittagong at the end of 1960, the workers of Isphahani Jute Mills in Chittagong (most of whom belong to Chittagong and Noakhali) moved for relief from the company and the government under the leadership of their union which had been formerly affiliated with the Majdur Federation (now banned). Naturally at that critical time when most of the workers had no hearths and homes and many had lost their relations, the union organised some gate-meetings of the workers which provoked the Martial Law authorities. Shooting and arrest of workers and their leaders followed. Two workers died, many were injured, nearly 60 workers including the President of the Union were arrested, warrants of arrest were issued for the arrest of all the office-bearers of the Union, not to speak of functioning properly the union is not permitted even to collect workers' subscription and periodical searches of workers' houses and police beatings go on in the name of looking for absconding workers. Under the circumstances there is practically no genuine and democratic workers' trade union in East Pakistan at present and no functioning trade union at all. There is a Union of Railway workers led by Mr. Mahubul Huq, but its activities now are confined in its Head Office at Chittagong and these too in the meetings of the Executive Committee only. Employees of some banks and mercantile offices have their unions at Dacca and Chittagong, but since Martial Law they do not even hold their Executive Committee meetings regularly.

Soon after the M.L. was declared, all the leading democratic T.U. workers were put under arrest if available, or warrents of arrest were issued against them. Moulana A. H. K. Bhasani, President of East Pakistan Railwaymen's Federation is still in jail. So also are Messrs. Roshan Ali Sheik, Mani Chowdhury, Abdus Samad, Md. Mansur, Sunil Roy and many other prominent leaders and workers of Majdur Federation and Railwaymen's Federation. Warrants of arrest are pending for last 2½ years against Mr. Md. Toaha, President of East Pakistan Majdur Federation, Mr. Harun-ur Rashid, a Vice-President of the Majdur Federation and a host of other ~~workers~~ T.U. workers. All the movable and immovable properties of Mr. Toaha and Mr. Abdus Samad, both of whom were members of East Pakistan Legislature, were seized and auctioned by the Government. Their families including the families of all those T.U. leaders and workers who are in jail for long ~~an~~ and also those who have to avoid arrest to continue their activities as best as they can under the circumstances, are on the verge of starvation. Properties of almost all the unions affiliated to the Majdur Federation were forfeited.

The Martial Law government has not only prohibited all T.U. and democratic activities in the country and made rules under which one can be sentenced for 14 years in jail and flogged to 30 stripes for any activity which the Martial Law authorities may consider detrimental to the interest of the country and harming the Martial Law government in any way ~~xxxx~~ (There are no specification and explanation of these offences in any code of law, the martial law courts are to decide on what the Martial Law prosecutor complains), there are serious reports of torture on T.U. workers

in jail. Not only are they beaten and tortured in other ways in the ~~pr~~ police lock-up after arrest, of late many prisoners both detenus confine in jail without any trial and convicted ones, were taken out of jail, some of them more than once, to Provincial Police Hq. at Lalbag, Dacca for a week or so and beaten mercilessly and not allowed ~~to~~ to sleep for days together.

So far as we know, the situation is almost the same in Karachi. Nearly 6 months ago, more than a dozen TU workers there mostly working in the Cotton Mills and P/A have been arrested. There are reports of very serious torture on the popular President of P/A Employees' Union, Mr. Toffail Ahmed and its General Secretary Mr. Alvi. Due to this torture an arm and some fingers of Mr. Toffail Ahmed got fractured.

In spite of such repression and torture, democratic T.U. workers who are outside jail are trying to keep contact with the workers in all the working class areas and even trying to establish new contact in the factories in which they had none before. The task is very hard, especially so as they have got no experiences of TU activities under such illegal and severe conditions when practically no T.U. activity is tolerated by the Government. It is quite natural that they seek fraternal help and advice from the experienced working classes and T.U. organisations of other countries.

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