



Support the three socialist candidates

- Against imperialism!
- Against fundamentalism!
- For a socialist revolution!

Pakistan elections 2008

www.ptudc.org

Elections in Pakistan 2008

AFTER MANY HESITATIONS and delays, not least because of the brutal assassination of Benazir Bhutto and hundreds of her supporters, the Pakistani parliamentary elections are scheduled to go ahead on 18 February. In the following interview Lal Khan, editor of the Marxist paper *The Struggle*, explains the present situation in Pakistan. These elections are different to any other ever held in Pakistan. Here, we present three candidates who are sponsored by the *Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign* and are standing on a clear socialist program. They are standing in three of the most diverse areas of Pakistan – from the proletarian heartland of Karachi to the tribal areas of Waziristan – but their struggle for a vote against both Islamic fundamentalists and the stooges of imperialism has a widespread appeal.

This makes the election significant for workers, peasants and everybody in the whole world who is against poverty and oppression. Manzoor Ahmed, Ali Wazir, and Riaz Lund stand for a socialist federation of the South Asian subcontinent and world revolution.

If the elections are not rigged, these candidates will win. Poor people throughout Pakistan are enthusiastically raising funds for their campaigns. But they are facing some of the richest people in Pakistan. They need our help.

By credit or debit card

Donations by credit and debit card can be made courtesy of Wellred Books. Go to www.wellred.marxist.com and click on Donations and subscriptions.

By bank transfer

Account holder: *Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign*

Reference number: K3414742PAK

Account number: 0005 0005

Sort code: 09 00 00

Swift code: to be provided by your bank

Bank's Address: Abbey National Plc 2 Triton Square,
London NW1 3AN

United Kingdom

Direct donations

PTUDC, PO BOX 6977, London, N1 3JN, Britain

PTUDC, PO BOX 4244, St. Paul, MN 55104, USA

Contents

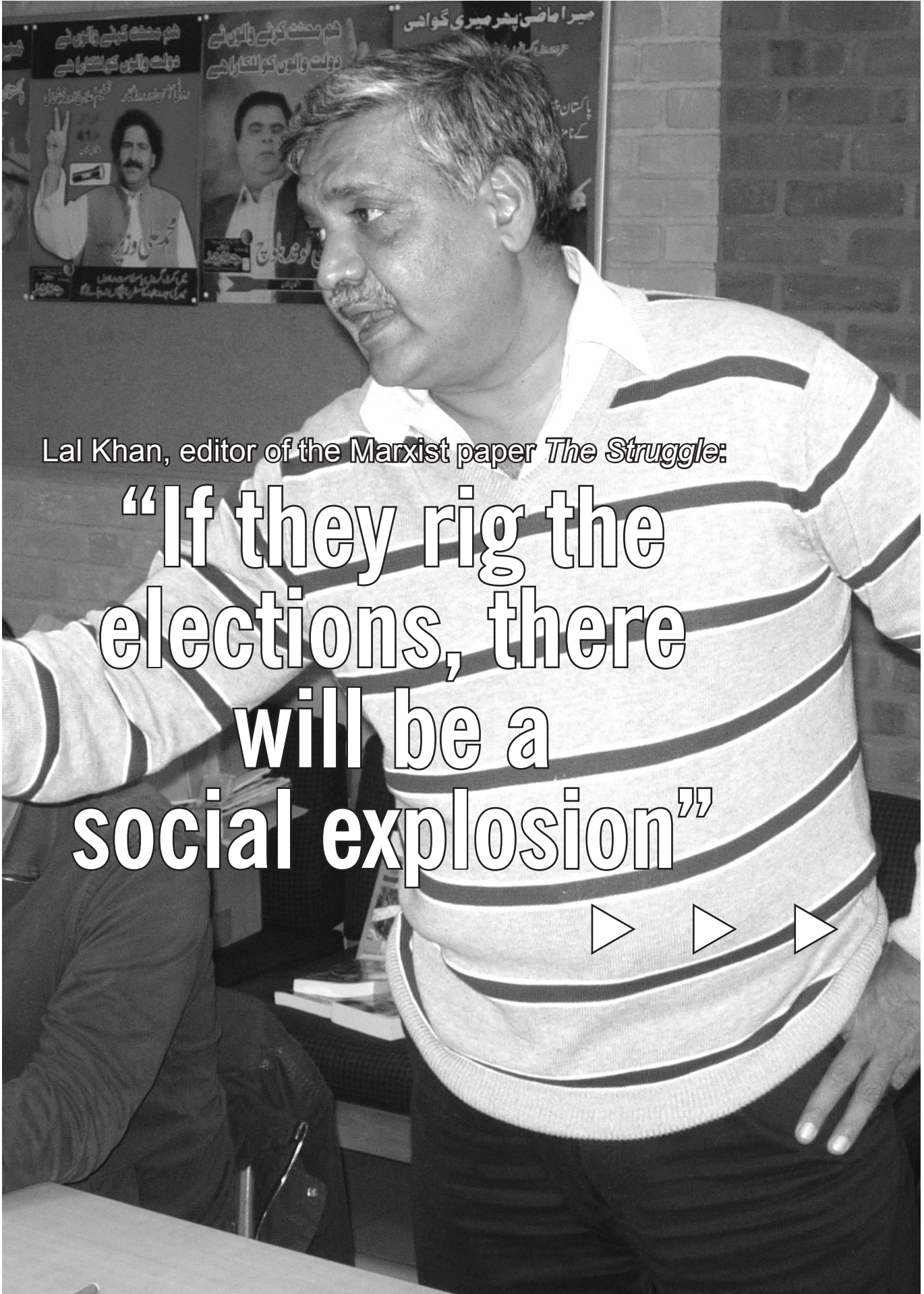
3. Lal Kahn, Interview

5. Candidate Manzoor Ahmed

6. Candidate Ali Wazir

7. Candidate Riaz Lund

8. The Pakistan Trade
Union Defence Campaign



Lal Khan, editor of the Marxist paper *The Struggle*:

“If they rig the elections, there will be a social explosion”



Interview with Lal Khan editor of the Marxist paper *The Struggle*

What is the situation in Pakistan after the brutal assassination of Benazir Bhutto?

Lal Khan: Even before the assassination of Benazir Bhutto the country was moving into disarray and chaos. The regime has lost its social base. The regime tries to impose itself but it is very weak. It is hanging in mid-air. All things are moving very rapidly. The economy is sliding down, not only from the point of view of living conditions. Pakistan is struggling with a soaring budget deficit, trade deficit, and current account deficit, so all indicators are flashing red. Things are going to deteriorate further in the aftermath of Benazir's killing.

There is enormous pressure on the regime to hold elections. The regime has not got a serious chance of winning the elections, but if they rig them there will be a social explosion. The masses have already shown they want to change society when they seized Pakistan for 48 hours after the assassination of Benazir. This shows the potential of the masses to go for the socialist transformation of society.

“There are between 10 and 15 comrades who will advance a left programme in these elections and possibly win them.”

*How did the Marxists of *The Struggle* intervene in the hours and days of the assassination of the leader of the Pakistan People's Party?*

Lal Khan: Immediately after the assassination we held a meeting of the comrades. We decided those responsible for the assassination should be brought to justice and punished. We produced a leaflet putting a clear programme forward explaining how this tragic end of Benazir could be avenged. Sections of the state and the policies of the regime lie behind the assassination. We basically tried to turn grief and sorrow into anger and strength, fighting against those responsible for the assassination and the system which has brought politics to such a state of brutality, murder, all sorts of crime and also terrorism, which have become the norm of Pakistan's politics.

Ever since then we have held protest rallies and demonstrations throughout Pakistan, from the main cities of Kashmir to Karachi, from Quetta to Lahore. The masses gave an enormous response to our leaflets.

What kind of demands did you formulate?

Lal Khan: Two days before her arrival in Karachi Benazir had sent a letter to Musharraf. She named different people from the state and the whole political spectrum who wanted to get rid of her. We demanded that those people be immediately arrested, prosecuted and punished for this heinous crime.

Secondly, we raised that revolutionary resistance and protest committees be formed in all factories, all the neighbourhoods and all the villages. The whole movement could be channelled and organised and given a direction through this.

Thirdly, we raised the demand that the PPP's founding programme of 1970 should be re-established as the fighting programme of this generation and for the people who are now

in the leadership of the party. We also added to this that the PPP demands immediate fair and free elections. Finally, we demanded that the PPP should come to power on a socialist programme.

*We understand that some of the candidates of the PPP are also leading figures of *The Struggle*. Can you give us some more information about them?*

Lal Khan: When Benazir came back the mobilisation of the masses gave her more confidence and strength. She was getting the feel of the masses and was getting more and more radical in her speeches and her programme. Now there are several left candidates contesting on the PPP ticket. There are between 10 and 15 comrades who will advance a left programme in these elections and possibly win them.

Have you faced problems with the repression of the state and the fascists?

Lal Khan: Immediately when we produced the leaflet the ISI personnel (Pakistan State Intelligence) came to our headquarters. They interrogated and harassed comrades, but they stood firm. In the election campaign in Karachi the thugs of the MQM, a fascist organisation set up by the former dictator Zia ul Haq, tried to kidnap one of our canvassers and physically assaulted the comrades. We protested against this. Due to the support of the unions in Karachi, in Pakistan and in the world we were able to defeat them.

What will happen on the day of the election?

Lal Khan: In Pakistan things are very unpredictable. Even one day is a very long time in Pakistani politics. Many things can happen, many events can take place. Sections of the state might carry out more bomb blasts, more terrorist activities to delay the elections because they are terrified of the elections.

If the PPP wins the elections Musharraf will have to resign and will leave the country. The masses will come out in huge numbers to vote the PPP into power. They hope the PPP will change their life of misery and extreme poverty, price hikes, disease, unemployment and illiteracy. This will put a lot of pressure on the PPP leadership. Probably the PPP will have a full majority. This will force them to come to power on the programme the masses are demanding. This will create a pre-revolutionary situation in Pakistan.

You advocate a socialist revolution in Pakistan, which is a backward, semi feudal, Islamic country. Do you think this is possible?

Lal Khan: If you look at the history of Pakistan, you have the 1968-69 revolution. That was a socialist revolution! People not only challenged the ruling regime but also property relations. When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto gave the party a socialist programme, this made the PPP the largest party in the history of Pakistan. In the founding documents of the party it is clearly written that the ultimate objective of the party is the attainment of a classless society. This programme meant that the party got more support and more votes in the Islamic republic of Pakistan than any Islamic party ever.

It is also very clearly written in the 1970 Manifesto and other founding documents that religion in Pakistan is not the issue when Muslims are exploiting other Muslims. Socialism was the leading political slogan and tendency in Pakistan in that period. Now it will redevelop with much more vigour and much more power.

Manzoor Ahmed

— MP who sparked hope

IN THE PAKISTANI GENERAL ELECTION of 2002, Comrade Manzoor Ahmed, standing in constituency NA-139, won one of the National Assembly seats for the district of Kasur. Kasur is a town ravaged by its many tanneries. Chemicals from the tanneries have seeped into the groundwater. Poor people who cannot afford bottled water suffer from all kinds of unusual diseases and deformities.

He confounded the expectations of all the political analysts of Pakistan, defeating three of the wealthiest people of Pakistan, despite them having spent billions of rupees in their election campaigns. The vote for fundamentalists was negligible. The basic reason for this victory was that Comrade Manzoor fought his campaign on a revolutionary class basis, vowing to wage an irreconcilable struggle till socialist revolution. Since his victory, Manzoor has worked tirelessly to use his parliamentary platform to fight for the interests of workers, peasants, and all other poor people. This has earned him a solid base for re-election in the upcoming election.

As a revolutionary socialist in a bourgeois parliament he came under enormous pressure from all sides. First the rulers tried to buy Comrade Manzoor by offering him a position as a minister. Then they offered him a huge sum of cash. But Manzoor stood firm. He continued to struggle inside and outside parliament for the rights of the working masses - against poverty, unemployment, price hikes, privatization and the exploitative capitalist system. He fought every battle with revolutionary honesty and courage.

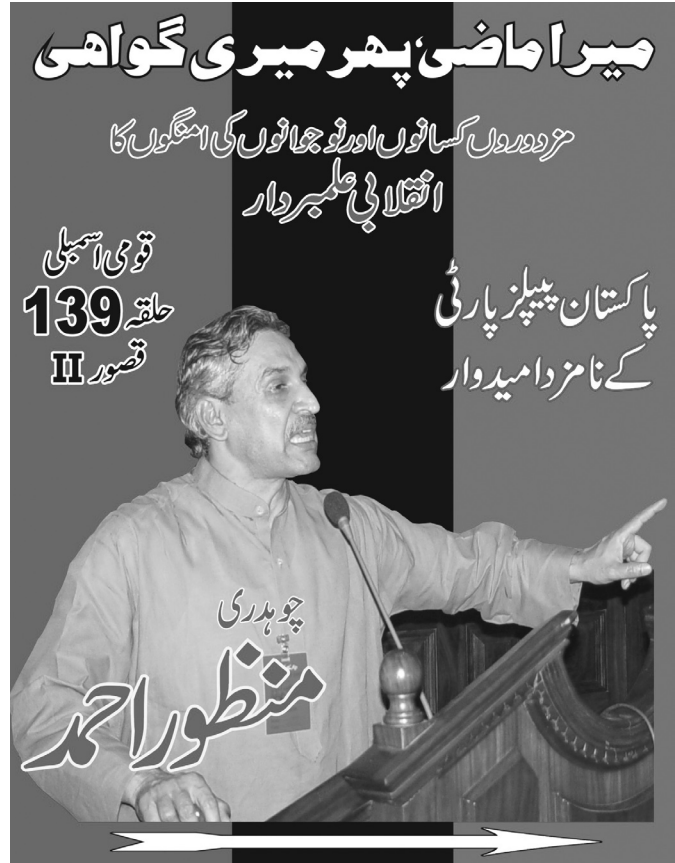
Workers and trade unionists in Pakistan and around the world know him as president of the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign and due to his tireless participation in workers' strikes and his role in organizing labour conferences in order to pull together and unite the fragmented trade union movement. He is also known because Hugo Chavez invited him to Venezuela and because of his efforts to bring the working people of India and Pakistan together.

After the dreadful 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, Manzoor Ahmed was the main organiser of five revolutionary caravans to set up relief camps with medical assistance where everything was destroyed and to encourage the Kashmiri people to take their lives into their hands. The revolutionary caravans were able to reach every corner of the destroyed areas of Pakistani Kashmir, exposing the rottenness of the military regime.

Every year his budget speech in Parliament has sent shock waves through the echelons of power. No MP in the history of the Pakistani parliament has presented so many motions and bills on working class issues.

THIS TIME he is again contesting the election against a woman who is one of the biggest industrialists of Pakistan. Her family is renowned for exploiting workers in their industries and sponsoring anti-labor laws and reactionary movements in the country.

Once again Manzoor's constituency has become the battlefield of pro-worker and anti-worker candidates. The workers and impoverished masses of the area are strongly supporting



Comrade Manzoor. His opponents are using every means available against him. However, every act of these reactionary elements gets a thumping response from the masses led by the Marxists in Kasur.

After the elections on the 18th of February the struggle is going to enter a new decisive phase. When it becomes clear that workers' problems cannot be solved by elections alone, they will search for new paths to express their revolutionary aspirations. This new phase of the class struggle will highlight the role of Comrade Manzoor in new circumstances.

Bills presented by Comrade Manzoor in the National Assembly:

1. Industrial Relations (Amendment Bill) 2004
2. Amendment Bill in Banking Companies Ordinance 1962
3. Amendment Bill in Services Tribunal Act 1973
4. Industrial Relations Ordinance IRO-2002 Amendment Bill
5. Bill for cancellation of Expulsion from Employment Ordinance 2000 (Special Powers)
6. Employment Bill 2007 for providing Employment or giving unemployment allowance to all the youth country.

Ali Wazir

— contesting the Taliban

ONE MOST REMARKABLE election campaigns in Pakistan is the one taking place in South Waziristan. In the midst of a war between the Pakistani Army and the Taliban, in one of Pakistan's poorest areas, the Marxist Ali Wazir is winning widespread support for a revolutionary program.

South Waziristan is one of the Tribal Agencies included within FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas). Lying by the Afghan border, this area has a long history of battles and wars. A tribal system and the absence of any social infrastructure and roads is combined with the most modern weapons, satellite telephones and big jeeps.

A massive Pakistani army presence has been backed up by US air strikes. But they are unable to defeat the Taliban who have a large part of the enormous resources of the Afghan opium trade at their disposal. Afghanistan supplies over 90% of the world's opium. Its value is estimated as equal to Saudi Arabia's oil export.

The "dollar Jihad" promoted by US imperialism against the Soviet Union in the 1980's promoted fundamentalism, which has now become a monster. The poor and underprivileged people of the area are caught between the fierce battle of the Pakistani state and the fundamentalists.

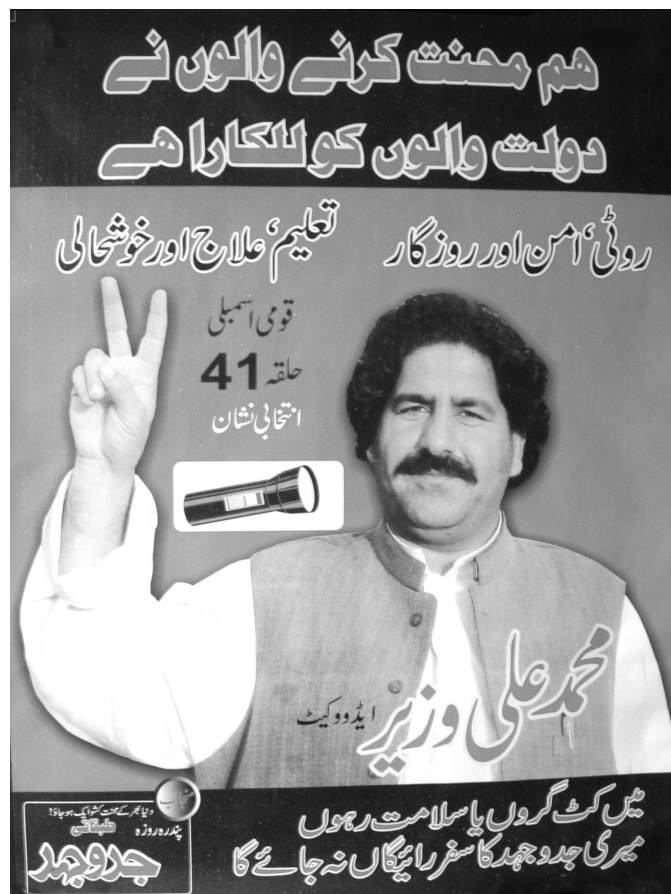
The Mehsud and Wazir tribes dominating this area have rich cultures and traditions. Both tribes have their characteristic dance styles, which mark their festive occasions. However, the clerics are imposing their will, while the Pakistani Army threatens people with home searches and curfews. War and destruction have turned the place into a living hell.

IN THIS SITUATION Ali Wazir is contesting the elections in NA-41 constituency, which includes Wana, the capital of South Waziristan along with the districts of Tiaraza, Birmal and Trikhel. This constituency has 64 170 male and 29 907 female voters who will cast their vote at 78 polling stations, if the elections are held on 18 February.

Ali Wazir became a Marxist while studying at Gomal University. His father, a member of the National Assembly, was assassinated. The slogans on Ali Wazir's posters are, "We the toilers, have waged a war against the wealthy" and "Bread, Peace, Employment - Education, Health, Prosperity". In his meetings he has explained that the only alternative to war and destruction is a socialist society. He has taken a position both against the Pakistani state and the mullahs, and he has stated that only class war and not religious and national war can bring prosperity.

In the 2002 elections Maulana Malik won this seat as an independent candidate taking 8005 votes. Maulana Malik is a follower of Fazl-ur Rehman, one of the staunch supporters of the Taliban. Fazl-ur-Rehman was the leader of the opposition in the last National Assembly. He patronizes many religious schools, Madrassahs, which produce the Taliban.

This time round the people have become tired of listening to anti-state sermons by these mullahs, as their previous experience has shown them that these same mullahs are actually the puppets of the ISI (Pakistani intelligence services).



Already deplorable living conditions have worsened over the past few months and currently basic necessities such as flour have been in short supply. People are migrating. According to the Urdu language BBC website, Noor Ali, from the Tiaraza area in South Waziristan, told a correspondent that, "Food supplies have finished in the area. People cannot do anything but leave. The people cannot tolerate the problems of Waziristan, but the government has closed the roads for the poor people." Another person, Mqarib who is a driver, told the BBC correspondent in Taank near Manzai that, "The army has seized more than a dozen trucks of flour bags near Manzai and have thrown the drivers in jail."

At this crucial juncture the election campaign of Comrade Ali Wazir with its clear socialist alternative is gaining wide support. If the elections are held in this area then the comrade has a big chance of winning and defeating the candidates supported by the mullahs and nationalists. There is no alternative on a nationalist basis. Only by carrying out of a socialist revolution and the building of a socialist federation of the sub-continent, including Afghanistan, can the problems be solved.

The present tense situation in the area after the recent attacks by the Taliban at Sararogha and Sipla Toi forts have increased security risks for the comrades taking part in the election campaign. The chances of elections actually being held in this area

are diminishing every day. It is evident that one wing of the ISI wants to spread the fundamentalist insurgency throughout the whole country in order to keep the masses out of the political process. The bomb blasts on Mall Road in Lahore and in Peshawar are links in the same chain.

ALI WAZIR'S CAMPAIGN is also having an effect in nearby constituencies. The candidate of the Pakistan Peoples Party in NA-25,

Taank, is Dawar Kundi who is contesting against the brother of Fazl-ur Rehman. The slogans painted by the campaign team of Dawar Kundi on the walls of Taank city are "Socialism is our economy" and "We want the end of Feudalism and Capitalism". Dawar Kundi is tipped to win his seat with a big margin. Comrades are playing a key role in the campaign of Dawar Kundi in NA-25. Dawar Kundi's belief in socialist ideas is growing as every day passes.

Riaz Lund

– steel worker candidate

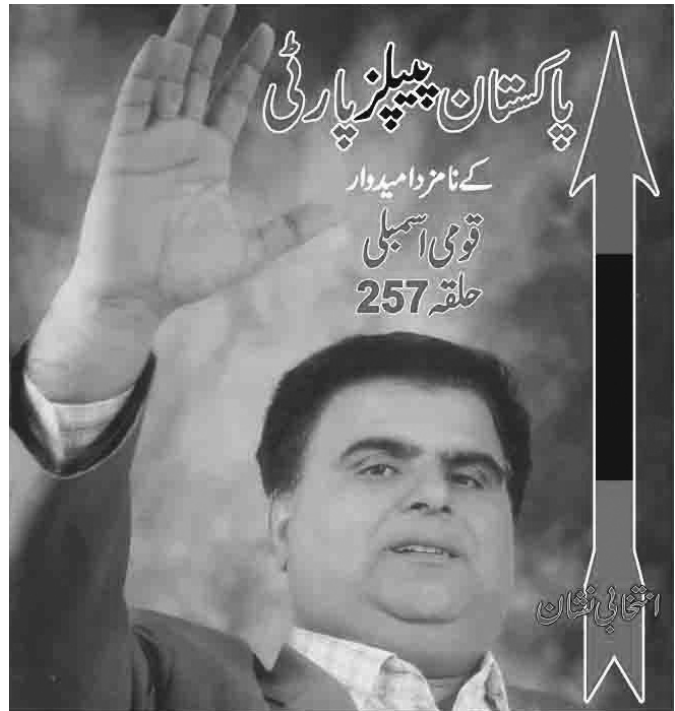
ELEVEN PEOPLE were killed and 50 injured on 14 January in the Karachi industrial area of Quaidabad when a bomb exploded at a roadside market near a textile mill. The area lies within the National Assembly constituency of NA-257, the most proletarian constituency in Pakistan. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) candidate here is Comrade Riaz Lund. The bomb blast shows the dangers facing Riaz Lund since he dared to become the only candidate to challenge the fascist MQM in the constituency. The slogan on his poster says, "We the toilers have waged a war against the wealthy". This has been very popular among the poor people in the constituency.

The constituency has historically been a stronghold of the PPP but the forces of black reaction have made gains in the constituency over the past few years. These reactionary forces, protected by the state, have always used tactics of fear and terror to keep the masses away from the political process. Major industrial units of Pakistan are within this constituency. Most of the biggest textile mills in the country lie in this area along with other key industries like General Tyre and Pakistan Machine Tool Factory. Bin Qasim Port, the main artery for the Pakistani economy is also here.

Pakistan Steel Mills lie adjacent to this constituency. Comrade Riaz Lund has a long history of trade unionism there. He led a decisive struggle against the privatisation of the Steel Mills, The privatisation was overturned. The lawyers' movement in Pakistan and the contradictions between the judiciary and the Generals were also sharpened due to the issue of the privatisation of the Steel Mills.

Now the State is once again intent on privatizing the Steel Mills along with another important industrial unit, Pakistan Machine Tool Factory. The struggle against this, and the revolutionary campaign of comrade Riaz Lund from the platform of the Pakistan People's Party, is a major obstacle for the State and its reactionary stooges.

THE MASSES are emphatically supporting comrade Riaz. He is tipped to win, which will be a big blow for the fascists and the Musharraf Government. Currently the administration of Karachi and the whole of the Sindh Province are in the hands of the MQM. They are trying their best to stop the mass mobilization in this key area. Apart from the recent bomb blast, Riaz Lund was shot in the shoulder and leg during recent protests against President Musharraf. Reactionaries succeeded in assassinating Abdullah Murad in 2004. He was elected Member of the Sindh



Provincial Assembly for the PPP in the 2002 elections. His constituency was within the National Assembly constituency that Riaz Lund is contesting. Abdullah Murad was very active in raising the voice of the people who were being tyrannized by the fascists.

The masses are raging with revenge and are seeking a revolutionary alternative that can lift them out of the miserable conditions they live in. When Comrade Riaz Lund visited Jinnah Hospital, the people injured in the blast welcomed him warmly. They raised slogans against the MQM and against president Musharraf. They assured the comrades that now the situation has changed, and the people will not allow anyone to sabotage the mass mobilisation.

Any attempt to foil the movement of the masses will only serve to give renewed strength to the people to fight against this tyranny and cruelty. Now the lines will be drawn on a class basis and the path that will be followed is none other than revolution.

The Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign

IN 1995 trade union leader Arif Shah was murdered. In Pakistan this is not an unusual event. To be an active trade unionist is difficult and dangerous. Only a week before Arif's assassination the secretary and chairman of the trade union at Lahore's largest steel mill were beaten up. Since then countless trade unionists have been attacked. What made Arif Shah's death unusual is what happened afterwards. Instead of becoming intimidated and shutting up, a number of trade unionists decided to get together and form the Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, PTUDC, to defend themselves against the employers.

During the time that has passed since Arif's death this movement has become a force to be reckoned with in Pakistan. By linking together existing trade unions and helping to form new ones the PTUDC has grown.

The PTUDC has also succeeded in explaining the plight of the Pakistani working class internationally. It has become more difficult for the employers to attack workers with impunity.

Unity

A major problem facing the Pakistani working class is its disunity. Fundamentalists get support among some sectors of the population because they are often the only ones who criticize US imperialism. Women are extremely suppressed. Men and women seldom meet outside the home. Shia Muslims are in conflict with Sunni. And Pakistan is a patchwork of languages and nationalities.

The PTUDC has managed to unite workers, regardless of their sex, religion, ethnic origin or nationality, in a common struggle against foreign and domestic capitalists, the government and fundamentalism. As part of their socialist ideology they fight for the rights of all the oppressed and the protection of minorities.

The PTUDC does not strive to replace the existing trade unions but unite them democratically and eventually form a Trade Union Congress. They have published leaflets, pamphlets and books for education and struggle.

Campaigns

Over the years the PTUDC has waged many campaigns against cuts, privatisation and the exploitation of women and children. More recently they have had a major campaign against the new law (IRO2002) that makes it impossible for workers to take their grievances to the National Industrial Relations Commission. The employers are to be allowed, in principle, to do whatever they want with their workers. They can employ and sack whoever they want and ban trade unions from their workplaces. Trade unions are forbidden in the most important sectors such as the railways and airlines. The right to organise has also been abolished in the public sector, Karachi's electricity company and other places. Among things, the PTUDC has organised a series of Labour conferences against these measures. The latest one in December gathered more than 63 trade unions, workers' associations and federations represented by nearly 500 delegates and trade union leaders.



The PTUDC has also campaigned against the USA's war on Iraq. The PTUDC's biggest victories have been won among the Karachi steelworkers, where privatisation was stopped after a militant struggle, and public sector workers in Quetta, despite the arrest of almost 200 activists.

Who supports the PTUDC?

Internationally the PTUDC has got its biggest support in Britain. The TGWU, GMB, NUJ and UNIFI all support the PTUDC at national level. PTUDC groups have been established in many countries such as Spain, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Canada and Sweden.

Such diverse organisations and leaders as the Austrian Young Socialists, Erik de Bruyn (leader of the leftwing of the Flemish Socialist Party), Quebec students, Moroccan activists, Alekos Kalivis (vice-president of the Greek TUC), John McDonnell (British MP), Islington Constituency Labour Party, and Vancouver Canadian Postal Workers Union have expressed their support for the PTUDC in recent months.

The program of the PTUDC:

1. Defence of our trade unions from the physical attacks of the employers. Defend our right to organise!
2. Stop the privatisation and plunder of state industries.
3. For a minimum wage for all.
4. The abolition of child labour.
5. The abolition of anti trade union laws.
6. The abolition of draconian fundamentalist laws against women. Equal rights for women.