

APFUTU and Woodcraft Brick Kiln Workers Children's Schools



All Pakistan Federation of United Trade Unions

Report of visit to Pakistan 2012



On 11th April, 3 of us went to Pakistan as a Woodcraft Folk delegation. The purpose of the visit was to attend the formal opening of the new school for brick kiln workers children set up by APFUTU with funds raised by Sheffield Woodcraft Folk and to assess future plans/viability.

This project came about after Sheffield Derwent and Porter and Don Districts invited delegates from the APFUTU youth wing, N Pakistan, to attend the International CoCamp in 2011. Sheffield young people raised about £10,000, mainly by 38 Sheffield Woodcraft members on a 4 day sponsored coast to coast cycle ride. The plan was to support 5 young people visiting the UK but only two were successful in securing entry visas. The two Districts agreed that the remaining funds should be used to support the setting up of a school in response to APFUTU's meetings describing the plight of the brick kiln worker children. Prior to CoCamp, some joint activities were organised with Pakistani community children in the Sharrow area of Sheffield.



One of the most important elements of our visit for us was to see the brick kiln factories. There are about 40,000 factories in Pakistan, employing about 8m people (average 200 per factory). In Punjab there is rich clay soil and in some villages there were several chimneys to be seen, belching black smoke. Workers may live in the village or some live on the factory site, unable to leave without the employer's permission. We saw very young children aged two and three years working with their parents and older adults 70

years and over working. They would work around 10 hours per day, 6 days a week and should be paid a government decreed minimum wage of 520 rupees per 1,000 bricks produced by a family. This would generate, per family, an income of around £12 per month. For those who lived on site, possibly because they were itinerant workers fleeing debt, small single room accommodation was provided. In the factory we visited there was one standpipe of unclean water for 15 families and no electricity. We were told that employers often deducted sums from the wages so that workers never got the minimum wage. For



most if not all families, employers paid advances that created a system of bonded labour and severe debt. Some employers chained selected workers and accommodated them in a 'lock-up'. Women, we were told, would have to work until hours before their babies were born and would have to resume working around 12 hours after birth. For some women, they would also be required to clean the employers houses and there were reports of sexual exploitation.

APFUTU has made considerable progress by supporting the establishment of the Brick Kiln Workers Union. By electing local representatives they are able to draw attention to specific cases. APFUTU has led a prolonged legal battle to the Pakistan Supreme Court in 1988 resulting in the ruling that there would be a minimum wage, the middle men who take a cut of workers wages are illegal and of the requirement for employers to provide schools for children. Despite winning this landmark ruling, progress is limited by inadequate enforcement. APFUTU supports workers on a case by case basis. Strike action initially led to significant wage increases but strikes are now illegal. Furthermore, any complaints about the employers made by APFUTU to the Police are only about 50% successful due to corruption – the employers pay off the investigators.



With financial support from a Unison Newcastle on Tyne branch, a school was set up one year ago in Rahmad Bura, in Punjab. Two unqualified teachers run the school and for their first anniversary celebration we presented new books to students going forward to their next grade. Around 60 children attend the school, all brick workers children. The

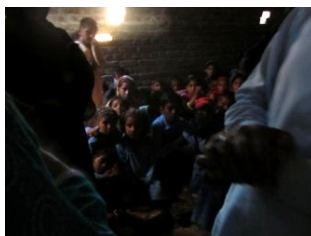


classrooms were furnished with basic wooden furniture and a white board. The children were given uniforms, with an embroidered logo, in order to provide them with clothing. School is from 8am till 1pm, the day started with teaching on the Qu'ran. Lessons covered English, maths, science and general studies. Children are given a drink and a small packet of crisps (Whatsits?) at morning break. We saw children's work and assessments. Bamboo ink pens on wooden boards are used as well as pencils.

The new 'Woodcraft' school nearby at Theekrian, Lala Musa consisted of 2 classrooms and a yard. 41 new students were enrolled to start on 16th April. Two qualified teachers had been appointed with a supervisor to visit weekly to oversee organisation and progress at the school. The same curriculum would be followed.



The third school we visited at Jalal por Jatan was set up two years ago by a government worker/teacher from a municipal school nearby. He was for the children of the brick kiln families families. There was one volunteer teacher the small school had about 60 children in was struggling to sustain the school and it and offered Woodcraft set-up money to



now move to a new venue. The English speaking Principal clearly had a real passion for the cause. After looking round the current school, we attended a ceremony where, after the speeches, children were awarded new books for the coming year. All families had been asked to dress as smartly as they were able.

committed to personally funding education and local litter-picking children of gypsy and one paid teacher, both qualified, but one tiny room and no furniture at all. He was going to close until APFUTU stepped in fund books and furniture and the school will

We attended the formal opening ceremony at Theekrian. We were met by drumming, sweet-smelling rose petals

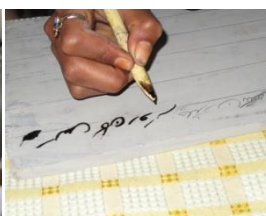


were thrown and garlands placed around our necks. After looking round the school and meeting the children in the yard, the opening place. There were around 400 people in a with 20 or so dignitaries on a stage. Speeches

District Commissioner, trade unionists and a doctor . Alleena (who year) gave a powerful address about starting life as a domestic Pirzada (who also visited Co-camp and was our host), Kieran and addressed the crowd. Trophies were given to the highest achieving children and gifts were received. We took stationery (pens, pencils, crayons etc) to be divided between the two schools.



ceremony took huge open marquee were given by the visited Co-camp last worker aged 5, Carolyn also



During our week-long visit we were extremely well looked after. Breakfast was given at Alleena's family's house, we were escorted in a minibus with two or three people from APFUTU and the local Chair of the Brickworkers Union. Pirzada generously accompanied us on all but one day. As our visit attracted a lot of national, regional and local media attention partly because very few Europeans visit Pakistan at the moment, we were provided with a police guard on the second day and for the remainder of the trip. Our programme was full and varied (see below) and we met many extremely friendly, warm and generous people. We felt safe and relaxed. Our only challenge was sickness due to inadvertently drinking local water, resulting in Saturday's programme being rescheduled.

It was impressive how highly respected and revered Pirzada is - some workers were tearful as they greeted him during our visits. We are confident in the accounting and recording systems of the schools and consider the cause is a justifiable and appropriate one for Woodcraft. The decision to provide furniture and books for the 2nd school is appropriate and APFUTU committed itself to support a further school in the last village we visited at Pininwal.



Recommendations and conclusions, discussed with members of Sheffield Woodcraft Folk Porter and Don and Derwent District members.

- We believe that this is an appropriate cause for Woodcraft to support. The young people were included as speakers at the events we attended and they are clearly being taught about their rights as well as realising their right to education.
- We recommend that Sheffield Woodcraft Districts, working with others (eg trade unions, schools, community organisations), should engage in further awareness-raising activities and seek to secure funding (for a possible period of 5 to 7 years) to support the school through donations and standing orders.
- That Sheffield Woodcraft believes that all brick-kiln worker children should have the right to free education and urges Woodcraft Folk and IFM to support APFUTU's campaign for the provision of sustainable schools for all child labourers.
- Sheffield Woodcraft should consider encouraging and supporting young people visiting and volunteering at the school.
- Sheffield Woodcraft should provide whatever appropriate support we can to enhance/improve the quality of the education provided and should encourage other educational establishments in Sheffield to do so.
- Sheffield Woodcraft should continue to raise awareness about child labour issues

Programme of visits

Thursday 12th

- Arrive at Alleena's cousin's house at 4:30am, rest
- Breakfast at Alleena's cousin's, then chat til 12 noon
- Gardens
- Fort
- Monument to Freedom of Pakistan
- Visit to the India Pakistan border at Wagah – closing of the border ceremony
- Drove to Gujrat. Stopped at Gujranwala for meal
- Arrive in District Council Rest House – 2 rooms – around 10pm

Friday 13th

- Breakfast at Alleena's family
- Drive to Unison school, welcome party with flowers. Garlands and drums.
- Look round school, give books to children progressing to next grade.
- Signed visitors book
- Lunch at restaurant, met Tan
- Visit to new Woodcraft school, met with garlands, rose petals and drums
- Look round school, meet new children in courtyard, give out sweets
- Formal opening ceremony in marquee, audience of about 250 men, 150 women, separate. Lots of speakers including District commissioner, doctor, Chair of Brick Kiln Workers Union, APFUTU Head of external relations, Alleena, Pirzada, Kieran and myself and others. Awarded trophies to higher performing children from Unison school. Received gifts from Municipal workers union at Wazirabad.
- Returned to Rest House. Given armed guard as we had generated so much national media coverage.

Saturday 14th

- Programme postponed due to sickness
- Carolyn visits market with 5 Trade Unionists and armed guard to buy Shalwar Kameez for all. Visit again briefly later.

Sunday 15th

- Kieran and Carolyn have breakfast at Alleena's family. Watch wedding video (Alleena's cousin) and play with baby Hani.

- Visited the brick kiln factories, looked around, took photos and film of families labouring. Had meeting with employer.
- Visited APFUTU offices, met officers, had meeting with q&a session. My speech was filmed and posted on the Gujrat online website.
- Went to Pirzada's home for lunch, met family
- Went to Brick Kiln workers school at Jalal pur Jattan, included some gypsy piltter-picking children
- Formal ceremony in wedding hall, speeches and gave books to children for next grade
- Had evening dinner by river hosted by GujratTV

Monday 16th

- Pirzada not with us, hosted by Zia, Head of External Relations, APFUTU
- Visited gold award winning municipal boys secondary school
- Visited Girls College, teaching Commerce and IT, leaving party on their last day
- Met Gujrat Police Inspector – External/overseas Pakistani's desk. Provides support service for Police matters for Pakistani's abroad as they make a significant contribution to the economy
- Visited women's short course college – provides short courses in cooking, hair and beauty, nails, etc. Given generous presents
- Boys Medical and Engineering College
- Women's Medical and Engineering College and teacher training
- Girls Municipal Secondary school
- Had lunch with Norwegian/Pakistani baker's family. Looked at daughter's wedding photos
- Visited Online news offices, watched video from APFUTU offices online and had photos
- Television interview at GujratTV
- Visit furniture market
- Visited Pirzada's house. Sang and played with children learning the Qu'ran
- Visited Ali's house – journalist who had accompanied us several times. Met his extensive family
- Visited body-building gym owned by Pirzada's son
- Took take-away pizzas back to rest house

Tuesday 17th

- Last breakfast at Alleena's family
- Visited her cousin's offices – arranging for students to attend education courses overseas
- Travelled to salt mines
- Stopped en route to greet brick kiln workers union officials/members
- Stopped at brick kiln workers village, greeted by explosions and petals. Had short meeting and lunch and drove on
- Walked into salt mines to look around. Plunged into darkness at bottom of mine, walk out with torches.
- Drive to Lahore, visit Badshahi Mosque
- Final meal overlooking mosque in beautiful quiet area. Taken to airport for Farewells.
- Airport security guard talk to Emily in Punjabi and she looks so authentic.