

*Public Authority and Local Resistance: Abdur Rehman and the industrial workers of Lahore, 1969–1974**

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Abstract

In 1968 a popular movement emerged on the streets of Pakistan which toppled the regime of General Muhammad Ayub Khan and ushered in the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). After a decade of military rule this movement was heralded as a turning point in the country's political fortunes. However, the war in 1971, the failure of the PPP to live up to its radical slogans, and Pakistan's eventual return to military rule in 1977 were seen as clear indications of the failure of both the movement and the PPP. This article focuses on the area of Kot Lakhpat in Lahore and the emergence of a worker-led court under Abdur Rehman to argue that this narrative of the failure of the movement does not leave space for local success stories which, while temporary, had an important impact on the role that the working classes imagined for themselves within the state. The Kot Lakhpat movement was part of a longer history of labour politics, and its story challenges the centrality of the PPP and shows how local structures of authority can be formed in response to the greater space for radical action opened up by a wider national resistance movement.

Introduction

On 1 May 1974, newspapers across Pakistan carried news of the murder of a labour leader, Abdur Rehman, in the Kot Lakhpat area in

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the south of Lahore. Discussing witness testimonies, the Lahore High Court observed that ‘thousands of labourers and other persons were present’ and that ‘traffic stood jammed’ after the incident.¹ These workers blocked one of the main roads into Lahore and refused to let the police take away the dead body until the early hours of the morning. As news spread, condolences poured in from worker organizations, while many attended rallies in and around Lahore and even set fire to shops and the home of one of the suspects in the murder.² Others stopped transport on the roads and railways.³ To the casual observer the scale of this reaction may seem strange. Pakistan’s industry was small and geographically limited and labour had virtually no rights up until the early 1970s. Yet here was a labour leader whose death had provoked a national response and had virtually shut down the city of Lahore.

Descriptions of who Abdur Rehman was and the work that he did in Lahore paint a picture of a larger-than-life figure. An editorial in the progressive newspaper, the *Pakistan Times*, described him as ‘smart, agile near sixfooter, muscular, tough . . . Abdur Rehman could take on a dozen men empty-handed’.⁴ Other sources—such as trade union federations and labour activists who had worked with Rehman—claimed that power relations in the industrial area of Kot Lakhpat had changed fundamentally because of him. Leaving aside the pressure he had brought to bear on industrial employers, police could no longer take bribes with impunity and men could no longer harass women; as stories spread of his influence in the area, people had come to him to resolve their conflicts.⁵ Poorer people and their families who lived in the adjoining areas had ‘stopped circling the offices of the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP)’⁶ and instead asked Rehman and his workers to solve problems in their area.⁷

¹ ‘Khushi Muhammad Dogar and another v. The State’, 1984 *Monthly Law Digest (MLD)* 1337, p. 1343.

² *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 1 May 1974, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 2 May 1974, p. 5.

⁴ Muhammad Idrees, ‘The Abdur Rehman Story (I) Dial “M” for Murder’, in *The Night was not Loveless* (Lahore: Rhotas Books, 1991), p. 189.

⁵ Khalid Mahmud, *Pakistan mein mazdoor tahrir [The Labour Movement in Pakistan]* (Lahore: University of the Panjab, 1958), pp. 63–64. Mahmud had worked with the labour movement and was also a university professor in Lahore.

⁶ ‘*Zinda hai zinda hai Abdur Rehman zinda hai* [He lives, he lives, Abdur Rehman lives]’, Pamphlet of the Muttahida Mazdur Majlis-e-Amal Lahore, No. 392, Progressive Movements in Pakistan Collection (PMPC), International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (hereafter IISH), p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*

On one level, these descriptions have the almost romantic tenor of a working-class hero. On another, they point to a peculiar configuration of public authority in this locality that came to supersede both official institutions and the writ of the political party in power at the time, the PPP.

This article traces Abdur Rehman's story and his murder against the backdrop of a longer history of labour politics, grounded in the specific context of south Lahore. Making use of the judgment in the Sessions Court, the subsequent appeals in the High and Supreme Courts, newspaper reports, trades union pamphlets, and interviews,⁸ it is possible to get an insight into the politics of labour in Kot Lakhpat in this period.

Rehman and the workers who supported him controlled the area for over two years, enforcing their own system of justice aided by an informal court and armed groups of men who were able to impose their authority on both political leaders and industrial employers. This only lasted for a brief period of time but a study of this mini-government can be seen as a microcosm of the effect that worker militancy, and other broader changes that were taking place in Pakistan at the time, had on the exercise of local power.

This article makes three interrelated arguments. First, this analysis contests the narrative that gives the PPP a central place in the labour militancy of this period. It does this by arguing that it was workers' demands that made the language of the Party more radical

⁸ Direct references to specific interviews have been made in the footnotes. However, in piecing together this story, the key interviewees were: Altaf Baloch, a Packages employee at the time, was accused of Rehman's murder and spent 15 years in jail. Muhammad Akbar was also a Packages employee who was accused, but was acquitted by the Sessions Court. Bashir Zafar, a worker in Kot Lakhpat, was part of Rehman's federation and worked closely with him. Yusuf Baluch, a trade union leader and labour activist in Lahore, was involved in the anti-Ayub movement when he was a railway worker. Muhammad Yaqub, a worker in the Kala Shah Kaku area in the late 1960s, continued to coordinate the activities of worker federations in Lahore. Karamat Ali was a labour activist in the 1970s and founder of the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) in Karachi. Aitzaz Ahsan, a student activist at the time, also participated in the study circles that Rehman attended and later joined the PPP where he continues to be one of its most prominent members. He knew Rehman and was present at the roadblocks when Rehman was murdered. Hussain Naqi, a founding member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, has been involved in student and leftist politics since the 1950s in Pakistan. In the early 1970s he was a journalist who reported on labour and was based in Lahore. Tariq Hameed, initially the director of production in Packages, was promoted to general manager in 1974. Ibrahim Ramay is the son of Hanif Ramay, the chief minister of Punjab at the time.

and inclusive of working-class demands.⁹ Secondly, it argues that the story of labour in early 1970s Pakistan was part of a longer history of labour politics and cannot be understood fully without reference to the changing dynamics wrought by the anti-Ayub movement which emerged between 1968 and 1969. Following on from this it maintains that this movement resulted in more extensive and politically oriented worker demands, based on the belief that the movement was about the creation of a worker raj.

The immediate backdrop to this was a social movement that began towards the end of 1968 in Pakistan. In its initial phases, it appeared to be a student movement protesting against the regime of General Muhammad Ayub Khan. In December 1968 it began to draw in other groups. Between February and March 1969, industrial workers joined and they soon far outnumbered students.¹⁰ Explaining how their entry changed the character of the movement, Muneer Ahmad argues that the workers 'shifted the emphasis of the mass movement from political to economic questions and transformed the ordinary trade union activity into class struggle'.¹¹ Through an extensive study of newspaper reports he shows how changing demands evinced an increasing militancy 'in each passing phase of the movement'.¹² The fact that this movement expanded, shifted its foci, and incorporated different groups is often lost in histories of the late 1960s and early 1970s as these tend to be dominated by the story of the rise of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Founded in 1967 and headed by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the PPP came to power on the back of a larger movement that espoused socialist rhetoric and promised food, clothing, and shelter to all. The fact that the story of the movement and its repercussions on society all but vanished is unsurprising. The movement against Ayub Khan was

⁹ A similar argument has been made by Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and its Forgotten Histories* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003). She argues that the militant strikes of the workers of Kanpur resulted in 'radicalizing the language of the local Congress' (p. 277).

¹⁰ Khalid Bin Sayeed, 'Mass urban protests as indicators of political change in Pakistan', *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 17:2 (1979), pp. 117–118; Lal Khan, *Pakistan's Other Story: The 1968–9 Revolution* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2009), pp. 137–142.

¹¹ Muneer Ahmed, 'The November Mass Movement in Pakistan: the Role of Government-Opposition Interaction toward Political Modernization', in Muneer Ahmed, *Political Sociology: Perspectives in Pakistan* (Lahore: Punjabi Adbi Markaz, 1978), p. 31.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

followed by Pakistan's first national election and the breaking away of the majority of the country after Bangladesh's war of liberation in 1971. Scholars who seek to examine the impact of these changes in Pakistan describe this time period as one when structural change was possible. However, the way in which events played out simply consolidated further the power of a military-bureaucratic oligarchy which had successfully constructed a form of public authority that was legitimized by national security concerns and which allowed for the military's continued dominance in political affairs.¹³ These analyses are important in their own right, but are premised on an understanding of sovereignty that emanates from a centralized state which exists above society. Following this line of reasoning, the 1968–9 movement was important when it became part of the explanation for these broader, more nationally important narratives, particularly when it could buttress those of the rise and fall of the PPP.¹⁴ The limited studies that focus squarely on the movement of 1968–9 then tend to question whether it was a success or a failure.¹⁵

¹³ Maliha Lodhi refers to this time as an 'extraordinary juncture' because of state weakness. See: M. Lodhi, 'Reflections on the Pakistani dilemma', *The Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 20:1 (1982), p. 97. Lodhi used this description as a point of departure to explain why Bhutto did not take advantage of this opportunity to restructure the state. In a seminal article that discusses the roots of this oligarchy, Hamza Alavi describes the early 1970s as a 'traumatic moment of crisis': H. Alavi, 'The state in post-colonial societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh', *New Left Review*, 72 (1972), p. 66. Though dated, Alavi's piece continues to inform discussions of the Pakistani state. For some of the work that engaged with Alavi's ideas within Pakistan, see: Hassan Gardezi and Jamil Rashid (eds), *Pakistan, The Roots of Dictatorship: The Political Economy of a Praetorian State* (London: Zed Press, 1983) and, more recently, Aasim Sajjad Akhtar's excellent, but as yet unpublished, thesis: A. S. Akhtar, 'The overdeveloping state: the politics of common sense in Pakistan', PhD thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2008. To scratch the surface of the broader discussions on the dominance of the military in the Pakistani state, see: Hasan Askari Rizvi, *The Military and Politics in Pakistan, 1947–1986* (Lahore: Progressive Publishers, 1986); Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), and, more recently: Aqil Shah, *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Rizvi, *The Military and Politics*; Philip Jones, *The Pakistan People's Party: Rise to Power* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Shahid Javed Burki, *Pakistan: A Nation in the Making*, 3rd ed. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1999); S. J. Burki, 'Ayub's fall: a socio-economic explanation', *Asian Survey*, 12:3 (1972), pp. 211–212; Maliha Lodhi, 'Bhutto, the Pakistan People's Party and political development in Pakistan, 1967–1977', PhD thesis, the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1980.

¹⁵ Riaz Ahmed Shaikh, '1968—Was it Really a Year of Social Change in Pakistan?', in Bryn Jones and Mike O'Donnell (eds), *Sixties Radicalism and Social Movement Activism: Retreat or Resurgence* (London: Anthem Press, 2010). Where Shaikh deems

This centralized focus precludes analyses of the variegated groups and demands that made up this ostensibly unified movement. These groups often contested the vision the PPP had for the future of the country and, as in the case of Abdur Rehman, used the momentum created by the movement to construct local structures of power and authority which give us an insight into how political movements have an impact on the functioning of de facto local sovereignty.

More recent literature on the state and public authority complicates these older narratives.¹⁶ Following the work of Thomas Blom Hansen, historically and locally grounded studies can draw out the workings of sovereignty as ‘multiple, provisional and always contested’,¹⁷ being formed and reformed through performance and operating within society.¹⁸ Hansen illustrates how this framework can also lead to a deeper understanding of the role of ‘local strongmen’ whose influence comes from concrete factors such as the ability to bend laws, physically overpower others, as well as intangibles like ‘*mardangi*—manliness/virility’.¹⁹ These strongmen are goondas to some and generous patrons to others, and have to constantly reiterate their authority to maintain their reputations.²⁰ From the outside, these individuals may seem like competitors for state sovereignty, filling the vacuum where the state has failed, but they often make use of official

the movement a failure, Tariq Ali heralds it as an unqualified success, portraying a Pakistan on the brink of socialism. See: T. Ali, in *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970). Using Tariq Ali's work and other accounts, Saadia Toor paints a picture of a thwarted socialist revolution in which state suppression of specific groups between the 1950s and 1970s represented the marginalization of ‘progressive models for the Pakistani nation-state project’. See: S. Toor, *The State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), here p. 2.

¹⁶ Recent studies on Pakistan have moved away from viewing the state as an autonomous realm and contest the narratives of state failure. See, among others: Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould and Sarah Ansari (eds), *From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947–1970* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). This excellent collection of articles was originally published as part of a *Modern Asian Studies* Special issue, 45:1 (2011); Oskar Verkaaik, ‘The Captive State: Corruption, Intelligence Agencies, and Ethnicity in Pakistan’, in Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (eds), *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 345–364.

¹⁷ Thomas Blom Hansen, ‘Sovereigns Beyond the State: On Legality and Authority in Urban India’, in Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (eds), *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 172.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 171–172. See also: T. B. Hansen and F. Stepputat, ‘Introduction’, in Hansen and Stepputat (eds), *Sovereign Bodies*, pp. 1–36.

¹⁹ Hansen, ‘Sovereigns Beyond the State’, p. 190.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 187–190.

symbols to bolster their authority. On the local level, their links with bureaucrats and politicians can work in the interest of both parties in order to maintain their overlapping power in the area.²¹ In effect, although these figures claim to be radical and opposed to the idea of the state, they take on some of its character.²² Therefore, far from being examples of an extra-legal element occupying the space left by a weak or failed state, they are part of the everyday reality in which *de facto* sovereignty operates.

Looking at local strongmen in this way has a resonance with labour history, particularly when exploring the bases of power possessed by the jobber, *mistri*, or *sardar*: they are from the world the workers inhabit, but have influence that should be the purview of state officials and employers. Dipesh Chakrabarty shows how the paper-hoarding *sardar* could exert influence on workers because of his administrative and bureaucratic control in the factory, and through his familial- and patronage-based links with the workers, while Rajnarayan Chandavarkar describes the jobber's power as coming from two realms between which he had to constantly negotiate: his place among the workers and his privileged position with respect to employers.²³ Crucially, the wider national environment had an impact on the autonomy and actions of these men. The *dada* in the Indian context could get jobs for workers and solve friends' dilemmas and conflicts, but as he was drawn into more powerful political connections that were facilitated by democracy, he moved further and further away from the everyday lives of the working-class neighbours who had been the initial source of his power.²⁴

In Pakistan, in the early 1970s the assertion of working-class interests within mainstream politics was intimately related to the movement of 1968–9. Instead of viewing Abdur Rehman and his

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 190; Christian Lund, 'Twilight institutions: public authority and local politics in Africa', *Development and Change*, 37:4 (2006), p. 688.

²² Lund does not refer specifically to local strongmen, but to examples of this type of authority like 'chiefs, vigilantes, political factions, hometown associations, neighbourhood groups', Lund, 'Twilight institutions', p. 689.

²³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 107–110; Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, 'The decline and fall of the jobber system in the Bombay cotton textile industry, 1870–1955', *Modern Asian Studies*, 42:1 (2008), pp. 122, 142, 139.

²⁴ R. Chandavarkar, 'From Neighbourhood to Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Left in Bombay's Girangaon in the Twentieth Century', in R. Chandavarkar, *History, Culture and the Indian City: Essays by Rajnarayan Chandavarkar* (New York: Cambridge, 2009), pp. 177–179.

control over Kot Lakhpat as an incident of deviant authority which emerged because law and order had broken down, the argument presented here, following Frederick Cooper, suggests that this moment of political contestation expanded the ‘changing definitions of the possible’²⁵ so that workers saw their actions as a legitimate part of a movement in which they were centrally involved. These workers in Kot Lakhpat in the south of Lahore were influenced by the older politics of workers and progressives, and drew on their political networks and on student organizations during the course of the movement. This was also partially necessary because the geographical space they inhabited in Lahore was, in the 1960s, in a newly developing area of the city. This narrative, therefore, has to begin by exploring the nexus between the wider movement, Lahore’s development in the 1960s, and the emergence of the Kot Lakhpat workers’ movement.

The development of Kot Lakhpat and worker networks in Lahore

By the 1960s, the industrial development of Lahore was limited but not insignificant. For the most part, it was concentrated in the north of Lahore, which was the effective centre of the city.²⁶ This meant that although industrial workers in the city of Lahore were a small proportion of the overall population,²⁷ they were clustered together in the northern part of the city, thus making them a much more visible and prominent force. Through their strikes and political activities, these workers made themselves relevant to Lahore’s political landscape. This backdrop shows that the claim that the workers were ‘a new constituency’²⁸ cultivated by Bhutto and the PPP needs to be reassessed.

²⁵ Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 1.

²⁶ Alvi notes that the centre of Lahore was around the walled city in Lahore and that, initially, most residential areas and work opportunities were to be found within six kilometres of this centre. See: Imran Alvi, *The Informal Sector in Urban Economy: Low Income Housing in Lahore* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 129.

²⁷ In 1951 the total population of Lahore city and the cantonments was 4,78,499, while the non-agricultural labour force was 1,87,013. Government of Pakistan (GoP), *Census of Pakistan, 1951*, I–2. By 1961 the population of Lahore city was 12,96,477 and workers (now listed under ‘Civilian labour force’) had increased to 3,65,928. GoP, *District Census Report Lahore*, Parts I–V, IV–50.

²⁸ Burki, *Pakistan: A Nation*, p. 43.

The northern part of Lahore was where the two main labour leaders in Pakistan, Mirza Muhammad Ibrahim and Bashir Ahmed Bakhtiar, operated. Mirza Ibrahim's central base was the railways and the area around Mughalpura, where the railway workshops were located. Bashir Ahmed Bakhtiar controlled the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Workers Union (formerly the Hydroelectric Workers Union). Both of them had participated in labour politics before 1947 and had been, to differing extents, the targets of repression by the Pakistani state which saw them as political troublemakers. Mirza Ibrahim, mainly because of his avowedly communist leanings, was arrested on multiple occasions.²⁹

The presence of outsiders in their unions and broad trade union federations enabled workers from other industries around the north of Lahore to form links. Political parties such as the Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) (before it was banned in 1954) and the National Awami Party (NAP) provided organizational and ideological support to labour in the city. Four months after partition, Mirza Ibrahim organized a protest by railway workers with the intention of pushing for their wages to be increased. This was reported to be the first strike in Pakistan's history and resulted in the arrests of several trade union leaders and workers who were considered radical. Shaukat Ali³⁰ estimates that this strike brought out 25,000 workers to protest on the streets of Lahore. In his account he adds that this was the first strike where the slogan of 'Food, clothing and shelter for all' was used.³¹ Their use of this slogan, which the PPP would later become known

²⁹ For an insight into the political activities and personalities of these two labour leaders, see: Ahmad Azhar, 'The Making of a "Genuine Trade Unionist"', An Introduction to Bashir Ahmed Bakhtiar's Memoirs', in Ravi Ahuja (ed.), *Working Lives and Worker Militancy: The Politics of Labour in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Tulika Press, 2013). This book also contains an edited version of Bakhtiar's memoirs, translated into English. Post-partition accounts of the Left and the labour movement in Pakistan also contain snippets of their activities. See: T. Ali, *Pakistan: Military Rule; Zafar Shaheed, The Labour Movement in Pakistan: Organization and Leadership in Karachi in the 1970s* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007); Kamran Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan 1947–1972* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³⁰ A railway labour leader and later a Communist Party member, Shaukat Ali was also an office holder in the communist-dominated Pakistan Trade Union Federation (PTUF). He worked among the railway and Bata workers in Batapur, Lahore, for several years. After 1956, he joined the National Awami Party.

³¹ Shaukat Ali, *Maghrabi Pakistan Mein Mazdoor Tahrik [The Labour Movement in West Pakistan]* (Lahore: Pakistan Trade Union Federation, n.d.), p. 24, No. 285, PMPC, IISH. This claim is repeated in another account of the history of the PTUF. See: S. H. Sindhu, *Hum Qanunan Azad Hain Magar...? [We are Legally Free but...?]* (Lahore: Awami Jamhoori Publications, 2010), p. 81.

for, shows that it was not handed down to the workers, but came from them. The self-conscious manner in which this claim was made shows that workers were actively trying to assert that their movements were not externally derived.

Mirza Ibrahim was arrested, but the workers continued to strike while their leader was in prison.³² Sajjad Zaheer, then the head of the CPP, wrote a letter in November 1948 to the Punjab Provincial Party of the CPP saying:

Did not some comrades say one or two months ago that the NWR [North Western Railway] Workers in Lahore were demoralized? They even went further and developed the theory that the NWR Workers, were not proletariat in the Marxist sense of the word, and that they were really propertied peasants ... Yet these very workers in Lahore have ... [shown] their attachment to the Union is unimpaired.³³

In the rest of this fascinating piece, he goes on to state that he had heard rumours that the workers of Batanagar were also agitating and that a presence needed to be established there so that the Bata union 'should be survived'.³⁴ This focus could also be discerned in the statements of other organizations affiliated with the CPP. In 1949, a report on a conference, submitted by a member of the Progressive Writers Association (PWA), stated that writers should try 'to establish closer contacts with the working-class movement and to write in simple and direct language on working class problems'.³⁵

The actions of the railway workers and, later, the workers of Batapur drew attention to the fact that even in Lahore labour could be a political force, which was an incentive for progressive parties to reach out to them more directly. The political links thus formed, continued even after 1954 as many of the CPP's prominent members, including Mirza Ibrahim and Shaukat Ali, shifted their allegiance to the NAP and continued their work within the labour movement.³⁶ A labour adviser from England, reporting on factories in Punjab, observed that strikes often involved political agitators who travelled from Lahore. Among these groups 'the more troublesome individuals [were] allied

³² GoP, Railway Division, *Report on Pakistan Railways, 1948-9* (Lahore, 1949), p. 29.

³³ Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Punjab, *The Communist Party of West Pakistan in Action, Vol. 1* (Lahore: Government Printing, 1952), pp. 286-287.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

³⁶ Iqbal Leghari, 'The Socialist Movement in Pakistan: an historical survey 1940-1974', PhD thesis, Laval University, Montreal, 1979; Abid Hasan Minto (Interview, 10 June 2011); Ahmad Salim (Interview, 19 April 2011).

to politicians of the National Awami Party' and so could call on local support from that Party.³⁷ From this very brief sketch, it can be gleaned that workers were involved in industrial action and had political links as early as the 1950s and managed to continue these actions even after the CPP was formally banned.

The link between the militancy seen in the north of Lahore and the Kot Lakhpat movement is not one of simple continuity. Literary writings about the city, which describe it as expanding and beginning 'to surge inexorably southward' so that new areas were subsumed 'seamlessly within it',³⁸ miss out on the tension between official planning and individual agency that characterized much of this expansion.

The development of the area around Kot Lakhpat in the 1960s was motivated both by the need to push squatter settlements out of the main city and to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding population. In the case of the Kot Lakhpat (or Township Industrial Estate, later renamed the Quaid-e-Azam Industrial Estate), the initial plans stated that it was a solution to the problems that were encountered by refugees and squatters in the city. Living, as they did, in makeshift housing, their living areas were seen as having become 'breeding grounds of social dissatisfaction and disease'.³⁹ There was agreement on the fact that this was a problem, but it became clear quite early on that the solution would not be found in the new township. Initially meant to house an estimated 30,000 low-income families in the environs of Lahore in an area of 8,300 acres, the revised project was reduced to 3,000 acres and 30 per cent of the residential houses were to be allocated to government servants.⁴⁰ The industrial unit that was to be a part of this area was envisioned as being spread over 700 acres and that it would be a source of employment for the new residents who would have to move ten miles (about 16 kilometres) away from the city centre.⁴¹ It is unsurprising, then, that the scheme (officially

³⁷ Report dated 19 March 1959, LAB 13/1049, the National Archives of the UK (hereafter TNA), pp. 4–5.

³⁸ Fakir Syed Aijazuddin, 'Akbar's Capital: Jewel in the Sikh Crown', in Bapsi Sidhwa (ed.), *City of Sin and Splendour: Writings on Lahore* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005), p. 11.

³⁹ 'Project Report on Lahore Township Scheme', Appendix F, p. 1, in *Revised Form P.C.I.*, 163/CF/65, reel no. 2490, National Documentation Centre (hereafter NDC), Islamabad, Pakistan.

⁴⁰ 'Part B: Description, Purpose and Benefit of Project', pp. 5–7, in *Revised Form P.C.I. of the Lahore Township Scheme*, 163/CF/65, reel no. 2490, NDC.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

launched in 1962) failed to benefit those for whom it had ostensibly been set up.⁴² Interviews conducted for this article with workers who were in Kot Lakhpat in the late 1960s suggest that it was workers from the adjoining areas, from smaller villages around Lahore, and from the older industries who actually came to work in the factories in the Kot Lakhpat area.

New industries were set up and older ones began to relocate, wholly or partially, to the Kot Lakhpat area by the late 1950s. An example of this was the Bata factory located in Batapur, just outside the limits of Lahore to the northeast of the city. The Bata Shoe factory was owned by a Czechoslovakian family that initially set up shop in Calcutta and then opened a 'sister factory' in Punjab in Batanagar to meet the demand for the production of shoes and boots for the military during the Second World War.⁴³ In the 1960s it shifted part of its operations to Kot Lakhpat. There is some evidence to indicate that older workers were rehired in this newer plant. For instance, in 1961, Bata leased a tannery in Kot Lakhpat and reportedly fired workers from the original plant then rehired them as casual labour there.⁴⁴ Other factories that moved included Ittefaq, an engineering company that was set up by a group of agriculturalists from Amritsar in 1940. In 1966, it was moved to Kot Lakhpat.⁴⁵ Rumours abounded that the punishment for troublesome workers in this factory was being thrown into the furnace.⁴⁶ The Batala Engineering Company (BECO) also moved to Kot Lakhpat in the 1960s. BECO was initially set up in Badami Bagh by a Hindu resident in Lahore and given to C. M. Latif after partition as compensation for a factory that he had previously owned in India. In 1972 it was nationalized and renamed the Pakistan Engineering Company (PECO). Until that time, however, it was one of the factories that received state benefits extended to industrialists under the Ayub regime. The Wazir Ali family, notables from a landowning background, set up the Packages factory. At the time of the 1968–9 movement this

⁴² Alvi, *The Informal Sector*, p. 66.

⁴³ J. Baros, *The First Decade of Batanagar* (Calcutta, 1945), p. 142, Ahmad Salim's Personal Archives (ASPA), South Asian Research and Resource Centre, Islamabad, Pakistan.

⁴⁴ 'Bata Shoe Company (Pakistan Limited) v. Muhammad Amin and Others', 1961 *Pakistan Labour Cases (PLC)* 618, p. 620.

⁴⁵ Anita Weiss, *Culture, Class and Development in Pakistan: The Emergence of an Industrial Bourgeoisie in Punjab* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1991), pp. 104–105.

⁴⁶ Altaf Baloch (Interview, 14 May 2011); Bashir Zafar (Interview, 7 November 2010); Yusuf Baluch (Interview, 1 June 2011). Reportedly, workers were taken to the boiler and threatened with this, but not actually thrown in.

factory employed about 2,500 workers⁴⁷ of whom Abdur Rehman was one.

Against the backdrop of the development of this area, resentment against the military regime of General Ayub Khan was picking up pace. The 1960s were characterized by political repression underpinned by a new system of indirect elections, the banning of political parties, and the arrest of politicians.⁴⁸ Much of the literature on the movement has stressed the role of Ayub Khan and of rising economic inequality in creating the conditions that enabled Bhutto to build up a support base.⁴⁹ However, rising economic inequality is an insufficient explanation. A study of the wages of industrial workers in Pakistan shows that real wages rose in 1963–4. While this increase stalled afterwards, wages never dropped back to pre-1963 levels.⁵⁰ However, the feeling of being left out of the much larger benefits that were accruing to a few was also important in launching the movement.⁵¹

There was also a perception among industrial workers that Ayub Khan's regime was inherently 'anti-worker'. Such criticisms gained much more traction after the economist Mahbubul Haq gave a public address saying that 22 families controlled most of Pakistan's wealth. The number of families is disputed, but academic studies published in the years following this announcement detail how the preferential treatment given to these older industrialists allowed them to expand in a manner that was not comparable to either small-scale industries or

⁴⁷ Jones, *The Pakistan People's Party*, p. 234.

⁴⁸ The system of indirect elections or basic democracies in Pakistan was intended to contend with the 'illiterate masses' in the belief that Pakistani politicians had 'made the working of democracy impossible': Khalid B. Sayeed, 'Pakistan's basic democracy', *Middle East Journal*, 15:3 (1961), p. 249.

⁴⁹ Craig Baxter argues that Ayub Khan was not politically astute enough to respond effectively to building resentment. See: C. Baxter, 'Pakistan Votes—1970', *Asian Survey*, 11:3 (1971), p. 201. W. M. Dobell stresses Ayub Khan's illness in 1968 which Bhutto took advantage of. See: W. M. Dobell, 'Ayub Khan as president of Pakistan', *Pacific Affairs*, 42:3 (1969), p. 307. Others point toward the hated terms of the Tashkent declaration, corruption, and economic inequality. See: Robert La Porte, 'Succession in Pakistan: continuity and change in a garrison state', *Asian Survey*, 9:11 (1969), pp. 842–861; Talukder Maniruzzaman, "'Crises in political development" and the collapse of the Ayub regime in Pakistan', *The Journal of Developing Areas*, 5:2 (1971), pp. 226–228; 229. Burki highlights inequities generated by rapid urbanization and industrialization, stating that these factors had a dialectical relationship with Bhutto's 'charismatic leadership'. See: Burki, 'Ayub's fall', p. 203.

⁵⁰ S. Guisinger and M. Irfan, 'Real wages of industrial workers in Pakistan: 1954 to 1970', *Pakistan Development Review*, 13:4 (1974), p. 367.

⁵¹ Sayeed, 'Mass urban protests', pp. 115–116.

middle-level entrepreneurs who set up establishments in later years.⁵² By the 1960s, the most powerful industrial families had control over the majority of banks in the country and had established interlocking directorships in each other's industries.⁵³ Informally, they were also largely endogamous, arranging marriages between their children.⁵⁴ Competition did result in infighting among them, but this did not produce the dissolution of these mutually beneficial networks.⁵⁵

The political repression, repressive labour laws, and industrial concentration that prevailed under Ayub Khan's regime did not, however, manage to completely eradicate labour protest. Indeed, new networks were formed during the 1960s, specifically between workers and students. Student protests had been increasing throughout the 1960s in opposition to Ayub's policies, which included the announcement of a longer BA degree programme and a university ordinance that allowed the university administration, or the government, to revoke the degrees of students seen to be involved in 'objectionable activities'.⁵⁶ The student protests of the 1960s triggered the formation of unions of students and professors who then linked themselves to labour organizations.⁵⁷ A major railway strike in 1967 further strengthened these ties.

⁵² Weiss makes this argument when comparing BECO and Ittefaq to what she calls the 'middle level indigenous bourgeoisie' in Punjab. See: Weiss, *Culture, Class, and Development*, p. 105.

⁵³ Rashid Amjad, *Industrial Concentration and Economic Power in Pakistan* (Lahore: Punjab University Press, 1974), pp. 32–34, 42–46; Lawrence J. White, 'Pakistan's industrial families: the extent, causes and effects of their economic power', *Journal of Development Studies*, 10:3&4 (1974), p. 281. See also: Rashid Amjad, *Private Industrial Investment in Pakistan 1960–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); L. J. White, *Industrial Concentration and Economic Power in Pakistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

⁵⁴ Hanna Papanek, 'Pakistan's big businessmen: Muslim separatism, entrepreneurship, and partial modernization', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 21:1 (1972), p. 25; Amjad, *Industrial Concentration*, p. 3.

⁵⁵ See: Amjad, *Industrial Concentration*, p. 67, for conflicts between industrialists as a result of a shortage of projects.

⁵⁶ Rizvi, *The Military and Politics*, p. 95; A. Ahmed, *Pakistan mein Tulaba Tahrik [The Student Movement in Pakistan]* (Lahore: Mashal, 2000), pp. 108–109.

⁵⁷ Amin Mughal (Interview, 4 December 2011), a committed leftist and also an NAP member at the time, was part of a professors' association at Islamia College. He had worked closely with Mirza Ibrahim. Aitzaz Ahsan (Interview, 6 August 2012). See also: Humeira Iqtidar, 'Radical Times: Students in Political Mobilization During the 1960s and 1970s', in *At the Crossroads: South Asian Research, Policy and Development in a Globalized World* (Islamabad: Sustainable Development Policy Institute, 2007), p. 237.

On 1 February 1967, after 8 am 'not a single train moved' in West Pakistan as 25,000 workers collectively went on strike.⁵⁸ It was preceded externally by a food crisis in Punjab, and internally by a conflict over leadership among the railways workers.⁵⁹ The handling of this strike created what can only be described as an atmosphere of rage. In response to this strike action, the police in the area of Garhi Shahu opened fire on a gathering of 'three to four hundred workers'.⁶⁰ It was claimed that these workers had been 'destroying Government property'.⁶¹ As a result of this action, two things happened. First, the workers directed their ire at state officials. During marches in Lahore, they made 'obscene references' to Ayub Khan and to the governor of Punjab, Muhammad Musa.⁶² They carried banners bearing slogans such as 'Down with Ayub', 'Out with Ayub', and 'Musa the killer', and began to paint graffiti with the same messages all over the walls of the residential area of Gulberg in Lahore.⁶³ Secondly, newer workers were radicalized through this movement and some of them came into open conflict with the old leadership in the railways, feeling that they were being too conciliatory. One account reported that Mirza Ibrahim was spat on by some of the workers when he attempted to make them stop the strike at the behest of government officials.⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that during this time, Bhutto did not make statements about this strike in Lahore nor about the earlier strike by

⁵⁸ *Pakistan Times*, 2 February 1967, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Brief accounts of this strike can be found in Tassaduq Hussain, *Pakistan People's Party: Irtiqa 1967–1971 [The Evolution of the Pakistan People's Party 1967–1971]* (Lahore: South Asian Institute, 1974), p. 38; T. Ali, *Pakistan: Military Rule*, pp. 145–146; Lal Khan, *Pakistan's Other Story: The 1968–69 Revolution* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2009), pp. 141–142.

⁶⁰ 'Special Meeting in the President's House to discuss the Railway Strike in West Pakistan held on 3rd February 1967', p. 3, 42/CD/67, reel no. 2557, NDC.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* The fact that the police had opened fire was discussed in this cabinet meeting, but was not admitted to in the press. The All-India Radio reported that several workers in Lahore died during the railway strike. In response, the provincial government spokesman stated that, 'The propaganda is false, baseless and concocted as not even a single person was killed during the strike.' *Pakistan Times*, 6 February 1967, p. 1.

⁶² Letter from D. B. Collard to S. Cottingham, 10 February 1967, p. 2, FCO 37/182, TNA. Governor Musa publicly issued warnings to the workers that if they did not return to work, 'firm action' would be taken against them. *Pakistan Times*, 3 February 1967, p. 1 and 4 February 1967, p. 1.

⁶³ Collard to Cottingham, 10 February 1967, p. 2, FCO 37/182, TNA.

⁶⁴ T. Ali, *Pakistan: Military Rule*, p. 146.

the workers of Karachi in 1963.⁶⁵ This period was in fact characterized by increasingly radical, wide-ranging demands being made by the workers themselves which the union and political leadership then had to respond to if they did not want to risk being sidelined.

New spaces of control and the labour movement in Kot Lakhpat

On 13 February 1969, workers from the railways, WAPDA, and other unions, mainly from the old centre of Lahore, took to the streets. Their extensive demands ranged from 'the abolition of capitalism and landlordism' to 'drastic reforms in the education system'.⁶⁶ In a massive strike held in March⁶⁷ Bakhtiar protested against the governor of the province on the basis that he served 'the interest of the capitalists' and threatened that his house would be *gherao*-ed by workers if he was not removed.⁶⁸ He added that the Army should be sent back to its barracks as its role was 'to guard [the] frontiers of the country'.⁶⁹ To show that the workers were serious, on the same day (17 March), the electrical workers under Bakhtiar cut off the supply of electricity to the Governor House and the Army's general headquarters for two hours.⁷⁰

This radicalization was giving birth to new ideas of what would be possible in the Pakistan that would emerge out of this movement. There were tales of poorer people in Lahore going to wealthier parts of the city 'to pick out the house they would occupy after the *awami inqilab*

⁶⁵ Both of the statements that Bhutto made to the press at the time that the Karachi firings were being covered related to China's border disputes with India. See: *Pakistan Times*, 2 March 1963, p. 1 and 3 March 1963, p. 1. Bhutto, as part of Ayub Khan's government, spent the first few months of 1963 preoccupied with a series of meetings with India to discuss the Kashmir situation. See: Herbert Feldman, *From Crisis to Crisis: Pakistan 1962–1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 129. Another pro-PPP account pointed out that Bhutto was also silent during the workers' protest of 1967, even though (according to Hussain) his sympathies were with the workers. See: Hussain, *Pakistan People's Party*, p. 38.

⁶⁶ *Pakistan Times*, 14 February 1969, p. 14.

⁶⁷ The headline reporting the strike stated: 'Wheels of industry stop for 24 hours', *Pakistan Times*, 18 March 1969, p. 1.

⁶⁸ A *gherao* is a protest tactic; it takes place when workers encircle a place of work, thus preventing employers from leaving, until their demands are met.

⁶⁹ *Pakistan Times*, 18 March 1969, p. 9.

⁷⁰ Jones, *The Pakistan People's Party*, p. 175. Jones based this claim on an interview with Bashir Ahmed Bakhtiar.

(people's revolution)'.⁷¹ Similarly, when Ayub Khan invited opposition members to a round table conference, a gathering of workers and student leaders in Rawalpindi addressed the president to demand that he hold a meeting between the government and workers as well.⁷² In the same meeting it was declared that 'workers and peasants' had previously limited their demands but 'now they should also demand the right to rule the country'.⁷³ This belief was perhaps most clearly voiced in the slogan used by workers during the movement: '*nikal jao sarmayadaron, Pakistan humara hai!* [Get out capitalists, Pakistan is ours!]'.⁷⁴

For most of February, the workers from the older factories were at the forefront of the movement, including those from the railways, WAPDA, Bata, and BECO.⁷⁵ A closer reading of the newspaper reports for March suggests that the BECO workers' strike in Badami Bagh (the location of the older factory) touched off strikes in the Kot Lakhpat area, shortly before martial law was imposed.⁷⁶ This is corroborated by interviewees who state that BECO in Kot Lakhpat was one of the first establishments in this area to join the movement, thereby making it a visible presence in the south of Lahore.

As the strikes gathered momentum, the workers, along with the student and professor associations, began to build labour unions. The Professors' Group started a Railway Inqilabi (revolutionary) Union among the railway workers⁷⁷ and also coordinated with some of the workers in Kot Lakhpat. Workers in Packages, namely Abdur Rehman, Kundan Lal, and Tariq Latif, were among those who formed the initial union in that factory, aided by these groups. During the movement, Abdur Rehman and Tariq Latif became associated with the Muttahida Mazdoor Markaz, a 'student-worker alliance' which was the result of

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 299.

⁷² 'RTC [Round Table Conference] to solve labour problems: a plea', *Morning News*, 17 March 1969, Press Clippings on Labour (PCL), National Archives (hereafter NA), Islamabad, Pakistan.

⁷³ 'Repeal of Labour Ordinance demanded', *Pakistan Times*, 16 March 1969, PCL, NA.

⁷⁴ Muhammad Yaqub (Interview, 14 May 2011).

⁷⁵ Ahmed, 'November Mass Movement', pp. 51–55.

⁷⁶ This can be inferred from newspaper accounts stating that workers in Badami Bagh demonstrated on 7 March. See: *Pakistan Times*, 8 March 1969, p. 10. By the time martial law was imposed it was reported that the BECO workers in both Badami Bagh and Kot Lakhpat had returned to work. See: *Pakistan Times*, 27 March 1969, p. 1. Therefore, between 8 and 27 March, the Kot Lakhpat-based workers of BECO joined the earlier strike of the Badami Bagh workers.

⁷⁷ Yusuf Baluch (Interview).

efforts made by students and lecturers from Punjab University to form links with other groups.⁷⁸

The story of how this union was formed varies widely. One worker states that Abdur Rehman was the leader of the union from the beginning. Influenced by the wider movement, he went to the management to assert the right of workers to form a union. The management tried to bribe him and when he did not desist, threatened to shave off his moustache. Eventually, the union was formed, but not registered, and Abdur Rehman and his group of workers were fired from the factory for two years. Another version describes how the Packages workers had been discussing the strikes in Lahore and talking about the benefits of having a union. Muhammad Akbar, a worker in the Packages factory, then stood on a table to make his arguments, because they did not have a microphone, and it was then that the workers decided to make him the leader of the union. The director of production at the time, who was in contact with the shop-floor workers, said that the initial union had ‘three pillars’—Abdur Rehman, Muhammad Akbar, and Altaf Baloch—all of whom began fighting among themselves later on.⁷⁹ Instead of trying to find the truth, it is perhaps more interesting to reflect on what they reveal about labour politics at that time. To be a labour leader in Lahore was to hold a position with real power. The Supreme Court in its discussion of Rehman’s murder notes this:

Labour leaders wielded vast power over their followers whose number ran into tens of thousands. Their large following gave [them] considerable leverage with the factory owners . . . as well as with the Government of the day.⁸⁰

In March 1969, however, it was not obvious that this strike action would produce a new kind of sovereign power, rooted in labour leaders, in these localities. While the actions of these workers were still at a nascent stage, martial law was declared. This did not, however, signal the definitive end of the workers’ strikes. By the end of the year workers began to mobilize again, this time with slightly different demands and strategies.

On 25 March 1969, amid the dramatic backdrop of a storm that left Lahore ‘covered with a white sheet of hailstones’,⁸¹ Ayub Khan

⁷⁸ Jones, *The Pakistan People’s Party*, p. 235.

⁷⁹ Tariq Hameed (Interview, 19 March 2014).

⁸⁰ ‘Khushi Muhammad v. the State and Altaf Hussain Baloch v. the State’, 1983 *Supreme Court Monthly Review (SCMR)* 697, para 8.

⁸¹ *Pakistan Times*, 26 March 1969, p. 1.

stepped down from power and relinquished office to General Yahya Khan.⁸² Immediately after martial law was imposed, the 'agitational atmosphere' in Lahore was said to have evaporated.⁸³

Realizing that the problem of industrial unrest needed to be dealt with immediately, Yahya Khan appointed Air Marshal Nur Khan to formulate a new Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO). After discussions with trade unionists and industrialists, the military government announced the IRO of 1969. Some union and federations accepted the new policy,⁸⁴ but for other workers in the country this policy was unacceptable as it also legalized lockouts by employers.⁸⁵ Perhaps the most important aspect of the new policy was the appointment of a Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA): workers would have to elect a union that would be the sole representing authority. This would then be the official platform from which workers would negotiate with management and with state officials.⁸⁶ Although the aim of the CBA was to restrict the presence of the older, employer-sponsored 'pocket' unions and to reduce rivalries between unions, conflicts arose as the CBA increased competition and privileged whichever group of workers was chosen.⁸⁷ As workers could influence employers and government policy, winning the position of CBA was comparable to securing a local government election.

Instead of calming the situation, the announcement of the new labour policy provoked widespread strikes all over the country. The workers demanded its immediate implementation, particularly the stipulations regarding a minimum wage. The response from employers, on the other hand, was to begin dismissing workers in order to reduce the costs of the higher minimum wage stipulated by the new labour policy. As labour protests broke out, employers in various industries in Lahore, including Packages and BECO, stated that this showed that labour was 'ignoring the spirit and procedure laid down in the new labour policy' and that it needed to desist

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Pakistan Times*, 27 March 1969, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Christopher Candland, *Labor, Democratization and Development in India and Pakistan* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 42–43.

⁸⁵ Jones, *The Pakistan People's Party*, p. 235.

⁸⁶ Kamran Asdar Ali, 'The strength of the street meets the strength of the state: the 1972 labor struggle in Karachi', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 37:1 (2005), pp. 87–88. For a general overview of this policy, also see: S. Ali, *Maghrabi Pakistan*, pp. 28–30, No. 285, PMPC, IISH.

⁸⁷ Shaheed, *The Labour Movement*, pp. 266–267.

from ‘wild-cat strikes’ as the employers were ‘prepared to negotiate’ under the new policy.⁸⁸ However, workers did not pay heed to such requests.

The workers from the Packages factory joined these protests in November 1969 thereby setting off strikes in other areas such as Kala Shah Kaku.⁸⁹ The limited secondary material that is available about these strikes gives Abdur Rehman an important position in Lahore, but folds this narrative into the history of the anti-Ayub movement and the rise of the PPP. As a result, one author even portrayed Rehman as a labour organizer for the PPP.⁹⁰

The accounts in the interviews contest this narrative. For instance, describing the formation of the union in Packages, interviewees do not mention the involvement of the NAP or the PPP in the initial stages. They begin by describing how most of the workers at Packages were initially wary of becoming involved in the movement. It was a new factory and many of its workers had only recently joined and came from areas around Lahore. They had heard stories of Ittefaq workers being burned in the furnace and did not want to risk such punishment. A procession of BECO workers who passed by the Packages factory presented the workers there with bangles. ‘They were asking us—what are you? Women?’⁹¹ Corroborating this story, a newspaper report from November stated that,

some female members of workers’ families, who went on strike, went to Packages Limited to present ‘Mehndhi and Churian’ to the workers for showing signs of weakness in their struggle against the adamant management by resuming work.⁹²

According to Muhammad Akbar, PPP members began to pay attention to the strikes because of the size of the workers’ processions. Philip Jones also mentions that Bhutto attended the strike at this stage, and, reflecting workers’ demands regarding the labour policy, denounced the provision regarding lockouts.⁹³ Packages workers described these

⁸⁸ ‘Lahore industrialists appeal for calm: ready for talks under new labour laws’, *Pakistan Times*, 16 November 1969, PCL, NA.

⁸⁹ Jones, *The Pakistan People’s Party*, pp. 234–235.

⁹⁰ Lodhi, *Bhutto*, p. 702.

⁹¹ Altaf Baloch (Interview).

⁹² ‘Partial strike in 4 Lahore firms continues’, *Pakistan Times*, 26 November 1969, PCL, NA.

⁹³ Jones, *The Pakistan People’s Party*, p. 236.

gatherings as 'labour camps' that were organized outside of the gates of the factory where protests were taking place.⁹⁴

Influenced by the wider environment and believing that the radical slogans and demands being made reflected the possibility of a new Pakistan with greater rights for workers, the Packages workers' strike began to build in intensity. It was at this time that PPP activists came to the workers' strikes and to their neighbourhoods and reflected their own language back at them. Indeed, Bhutto was also reported to have said to them that the employers at Packages would be severely punished.⁹⁵ In interviews, some Packages workers similarly claim that when Bhutto came to address their protests in 1970, he told them that when he came to power the mills would belong to them and the fields would belong to the peasants. They also add that Mubashir Hasan and Shaikh Rashid said that a vote for the PPP would allow them to drag their employers out by their moustaches to receive the workers' judgement.⁹⁶

It can be argued, therefore, that at this stage of the PPP's existence, the militant demands of the workers were incorporated within both the actions of its members and in the promises Bhutto made to workers. PPP party members then contested the elections on the basis of these slogans. Dr Mubashir Hasan, who won the election against Mirza Ibrahim in the railway constituency in 1970, 'campaigned on a platform calling for the nationalization of industry and large landholdings'.⁹⁷ It was precisely because Mirza Ibrahim was seen to have watered down his radical demands, and make compromises with the government, that he was seen as a less preferable candidate.

Soon after the PPP came into power, workers across the city began to take over mills and lock out their employers because they believed that

⁹⁴ Muhammad Akbar (Interview, 18 May 2011). These 'camps' outside the factory gates are also mentioned in 'Talks begin to end dispute: BECO, Packages workers strikes', *Pakistan Times*, 28 November 1969, PCL, NA.

⁹⁵ Cited in Leghari, 'Socialist Movement', p. 142.

⁹⁶ Bashir Zafar (Interview); Altaf Baloch (Interview); Muhammad Akbar (Interview). Such statements are also corroborated by Aitzaz Ahsan (Interview). Jones also states that Bhutto and Sheikh Rashid were 'consistently quoted' using such slogans: Jones, *The Pakistan People's Party*, p. 299.

⁹⁷ Roedad Khan (ed.), *The American Papers: Secret and Confidential India-Pakistan-Bangladesh Documents 1965-1973* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 799. This correspondence also discusses an interview with Mubashir Hasan (a prominent founding member of the PPP), and reports that he appeared to be 'not entirely convinced with Bhutto's credentials as a genuine social revolutionary', *ibid.*

this was what the movement had been about. The PPP responded by cracking down severely on many of the workers and ousting the more radical elements from its political ranks.⁹⁸ At the time, academics and journalists responded by castigating the PPP, pointing out how workers had even increased production in some of the mills they had taken over.⁹⁹ In other words, they further legitimized the claims that workers were making through this takeover—that the movement was not just political, but had promised much more fundamental and radical changes.

These divergent expectations show that the idea of what the movement represented, was not entirely under the control of the PPP and that it evolved through the dynamics of the movement itself. What the country would look like after the movement, and who would take on the new mantle of legitimacy, was still contested territory. For some the PPP's response indicated that it was no longer the true voice of the people.

The workers strike back: Abdur Rehman and his court in Lahore, 1972–1974

As the PPP moved away from the revolutionary claims that brought it to power, not all the members of the party who had been involved with labour and the unions changed their stance. Some of them left the PPP in protest at the regime's actions.¹⁰⁰ Others like Hanif Ramay and Mubashir Hasan in Lahore continued to support labour's demands and formed close links with labour leaders like Abdur Rehman.

⁹⁸ For these takeovers and the PPP's response to them, see: 'Koh-E-Noor Rayon under workers' control', *Pakistan Forum*, 2:9/10 (1972), pp. 8–10+7; 'Who is sabotaging production?', *Pakistan Forum*, 3:2 (1972), pp. 5–6; Iqbal Khan, 'From Pathan colony to workers' state', *Pakistan Forum*, 2:11 (1972), pp. 4–8; Shaheed, *The Labour Movement*; K. A. Ali. 'The strength of the street', pp. 83–107.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, especially the *Pakistan Forum* report, 'Who is sabotaging production?'

¹⁰⁰ Reportedly, Mukhtar Rana was among the first to leave. Declaring that the PPP had betrayed the cause of the workers, he held a mock trial of Bhutto in Faisalabad and was subsequently arrested for making an objectionable speech. Mairaj Muhammad left soon afterwards because he felt the PPP's industrial and land reforms were not what had been promised. Lodhi, *Bhutto*, pp. 404–405. Yusuf Baluch said Mairaj was known for going and crying at the graves of the workers who were killed in Karachi (Interview).

The PPP's response to workers' radicalism did not immediately result in the cessation of strike action. Indeed, in areas like Landhi in Karachi, workers' strikes initially intensified to protest against Bhutto's actions.¹⁰¹ However, the use of force and intimidation eventually began to reap rewards. It is interesting, therefore, that instead of engaging in strike action, the workers who had been part of the Kot Lakhpat movement, particularly those in Packages, set up local, informal structures of power that self-avowedly claimed to be alternatives to those controlled by the PPP. However, the way in which these alternative structures exercised authority overlapped with extant state institutions. Putting pressure on the police and forcing them to be more responsive to the needs of the poor or coercing industrial employers to pay better wages were just some of things that Abdur Rehman did in Kot Lakhpat.

Abdur Rehman began to refer to himself as the '*asli* [real] Bhutto'.¹⁰² This was meant to show his opposition to the state and to the power relations it perpetuated. The *idea* of the state is what is important here. The workers, during the movement, saw the state as anti-worker and thought things would be substantially different under the new PPP government. As that idea rapidly lost legitimacy, they came up with different ways of attempting to realize the aims of the anti-Ayub movement by creating new structures of local authority. In Kot Lakhpat this may have been described as a 'parallel government',¹⁰³ but it did not become the target of state repression in the way that the factory takeovers did, because it operated within certain bounds and with the cooperation of government and state officials, as well as employers. In effect, for all his rhetoric, Rehman maintained links with politicians and employers, using his own support base to force certain actions. He was, therefore, perhaps more comparable to a populist and somewhat flamboyant local government official than he was to a revolutionary interested in overthrowing the government.

Rehman, for instance, remained a worker at the Packages factory. He did clash with management over authority, but when it came to dismissing a worker for stealing, he supported the management's decision. In fact, it may be possible to argue that management even respected him, in spite of the problems he caused for them. With regard to this, Tariq Hameed states that 'nobody could influence him

¹⁰¹ K. A. Ali, 'The strength of the street', p. 99.

¹⁰² Yusuf Baluch (Interview).

¹⁰³ Jones, *The Pakistan People's Party*, en. 93, p. 252.

by increasing his pay or giving him more power. He honestly, genuinely believed in it.¹⁰⁴

Speaking after Rehman's death, Hanif Ramay, then chief minister of Punjab said that he thought Rehman was 'highly reasonable and fully dedicated to the cause of labour'.¹⁰⁵ A newspaper report published after Rehman's death claimed that Ramay had helped Rehman to resolve disputes among mill workers.¹⁰⁶ Sheikh Rashid, then federal minister for health, went much further: condemning the murder, he declared that '[e]very drop of his blood is a sacred trust of the nation and will be accounted for...'.¹⁰⁷ These statements may have been defensive partly because after the murder, workers in Kot Lakhpat chanted the slogan '*Rehman keh badlay teen sar; Bhutto, Ramay aur Khar* [For Rehman three heads; Bhutto, Ramay and Khar]'.¹⁰⁸

There were elements of both coordination and resistance in the relationship between the workers of Kot Lakhpat, the PPP government, and industrial employers. However, under Rehman, the workers in this area made the final decision in disputes. If punishment was to be meted out, it was done with their blessing. In a fascinating display of their power, it is also claimed that some of their supporters came to them for advice when they had to make personal decisions. According to Bashir Zafar, a worker in the factory came to him to ask for his blessing before he agreed to a marriage proposal.¹⁰⁹ The person accepted as a labour leader was able to exercise authority and become the sovereign power in this locality, and this produced violent conflicts among those vying for this position.

Until 1972 on the surface workers appeared united. At the beginning of that year, the Kot Lakhpat workers set up a hunger strike camp in front of Governor House to press for the implementation of their earlier demands and for a new labour policy. In a similar manner to the way in which various groups came together in the labour camps outside the mills during the 1968–9 movement, workers from

¹⁰⁴ Tariq Hameed (Interview). When questioned about what 'it' was, Hameed said that Rehman believed the system around them would inevitably collapse and all people who were professional and did their work with due diligence would find a place in whatever new system came to replace it.

¹⁰⁵ 'TU leader slain: angry protest by workers', *Eastern Worker*, 14:6, June 1974, pp.

140–141.

¹⁰⁶ *Dawn*, 1 May 1974, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Hussain Naqi (Interview, 14 March 2016).

¹⁰⁹ Bashir Zafar (Interview).

all over Lahore, members of the PPP, and two from the NAP came to the hunger strike camp to support them. The two main hunger strikers were Abdur Rehman and Altaf Baloch, even though they were associated with different factions of the NAP.¹¹⁰

Also a worker at Packages, Altaf Baloch began to organize worker unions in different mills such as the Ittefaq foundry. Abdur Rehman was similarly organizing workers in Packages and in factories such as the Oriental Silk Mills and Lall industries. However, as the head of the Mazdoor Markaz, Rehman led the stronger group to which different unions were affiliated. He was also the general secretary of the Muttahida Mazdoor Majlis-e-Amal which had affiliated unions from across the city.¹¹¹ It is, therefore, not surprising that in a referendum held in December 1973, his union beat Altaf Baloch's rival union to become the Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) in the factory.¹¹²

As competition between the union leaders grew, many workers tried to establish themselves as genuine leaders, true to the cause of the working class. This necessarily involved referring to the other workers as 'goondas'. The language used in Urdu newspapers, particularly after Abdur Rehman's death, is revealing in this regard. Workers demanded that the government end the 'lawlessness' and that the 'hooligans' who were responsible for jeopardizing the 'working class movement' should be brought to justice.¹¹³ These statements show, first, that in the early 1970s, the workers of Kot Lakhpat self-consciously thought of themselves as part of a working-class movement. Secondly, the clear implication was that the goondas were those workers who did not have the higher cause of the working-class movement foremost in their minds. If an intrinsic part of the exercise of public authority is the

¹¹⁰ Muhammad Idrees, 'The Abdur Rehman Story (II): A Bomb That Didn't Explode', *The Night*, pp. 195–196. Very little has been written on the NAP in West Pakistan. For accounts of the party and the factions that formed within it, see: M. Rashiduzzaman, 'The National Awami Party of Pakistan: leftist politics in crisis', *Pacific Affairs*, 43:3 (1970), pp. 394–409; Ishtiaq Ahmed, 'The rise and fall of the Left and the Maoist movements in Pakistan', *India Quarterly*, 66:3 (2010), pp. 251–265.

¹¹¹ Idrees states that 20 unions were affiliated to the Mazdoor Markaz. See: Idrees, 'Story (I)', p. 189.

¹¹² 'Khushi Muhammad Dogar v. The State', 1984 *MLD* 1337, pp. 1344–1345.

¹¹³ *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 5 May 1974, p. 2. Accusations were also made about workers losing track of their cause. Specifically, workers from different unions who had personal or professional conflicts with other workers implicated one another in Rehman's death to get back at them for perceived slights. *Imroze*, 6 May 1974, p. 2. Similar sentiments about opportunists and hooligans were expressed in *Nawa-i-Waqt*, 4 May 1974, p. 5.

ability to make distinctions between different orders of citizenship and to name those who belong and those who do not, what the workers were doing through these actions was an important part of creating their own legitimacy in opposition to that of competing others.¹¹⁴ In Kot Lakhpat, this legitimacy was based on whether the worker in question was part of Abdur Rehman's group or not, because the actions of the different groups were not qualitatively distinctive.

Identifying the goonda as the repository of illegitimate power in working-class localities increased during the early 1970s. Of course, there were individuals who sought to take advantage of the opportunities opened up in this politically volatile space. Some workers, after gathering a considerable following, or making themselves known by flamboyantly flaunting their employers' authority, would leave the factory premises and set up a gang of sorts. These individuals then became strongmen for hire.¹¹⁵ Industrial employers were also known to keep such men on their payroll to intimidate their increasingly militant workforce. For instance, in 1973, a group of workers who were scheduled to hold their federation meeting in an empty plot in the Gulberg area of Lahore were fired upon. Those present said it was the infamous goondas from the surrounding areas who had attacked them. Specifically, it was claimed that they had been hired by the management of the 7 Up factory, located nearby.¹¹⁶ What can be gleaned from this is that the workers and the reporters from *Imroze* were implying that there were individuals who worked as thugs in factories and the surrounding areas who could be recognized on sight.

Khushi Muhammad Dogar, the main accused (along with Altaf Baloch) in the Abdur Rehman case, and an ex-Packages employee, was among those individuals who were 'muscle for hire'. He used his reputation as a strong man to hire himself out as a local thug in matters such as property disputes and to employers, and he became well known for his ability to get the job done.¹¹⁷ Dogar and his men would frequent the area of Qainchi, near the Packages factory, and would regularly demand money from the shopkeepers there.¹¹⁸ In terms of the use of force and violence, these actions were not so different from what

¹¹⁴ This argument follows Lund who argues that this ability to make distinctions 'may just be the essence of public authority'. See: Lund 'Twilight institutions', p. 689.

¹¹⁵ Bashir Zafar (Interview); Tariq Hameed (Interview).

¹¹⁶ *Imroze*, 10 May 1973, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Mohammad Yaqub (Interview); Hussain Naqi (Interview).

¹¹⁸ Tariq Hameed (Interview).

Abdur Rehman and his men did. The key difference for the workers, and for the way in which the two men are remembered, is that one was seen as a true working-class hero whose aim was always to engage in improving the everyday lives of the working classes, while the other was motivated only by his own betterment. These characterizations show that workers attributed meaning to politics, depending on who they supported: while Khushi Dogar hired himself and his men out to anyone for money, Rehman and his men protected the workers and their families in the area and supported their actions against the employers; while Dogar left Packages, Rehman remained employed there, organizing workers against the employers. In the Mazdoor Markaz workers' accounts, Altaf Baloch was lumped in with the Dogar group and referred to as a stooge of the government or '*hukoomat keh chamchay*'.¹¹⁹ This is not entirely fair as Baloch was an important union leader in his own right, and the accusations traded after Rehman's murder—that workers were trying to make political capital out of Rehman's death by implicating other union leaders—are likely to be true, given that, by the time of the murder, both Rehman and Baloch's groups 'went about armed' and 'violent clashes' between the two were common.¹²⁰

Between 1972 and 1974, Abdur Rehman's federation began to hold his 'worker court', partly to protect the poor from tactics of those like Dogar, but also to provide an alternative form of justice as the police and the PPP government were seen to be unresponsive to the workers' demands. Idrees's account, which drew on the newspaper reports around the murder, states:

With [Rehman] around, police patronage of gangsters in the area could hardly go very far. Bribes dwindled because all those run of the mill cases out of which police might make some capital were going over to Abdur Rehman's 'court' for settlement.¹²¹

This court was held on an ad hoc basis. Whenever a case was brought to him, Rehman would call together his closest allies to discuss it. They would ask around about the case, bring in the complainants to hear what they had to say, and then Rehman would call on the Packages workers to support him and punish the accused. The stories of the cases taken up by this court are varied. If a road accident occurred in the area

¹¹⁹ '*Abdur Rehman ko shaheed kar diya gaya, Abdur Rehman zinda hai* [Abdur Rehman has been martyred, Abdur Rehman lives]', no. 392, PMPC, IISH.

¹²⁰ Idrees, 'Story (I)', p. 192; Idrees, 'Story (II)', p. 194.

¹²¹ Idrees, 'Story (II)', p. 197.

and one of the workers, or their family members, was injured, Rehman and his men would block the roads, effectively putting pressure on the police and regular commuters until compensation was provided.¹²² If they could, the workers would be ordered to take possession of the vehicle and keep it until the owner himself paid compensation.¹²³ In one such case, the police official in charge tried to reason with Rehman, saying that they were both workers and had to get their jobs done, the only difference being that the policeman had a cap and a belt. So Rehman agreed to open the road in exchange for the cap and belt, which he then went about wearing for the next few days.¹²⁴ In another case, the police reportedly killed a tea-stall owner in the Kot Lakhpat area. His family came to Abdur Rehman asking for his help and so Rehman directed his workers to block the traffic in the area and *gherao* the police station. Eventually, he forced the police to compensate the aggrieved family.¹²⁵

The interviewees testify that his activities went even further. The stories include an incident involving the mother of a girl who had been molested, who came to Abdur Rehman asking for his help. He and the workers of the Mazdoor Markaz beat up the accused man and then arranged a marriage for the girl. Similar stories included those of women whose husbands had beaten them coming to Rehman to ask for justice. He would drag their husbands out in public and beat them. Women workers who were prevented from unionizing also came to him and he would send his men to force the employers to let them form their union. It was actions such as these that led one writer to observe that those who did not have money for a court case could be assured of justice whenever they went knocking at the door of Abdur Rehman's court.¹²⁶

Other accounts characterized Rehman as an ordinary hoodlum. Idrees points out that '[w]here he lived, there were people who said he was an adventurer, a hardliner, a man who made too many enemies'.¹²⁷ These conflicting descriptions came together in the narrative of how

¹²² Bashir Zafar (Interview).

¹²³ Idrees, 'Story (I)', p. 191; '*Zinda hai*', no. 392, p. 3, PMPC, IISH.

¹²⁴ Tariq Hameed (Interview).

¹²⁵ Idrees, 'Story (I)', p. 191.

¹²⁶ Mahmud, *Pakistan mein Mazdoor Tahrik*, pp. 63–64. This account also mentions that no woman could be harassed and no police officer could abuse anyone while Abdur Rehman was in control of the area.

¹²⁷ Idrees, 'Story (II)', p. 196. These include local industrialists, Altaf Baloch, and other trade union rivals as well as 'local gangsters', *ibid*.

Abdur Rehman handled one of the last cases before his death. Rehman had previously had an altercation with Khushi Dogar's brother, who was part of the rival union in Packages and a supporter of Altaf Baloch.¹²⁸ This conflict set the stage for what was to follow.

A group of shopkeepers and workers from nearby areas came to Rehman to complain about Dogar's criminal activities and were assured that he would be punished.¹²⁹ Discussing the murder, the High Court at Lahore observed that Dogar had received a 'severe beating' by 'the party of Abdur Rehman'.¹³⁰ Interviewees state that Rehman went too far in this instance, allowing his workers to torture Dogar by extinguishing their cigarettes on his body.¹³¹ This indiscriminate use of violence was not just reserved for individuals like Dogar: Altaf Baloch and his men were prevented from entering the factory premises and were beaten up if they tried to do so. As the management was behind Rehman and his men, this was easily done.¹³² It is therefore not surprising that the workers of the Majlis-e-Amal named both Baloch and Dogar as co-conspirators in the murder.¹³³

After the murder of Abdur Rehman, Khushi Dogar and Altaf Baloch were arrested. All accounts corroborate that the day before the May Day celebrations for which Abdur Rehman had planned a large rally, a car hit his motorbike. He was on his way back to Packages from the National Industrial Relations Commission, where he had been summoned to respond to a charge of unfair labour practices by Altaf Baloch and his workers. The assailants in the car then emerged, wielding weapons, and ran after Rehman, who tried to take refuge in a nearby hospital. Ironically, it was inside the hospital that he was shot and, crucially, nobody witnessed the actual killing.¹³⁴ All the accused in the case cited union rivalry or 'previous enmity' as the reasons for having been named as the murderers.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Bashir Zafar (Interview).

¹²⁹ Tariq Hameed (Interview).

¹³⁰ 'Khushi Muhammad Dogar v. State', 1984 *MLD* 1337, p. 1340.

¹³¹ Hussain Naqi (Interview); Mohammad Yaqub (Interview, 14 May 2011); Altaf Baloch (Interview).

¹³² 'Khushi Muhammad Dogar v. State', 1984 *MLD* 1337, p. 1349.

¹³³ 'Zinda hai', pp. 3–4, no. 392, PMPC, IISH.

¹³⁴ 'State v. Altaf Baloch and 15 others', In the court of Sh. Muzaffar Hussain, Addl. Session Judge, Sessions Court, Lahore, Session case No. 8 of 1975, Session trial No. 9 of 1975, from the transcript of the court judgment, p. 41.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.

In the court case the judges observed ‘the utter helplessness of Management’ in the face of the demands made by the workers and stated further that it was:

[A] matter of common knowledge that from 1972 onward labour had an upper hand in the industrial and commercial establishment and all effective checks to make them amenable to discipline had been either removed or diluted.¹³⁶

The court noticed ‘serious irregularities’ in the investigation of the case.¹³⁷ Indeed, the differences in the original witness accounts and the statements made in court included: lists of the people implicated being altered, trees being newly imagined in areas that would have affected what the witness could claim to have seen, and, best of all, Abdur Ghafoor, a Rehman supporter, initially claimed he had arrived in time to hear Rehman say ‘in a sinking voice, that he had been attacked by Altaf Baloch and his companions’¹³⁸—Ghafoor admitted later in court that Rehman was already dead when he arrived.¹³⁹ The court eventually laid aside these irregularities based on the fact that a patient and two employees in the hospital broadly corroborated the main narrative.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps the court was not aware that Idrees’s account, printed in the *Pakistan Times* in 1974, states that the hospital employees’ union was part of the Mazdoor Markaz.¹⁴¹

The judgment of the Sessions Court was that the motive for some of the accused in the case had not been proven and declared that it would give ‘them benefit of doubt’ and acquit them; Baloch and Dogar, however, were sentenced to death.¹⁴² Commenting on the brazen disregard of consequences in this murder, the Supreme Court judgment observed that Rehman was killed in ‘broad daylight’ and his murderers were ‘totally unmindful of the fact that dozens of persons may be watching them’.¹⁴³ It is possible to argue that the workers’ lack of confidence in the ability of officials to collect reliable information was well placed.

¹³⁶ ‘Khushi Muhammad Dogar v. State’, 1984 *MLD* 1337, p. 1344.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1349.

¹³⁸ ‘State v. Altaf Baloch and 15 others’, In the court of Sh. Muzaffar Hussain, p. 4.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Khushi Muhammad Dogar v. State’, 1984 *MLD* 1337, pp. 1348–1349.

¹⁴¹ Idrees, ‘Story (I)’, p. 188.

¹⁴² ‘State v. Altaf Baloch and 15 others’, In the court of Sh. Muzaffar Hussain, pp.

38; 40.

¹⁴³ ‘Khushi Muhammad v. the State’, 1983 *SCMR* 697, para 8.

This can be gleaned from the fact that the police clearly played a partisan role in the case and its investigation. An inspector in the police department gave a statement saying that the majority of the accused workers in this case were innocent and simultaneously added people to the list of the accused simply because they were sitting with Khushi Dogar when he was arrested.¹⁴⁴ The Sessions Court observed that the ‘police involved so many innocent persons in this case to show some sort of performance’¹⁴⁵ and started a discussion on police collusion in the case.¹⁴⁶ These aspects of the murder case show how the police (much like the PPP) had been reacting to, and coming up with strategies to deal with, the workers’ power in Kot Lakhpat.

In terms of the resolution of worker disputes, the police and the PPP had limited authority. The workers tolerated only those party members who had proved useful to them in the past. For instance, Mustafa Khar, then governor of Punjab, showed up at the road blockade following Rehman’s death.¹⁴⁷ He was embroiled in a long-standing power struggle with Hanif Ramay whom he thought too weak to handle Lahore and its politics. When Khar arrived in the Kot Lakhpat area workers attacked his car. He and his companions were ‘manhandled’ and the police had to intervene to ‘rescue them’.¹⁴⁸

While Baloch’s testimony in the court was that he had been ‘falsely involved’ as part of a ‘conspiracy’ intended to remove him ‘from the labour and political fields’,¹⁴⁹ the Majlis-e-Amal’s pamphlet made a different claim. It stated that Baloch had been part of a longer ‘reformist’ trend in the labour movement of Kot Lakhpat (as opposed to Rehman’s radicalism) and that he had begun to work with goondas and ‘PPP agents’ against Abdur Rehman.¹⁵⁰ This last claim revealed a changing idea of what the PPP represented, and defined the radical trend in Kot Lakhpat in opposition to the Party. Workers’ militancy in the area may have been distinct from national level politics, but they had nonetheless engaged with the shift in the PPP’s stance. From

¹⁴⁴ ‘State vs. Altaf Baloch and 15 others’, In the court of Sh. Muzaffar Hussain, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁷ *Musawat*, 1 May 1974, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Trade union leader slain: angry protest by workers’, *Eastern Worker*, 14:6 (1974), p. 140. This issue of the *Eastern Worker* contains several short pieces on Abdur Rehman’s death.

¹⁴⁹ ‘Khushi Muhammad Dogar v. State’, 1984 *MLD* 1337, p. 1342.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Zinda hai’, pp. 3–4, no. 392, PMPC, IISH.

being included in their demands during the anti-Ayub movement, the Party was now viewed as synonymous with ‘reformists’ who were not above using hoodlums to intervene in the labour movement.

Conclusion

Abdur Rehman was 22 years old when he joined Packages in 1966. Originally from a small village in Punjab, the movement against Ayub Khan radicalized him and allowed him to form links with students, professors, and political organizations in Lahore. By the time his bullet-ridden body was pulled out of Gulab Devi hospital, he was known by workers across the country.

It can be argued that the workers of Kot Lakhpat saw their organization and their authority as a more legitimate representation of what the movement of 1968–9 had promised. An interesting symbolic representation of this can be seen in what Abdur Rehman had planned for May Day, shortly before his death. He had intended to begin a procession from the Minar-e-Pakistan, a monument constructed to mark where the Lahore resolution had taken place; after his murder, the workers wanted his funeral procession to follow the same route.¹⁵¹ Although the procession did take place, it was without Rehman’s body, as the police had forcibly removed it on the grounds that ‘a serious law and order situation was likely to arise’.¹⁵² The choice of the Minar was not insignificant: it can be read as an example of the workers’ own perception of their political importance within the national imaginary.

The party that the workers had helped bring to power had failed them, but their response to this was not to simply force the PPP to live up to their election promises. Instead, they created their own system of local power precisely because the movement and the political rupture of the late 1960s and early 1970s had not been about the PPP—it was about creating a completely new system of rule with new priorities. The workers had hoped to create a new order in which they would have decision-making authority and the ability to mete out justice and punishment. Their involvement in the movement made them perceive their position, as the local leaders of this order, as the legitimate one.

¹⁵¹ *Dawn*, 1 May 1974, p. 1.

¹⁵² ‘Khushi Muhammad Dogar v. State’, 1984 *MLD* 1337, p. 1343.

We may never know, perhaps, the exact circumstances of the murder of Abdur Rehman. What is known is that Altaf Baloch, along with Khushi Dogar, were handed down death sentences by the court in 1984. Baloch was only freed when Benazir Bhutto's government came to power. When he emerged from prison, 15 years after Rehman's murder, he said he felt that the world had changed: there was no sign of the labour movement.

That is not to say, however, that the movement left no imprint on the space it had occupied. For decades afterwards, the workers of Kot Lakhpat continued to be active in organizing for their rights.¹⁵³ Their activities and their power may not have been the same as it was in the early 1970s, but the fact that they were involved in anti-privatization struggles in the 1980s and continue to be part of political forums in the present day, shows that the presence of such struggle is important in and of itself.

When Pakistan again came under martial rule after 1977, the official patronage extended to organizations like the Jama'at-e-Islami allowed them to assume greater control in the field of labour.¹⁵⁴ Of course, it can be argued that the co-optation of worker organizations was seen as necessary only because workers had become politically relevant. The early 1970s had shown that a leader who exerted local sovereignty could have a far greater degree of control than that which resulted from official coercion or police brutality. In the final analysis, it is possible to suggest that such struggles leave a forever-expanded sense of what the political role of workers could be. In their later years, the workers who had been part of the Mazdoor Markaz were also able to link up to smaller leftist parties and wrest some concessions from the PPP.

This labour movement, short lived as it was, was important: first, because it was a movement of newer workers whose militant strategies drew on the wider movement of 1968–9. Secondly, it engaged with

¹⁵³ After Rehman's death, his friend and associate Tariq Latif changed his name to Tariq Rehman and took over the federation. The workers continue to be involved in new parties like the Awami Workers Party (a coalition of leftist political parties recently formed in Pakistan), and to act as a pressure group for the implementation of things like better policies with regard to pensions and wages.

¹⁵⁴ See: Humeira Iqtidar, 'Jama'at-e-Islami Pakistan: Learning From the Left', in Naveeda Khan (ed.), *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010). Iqtidar argues that the Jama'at learned from the Left in the 1960s, changing their demands and expanding their constituency to focus more on peasants and workers (p. 247).

older political groups while maintaining its independence from them. Lastly, it represented a moment in time when workers had an expansive view of what was politically possible, which left a legacy long after its ostensible failure.