

The attack on the Karachi stock exchange

International Secretariat, League for the Fifth International Thu, 02/07/2020 - 15:29

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On June 29, 10 people were killed in an attack on the Karachi Stock Exchange by four assailants who launched a bomb attack and then opened fire with guns. In a shoot-out, police forces and Rangers killed all four. Six guards and passers-by also died in the fire.

The 'Baloch Liberation Army', BLA, a nationalist, guerillaist underground organisation, claimed responsibility for the attack. In a statement, it justified the assault as a response to the continued oppression and plunder of Balochistan by the Pakistani ruling class and its imperialist backers, operations by the army, which have led to the killing and 'disappearance' of tens of thousands during the past decade and the more recent plunder of the region by Chinese imperialism.

Allah Nazar, the leader of another guerillaist organisation, the Baloch Liberation Front, BLF, also justified the attack as a message to Pakistan and China, similar to the attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi by BLA fighters in 2018.

Response of the rulers

The Pakistani state forces and police immediately branded the attack as an operation by 'terrorists'. They clearly intend to utilise the attack by the BLA as a pretext for retaliation, intimidation and repression of the whole Baloch liberation movement, whose mass struggles in recent weeks have focussed on both violent repression by police and other state forces and on social and political issues.

At a press conference, the Director of the Sindh Rangers, General Omer Ahmed Bukhar, congratulated himself for the 'successful operation' and 'strong response', claiming the four attackers were killed within 8 minutes. Of course, he also did not forget to suggest that involvement by 'foreign forces', such as those of India, could 'not be ruled out'. The Chairman of the Pakistan Stock Exchange, Sulaiman S. Mehdi, proudly pointed out that the market had quickly recovered from short term losses and that 'trading didn't close even for a minute'.

The whole establishment of the country joined in similar vein. The Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, paid his tribute to the killed security staff and also suggested that India was behind the attack by activating 'sleepers', a 'narrative' repeated by several ministers and leading security personnel. Moreover, state authorities in Sindh province and in the whole of Pakistan have made clear that they will use the attack as a pretext for extensive operations.

Sindh Chief Minister Shah directed law enforcement agencies to "intensify" targeted operations and further strengthen intelligence gathering "so that the emerging threat of terrorists could be crushed all over Sindh". Police and Rangers officers declared that a targeted operation will be started against militants in Karachi and other districts of the province within 24 hours.

In Balochistan, another round of intensified repression, military and police operations is almost certain to start. The silence on this issue in the bourgeois media is not a reason for complacency, but rather for concern in a state like Pakistan. So far, the security forces have raided the houses of those killed in the Karachi Stock Exchange and abducted some family members, whilst others have forcibly 'disappeared'.

In addition to the threats of 'security' operations, a public hate campaign is also starting against all those, who have solidarised with missing persons or opposed the violation of human rights and repression in Balochistan. Even the well know journalist Hamid Mir, who actually welcomed the shooting of the BLA fighters by the police, has nevertheless been accused of 'betraying the country' because he called for reforms in Balochistan in the past.

Cause of the attacks

Revolutionaries and the working class in Pakistan must not allow themselves to be blinded by the narratives of the security forces and the federal and provincial governments in which the state is presented as the defender of 'democracy' and 'progress' in a struggle against 'terrorists' or even foreign forces. This only serves to cover up what gave birth to a liberation struggle and nationalist and guerillaist movements and organisations in the first place; the systematic national oppression of the Baloch people since the creation of Pakistan.

Balochistan, with its 13 million inhabitants (out of 220 million in Pakistan) is not only geographically the largest province of the country, encompassing about 44 percent of the whole territory, it is also a region rich in resources that include coal, gas, gold, copper as well as many other natural and mineral resources. Most of the revenue from these, however, is directly appropriated by the central state of Pakistan and imperialist investors. In addition, it is central to Chinese imperialism's interests and its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC, project.

It was the oppression and impoverishment of the Baloch workers, peasants and even large sections of the petty bourgeoisie that led to a resistance struggle. This was met by massive repression, including tens of thousands killed, or 'disappeared' by the army and security services. It is these forces who are the real terrorists. The Pakistan state does not defend freedom or democracy in Balochistan, but only its social, economic and geo-political interests and those of its imperialist masters.

When it threatens to hunt the 'terrorists', it does not mean only, or even primarily, the fighters of the BLA, but all Baloch democratic, nationalist or socialist forces, the whole mass movement that has developed in recent years against the plunder, exploitation and oppression. More, they also want to give a warning to all those workers and youth, in other parts of Pakistan, fighting exploitation and oppression or mobilising in solidarity with the Baloch and other oppressed minorities.

Therefore, revolutionaries and the labour movement must oppose the operations against all Baloch organisations in Balochistan, Sindh and other provinces. Whilst we and many others do not agree with the politics and strategy of the BLA, we must refuse to recognise the right of the state forces to suppress, arrest or kill Baloch fighters. The labour movement and organisations must oppose all repressive operations against the Baloch people and activists under the pretext of a 'struggle against terrorism'. They must come out in solidarity, not only in Pakistan, but globally.

There can be no question that the struggle against the national oppression of the Baloch people is a justified struggle that deserves and needs the support of the entire working class, the left and all progressive forces in Pakistan and globally. Therefore, we must defend all Baloch forces fighting this oppression, irrespective of whether we share or reject their political strategy. Any other position would

mean equating the forces of oppression with those of the oppressed.

Which strategy?

This does not mean that revolutionaries should be uncritical of the strategy and tactics of the BLA or other nationalist guerilla organisations. Indeed, they should reject and openly criticise the strategy and the petit-bourgeois character of their politics.

But, as Marxists, we criticise it from a purely revolutionary point of view. Revolutionaries like Lenin or Trotsky rejected the methods of individual terrorism but not from a hypocritical or bourgeois-moralist point of view. With them, we recognise that a mass revolution and, therefore, revolutionary violence, is necessary if one wants to overthrow the existing capitalist and imperialist order. We fully agree that the national oppression of the Baloch, Pashtun and other oppressed nations will not be granted by gradual reform from above, but only as a result of a mass social, economic and political struggle.

But, the strategies of guerrilla struggle and individual terrorism do not promote or strengthen that struggle, on the contrary, they disorganise it. It gives the state a pretext for crushing existing movements. Even more importantly, it does not see the working class and the oppressed masses as the subject of revolutionary change, but substitutes for them an unaccountable, self-selected group of people.

Revolutionary communists in the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky advocate a radically different revolutionary strategy, programme and form of organisation. We stand for the creation of a revolutionary working class party, which can give a lead to the mass struggle, but which is and remains accountable to the fighting organs of the working class, to democratically organised trade unions, to committees and councils of action and ultimately to democratic workers' and peasants' councils.

During the past months, new mass movements, movements of political struggle, have emerged in Balochistan and many other parts of Pakistan, whether that is the solidarity movement with Bramsh Baloch, the student movement or working-class actions and strikes against the crisis. Our task is to build on these first, important steps, which have started to raise the spirit, self-confidence and the self-organisation of the masses. We need to follow the path to building, uniting and generalising such movements, to build a mass united front of all working-class forces, of all the organisations of the oppressed, of all the sectors of the left, willing to fight.

Solidarity with all those under attack and with the nationally oppressed is one pre-condition for making such a unity effective and lasting. Only on such a basis, can real unity between the workers, peasants and revolutionary youth of the different nations, and a working-class party and International, be built!

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