

Balochistan: Support the Self-Determination of the Balochi People

Arshad Shahzad Wed, 18/04/2012 - 13:11

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In recent months, the Pakistan military has increased its operations in Balochistan.

There, the resistance movement is against national oppression, oppression and torture. Balochistan is facing a fifth Pakistani military operation. Thousands of Baloch political activists are missing, many of them murdered by the Pakistan security agencies. Up to now some four hundred bodies of students, engineers, doctors and workers have been found. Some show evidence of having been severely tortured before they were killed.

The assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti on 26 August 2006 provoked the rise of a major wave of resistance to the murderous campaigns of the Pakistan Army and security services. More recently the discovery of the mutilated body of Sangat Sana Baloch ? a leader of the national movement - on 13 February, has led to widespread indignation and the involvement of broader masses in the struggle, including many women,

The Historic Background

Since the foundation of Pakistan, the Baloch people have been an oppressed, national minority. Self-determination or independence ? whilst promised by the British ? was soon ruled out. They had to choose joining India or Pakistan after Partition. Moreover, the concessions on autonomy initially granted to Baloch nationalists have been removed in a series of actions by Pakistan federal governments ? leading to five full-scale uprisings and continuous armed resistance since the foundation of the country.

The reason why the province is so fought over is simple enough. Balochistan, with its 13 million inhabitants (out of 177 million in Pakistan) is not only the largest province of Pakistan, encompassing about 44 percent of the whole territory, it is also one of the world's richest regions in terms of natural resources that include coal, gas, gold, copper as well as many other natural and mineral resources.

These resources have not improved the lives of the Baloch people. On the contrary, they are the principal cause of their suffering. These circumstances have also given rise to imperialist intervention, which has made the struggle against national oppression very contradictory. Imperialists are interested in Balochistan because of its geo-strategic position. The United States and China, as well as the Pakistan and Baloch ruling classes, are fighting for greater control of the mineral resources and the deep water Gwadar Port situated close to the strategically vital Straits of Hormuz.

What position should revolutionaries take?

In these circumstances, the question arises: What should be the position of those who struggle for socialist revolution? Should we support the struggle for Balochistan's national independence?

There are major differences of opinion on the Pakistan left on this important issue.

Some are against supporting the Baloch liberation movement because it is supported by the USA and India, while others point out that the leadership of the movement is in the hands of tribal chiefs. They argue that these leaders are hostile to development and progressive values and that we should support capitalist development. In circumstances where Baloch nationalists are killing Punjabi, Kashmiri and other Pakistani workers, others ask how the left could support them?

Let us start with the claim that the Baloch tribal chiefs are against development. The first question that arises, however, is why these tribal chiefs still exist and why the Pakistan state has not eradicated their social basis. The majority of the tribal chiefs and nobility always were, and remain, supporters of the Pakistani state. Why are these areas still underdeveloped? Clearly because the Pakistani state is reactionary and its ruling class did not fulfil any of the tasks of a bourgeois democratic revolution, nor did they carry out any social improvements such as the building of infrastructure and addressing the national question. In other words, it is the continued rule of Pakistan that keeps the majority of tribal chiefs in their positions of authority.

The Pakistani ruling class is benefiting from enormous profits from the natural resources of Balochistan whilst the Baloch people are deprived and living in acute poverty and hunger. The 'left' might still view the tribal chiefs as the main obstacle to progress, but for the Baloch people these chiefs are not the frontline issue. For them, it is the continued plunder and national oppression of the Baloch people that is the prime cause for underdevelopment and misery.

Imperialist Intervention

Some who call themselves leftists claim that it is U.S. imperialism and India that are fomenting the Baloch liberation movement, making it a conspiracy against Pakistan rather than a genuine national movement. This is the same argument that is used in every working class movement or liberation movement by the capitalist class. They always claim that it is not a matter of justified resistance to exploitation and oppression that gives birth to such struggles. Instead they claim it is the work of 'outside agitators' - trade unionist militants or socialists who are misleading the workers. During the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks were accused of being German agents.

This approach sees history as one long series of conspiracies, ignoring the unpleasant fact that such movements erupt because of socio-political crises, because of intensified exploitation and oppression. Of course, there is no doubt that imperialist powers are backing part of the movement. They want to manipulate it in their own interest, but that is not a reason to reject an entire movement that is fighting against national oppression, plunder of the country's resources and military occupation. Virtually every national liberation struggle or revolutionary uprising around the world, has been the subject of imperialist intervention and meddling.

Reactionary attacks on migrant workers

It is unfortunately true that some Baloch nationalists are attacking migrant workers and we vigorously oppose such attacks. The vast majority of these workers are poor and such indiscriminate terrorist acts actually weaken the Baloch struggle itself by antagonising potential allies within Pakistan. The main

question remains what approach should revolutionary socialists adopt towards the Baloch movement.

In fact we support the right of national self-determination unconditionally, but critically. Although it is a bourgeois-democratic demand, Lenin wrote that support for the self-determination of oppressed peoples by the workers of the oppressor nation creates better conditions for working class struggle. Instead of the workers of the different nations fighting each other, they can unite to fight against capitalism.

We want a voluntary federation of nations ? not a forced one. We want to abolish borders and boundaries instead of creating them. National self-determination (including the right of oppressed nations to form their own states, if they wish) has to be understood as a step towards this unity. It increases the forces of socialist revolution. Why? Because, the workers and all progressive forces of the oppressor nation and state can only win the trust of the oppressed if they support their rights without hesitation. The achievement of self-determination, with the support of the workers and peasants of the former oppressor nation, is the best way to weaken reactionary forces in both nations. As soon as the system of class exploitation is overcome, the basis for the exploitation of one nation by other nations will be overcome too.

In these circumstances revolutionary socialists should support the Baloch national movement. They must also warn against the intervention of imperialism ? whether by the US or China. Neither power will bring the Baloch people independence, instead their intervention makes the situation worse, giving rise to war, distraction and rivalries.

We must also point out the class differences within the national liberation movement and the dangerous misleadership of bourgeois and tribal forces. We need to fight for the working class and socialist forces to become the leadership of the national liberation movement. The working class needs to build its own organs of struggle that will link their struggles with those of the whole Pakistani working class, indeed with workers worldwide, using the methods of class struggle, strikes, occupations, the general strike, culminating in mass political uprising, instead of the petty bourgeois methods of guerillaism. In this way the national liberation of Balochistan and the struggle for socialism can go forward.

- Stop the military offensive! All Pakistan military out of Balochistan!
- No to imperialist interference
- Self-determination for the Balochi people!

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