

Brutal Killings: Call for International Solidarity with the Pakistan Airlines Strikers

International Secretariat, League for the Fifth International Thu, 04/02/2016 - 14:18

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On Tuesday, February 2, two Pakistan International Airline workers were killed, and at least 28 others injured, when paramilitary security forces opened fire on them without warning near the main entrance to Karachi Airport. The killings came on the first day of strike action against plans to privatise the national carrier. The workers, who were also demonstrating against government attempts to outlaw their strike, were also subjected to tear gas, water cannon and baton charges. The killings have led to the cancellation of all PIA flights and to a major crisis for the Pakistan Muslim League government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

PIA workers have been campaigning for the last month against the privatisation of the airline as part of a deal Sharif made with the International Monetary Fund in return for a \$6.2 billion loan. Although the government has already sold \$1.7 billion of shares in state enterprises, its plans have met with mounting opposition. Pressure from workers and opposition parties has already halted the completion of its hand over of other firms such as Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) and Faisalabad Electricity Supply Company (Fesco).

Immediately after the killings, fellow trade unionists, like the rail workers, declared their intention to take solidarity action, creating a major crisis for the government. Protests and sit-ins have spread to various cities across the country. This militant reaction to the brutal killings has led the government to announce a six month delay before it opens bidding for PIA, hoping to defuse the response but return to the attack in the summer.

The government is doing its best to divide the unions by a combination of negotiations and repression, hoping to embroil them in plans to rationalise the loss making firms. For them to agree to this would be a major error. What is needed now is united action between all the sectors under attack, drawing in the communities who will suffer terribly if there are major job losses and slashing of essential services. Such concerted action, now, can not only halt the government's offensive but force a complete, unconditional and permanent cancellation of the whole plan.

Pakistan's militant workers plainly need a party of their own, able to fight for a workers' government that can solve the chronic crisis the country is in, at the expense of the domestic capitalists and landlords, and the foreign imperialists, who have exploited them for so long.

The international trade union movement and working class political parties around the world should join Pakistan workers in expressing their sympathy with the families and comrades of the victims, demand the arrest of the killers and the granting of the PIA workers' just demands for an end to the IMF-dictated attack

on their jobs and working conditions. Once again, the IMF is revealed as an arch-enemy of workers around the world, from Athens to Karachi. Proof, once again, of the need to give practical organised expression to the old militant slogan; workers of all countries, unite!

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