



# Pakistan: No to cuts in education! Solidarity with student protests in Punjab!

International Secretariat, League for the Fifth International Fri, 25/09/2020 - 10:00

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The League for the Fifth International sends solidarity to the students of Bahauddin Zakaria University, in Multan, and Islamia University, in Bahawalpur, who have been protesting against threats to their education for nearly a month now. These students come from Balochistan and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA, which was merged with Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa by an act of Parliament in 2018.

Opportunities for higher education are meagre or absent for youth in the peripheral provinces. As a result, students from these neglected areas used to head to the Punjab to attain higher education. After the fall of Musharraf's dictatorship, the PPP-led government initiated a scheme under which students from Balochistan would get scholarships to study in Punjab's higher educational institutions.

Successive neoliberal governments have attempted to end these scholarships. Now, the cuts announced by the current regime in the education budget are being used as a justification to prevent youth from these provinces acquiring a higher education.

The university administrations claim that the provincial government of Balochistan has defaulted on its payment for these scholarships, which is why they can no longer afford to provide for these students. This means that, although students from Balochistan and former FATA can still gain admission to these universities, they will have to pay for all their expenses including tuition, accommodation and travel.

Naturally, such measures are going to affect the vast majority of working-class youth, who largely depend on scholarships for a higher education. This demonstrates the way that the peoples of the peripheral provinces are systematically held back. The Punjab-centred state of Pakistan has long exploited the people, and extracted the mineral wealth, of Balochistan without ever accounting for it.

Similarly, the state has never accounted for the damages it inflicted on Pashtun lands in ex-FATA in the name of the imperialist war on terror. It is utterly shameful that the administrations of the Punjab universities are now bringing up the dues that the Balochistan provincial government owes them. A few scholarships for students was all that the state used to give to these provinces. Now, it is adamant on attacking even those.

Last year, the neoliberal regime of Imran Khan went to the International Monetary Fund for a bailout worth US \$6 billion. This loan was used to keep afloat the profit-making of the capitalists, but it was conditional on major privatisations and an end to subsidies for public services. As a result, prices for electricity, petrol and basic necessities soared.

Moreover, the government introduced measures to cut jobs and to end pensions for retired citizens. As part of this austerity drive, major cuts were inflicted on education and this resulted in an exorbitant rise in tuition fees and other expenses for students. The attack on student scholarships is part of this bigger policy of attacks in the name of economic crisis. While the government has millions to give as relief to big capital, the crisis is used to justify major attacks on education, health and public services.

As a result of this blatant oppression of youth from already oppressed nationalities, protests have erupted. The students of Bahauddin Zakaria University in Multan have maintained a protest camp outside their institution for nearly a month now while those of Islamia University, in Bahwalpur, are also planning a sit-in camp.

Our comrades in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad have been active in setting up solidarity camps with struggling students in their areas. A protest camp will be set up in Lahore on Friday, 25th September while, in Karachi, the camp will be set up on Saturday, 26th September. We extend international solidarity to the youth in struggle and also appeal to the students, youth organisations, trade unions and left groups in Pakistan to participate in the solidarity action. Struggle till victory!

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