



Pakistan: Pashtun leader beaten to death in police provocation

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Muhammad Ibrahim Arman Luni is no longer with us. He was beaten to death by police on Saturday, February 2. Arman Luni was not just a kind college teacher, and a friend to many; he was one of the leaders of the Pashtun Protection Movement, PTM. Thousands of people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and across the globe are mourning his death. Our sympathies are with his family, friends and comrades. Our support goes to the courageous women, men and youth who are taking to the streets, against injustice and tyranny.

We share the message of Arman Luni's sister who called on all Pashtuns to 'raise their voices as otherwise they will kill you in hundreds and thousands?', and we extend this call to the workers, peasants, youth and women's movements in the whole of Pakistan. Every socialist, indeed every honest democrat, should give their support to the PTM and to the Pakistani Left at this juncture. The stakes are high and international solidarity is crucial.

Cold-blooded murder

Arman Luni went to the city of Loralai, in Balochistan, to address a sit-in protesting against continued violence and the forced eviction of locals from the area. Those 'measures' were the background to a terror attack by the reactionary Tehrik-i-Taliban on January 29, which left nine people dead, eight of them policemen, and injured another 21 citizens. By contrast, the sit-in was principled, peaceful and legitimate. Nevertheless, it was used as a pretext by the police to brutally murder Arman Luni in public, in broad daylight.

The government even tried to prevent Mohsin Dawar, Ali Wazir and other leaders of the PTM attending the funeral. It issues a statement that it was 'pleased to impose a ban on the entry of Dawar and Wazir along with their supporters with immediate effect for ninety seven days.' It then added insult to injury by stating that, "it had reasons to believe that circumstances exist that demand extraordinary vigilance and extensive security means to preempt any untoward incident?'. In fact, with local assistance they were able to attend the funeral but, on their return journey, the military opened fire with live ammunition, hitting and damaging their vehicle as they approached the provincial border.

Hypocrisy Unveiled

Both the Pakistani Muslim League-Nawaz PML-N, Pakistan's major opposition party and the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, PTI, of Imran Khan, kept silent about these atrocities. By so doing they confirmed their past and present complicity with the military and security forces in suppressing genuine mass movements of oppressed people for social and democratic rights.

Clearly, the Pakistani ruling class has no shame. The current course of events is not just a violation of any imaginable democratic rights but even the legal rights the state claims to guarantee. The movement needs to see the truth, and make the truth resound in every corner of the country.

It has long been obvious that the Pakistani state is prepared to crush peaceful protests and kill political activists but what needs to be emphasised here is that the sit-in was a protest against both the state's repressive measures and the

Taliban's reactionary policies. To then deny two elected MNAs entrance to a province, shooting at them on the border, makes all too clear the authoritarian character of the state apparatus, no matter whether the government is civilian or military.

It also reveals that, while the Pakistani ruling class make a great show of defending the country's unity, their 'unity' does not include the freedom of movement of its citizens. In fact, their talk of unity is a pretext to mute criticism and opposition, to divide along sectarian lines and to deny any democratic or national rights to minorities. When friends came to mourn the killing of a companion, they were denied their right to participate in a Janazah (Islamic funeral).

Truly, the killing of Arman Luni has unveiled the hypocrisy of the ruling class. It has revealed before the whole nation what the "Naya Pakistan" that Imran Khan promised in his election campaign, is really about.

Provocation

Regardless, of that, however, this is not a battle which will be won solely on the grounds of greater moral authority. Were that the case, the PTM would already have won. We need to recognise that the murder of such a high ranking leader of Pakistan's most prominent mass movement was not an arbitrary act by a local police force. The murder bears all the signs of an attempt by the ISI, Pakistan's sinister security agency, not only to frighten the PTM's leadership but, above all, to provoke a response that could then "justify" much more widespread repression of the Pashtun movement. If provincial and national government bodies were not complicit in this from the beginning, they have made themselves complicit both by their actions and their silence.

The Balochistan Chief Minister, Jam Kamal Khan Alyani, unintentionally reveals the military's and government's plan when his administration says that the PTM is endangering 'public peace and security'. The military and the government want a show-down. They are currently looking to provoke a situation which would allow full scale operation against the PTM, oppressing the broader movement, incarcerating if not killing the movement's leadership. They want the PTM to cross the imagined 'red lines' that Major General Asif Ghafoor, Director-General of the Inter-Services Public Relations ISPR, the media wing of the Pakistan Armed Forces, created in a thinly veiled threat at the beginning of December 2018.

...don't let them.

The leadership of the PTM are well aware of this. While protests erupted after news of the killing spread, nationally and internationally, they have called on their supporters to remain calm. This is a wise decision, and we strongly support its reasoning. The movement should not let the government determine its next steps. The murder alone can and will sweep new supporters into the movement, and revitalize those layers that have been active from the start.

Why now?

The state wanted to launch an offensive for two related reasons. The mass rallies of last Spring have passed, making the core activists of the movement more vulnerable but, at the same time, there are more and more frequent cases of fraternisation with other national and ethnic minorities across provincial borders. Pakistan's ruling class fears all such developments like the plague, and for very good reason.

If anything, this process has progressed in recent months. The spirit of the PTM and its democratic demands have swept beyond the borders of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Pashtun heartland. This could be seen in the show of mutual support when the Baloch Student Organisation, BSO, came under attack in the recent offensive against the Baloch people. The BSO's call for solidarity was answered by the PTM, and its main leader, Manzoor Pashteen, went to address the protest in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan but was shamefully denied access to the province by the provincial government, like Arman Luni's mourners.

Similar forms of political awakening could be seen when Manzoor Pashteen visited Karachi. Thousands flooded the streets to greet, see and hear him. Even the attempts of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, MQM, to liaise with the PTM,

could represent the first cracks in the wall of sectarian hate that has been carefully erected by Pakistan's elites. Though one needs to see such attempts of the MQM leadership in a critical light and oppose any political alliance with this force, we clearly condemn the state terror that is currently waged in Karachi, and see that there is an opportunity to end the sectarian hate that has haunted and divided the Pashtun, Afghan and Mohajjir communities of Karachi and Hyderabad.

We have to move on, to be victorious

That the PTM needs to keep calm in the current situation and not fall into the obvious trap of state provocateurs, does not mean that things should remain as they were. The killing of Arman Luni has fundamentally changed the situation. While the army generals were just buying time in December when they declared the followers of the PTM their brothers, they might now be prepared to go into a full scale war. Without having any illusions in the officer caste, the PTM would do well to remind the rank and file soldiers of this promised brotherhood.

In such a situation, it is no surprise that misguided ideas and illusions arise. For example, some, especially youthful, supporters have called for investigations by the United Nations. Contrary to the reactionary slander of the right-wing this is not advancing any pro-imperialist agenda. Rather, it expresses despair in the face of an outrageously oppressive state.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to clearly state that no hopes or trust can be placed in the United Nations, as the victims of Al Sisi, Erdogan or Assad, of Putin, Xi or Trump, can all testify. Whilst some bourgeois governments might be prepared to protest for their own interests, the backers, trading partners and allies of the Pakistan state will keep silent on the fate of the PTM, if not secretly support its oppression. The PTM's courageous struggle, however, does urgently need, and deserve, the support of the international working class movement. Therefore, we call on all trade unions, workers' parties and progressive movements, to offer it.

Most urgently, the present situation demands that the Pashtun people and the PTM's leadership consciously seek to unite their movement with the people of the other provinces. The surest way of fulfilling the justified democratic demands of the Pashtuns is via solidarity and joint action with the Baloch, Sindhi, Muhajjir, Kashmiri, and yes, the Punjabi, masses, too. It is especially difficult to win the solidarity of the Punjabi workers, peasants and middle classes. The central province is the power base of the state apparatus and where it has made the biggest attempts to distribute its poison of chauvinism. But it is not impossible, as was seen by PTM protests in Lahore and Islamabad, which were joined by Punjabi workers and students. It was no surprise that it was especially in Islamabad that protests were met with police brutality. The very existence of the PTM has already created opportunities for bringing the oppressed of the different ethnicities in Pakistan together.

In this process we can place no hope in the bourgeois press. The TV stations, the press and a majority of journalists have shown that they are either on the side of the Pakistani ruling class on this issue, or that they are too cowardly to defy the de facto media blockade that the military and the government have established. Instead, the PTM, together with all left and progressive movements, should establish a system of online and printed media that can reach the workers in the industrial cities and the peasants in the rural areas outside Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

On February 5, mass rallies were called and these were very successful. The participation of the Awami Workers Party, and different smaller socialist organisations was a positive development. Equally, we welcome the condemnations of Luni's murder by AWP leaders like Ismat Shah Jahan. But we think that 'support' is not enough. Every socialist organisation that is worthy of its name should not just support this process, but stand in the front lines. What is needed is a strategy for the fightback and unconditional material support. The League for the Fifth International is proud to stand on the side of the PTM, and calls on all Pakistani leaders of trade unions and socialist organisations to build a united front for the defence of democratic rights together with the PTM and to mobilise mass action on the streets and in the work places.

At the same time, we call on all those organisations that agree with us on the issue, to come together in a serious

discussion about a revolutionary socialist programme for Pakistan. We offer our own "Action Programme" as a basis for such a discussion. The Awami Workers' Party has not lived up to its founding promise to take forward the building of what we urgently need today; a united workers' party, with a clear plan of action.

* For an immediate investigation into the killing of Arman Luni, under the direction of MNAs Mohsin Dawar and Ali Wazir, as well as elected representatives of the PTM.

* For freedom of movement and an end to all restrictions on crossing provincial borders, as well as an end to the repressive check point system.

* For the right to protest, and an end to all harassment by the state, be it via police brutality during the protests, or intimidation through threats and disappearances by the secret services before or after protests.

* For the immediate release of all missing persons and an end to the criminal practice of extrajudicial abductions! We propose that representatives of the movements for the recovery of missing persons and the PTM acquire the right to elect representatives with the right to investigate and examine the prisons and hideouts where people are kept without any legal process.

* We demand an end to all military operations in Pakistan. There is a simple way to end the 'war on terror' in Pakistan: the state should end all its support for fundamentalist and terrorist organisations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Pakistani state is not acting as an 'anti-imperialist' by dividing the Pakistani people on sectarian grounds and keeping the Afghan people dependent.

* We fully support the resistance against the criminal occupation of Afghanistan and the crimes against our Afghan brothers and sisters. We look forward to the day when the foreign forces will be defeated and kicked out of the country. If the Pakistani state were truly interested in this, and not its own selfish interests, it would close all the support routes for NATO troops and end its own military intervention.

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