

Pakistan: Prime Minister disqualified by Supreme Court

Hassan Raza Sun, 06/08/2017 - 16:42

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On 28 July, the Supreme Court of Pakistan disqualified the Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, both as Prime Minister and as a member of parliament for being dishonest and ordered all materials gathered as evidence against him, his three children Maryam, Hassan and Hussain Nawaz and his son in law and Minister of Finance, Ishaq Dar, to be referred to the Court of the National Accountability Bureau. After the verdict, Nawaz Sharif stepped down and his cabinet was dissolved.

The verdict clearly marks a major setback not only for the Prime Minister but also for other long standing leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N). It is a massive blow for one of the most powerful capitalist families who have ruled Pakistan for several decades. However, the revelations published in the Panama Papers, which led to the downfall of Nawaz Sharif and his associates, also highlight the nature and crisis of the country's established political system.

Parliamentary opposition celebrates

The parliamentary opposition has congratulated the Supreme Court for the verdict. They even foresee a new era of across the board accountability of politicians and bureaucrats, including those who helped in concealing corruption. Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) chairman, Imran Khan, called the verdict the dawn of a new Pakistan and said, Today is the beginning of a new Pakistan where justice will prevail and more big fish will be caught soon. He said the court and its Joint Investigation Team, JIT, deserved appreciation from the nation for the unprecedented decision. I congratulate the nation and thank the Supreme Court and the JIT for upholding the law. He further added that the day could be a starting point to realise the dream of the founder of the country, Qaudi-i-Azam (Muhammad Ali Jinnah as he is known elsewhere) to make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state. Pakistan has won today.

The subsequent decisions of the PML(N) and its parliamentary majority should have a sobering effect on anybody carried away by such talk. After Nawaz Sharif resigned, the party's initial policy was to designate his brother, Shahbaz Sharif, currently the Chief Minister of the largest, and dominant, province, Punjab, as his successor. Since only members of parliament can become Prime Minister, Shahbaz could not step in immediately but this could be overcome by organising a by-election. A former minister and close supporter of Nawaz Sharif, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, was therefore elected as interim Prime Minister. Subsequently, it was decided that there was more advantage to keeping Shahbaz in control of Punjab so, for the time being, Abbasi will remain in office. Such is the reality of politics in Pakistan.

Whatever other decisions may be taken, the present arrangement leaves control and power over one of the historic parties of Pakistan, the PML(N) in the hands of the Nawaz family and the dominant Punjab-based section of the capitalist class of the country. The fact that, as well as the former Prime Minister, another 336 members of the country's elite of capitalists and large scale land-owners, of corrupt, selfish

and tax-evading super-rich, are named in the 'Panama Papers' which were leaked in April, demonstrates that the Prime Minister was truly a representative of the ruling class.

Corruption, nepotism and control over political parties via family networks are not just widespread in the country. They are the norm. And, as the Panama Papers also showed, this is not just confined to the 'Third World', it is a global phenomenon. In the end, corruption is not a moral question or a phenomenon independent of the logic of capitalism. Within crisis-ridden, semi-colonial capitalist states like Pakistan, however, they take very drastic forms. The economic and social basis for 'normal' or 'legal' forms of distribution of wealth amongst those who are already wealthy, which imperialist countries can maintain because of their plundering of the weaker capitalist countries, simply cannot be sustained in Pakistan.

The reason Nawaz was disqualified is simple; he had become a burden for the capitalist system. His involvement in corruption was too much even for his own class and that is why he had to go. Nonetheless, the fact that his resignation is intended simply to allow a hand over of power to his brother demonstrates how shameless the ruling class is and how much it is dominated by a small number of super-rich capitalist oligarchies.

Civilian rule and the military sector

While sacrificing Nawaz, the oppositional wing of the Pakistani ruling class, whose objective, of course, is to gain control over the whole corrupt system for itself, is using his downfall to deceive the masses, claiming that the verdict of the judiciary proved the 'democratic' and 'independent' nature of the state.

On the other hand, the leadership of the PML(N), whilst accepting the Supreme Court's judgement, portrays it as an attack on democracy. Addressing a news conference, a member of the Nawaz Sharif cabinet bitterly criticised the verdict and announced that their party would use all 'legal and constitutional options' available to challenge the decision. Saad Rafique, a former railway minister, called July 28 'a black day' and claimed that it was not the first time that a civilian government had been undermined by other parts of the state.

According to him, the charges of tax-evasion and plundering of wealth were only a pretext for those who want to weaken the civilian government and hand over more power to the military. He further claimed that those who staged sit-ins and threatened to lock down the country were simply puppets in the hands of international conspirators and expressed the hope that the PML(N) would stage a comeback. He even said the time had come to change the rules of the game before the next elections to prevent other state institutions interfering. Seen alongside the nomination of Nawaz's brother as the next Prime Minister, such protestations are not only hypocritical but bizarre.

Of course, this should not blind one to the lies of the parliamentary opposition. The 'Pakistan Peoples Party' (PPP) was as corrupt as the PML(N) when in government and it continues to work with the same methods where it controls provincial governments, as in Sindh. Likewise, the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf, PTI, of Imran Khan, now the strongest opposition party, is involved in corruption and bribery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which it rules.

The army will no doubt aim to take advantage of this latest scandal in bourgeois politics and of Nawaz Sharif's resignation. Its leadership might prefer his brother as Prime Minister but expects its own power to increase anyway. This has led a number of liberals and leftists, such as Asma Jahangir and Abid Hassan Minto of the Awami Workers' Party, AWP, to mourn the 'devastating decision' of the SC. They are portraying it as coup against the 'democratic' government.

Whilst it is clearly true that the resignation of Nawaz has weakened the PML(N) government and strengthened the military, such an analysis is entirely superficial and eventually leads to whitewashing the

?civilian? bourgeoisie.

In Pakistan, the military ruled the country for decades and controlled a number of the civilian governments behind the scenes. Past and present army leaders are themselves a key component of the capitalist class. In recent years, the army has played a more independent role because of the instability of system, the capitalist crisis, the weakening of US-hegemony and the turn of large sections of the ruling class towards Chinese imperialism. Within this framework, the traditional capitalist families like the Nawaz or Bhutto clans have proved incapable of pursuing a policy which expresses the interests of capital in general, of the ruling class as a totality.

Secondly, it is superficial to present the divisions within the ruling class over its international orientation and its strategic plans as just between a homogeneous ?civilian? sector on the one hand and the army or other repressive apparatuses like the intelligence services, ISI, on the other. In reality, the divisions run through all the different institutions.

These are the fundamental contradictions that lie behind the current and sharpening political crisis. To present them in terms of a conspiracy against Nawaz Sharif and civilian government means to obscure the real dynamics of the situation and tends to whitewash the ?civilian? sections of the ruling class, making the military solely responsible for all the ills of capitalist exploitation, oppression and terrorism.

Army and parliament are two organs of the capitalist state. One is elected, in the sense that the masses can vote for one faction or another of the ruling class to govern for five years. The judiciary, civil service, police, intelligence and military represent the un-elected organs of the state. The two elements need each other to rule in the interest of capitalist class. In a crisis situation, the military and other organs become more independent and play a more significant role. Even then, however, they rule in the interests of capital. At a time when the corruption of the capitalist class and its Prime Minister is exposed, it would be a political joke simply to side with the Prime Minister in the name of ?civilian supremacy?.

Rather than siding with an imaginary cleaner civilian faction of the bourgeoisie, the corruption scandals need to be used to expose the system as a whole.

The working class organisations like the unions and left parties like the AWP, as well as peasant and popular organisations, should demand the opening of all the books, all the accounts of the ruling class and all tax arrangements to the public. This should obviously, include not only the ?civilian? capitalists, but also the deals of the military and foreign investors from all states. Democratically elected and accountable tribunals should investigate and the accounts of all those found guilty of corruption and transferring wealth out of the country should be frozen and their property nationalised under workers' control.

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