

Pakistan: Solidarity with PTM leaders! Free Manzoor Pashteen!

League for the Fifth International, January 29, 2020 Wed, 29/01/2020 - 09:08

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The Pakistani state has unleashed its paranoia-filled authoritarianism once again with the arrest of the leader of the Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement (PTM), Manzoor Pashteen, and others, on January 27. This was followed by the arrests of numerous others, who protested to demand his release a day later.

The PTM had called for countrywide protests against the arbitrary arrests of Manzoor Pashteen and nine other members of the movement. Large numbers attended the protests in different parts of the country, including major cities such as Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore. In Islamabad, protesters were rounded up on the orders of higher authorities.

The police in the capital city, Islamabad, disclosed the arrests of 29 people, which included well-known socialists such as Awami Workers' Party leaders Ammar Rashid and Ismat Shahjehan - the latter is also the president of the socialist-feminist women's organisation Women's Democratic Front. Two young women leaders of the Front, Maria Malik and Muneeba Hafeez, have also been taken into custody. Women suffered injuries as cops manhandled and dragged them into police vans. Another well-known PTM leader, Mohsin Dawar, was also arrested along with them.

Whilst Ismat Shahjehan, Mohsin Dawar and several others were released a few hours later, other participants in the solidarity actions are still under arrest. Most importantly, Manzoor Pashteen is still in prison.

The PTM leader was arrested on Monday, January 27, in Peshawar's Shaheen Town and was remanded to judicial custody in the city's central jail. As per a local court, he was then shifted to Dera Ismail Khan where a 'First Information Report', FIR, has been registered against him. Among other charges, he has been accused of sedition.

The FIR claims that Pashteen and other PTM leaders had attended a gathering on January 18 in Dera Ismail Khan where the PTM chief had allegedly said that the 1973 Constitution violated basic human rights. The FIR also accuses Pashteen of having made derogatory remarks regarding the state.

PTM leaders Ali Wazir and Mohsin Dawar, who are also Members of Parliament, condemned the arrests and together with the PTM leadership called for countrywide protests. Dawar described Pashteen's arrest as an 'abduction'.

'We think that Manzoor Pashteen has been arrested for the speech he delivered in Bannu in which he said he will gather all Pashtun leaders.' He urged members of the PTM to stay 'peaceful like always' and announced that the group will hold protests in Pakistan and across the world on Tuesday. 'FIRs will not frighten us', said Dawar. 'Resistance will balloon now.'

The League for the Fifth International categorically condemns the arrests of both Manzoor Pashteen and the comrades who were arrested in Islamabad for demanding his release. We also demand the release of Alamgir Wazir, who has been detained since December after participation in the Student Solidarity March.

Manzoor Pashteen has committed no crime. Indeed, he has consistently advocated non-violent action in the face of constant provocation and repression by the state. We reiterate our support for the PTM and its demands for the de-mining of the tribal areas and an end to the racist checkpoint system, the extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and unlawful detentions.

We call on the PTM, left groups, trade unions, the students' movement and all organisations that agree on the need to build a united front to join hands against the attacks on democratic rights and state authoritarianism. We must unite against all the neoliberal and anti-working class attacks that the government aims to force through as a result of its deal with the International Monetary Fund.

- Release Manzoor Pashteen and all PTM members!
- Release all socialists and activists arrested in Islamabad!
- Release Alamgir Wazir!
- Drop all cases against PTM leaders and other political activists!

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