



Pakistani government defeated by mass movement - Chief Justice Chaudhry reinstated

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The mass movement delivered a significant defeat to the PPP government when it forced a huge climbdown by President Zardari on the issue of reinstating the sacked judges. This article is based on a report by members of the League for the Fifth International in Lahore.

Pakistan's government has finally caved in to the protests by lawyers and students and announced the reinstatement of chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, deposed with 60 other judges by the recently deposed military dictator Pervez Musharraf. The current president, leader of the Pakistan People's Party, Asif Ali Zardari, refused for months to reinstate Chaudhry despite it being an election promise to do so. He fears Chaudhry, or other judges, may re-institute the corruption charges levelled against him many years ago (Zardari's nickname is Mr 10%, a reference to how much profit he was supposedly creaming off important contracts and government deals).

Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, also ordered all lawyers and political activists arrested over the protests during the past week of the 'long march' to be released. The turnaround was in part a result of mounting tensions within Zardari's own party the Pakistan People's Party, partly from pressure from Washington and its European NATO Allies, who intervened to express their dismay at the crisis that was clearly spiralling out of control. They want the Pakistan government and army to step up the war against the so-called Taliban forces in the frontier provinces. Pressure too came from Army Chief of Staff, General Ashfaq Kiyani, a clear warning to any Pakistani president not to go against the wishes of the military.

The immediate political winner is ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif, of the opposition Pakistan Muslim League-N who jumped on the bandwagon of the lawyers and students protests. He was prime minister in the 1990s and implemented massive rounds of privatisation and ruled over a growing gap between rich and poor. He may now press for early elections. Nevertheless the thousands of activists on the streets, willing to face the beatings and gassings were the real driving force driving in the movement.

Comrades of the League for the Fifth International in Pakistan reported the mood as the news broke that the Lahore police chief had resigned and that, Zardari was on the point of caving in over the judges. They report that a major factor was the evident breakdown of police morale and the confidence this has given to people on the streets.

'The feeling is jubilant. All the governments' plans have ended in disorder. The police have stopped attacking people, they have stopped using tear-gas. Some policemen joined the protests and high ranking Lahore police officers came inside the High Court and made speeches, expressing regret to the lawyers, social, political activists and students, saying that the beating and gassing was wrong and from now on they won't attack the people.'

Now the task is for workers, the urban and rural poor to mobilise against the effects of the crisis, mounting unemployment as well as the PPP government's privatisation plans. The working class must play a role independent of the two main capitalist parties, indeed a leading role in the struggle. Its programme must link together the fight against the effects of the world crisis, the fight for democratic rights, and the fight to drive the US and Nato forces out of the entire region. To fulfil this leadership role the working class and its allies in the countryside (the poor peasants) needs to create a revolutionary party capable of fighting for a workers and peasant's government. This is the task that

socialists must set themselves in the next period.

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