



Pakistani government launches vicious crackdown on dissent - mass action can stop them

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We have received a report from our comrades this morning, 15 March 2009, that there has been major fighting around the Lahore High Court. State forces were beaten back by students and lawyers, the court is now under occupation and there are rumours that the Lahore Police Chief has resigned. More details to follow.

LEAGUE FOR THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL STATEMENT

The Pakistan People's Party government led by President Asif Zardari has launched a vicious crackdown on political opposition and dissent. Activists from the lawyer's movement were planning a long march from four cities culminating in a sit down in Islamabad. Their demands are for the reinstatement of the judiciary disposed of by the regime of General Musharraf in the November 2007 state of emergency and to this day not reinstated by Zardari's government.

The situation now is very similar to the 2007 state of emergency. Then, as now, thousands of arrests were carried out, political meetings were banned and demonstrations were declared illegal and attacked by the police. But back then it was the military government of General Musharraf that carried out this crackdown on dissent. Back then the PPP were victims of the crackdown. Now a PPP government is carrying out these attacks on democracy. It has even dismissed the provincial government of Punjab which was ruled by the other party of the ruling class, the Pakistan Muslim League.

Deja vu like this is not unusual in Pakistan's troubled history. As comrades of the League for the Fifth International have always argued we did not expect the corrupt bourgeois parties - either of the Zardari and Bhutto clan's PPP or the Sharif family's Muslim League - to be consistent democrats. They will pose as democrats to win power and then crush their opponents with terrible force. This is the lesson of their reactionary regimes of the 1990s: power was centralised into the hands of PPP and PML leaders while the state was used as a vehicle to repress the masses and enrich these leaders' bourgeois friends and cronies.

Now Pakistan is enslaved to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund and the United States. They demand the most vicious economic medicine in the face of the global industrial slump: their principle is that working people, the urban poor, the poor peasants, these classes and not the rich, must pay for the crisis in the capitalist system. The Zardari government, hand in hand with the imperialists, is now pushing through a major privatisation programme of some 21 different state utilities. While at the same time, the United States demands a vicious war is waged in the Afghan border regions that has led to an appalling humanitarian crisis and threatens a full scale civil war.

The fight to defend democratic rights and freedoms, to oppose a vicious crackdown on dissent, is a crucial part of the class struggle. In a country like Pakistan whose huge peasant populations lives in fiefdoms controlled by rich landlords or the wealthy military caste of exploiters, where the boundaries between economic and political domination are difficult to distinguish, where the military has a stake in government and own whole swathes of the economy, the struggle against capitalism and for democracy must - more than ever - go hand in hand.

Economic exploitation and tyranny are not local phenomenon for Pakistan alone: they are part and parcel of a system of global imperialist exploitation and war. The Pakistani ruling class has since the country's inception remained - despite formal political - independence completely subservient to British and American imperialism. We stand alongside the movements in the Afghan border regions opposing the military offensive of the US government and Pakistani army.

We support the self-determination of the provinces ? including Balochistan, whose oppression has its origins in Islamabad not Washington - up to the right to secede from Pakistan if they wish. We oppose the occupation of Afghanistan. We support the victory of all forces confronting US imperialism across the world.

We stand alongside the lawyers who are calling for the reinstatement of the judiciary. That a section of the judiciary, which was for years a bulwark of the establishment in general and the military in particular, has taken a step to demanding basic civil rights and freedoms testifies to a situation that remains rich with revolutionary opportunity. But we know this act alone will not liberate Pakistan from the shackles of class exploitation and tyranny. The movement must go to the trade unions, to the urban poor, to the peasants, and urge them to ?bring forward your own demands? and join the resistance. We need to build democratic co-ordinations of workers and peasants to organise the struggle. We need to sweep away the old order once and for all and fight for a revolutionary constituent assembly ? with delegates recallable to the local committees.

We fight in any constituent assembly for the formation of a workers? government to expropriate the capitalists and open the way to a socialist federation of South Asia. We oppose any moves of the Army general staff to depose the government in the name of democracy and we call for democratic rights for the army rank and file so that any such moves can be challenged.

Now rumours are circulating that Nawas Sharif will strike a reconciliation deal with the government in talks backed by the United States and Britain. Certainly, the Pakistani ruling class are fearful that the movement will spiral out of control of Pakistan?s two traditional parties of the ruling class, the PPP and the PML-N. Given the deep economic crisis and the war on terror, there is a lot of pressure on these political forces from the Pakistani and imperialist ruling classes to cut a deal to stabilise bourgeois rule. The movement must oppose all such reconciliations with corrupt tyrants and be 100% insistent on the immediate formation of a revolutionary constituent assembly.

? Down with the corrupt billionaire Zardari!

? Reinstatement of the Punjab government now

? Stop the crack down ? release all political prisoners now

? Link the democratic struggle to the class struggle: workers and peasants bring forward your own demands to fight the crisis

? No to a military intervention ? no coup ?for democracy?

? Sweep away the old order ? for a revolutionary constituent assembly

? Organise workers? and peasants? committees, democratic rights for the army rank and file

? Build a new workers? party

? For self determination for all Pakistan?s oppressed nations ? up to and including the right of cessation. Only working class unity ? not national oppression ? can liberate Pakistan

? Stop the neoliberal policies ? no to privatisation of 21 industries, including post, railways and electricity

? End military occupations in Afghan border areas ? for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of troops. End the occupation of Afghanistan.

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