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Pakistan

Against His Masters Voice

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Thousands of Pakistani religious elements including the young students have taken to the street all over Pakistan on the first day of bombing Afghanistan. At Lahore, over a dozen small and big demonstrations were seen organized by the religious parties. Peshawar and Quetta, the two cities close to Afghanistan, have particularly seen massive demonstrations. Police tried to break the demo with tear gas and beaten charges at both places.

The Taliban claimed over 30 dead during the cruise missiles attack by the forces of the UK, Germany, Russia, Australia and the US. The irony of history is that the five richest nations of the world are eager to destroy the poorest nation on earth by force and with the most sophisticated weapons. Pakistani newspapers reported the possibilities of using Neutron bombs if the presently used weapons do not bring "positive" results.

Would these demonstrations be able to take the masses with them in the coming days? What future for the military regime in Pakistan? What is the general mood among ordinary Pakistanis after the US attacks? And above all what future for the Left movement in Pakistan? These are some of the questions that will be examined in this article.

The air attack on Afghanistan brought resentment among ordinary Pakistanis across the country although the level of anger varies from area to area. There is much militant mood developing in North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan, the two provinces bordering Afghanistan. The general comment among the working people was that now the Taliban will retaliate and that US has not done good by this attack. 'Is this not terrorism' Nazir Bhatti, a motor mechanic told me this evening while commenting on the present situation. "If Americans die, it is very bad, if Afghans die, it is no problem for the rich countries" Nazir said. So were the comments of a hotel worker at Sahiwal, a district in central Punjab, just after three hours of bombing. As we stopped at a tea café in Sahiwal last night, a hotel worker told us that the US has attacked and that there will be a lot of bloodshed now.

The mood in Punjab cities is different than in the villages. In the villages, Osama Bin Laden is becoming like a folk hero. He is worshipped everywhere and has become the person to follow. How this mood is translated in action is yet to be seen. But one aspect is very clear, that the US have bought more hostility by these air attacks.

The military regime is becoming popular among the traders and rich people. They see a lot of opportunities to make money in pursuing this policy. As every day, one or the other minister or prime minister is visiting Pakistan and telling the military regime their intentions to generate the economic activities. And what a brave stand the military has taken by supporting the US and its allies in combating "terrorism". What great hypocrisy by these gentlemen in gray suits who have been lecturing the military regime on the great fruits of democracy and non-nuclearisation of Pakistan.

After Blair, now Colin Powell is coming here to appreciate the timely help given by Pakistan to the US and its allies. Only two years before, the former US president Bill Clinton visited Pakistan for four hours and he remained for four days in India, a fact the military regime did not like very much. Such was the friendship of American imperialism just before the 11th September.

But for the ordinary Pakistanis, the regime is becoming increasingly isolated. With the rising unemployment and price hikes, the result of following blindly on IMF and World Bank policies, the masses pay the real price. With the ongoing attacks on Afghanistan, these hate feelings against the military regime and US imperialism will grow. The fact that General Musharraf noticed and told the US today on 8th October, in a televised speech that the US military approach should be short and sharp. But there is no short and sharp way of dealing with those who have been trained and equipped by the same army who declares them as terrorist today.

The "heroes" of the past in the military dictionary have become villains. The "Jihad" (holy war) becomes terrorism today for the military regime. It was us, the Left forces of Pakistan, who do not need to change their position about these religious fanatics who were fanatics earlier and remain so today. US imperialism was the enemy yesterday, so it remains today. But for the religious fanatics, the US was a great source of help for their Jihad in the eighties. Now it is a great Satan on earth that must be destroyed at all costs. In a debate on third party politics with Liaqat Baluch, the second in command in the most powerful religious fanatic party of Pakistan, before 11th September at the Sustainable Development Planning Institute in Islamabad, my main arguments against the religious parties politics were that they are always tied up with the military regimes. They were used at every important juncture of Pakistani politics by the successive military regimes, I told the audience in his presence. Whenever the military want to get rid of a civil government, the religious parties are very much willing to do the dirty job of creating a law and order situation.

Liaqat Baluch became very angry when I said that in the eighties, it was US dollars and not Jihad that was the guiding principle for the fight against the Soviets. But unfortunately, including Jamaat-I- Islami, most of the religious parties who got all sort of help from the military has to oppose openly their masters of the past. By doing so, they want to echo the general feeling of the masses at present. Many a time in history, monsters brought up for any reason go against his master's voice.

Look at the example of Sint Bhinder Singh Wale, a monster brought up by Indira Ghandi, the former Prime Minister of India. This was to be used against the growing influence of Akali Dal, a Punjabi political party of the rich. But he broke his chains and led the powerful Khalistan movement in the eighties in Indian Punjab. Indira Ghandi had to send forces to kill him alongside with hundreds of his followers at Golden Temple in Amretser. She had to pay the price as two Sikh gunmen killed her in revenge few years later.

After 11th September, whenever General Musharaf appeared on TV he seems upset and agitated. He wants to say many things that he does not say. He has to think about what he says. His appearance on national TV represents the factual situation. He knows what can happen to him. He is playing with fire. By siding with US imperialism, he has turned many of his former friends as enemies. The US attack on 7th October also brought the news of changes among the army generals.

Two of his close allies had to go prematurely and surprisingly, apparently, a close friend of the religious fanatic forces has been promoted as the Chairman joint chief of army Staff. The changes in the army top ranks have all to do with the 11th September incident contrary to the claims of General Musharaf today while answering a question during his press conference.

General Musharaf may be receiving the Prime ministers and ministers every day, an unprecedented situation for Pakistan, but all this cannot go very far to stabilise his regime. We do not expect a dramatic economic help that could lay the basis for the recovery of the ever-declining economy of Pakistan. On the contrary there is a growing danger of development of a reactionary popular movement against his policies. A lot more blood can be shed than expected by the military regime.

Today Musharaf told another blatant lie, that the Nation is with him. His meaning of Nation can be the traders, exporters, feudalists and capitalists who smell US dollars from his policies but ordinary Pakistanis are becoming more and more vocal against his policies. He may lose power earlier than many think about his future. It may be an assassination attempt by a fanatic or change in leadership on any grounds. He is not so strong as he appears to be. He may have bought some time for his power, but not peace of mind.

Unfortunately, those who have been saying that US imperialism is an enemy of the workers nationally and internationally are in a very weak position. Their political terminology has been proven correct with the passage of

time but they do not have the power and resources to tell on a mass level how correct they were in the past. It is not the old faces of the Left that have surfaced in the main political arena at present, it is the new and young voices around Labour Party Pakistan who are eager to build a peace movement. This is to oppose all those who believe that they can use the language of terror and suppression to make a point.