

Arm Pakistani workers with a revolutionary socialist program

Build the Pakistani section of the International Committee of the Fourth International!

Part 2

Marxist Voice
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The World Socialist Web Site is publishing here the second part of a statement from Marxist Voice, a Pakistani group that has expressed political agreement with the perspectives of the International Committee of the Fourth International and undertaken to work with the ICFI to build it as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

The Marxist Voice statement represents an important advance in the elaboration of a revolutionary perspective for the workers of Pakistan and South Asia. Based on a review of the essential strategic experiences of the working class in South Asia, it demonstrates the necessity for Pakistani workers to base their struggles on the strategy of permanent revolution.

The WSWs appeals to our Pakistani readers to study and distribute the Marxist Voice statement and participate in the elaboration of the perspectives and program for the development of a revolutionary socialist party of the Pakistani working class by forwarding us your comments and questions.

The first part of the statement by Marxist Voice was published on Monday. The third and concluding part will be posted Wednesday.

Key experiences of the Pakistani working class

From a review of the key experiences of the Pakistani working class, two pivotal conclusions emerge:

- All sections of the bourgeoisie are hostile to and organically incapable of realizing the democratic and social aspirations of Pakistan's toilers.
- The Pakistani working class is a mighty social force and has exhibited great militancy and potential for self-sacrifice. But it has repeatedly been politically derailed by trade unions and parties—the Stalinist Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) and its offshoots, including the Maoists, and more recently various pseudo-Trotskyist groups—that have tied it to the parties and politics of the Pakistani bourgeoisie.

The first decade of Pakistan's existence—before the resort to outright military rule in 1958—was dominated by the attempt of the north- and north-west South Asian Muslim capitalists, zamindars and politicians who had spearheaded the campaign for Pakistan to construct a political-constitutional system that would guarantee them a privileged economic and political position in the new state and thwart the will of the majority

of the population.

Urdu, a language spoken by less than 10 percent of the population, was imposed as the country's sole *national* language, while Bengali, the language of the majority of Pakistanis and virtually the entire population of East Pakistan, was denied official status. Similarly, East Pakistan was systematically denied anything approaching its share of government spending and development funds. When East Pakistani students protested, they were repressed, initiating a cycle of mounting protests and increasing state repression that culminated in 1971 in a savage military offensive that killed hundreds of thousands of Bengalis and triggered the successful breakaway of Bangladesh.

The denial of elementary democratic rights went hand in hand with the Pakistani bourgeoisie's solicitation of a subordinate partnership with imperialism. No sooner was Pakistan founded than its new rulers began promoting it as an imperialist bulwark—a proxy garrison state in Asia first for Britain, and when Britain proved too weak to assume this role, for the US.

The US-Pakistan alliance—enshrined in the 1954 US-Pakistan Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement, and SEATO and CENTO—encouraged the Pakistani elite in its reactionary geo-political rivalry with India and facilitated the emergence of the military as the most powerful state institution and one increasingly with political ambitions. Under conditions of deep factional rifts within the ruling elite and a mounting wave of worker and peasant struggles, the military first seized power in 1958 under Ayub Khan.

From the get-go, the Stalinists accepted the legitimacy of the capitalist nation-state framework imposed by partition. The failure of Pakistan's crisis-ridden government to uphold basic civil liberties, institute land reform or address the other democratic and social needs of the masses became for the Stalinists a fresh argument justifying the need for alliances with the so-called progressive bourgeoisie. In the name of opposing the reactionary One-Unit West Pakistan scheme, the Stalinists forged ties with regional bourgeois elites through such formations as the National Awami Party (NAP). So as to be better able to pursue these class-collaborationist alliances, the CPP in 1968 split itself into two parties, one for West Pakistan and another for East Pakistan.

In 1968-69—after a period of economic growth whose benefits flowed almost exclusively to a tiny capitalist elite and Ayub Khan's cronies—and under conditions of a growing international working class offensive, the workers of Pakistan erupted onto the stage. Clashes between students and

the dictatorship provided the catalyst for working class protests and strikes. But it was the fear of the growing power and militancy of the working class that ultimately led the military to itself sack the hated Ayub Khan and impose martial law, while promising to hold the country's first ever national election.

If Zulfikhar Ali Bhutto—the scion of a feudal family and a disgruntled Ayub Khan cabinet minister—and his newly founded Pakistan Peoples Party emerged as the leadership of the opposition to military rule in West Pakistan, it was because they were able to exploit a gaping political vacuum on the left. The various Stalinist parties were all in one form or another immersed in the regime's phony political structures. The Maoists were, if anything, the most craven. Taking their cue from the Chinese Stalinist regime under Chairman Mao, they proclaimed the dictator Ayub Khan a “progressive autocrat,” since he was a proponent of Pakistan's capitalist industrialization and a diplomatic ally of Beijing.

At its birth, the PPP was a bourgeois party that employed socialist-sounding, populist rhetoric to harness the masses to a program of national capitalist development and, just as importantly, prevent the working class from escaping the political control of the bourgeoisie. Virulently Pakistani-nationalist, it advocated “Islamic socialism”—a religio-communal nationalist ideology combined with a series of reforms, including the nationalization of sectors of industry, meant to underpin a state-led program of capitalist development similar to that pursued by India under the Congress Party and by many other newly independent bourgeois regimes in Asia and Africa.

The Stalinists immediately adapted to the PPP, boosting its claims to represent a viable instrument for social progress. Large sections (especially pro-Beijing groups like the National Students Federation) openly called on workers and other socialist-minded elements to join and build the PPP.

Virtually from the outset, Bhutto made clear the limits of his opposition to the dominant faction of the Pakistani bourgeoisie. He collaborated with the Pakistan military and state bureaucracy in opposing the Bengali-based bourgeois opposition led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, including supporting the horrific military repression mounted against the Bengali people.

Bhutto was thrust into the presidency in December 1971 after the Pakistani ruling class had suffered an ignominious defeat in the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War and had lost East Pakistan/Bangladesh. By the fall of 1972, his PPP government was coming into violent conflict with the working class, especially in Karachi.

Trade unionists who had been jailed for their opposition to the military regime soon found themselves incarcerated under Bhutto. Land reform legislation was enacted, but as one historian notes, “behind the rhetoric, the status quo was largely unshaken... As in 1959 only a limited amount of land was ultimately made available for redistribution” (Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History*).

The dictatorship of General Zia-ul Haq, who toppled Zulfikhar Ali Bhutto in 1977 and then organized his judicial murder, is rightly recognized as a major turning point in the history of Pakistan.

Zia declared *Nizam-i-Mustafa* (the Rule of the Prophet), and working in close association with the Islamic fundamentalist Jamat-i-Islami, stripped women of basic rights and imposed medieval punishments for various offenses. For Zia, Islamicization was a means of legitimizing his dictatorial rule, revitalizing the increasingly discredited Pakistan national project, and promoting a network of fundamentalist institutions and parties that could serve as a reactionary bulwark against the working class and the left.

With the December 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—an invasion that former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski now admits was deliberately provoked by Washington through US support for the Mujahedin—the Zia military regime emerged as the linchpin of a renewed US military-diplomatic offensive against the USSR. The Saudi

monarchy also emerged as a major sponsor of the Zia regime, the CIA-ISI intervention in Afghanistan, and Zia's reactionary Islamicization campaign, infusing it with its own obscurantist Wahhabi ideology.

The policies of the Zia regime have had an enduring and disastrous impact on the Pakistani people. But it is critical to recognize that the populist bourgeois demagogue Z.A. Bhutto paved the way for Zia, and not just because he catapulted him over the head of more senior generals to the post of army chief. Bhutto maintained Islamabad's alliance with Washington and helped politically rehabilitate the military by championing its role in the bloody suppression of a nationalist insurgency in Baluchistan. He encouraged the religious right, ceding to a whole number of its reactionary demands, including decreeing that Ahmadis are not Muslims, making the Muslim Sabbath a holiday, and outlawing alcohol. The 1973 constitution went far beyond that authored by Ayub Khan in affirming a privileged position for Islam in Pakistan, and Bhutto stressed Pakistan's Islamic character in courting the support of the reactionary sheiks of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. With Bhutto's blessing, the Pakistani military provided sanctuary and logistical support to Gulbadin Hikmatyar and other Islamicists opposed to the Afghan government under Mohammed Daoud.

There are striking parallels between the role played contemporaneously by Bhutto in Pakistan, Indira Gandhi in India, and Madame Bandaranaike in Sri Lanka. Under conditions of a rapid intensification of the class struggle associated with the end of the post-World War II capitalist boom, all sought to bind the working class and oppressed toilers to the bourgeoisie through pseudo-socialist rhetoric and populist nationalism, initially enacted very limited reforms, then came into headlong collision with the working class and employed emergencies and other authoritarian methods to suppress dissent.

Having served to blunt the challenge from the left through populism and repression, they all fell from power within the space of five months in 1977. Bourgeois politics then shifted sharply to the right, although in the case of Indira Gandhi, she herself came to embody this shift when restored to power in 1980. These governments left an enduring reactionary legacy—their “left” populism, laden as it was with chauvinism and appeals to national and religio-communal identities, sowed the seeds for a qualitative escalation of ethno-communist politics across South Asia in the 1980s.

The Stalinists and Maoists played a crucial role in preventing the working class from challenging these ostensibly left regimes. They failed to fight to mobilize the working class as an independent political force against the PPP regime and the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), the right-wing-dominated anti-Bhutto opposition created in 1977. A coalition that united the Stalinists' long-time ally the NAP (renamed for legal reasons the National Democratic Party) with the right-wing Pakistan Muslim League and the Islamic fundamentalist parties, the PNA contested the 1977 elections jointly, then after the elections mounted a wave of anti-government protests that helped pave the way for Zia's coup.

The Communist Party of India was a coalition partner of Indira Gandhi's Congress government, including during the 1975-77 Emergency. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), meanwhile, subordinated the working class to the bourgeois opposition to Congress, ultimately supporting the coming to power of the Janata Party—an ad hoc coalition of Congress opponents, including the cadres of the Hindu supremacist Jana Sangh. The Naxalites (Maoists) refused to challenge the Stalinist parliamentary parties' political domination of the working class. They proclaimed peasant-based guerrillaism (“a protracted people's war”), not the struggle for the development of socialist consciousness and the political independence and hegemony of the working class, to be the crux of revolutionary struggle. And like the CPI and CPM, the Naxalites openly opposed socialist revolution, advocating a peasant-led bloc of four classes, including the “patriotic” elements of the bourgeoisie, in order to

complete the national democratic—i.e., capitalist—revolution.

Afghanistan provides yet another tragic example of the political disasters that have resulted from Stalinist-nationalist politics in South Asia. The 1978 Afghan or Saur Revolution was nothing of the sort. When their long-term ally, the Afghan prince and politician Daoud, turned on them and began a campaign of repression, the Afghan Stalinists, organized in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), responded with what was in effect a palace coup. The bitter rivalry between them notwithstanding, all factions of the PDPA hoped to consolidate a progressive bourgeois regime through reforms from above and the patronage of the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy. They grossly underestimated the opposition they would encounter from landlords and tribal leaders, other sections of the Afghan elite, and, more importantly, from the Pakistani ruling class and imperialism. Steeped in Afghan nationalism, they were incapable of appealing to the workers of Pakistan, India and the world and responded to the machinations of US imperialism with political retreats and savage repression.

The Zia-ul Haq dictatorship provoked mass opposition, especially in Sind in 1983, where the army required three army divisions and helicopter gunships to crush a peasant rebellion. Five years later, the dictatorship ended abruptly with Zia's assassination. But there had been many signs that he and his regime were rapidly reaching the end of their tether. The Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy had begun a promised full withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, making Zia a rapidly diminishing asset for the US national-security apparatus. Broad sections of the Pakistani bourgeoisie and even the military had come to see the dictatorship as a liability, especially its divisive and destabilizing Islamicization campaign. Not only was the Islamicization campaign fueling sectarian strife, it and the related policy of a "strong" central government were feeding centrifugal tendencies within the Pakistani state and making the army the target of popular wrath.

The Stalinists sought to politically subordinate the working class opposition to the Zia dictatorship to the PPP and its Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). Their perspective was shared by Tariq Ali, the one time Pabloite leader and current-day promoter of the Labour Party of Pakistan. During much of the 1980s, Ali served as an unofficial advisor to Benazir Bhutto, including writing the speech she delivered in Lahore in 1986, the first occasion when the military regime that killed her father allowed her to speak to a mass audience.

Pakistan's official Left promoted popular illusions in the PPP and bears political responsibility not just for the actions of the PPP when it returned to power following the 1989 election, but also for the political confusion and disorientation occasioned by the PPP's role in spearheading privatization and other right-wing pro-market reforms.

The actions of the PPP and the Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League (PML) during their repeated abbreviated terms in office in the 1990s underscore their fundamental class unity. Both imposed IMF restructuring, pursued Pakistan's nuclearization, and supported the Pakistan military-intelligence establishment's sponsoring of the Taliban and its rise to power in Kabul. Today the PPP and PML (Nawaz) dispute who deserves the true credit for the "triumph" of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.

Musharraf's October 1999 coup was rooted in major changes in world geo-politics following the end of the Cold War. The military was angry that Sharif had caved in to pressure from the US to end the Pakistani army incursion into Kargil in Indian-held Kashmir. The US stance arose from Washington's eagerness to establish closer relations with India now that it was free of its Cold War alliance with the Soviet Union.

Less than two years later, Musharraf was himself compelled under US pressure, including threats to bomb Pakistan "back to the Stone Age," to make a far more significant strategic reversal: withdrawing Islamabad's patronage of the Taliban regime in Kabul and providing logistical support

to the US invasion of Afghanistan.

As in the past, the Pakistani elite, especially the officer corps, has reaped economic and geopolitical benefits from acting as a handmaiden to US imperialist aggression. But the Afghan War has also compounded the crisis of the Pakistani bourgeoisie, plunging significant parts of the country into civil war. Even more fundamentally, the US drive to assert hegemony in Asia is disrupting the entire region, adding an unpredictable and explosive dimension to many longstanding geo-political conflicts, not least the Indo-Pakistani rivalry. Power and influence in Afghanistan has become a major object of the competition between New Delhi and Islamabad. And the US drive to contain China by forging a "global strategic partnership" with India threatens the long-term strategic interests of the Pakistani bourgeoisie.

The PPP initially welcomed Musharraf's coup, just as Nawaz Sharif had welcomed the repeated anti-democratic maneuvers of the military and state bureaucracy to unseat PPP-led governments during the preceding decade. Only after the general made clear that he was determined to exclude the PPP from all positions of power did the PPP come out against the dictatorship. Much of the leadership of the PML (reorganized into the PML-Q) rallied to the Musharraf regime.

The subsequent opposition from the PML (Nawaz) and PPP was anemic. Benazir Bhutto stated repeatedly that the PPP would not lead or support a mass movement against the dictatorship for fear that it would escape the control of the parties of the bourgeoisie and take a radical direction. Instead, she courted the Bush administration, pledging that a PPP-led government would pursue the Afghan war more aggressively than the military government. Ultimately, she and the PPP entered into a Bush administration-brokered deal to partner with Musharraf, Washington having become increasingly concerned that the war and the mounting socioeconomic crisis could spark social upheavals.

Under conditions where the official political opposition was prostrate, the growing resentment of the urban middle class and wide sections of the bourgeoisie with the Musharraf regime found expression in the lawyers' movement against the dismissal of Chief Justice Chaudry and, following Musharraf's second coup of November 3, 2007, for the restoration of all the purged judges.

The question that needs to be raised is why did the lawyers' movement monopolize the political stage? Why was the working class not able to mount its own challenge to the dictatorship, mobilizing all the toilers behind it? Here once again the politics of the ostensible left played a pivotal and debilitating role.

The Musharraf regime did face significant opposition from the working class in response to its privatization, downsizing and liberalization policies. Especially important was the May-June 2005 PTCL (Pakistan Telecom) strike. But these struggles were confined by the unions, with the backing of the left, to collective bargaining disputes—not made the spearhead of a working class-led mass movement of the toilers—and thus betrayed.

When the lawyers' movement emerged, organizations like the Labour Party of Pakistan (LPP) and International Socialists (Pakistan) [a sister party of the British SWP] became its cheerleaders. Insofar as they made any appeal to the working class, it was for it to support the lawyers, not intervene as an independent force advancing its own program to mobilize the masses against the dictatorship and the big business and imperialist interests upon which it rested.

The LPP and International Socialists hailed Justice Chaudry, a longtime hand-raiser for the military regime, for "challenging" Musharraf, and repeated the lawyers' claims that the fight for an "independent judiciary" was the cutting edge of the fight for democracy. They thus covered over the fundamental class truth that the social function of Pakistan's judiciary is to enforce the laws that uphold its grossly unequal social order, and they promoted the lawyers' emasculated definition of democracy—a definition

which reduces it to the observance of a handful of civil liberties and accepts as a given Pakistan's capitalist order and subservient relationship to the US and world imperialism.

Predictably, the lawyers' movement, notwithstanding the courage and sincerity of some of its participants, has effectively become an instrument of the ongoing campaign of the PML (N) and the military to destabilize the current PPP government.

The time is long overdue for the Pakistani working class to open a new page in its history—for the development of a genuine revolutionary party. The vanguard elements in the working class must turn to the Fourth International, led today by the International Committee, and base their struggles on the Trotskyist program of Permanent Revolution.

To be continued

See also:

A welcome advance for the Pakistani and world working class
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