The political fraud of the Pakistani elections

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Celebrations of today's Pakistani elections to the National Assembly and four provincial assemblies are a political fraud, intended to lend a veneer of "democracy" to a neocolonial regime that is presiding over a society in a state of economic and political collapse.

The elections take place as Pakistan sinks deeper into financial crisis and civil war, driven by the government's support for the Obama administration's escalation of the Afghan war into Pakistan. Since the beginning of April, over 100 people have been killed, including several election candidates, by forces allied with the Afghan Taliban who are resisting the US-led occupation of Afghanistan.

The election will be overseen by hundreds of thousands of security personnel, including tens of thousands of army troops. In Punjab province alone, 300,000 security personnel, including 30,000 army troops, have been deployed.

The votes cast by Pakistan's workers and oppressed masses will have no influence on the key economic or military decisions affecting them. The basic framework of state policy has been agreed by the army and the political elites, on the instructions of the Obama administration and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The current caretaker government has already negotiated the framework of a new International Monetary Fund emergency package of austerity measures.

The media has rejoiced that the outgoing Pakistan People's Party (PPP)-led government completed its five-year term, the first time a civilian government has served its full term in the history of a country ruled by US-backed military dictatorships for half of the period since formal independence in 1947. The PPP government survived, however, only by uniting with the army in imposing widely hated policies dictated by Washington. It left its security policy to the army and the Pentagon and implemented austerity policies formulated by the IMF.

The PPP, the Pakistani bourgeoisie's traditional "left" party of rule, not only continued military dictator Pervez Musharraf's support for the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, but extended it into a war on its own people. The PPP and the Pakistani army have acquiesced to illegal CIA drone strikes that have terrorised large parts of the country and killed thousands, including unknown numbers of women and children. They have also sent troops into Pakistan's tribal areas bordering Afghanistan to crush Taliban resistance, displacing millions of Pakistani civilians.

The Pakistani ruling elite's decades-long subservience to US imperialism, dating from the time the Pakistani state was established in the reactionary partition of the Indian subcontinent, has culminated in the re-imposition of new and toxic forms of colonial rule.

In the 1980s, General Zia ul-Haq's military dictatorship backed Washington's policy of destabilising the Soviet Union by stoking a civil war against the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul. The CIA funnelled arms and money through Pakistan's ISI military intelligence agency to sectarian Sunni Islamist groups, including the forerunners of Al Qaeda. This reactionary war was the political framework for Zia's Islamicisation of Pakistan, which fuelled ethno-sectarian conflict and set the stage for an escalating US imperialist intervention into Central Asia that has now plunged Pakistan into violence.

Karachi, Pakistan's financial centre, is routinely ravaged by sectarian violence, prompting sections of the establishment to demand military deployment to make daily functioning possible.

All sections of the Pakistani bourgeoisie are bankrupt. They are incapable of addressing the masses'

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democratic demands and rely instead on communal discrimination to divide the working class and the poor. This was graphically exposed in the PPP's bloody repression of separatist groups in impoverished Balochistan province, in which the regime terrorised the entire community. The PPP relied on the military to suppress the Balochi bourgeoisie's reactionary attempts to partner with Washington as a pawn of US intrigue against Pakistan and Iran, with the US seeking to exploit Balochistan's strategic location and rich resources.

Whatever their tactical differences, Pakistan's bourgeois parties—the PPP, the Pakistan Muslim League of industrialist Nawaz Sharif (PMLN), Imran Khan's Tehreek-i-Insaf, and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement—are pro-imperialist parties relying on blood money paid by Washington to run the country. Whatever coalition of parties wins the election, it will continue to implement policies dictated by the Obama administration and international finance capital that have already devastated the country.

Carrying out US and IMF demands for business-friendly policies for foreign investors, the PPP impoverished vast sections of the population, half of which was affected by food insecurity in 2011, an increase of 10 percentage points in two years. US bullying of Pakistan is also seen in Washington's moves to cut off Pakistan's access to neighbouring Iran's oil and gas, resources that are needed to address Pakistan's chronic energy shortages. Constant power cuts and load shedding have crippled the economy, affecting millions of jobs.

Bourgeois rule in Pakistan has produced a historic failure. The outbreak of social and industrial struggles of the working class against power cuts and austerity has demonstrated the workers' readiness to fight back. However, antiwar sentiment and opposition to economic plundering in the working class have been suppressed by the trade unions, abetted by Pakistani pseudo-left parties working in the orbit of the PPP and US imperialism. They reject the revolutionary role of the working class, cynically calling instead for "democratisation" and reform of Pakistani capitalism and the military.

The struggle against US imperialism—which will seek to tighten its grip on Pakistan as it prepares, in line with its "pivot to Asia," for war with neighbouring China—is the central issue in fighting for the Pakistani masses' social and democratic aspirations.

The struggle against US imperialism and its client bourgeoisie in Pakistan is bound up with the struggle for socialist revolution, led by the working class in alliance with all the toiling poor. The catastrophe that has resulted for Pakistani workers and poor can be fought only on the basis of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. There is no faction of the bourgeoisie capable of or willing to carry through pressing democratic tasks in the economically backward, ex-colonial countries.

The emergence of the working class in Pakistan as the leader of the oppressed masses in the struggle for socialism is bound up with the fight for the international unity of the working class—across the entire Indian subcontinent and worldwide, including the workers in the imperialist centres, who are overwhelmingly opposed to colonialism and war.

Only the International Committee of the Fourth International advances this perspective. We urge Pakistani workers and youth to join the ICFI and build a Pakistani section as the new revolutionary leadership in the working class.

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