Protests in Inner Mongolia over Chinese government language policy

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Protests have been underway in recent months in Inner Mongolia over the Chinese government's new education policy, which mandates a transition to the use of the "national common language," that is, Mandarin Chinese, in local schools that teach in the Mongolian language. The new policy, which commenced at the beginning of the new semester in September, has provoked considerable dissatisfaction in what is an autonomous region of China.

On August 26, the Inner Mongolia Education Bureau issued anotice requesting that some subjects in elementary and middle schools (at present Chinese, politics, and history) be taught in Mandarin Chinese using Chinese textbooks. According to official reports, this policy was formulated in accordance with Chinese President Xi Jinping's instructions that "minorities should learn the national common language."

On August 31, a protest broke out in Tongliao City. The police responded with a notice stating that more than 100 participants were wanted, and warning that all crowds gathering in public places would be thoroughly investigated. The Associated Press quoted a participant as saying that similar protests occurred in many cities in Inner Mongolia. Citing other participants, Agence France-Presse reported that demonstrations of more than 10,000 people took place in some cities, making it the largest protest movement in the region since 2011.

Videos show students and parents taking part in school strikes. Some clashed with the police and guards. According to the BBC, a school with more than 1,000 students had less than ten students left in class. More recently, local governments and education bureaus in Inner Mongolia issued notices calling on students to return to school. The government reportedly is trying to force students on strike to return to school, including by threats and arrests.

Inner Mongolia is not a special case. Previously, similar policies have been implemented in Tibet and Xinjiang. After the change in Inner Mongolia, other regions have promulgated the same policy. Starting this year, all high school freshmen across the country are obligated to use Chinese textbooks, and minority schools are required to teach in Chinese, generating hostility among other ethnic minorities.

The Chinese Communist Party regime in Beijing is certainly riding roughshod over the democratic rights of ethnic minorities, further tightening longstanding policies that paid lip service to their cultural sensitivities. Since the restoration of capitalism in the 1980s, the government has increasingly relied on whipping up Chinese nationalism to divide the working class and consolidate its shaky social foundation. Like other capitalist regimes, China is being hit hard by the global capitalist crisis, leading to mounting unemployment and deteriorating wages and conditions, and brewing opposition among Chinese workers and youth.

Ethnic minorities are commonly found in economically underdeveloped areas. An influx of investment is often accompanied by the immigration of large numbers of Han Chinese workers, aggravating unemployment and the relative poverty of local ethnic minorities. Incapable of providing any progressive response to the discontent, the Stalinist CCP is resorting to police-state measures and the promotion of Han Chinese chauvinism. This only deepens the divide and plays into the hands of separatist tendencies among ethnic minorities, as well as US imperialism.

Just as it has latched onto "human rights" in Tibet and among the Uighur population in Xinjiang, so Washington has sought to exploit discontent in Inner Mongolia. The CCP regime, in turn, seizes on the activities of the US to justify its own crackdown, attributing all protests and opposition to "incitement by foreign forces," and ignoring the genuine grievances among ethnic minorities over the trampling of their democratic rights.

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While “human rights” in Inner Mongolia is not, as yet, as central to American propaganda as in Xinjiang for instance, the US media has seized on the protests. The reports frequently quote the dubious Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center, which is based in New York. Its official webpage notes that it has been funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which is notorious as a front for the CIA and US State Department. The NED is closely involved with exile Tibetan and Uighur organisations, as a means of promoting separatist groups inside China.

The Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center founder, Enghebatu Togochog, who is proclaimed in the Western media as “a representative figure,” accuses the Chinese government, without substantiation, of a “genocidal policy.” Since July, the organisation has given interviews to the right-wing, anti-communist journal *Bitter Winter*, which is notorious for its anti-Chinese propaganda and promotion of separatism.

As early as 2016, an organization calling itself the Southern Mongolian Congress was formed in Japan. In the same year, it participated in a leadership meeting sponsored by the Chinese exile and separatist groups in Dharamsala, India—the base of the so-called Tibetan government in exile. The Southern Mongolian Congress claims to be an organisation of independent activists and political parties, but it is a mouthpiece for US propaganda and has promoted rallies around the world to highlight the protests inside Inner Mongolia.

The use of the term “southern Mongolian” is significant. It is based on the idea that Inner Mongolia should separate from China and integrate into the existing country of Mongolia. The promotion of Mongolian nationalism does not serve the interests of the working people of Inner Mongolia or Mongolia but the ambitions of a small capitalist elite that seeks the “right” to exploit its own working class.

The efforts of these “Southern Mongolian” organisations also serve the strategic interests of US imperialism, which cynically and selectively exploits “human rights,” in this case to undermine the Chinese regime. For more than a decade, under presidents Obama and Trump, the US has recklessly ratcheted up its economic and military confrontation with China, seeking to prevent it from threatening American global hegemony. Its promotion of separatist organisations in Tibet, Xinjiang and now Inner Mongolia—all crucial strategic areas—is clearly aimed at weakening and ultimately fragmenting its rival.

At the same time, Washington is developing closer ties with Mongolia, on China’s sensitive northern border. In July last year, the Trump administration invited the president of Mongolia, Khaltmaagiin Battulga, to the US. In a bid to undermine China’s near-monopoly of the world’s supply of rare earths, the US has signed an agreement for large investments in mining in Mongolia, which has rich reserves of rare earths. After the visit, the White House said the US and Mongolia shared a close security partnership, and reported that Mongolia has pledged to commit troops in Afghanistan, at least through 2021, and has supported US sanctions on North Korea.

Just weeks later, Donald Trump Jr. made a trip to Mongolia, supposedly “in his own name.” This “personal trip” was warmly welcomed by the Mongolian government with President Battulga warmly receiving the US president’s son. Mongolia refers to the US as its “third neighbour,” as it relies on American economic and security support.

Significantly, the US media and political establishment is increasingly vocal and strident about the Chinese government’s “human rights” abuses of Uighurs, Tibetans and now Mongolians, but rarely even mentions the repressive measures being used to suppress the opposition of the Chinese working class as a whole. Washington is clearly fearful of any movement of workers in China, as this would threaten the profits and investments of major American corporations. For all its crocodile tears in 1989, over the brutal crackdown on Tiananmen Square protests—directed above all against Chinese workers—the US political establishment saw these “human rights” abuses as vital to its economic interests.

The only way that the democratic rights of ethnic minorities in China can be defended is precisely by turning to the working class in China and internationally—in opposition both to the CCP regime in Beijing, and to the intrigues of US imperialism and the separatist organisations that it promotes.

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