

World Affairs:

Million March of Chilean People

On October 25th, 2019, Santiago city - the capital of Chile, a Latin American Country, has transformed itself into a sea of over one million people. The protesting people have flooded the city responding to a call of the Convocation of Students and Labor Union. To start with, the exorbitant hike in transport fares was the cause of protest, but soon it rose into a powerful united protest of people to demand among other things the end of repression, sending back of armed forces to their military base and convocation of a Constituent Assembly to outline a new Constitution. In no time, it boiled into massive marches in all cities. The protesters carried indigenous and national flags, banners like "Chile wake up", "we are not at war" and raised the slogans against the government. Shops, schools and transport remained closed in downtown Santiago. Trucks, cars and taxis slowly crawled down on the major roads, honking horns, waving the flags and bearing signs of protest. "No more tolls!" "Enough with the abuse!" - read bright yellow-and - red signs plastered to the front of vehicles. The protesting people sang the songs of resistance which were very popular in the movement against Augusto Pinochet- fascist dictator who ruled Chile during 1973 - 90.

The President of Chile Sebastian Pinera initially dismissed the mass protest as a war declared by the enemy on the state. He called the military onto the streets, imposed night curfew and extended the emergency to crush the protest. At least 20 people were gunned down; Hundreds have been wounded; Many were blinded by pellet guns fired by the police; Over 700 were arrested. The hospitals found unable to cope with the medicines and equipment to treat the wounded. But these moves infuriated the people more and they clashed with the military in several places.

Then the govt. moved to the methods of pacification. It announced the intention to lift the state of emergency. Military too has lifted the night curfew. The President Pinera announced reversal of fare hike. He asked his cabinet to resign in a move to reshuffle it. The govt. indicated the plan to raise taxes on the rich in a bid to redress the inequalities. Of late, the govt. agreed to replace the Constitution of the fascist dictator Pinochet's era with a new one by seeking the opinion of the voters through a referendum.

The Chilean rulers are for dolling out a number of concessions, but, of course, without seriously wounding the system.

Chile is known as a richest country in Latin America. Yet, like any system heavily weighed down by an economic and political system dictated by the imperialist plunder and oppression, the Chile also is plagued by all the ills of the crisis-ridden world Capitalist system. Hunger, poverty, un-employment, illiteracy, ill health, inequalities, lack of democratic rights and freedoms continue to make the life of vast majority of people intolerable. The people had suffered a lot under the fascist rule of Pinochet which lasted for 17 years. The same Constitution and same laws continue to rule even under Pinera's regime. So, the strong urge-expressed or unexpressed- for a genuinely independent and democratic economic and political system was at the bottom of present people's protest in Chile. The hike in metro-transport fares has only opened the lid and acted as a catalyst for the pent up anger and protest of people to burst out.

Many countries of Latin America like Ecuador, Peru, Sudan and Algeria are seething with similar protests today.

The protest in Chile is a product of decades- long exploitation and oppression. Almost 20 years of brutal military rule of Augusto Pinochet (1973 to 1990) with torture, killings

and human right abuses. It was accompanied by an atrocious economic regime imposed by US hired so-called "Chicago Boys" - ruining the economy, privatizing social services, national infrastructures and natural resources. The vast masses of Chilean people were put under constant surveillance and threat of punishment/abuse. Pinochet, along with the western directed financial sector turned Chile into a largely impoverished and complacent population. Chilean people's sufferings did not end even under the so called socialist Madame Bachelet who took the reins of power in Chile after Pinochet. Pinochet's 1980 Constitution, the IMF and dollar dictated banking system imposed a culture of economic neo liberalism and ideological conservatism. These key parameters, remnants from the epoch of Pinochet continue as of this day. Chile has a most privatized and segregated education system. Health care is out of reach of common people. The transport is totally privatized and too costly. The carabineros (police officers) created by Pinochet continue to exercise powers of military nature.

The Chilean people no more are prepared to suffer from the leftovers of Pinochet under the rule of Pinera now. They want an end to them. They want a Constitution which ensures a national political and economic system and sovereignty which is free from the imperialist intervention.

The massive march of Chilean people is a part of their long journey to realize this objective. They have exhibited an excellent unity and militancy in the context of this march. How the people turn the situation decisively in their favor depends on the ability of a political leadership in steer the people's movement to the destiny in the turbulent waters.
