

Students Solidarity March in Pakistan

Like India, Pakistan too is worst victim of imperialist-dictated policies and the consequent economic crisis. The rulers are seeking to bail themselves out of the crisis by shifting the burden of crisis on to the shoulders of people by imposing more taxes and by enhancing the costs of life and services on them. But there is a limit for the tolerance. Even in the worst repressive regime and the onslaught of communal fundamentalist forces, Pakistan people are on the streets to oppose the policies of rulers and for the resolution of their problems.

Especially, the students in Pakistan are in the forefront of this struggle. This year, the students held a massive nationwide solidarity march in protest against the cuts in the Budget for education made by the Pakistan govt. in compliance with the conditions of IMF. Even before this, there were spontaneous protests of students in almost every major educational institute in Pakistan. The University of Baluchistan faced a huge back lash from student in protest against the sexual harassment of female students and the installation of CCTV cameras in hostels. The students also protested against the militarization of campus. There were biggest rallies in the Punjab and Lahore Universities. The students of Mehran and Sindh University in Jamshoro and Sindh took out three rallies demanding the restoration of students union. The death of two students in Islamabad's private universities, Bahria University and COMSAT University due to the criminal negligence of University administration has led to huge students protests. Rape and murder of a medical student at Chandka Medical University has triggered country wide protests. These are just few examples. The student movement in Pakistan is on the verge of explosion.

In this situation, the Progressive Students Collective convened a meeting of several student organizations on Nov 3, 2019 under the banner of "Education Emergency". The representatives of more than dozen organizations from Baluchistan, Sindh, Gilgit, Baltistan, Khyber, Pakhtuni-stankwa, J&K and Punjab, etc. met at the South Asia Free Media Association's Auditorium, Lahore. The meeting passed a Charter of Demands, formed a Students Action Committee and decided to take out a massive STUDENTS SOLIDARITY MARCH on Nov' 29, 2019.

The Demands are: 1. Lift the ban on student unions, hold elections immediately in all educational institutions; 2. Withdraw the so called administrative rule that require the students to sign an affidavit that bars them from any kind of political activity; 3. Form anti-harassment committees with the representatives of women students; 4) Allocate at least 5% of GDP for education budget; 5) End all kinds of scrutinisation and violence on campus; 6) Provide all students with housing facilities for the period of their study; 7) Free education for all; 8) End curfew timings imposed on students in University – administered and private hostels; 9) Provide employment for the graduate students or announce a minimum wage as unemployment allowance; 10) Commemorate April 13 as Mashal Khan (a progressive student who was lynched to death by the fundamentalist and fascist mobs in the campus) Day with public holiday.

On November 29, the students' solidarity marches have taken place in 50 cities. In Karachi, nearly 400 students, parents, lawyers and prominent citizen took part in the march. The slogans like, "hum kya chahte hai?" "Azadi"- echoed in the area. One participant said, 'we have come to support our Country's future. Students are future....Our future will never be bright if we keep on lighting the monuments of the past.' The students of Balochistan too have participated in the march of Karachi students. A woman who had been once active in the students politics said, 'A student is part of a Country's political struggle. Society has now been depoliticized... We have witnessed society's regression.....We saw Taliban attacks on Universities. All this happens because students were depoliticized and the whole society was depoliticized. As a result, our society has witnessed a decline.' In Hyderabad, the young students marched chanting slogans like, 'surkh hai, surkh hai, Asia surkh hai' (Communist, Communist, Asia is Communist) and other slogans. As a mark of solidarity, the leaders and activists of the Communist Party of Pakistan, Awami Workers Party and other also have participated in the students march. The members of Progressive Students' Federation (Sindh), Shagird Tehrik, Trade Union Defence Council and Women Democratic Front also joined the Students March. The Marches of this kind were held in all the cities, slogans were raised on the demands of students and the student as well as the leaders of other organisations who joined the march spoke explaining how the students demands as well as struggle are just and democratic and condemning the repressive policy of Pakistan Government.

Present protest is a part of long drawn struggle of the students. The growing political consciousness, organization and unity among the Pakistan students and the growing solidarity, co-operation and unity that are seen in the present March among the students, working class and other toiling and oppressed people are most welcome and commendable.
