

A call from Britain: Solidarity with the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement in Pakistan

Tuesday 11 June 2019, by [SHINGAVI Snehal](#), [UZMAN Seth](#) (Date first published: 7 June 2019).

A violent crackdown on the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) by state security forces is underway in Pakistan. International solidarity is crucial and the Left in Britain has a particular responsibility to play its part, write Seth Uzman and Snehal Shingavi.



PTM protest in Loralai, Balochistan. Photo: Mohsin Dawar via twitter @mjdawar

On Sunday 26 May, during a peaceful protest in North Waziristan against an epidemic of state terror and ‘missing persons’, the armed forces used live ammunition as it opened fire on demonstrators, murdering at least thirteen and injuring over forty.

Elected member of the National Assembly and socialist Ali Wazir as well as eight of his comrades were arrested.

Fellow elected parliamentarian and leader of the PTM, Mohsin Dawar was forced to turn himself in to authorities on 30 May after leading a sit-in against the crackdown as security forces had terrorised villages, imposed curfews and medicine and food shortages in pursuit of his arrest.

International solidarity is crucial now more than ever for the PTM and their struggle for democratic and civil rights. Launched in 2018, the movement has convened massive rallies to resist military occupation and extrajudicial killings and disappearances. The movement’s three central demands are: the clearance of land mines and other unexploded ordnance from the tribal districts; an end to extrajudicial killings in Pakistan’s war against armed groups; and accountability for thousands of people who have been subjected to enforced disappearances by the state.

The government’s armed forces occupy tribal lands to prosecute a brutal ‘war on terror’ to meet the convergent needs of the Pakistani state as well as those of British and US imperialism. For nearly two decades, the local population has been caught in the crossfire in an apparent war between the Taliban on the one hand and the Pakistani military on the other. The conflict on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan has always been complicated, as the Pakistani state cynically uses and then later attacks its connections in both the Afghani and Pakistani wings of the Taliban. Sometimes the Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI) has needed the Taliban as a proxy against Indian interests in the region; at other times, the Taliban has threatened the deep Pakistani state with its own agenda. The lives of ordinary Pashtuns are devastated in the process: they become collateral

damage in the war on terror.

The military establishment lubricates state violence with the most absurd of misinformation campaigns. Claims that the popular movement provoked state violence on 26 May come after months of media silence – maintained at the behest of the Pakistani military establishment – on the peaceful protests led by the PTM. The most ludicrous of the accusations against the PTM, emanating from the armed forces, has been the assertion that the movement is doing the bidding of India.

In this dire hour as the state opens charges of terrorism against Wazir, the Left and its networks in the trade unions and social movements must demand nothing less than the release of Ali Wazir, his comrades and all political prisoners held and ‘disappeared’ by the state. They must also raise the demands, shared by leading organisations within the feminist movement in Pakistan [\[1\]](#), for an end to the curfew and the regime of media blackouts, the withdrawal of all military personnel from former-Federally Administered Tribal Areas and the immediate transfer of power over them to civilian authority. Popular pressure has forced the state to convene an inquiry into the events of 26 May; but given the wide penumbra of military influence in the ostensible ‘civilian’ government, popular pressure and international solidarity must be maintained to prevent the inquiry from turning into another misinformation campaign.

This is crucial for the Left and its networks in Britain, playing host to an active Pashtun diaspora, which organised a protest in solidarity with the movement on Thursday 30 May outside Westminster. The British state and arms trade directly enables the persecution of Pakistan’s oppressed nationalities as weapons exports to Pakistan totalled £11.2 million in 2017 and over £40 million since 2015.

The crackdown arrives following a broader escalation of violence against national minorities in Pakistan, as well as repression of trade union leaders, most recently directed against the SAPT Democratic Workers Union in Karachi.

Prime Minister Imran Khan’s agenda promises a ‘Naya [New] Pakistan’ which is anything but new: the privatisation of what remains of the country’s public sector and a further devaluation of its currency in accordance with IMF ‘recommendations’. Repression follows against the forces which, if united, could disrupt his agenda and open up new agendas advanced by the oppressed and exploited. Such alliances will only grow more decisive as the country enters an unparalleled economic crisis, confronting a large, expanding current account deficit as the country’s foreign exchange reserves dwindle. The \$6 billion in IMF loans won in exchange for austerity and tax hikes on basic necessities represent a desperate attempt to fill empty state coffers in one of the most regressive, rich-friendly taxation systems in the world.

While the military feigns internal budget cuts, it safeguards earmarked funds for ‘development’ projects in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa to attract foreign direct investment, particularly from China to whom it looks for increasing support, against the demands of the lands’ inhabitants. The situation is highly unstable: if Khan is unable to resolve the crisis, the armed forces may attempt to take a more direct and heavy-handed approach to governing the state’s internal affairs, relying on the most reactionary and repressive organisations of the country’s religious far right if necessary. The PTM particularly threatens Khan’s agenda since the Pashtuns make up a large share of the working class in the major urban centres in Pakistan.

Whether the crisis receives a progressive answer will depend on whether the trade unions, social movements and organisations of the Left (the most decisive of whom, the Awami Workers Party) work together to forge a unanimous agenda of vigorous action to resist the state’s repressive resolutions to the crisis, while collaborating on a combined program of wealth redistribution,

production and development that respects the rights of the country's exploited majority and oppressed minorities. The working class in Pakistan – Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, Baloch, Kashmiri, and others – have more in common with each other than they do with the security state that collectively immiserates them all.

In Britain, placing PTM on the solidarity agendas of the social movements and especially the trade unions is crucial for two reasons. First, it contributes to recovering a desperately needed culture of internationalism within the labour movement. Second, it makes participants more involved in the fight against the far right by taking the interests of minorities and migrants more seriously. Socialists should raise and spread the following petition [2] and issue similar motions among their branches and campaigns. Socialists in UCU branches, for example, could and should go further and organise public events on the PTM and its history and build them among the local Pakistani community.

With informal sector organising initiatives by unions such as the IWGB, growing layers of the Pakistani diaspora are at the cutting edge of the newest forms of collective class organisation in Britain. Bringing these efforts and developments together remains a critical next step for left-wing activists in building a coherent international socialist movement, capable of scattering the far right from its trenches both at home and abroad.

Seth Uzman and Snehal Shingavi - 7 June 2019

P.S.

- <https://www.rs21.org.uk/2019/06/07/solidarity-with-the-pashtun-tahafuz-movement/>

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 49099), [Joint Statement of Solidarity with PTM by Feminist Groups across Pakistan](#).

[2] ESSF (article 49080), [International Call – Pakistan: Release Ali Wazeer and Mohsin Dawar, withdraw false police cases:](#)
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article49080>