

Musharraf: A Dictator Is Gone But Not His Policies

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LAHORE, August 19, 2008: Thousands across Pakistan celebrated the humiliating departure of dictator Pervez Musharraf on August 18, 2008. As he announced his resignation - in an unscheduled nationally televised speech of one hour - private television channels showed an instant response of jubilation and welcoming the decision in all four provinces. General (retired) Musharraf resigned as president of Pakistan as he was facing an impeachment move by the Pakistan Peoples Party-led ruling alliance of four parties.

For the first time, not a single political party defended General Musharraf after the announcement of the move by the ruling alliance. He was very isolated in the political field. Even Mutihida Qaumi Party (MQM) was not ready to defend him publicly, a party that he was associated for long time. All the four provincial assemblies had passed resolutions asking Musharraf to take a fresh vote of confidence from this electoral college of the presidency. Sind and Baluchistan voted unanimously while in Punjab, over 90 and in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) over 98 per cent voted against Musharraf.

Such was the revulsion against Musharraf among the masses that many of those who were hand picked politician of General Musharraf decided to abstain from the votes. The resolutions in all four provinces brought the extreme weak social base of the dictator Musharraf supported by nearly nine years by American imperialism.

There were at least four occasions during the last year alone when General Musharraf could have lost power.

General Musharraf must thank the PPP leadership for providing him nearly eight more months in power after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on December 27, 2007. He could have lost power then, if the PPP leadership had decided to demand his immediate resignation. For five days after the assassination, Pakistan was under siege by the masses. Unfortunately, the PPP leadership decided not to do this and to take part in the general elections.

President in uniform

Earlier, after the restoration of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on July 20, 2007, the top judges were indecisive about the fate of General Musharraf and allowed him to contest the election of president in uniform. He was "elected" president for the second time from a parliament,

which was elected for five years only. A parliament elected for five year elected the president for ten years! However, the hesitation of the top judges to stop him doing that when challenged in Supreme Court of Pakistan provided him another chance to remain in power. He used dictatorial powers on November 3, 2007 to suspend all those top judges before the final decision of the Supreme Court.

The outcome of the general elections on February 18, 2008 was totally against general Musharraf. Instead of asking resignation of general Musharraf after the elections, however, the PPP opted to work with him. This gave General Musharraf another chance to remain in power.

The PPP leadership did not restore the top judges within a month of coming into power, as it had promised. The restoration of top judges would have given the judges a chance to decide on the hearing of some petitions challenging the election of the president Musharraf. Hence, a fourth opportunity to topple Musharraf was lost.

After implementing highly unpopular economic policies, the PPP leadership lost popularity at an historic speed. Had they not taken a decision to impeach Musharraf, the General could have decided to remove the PPP-led coalition government. The PPP took this popular decision to change gears and reverse its unpopularity. This has paid off for the time being.

While General Musharraf formally had the dictatorial powers to remove the parliament at any time, he had already lost the social basis for that. He was more unpopular than the leadership of PPP.

The departure of General Musharraf is one of the best news that heard for a long time in Pakistan. It was defeat of the military generals and a major set back for those political trends always seeking refuge with the military generals. It was very welcome news.

Importance of the lawyers' struggle

General Musharaf lost the power as the direct result of the mass revulsion against him during the last one half year in particular. There have been many important struggles against the military rule during the last nine years of General Musharraf. The peasant struggle for land rights at Okara Military Farms during 2001-2005 set the tone among the most exploited strata of the society. The 10-day national strike by the telecommunication workers against privatization in June 2005 was another manifestation of workers' consciousness against the military dictatorship. The successful revolt of the Sindh masses against the building of controversial Kala Bagh Dam, the three days general strike by Sindh and Baluchistan province against the killings of Nawab Akbar Bhugti were the two other important struggles. However, these revolts did not have the national character and remained isolated in one or other part of Pakistan.

It was the militant lawyer's movement after the removal of Chief Justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan on March 9, 2007 that was mainly responsible for the departure of the dictatorship. The 80,000-strong lawyer's movement showed a tremendous energy to continue for over one and half year consistently. The young lawyers played a decisive role in this important movement.

Musharraf must be arrested

The PPP-led coalition government has earned a lot of respect by taking this latest move to impeach Musharraf. However, Musharraf should not leave Pakistan unaccountable. The farewell guard of honor for the dictator even after his resignation showed some glimpse what been agreed under hand. It seems that the dictator Musharraf has been offered a safe passage and a luxurious

retirement after his forced resignation.

The tradition of granting a safe passage for the military rulers after their departure from power has to be changed. A very popular demand has been to arrest Musharraf to face charges of murder and other crimes. General Musharraf must be arrested. "Military out of politics" must be the main slogan for future.

32 years out of 62 years of independence of Pakistan have been under the direct military rule. However, no military general yet been tried for the crime of breaking the constitution. The strong social movement in Pakistan at present would not be silenced and satisfied only by the departure of a military dictator.

New wave of class struggle ahead

After the departure of General Musharraf, a new wave of class struggle will explode in Pakistan. The PPP government would have no excuse of not solving the main question of the price hikes. The implementation of neo-liberal agenda will be challenged by all sections of the working class. The PPP-led coalition has no other economic plan except to go the Musharraf way. They want to privatize the remaining public sector institutions. They want to remain partners with the American imperialism in their so-called war on terror. They want to do things that Musharraf could not do openly. The capitalist feudal led coalition government of PPP and PMLN will miserably fail in solving any of the basic problems of the masses.

The governing coalition's honeymoon after the departure of Musharraf dictatorship will last very long. Mian Nawaz Sharif economic policies are no different from the PPP. Anyhow, the strong open support for the judges and for the accountability of the dictator has earned more respect for PMLN than PPP.

The PPP has taken back some of the lost ground but not for long. The implementation of neo-liberal agenda will clear some of the dust from the real face of the PPP. An extreme right-wing party of the rich cannot base itself on the past reform agenda for long time.

The restoration of judges, if done as promised, will earn the PPP some more respect. However, that will also be tested in the economic field by the masses. All the measures against the dictatorship are been welcomed by the masses in hope that it will help to end their miserable life. The expectations from the coalition government are much higher now than the past. However, none of this will be met with success. The masses will once again be on the move, this time not on political issues but on economic issues.

A new era of class struggle will be a challenge for the forces of the Left and social movements. The religious fundamentalist forces are in the field. Most of them have been seen wrongly as anti imperialist forces. They are also in the field to enhance their political bases. However, they have no solution the problems facing the masses. The left forces have to fight against the pro-imperialist forces and those who are wrongly seen as anti-imperialists. It is a difficult objective condition for the forces of the left, however, what other options are for the left apart from fighting back?

A dictator gone but not his policies. That is a real challenge that Labour Party Pakistan and other Left forces are facing at present.