

Kashmir: An eyewitness to oppression in the valley

“A PARADISE turned into hell”. That’s how the people who live there describe Indian occupied Kashmir. Monday 13 September saw 18 people, mainly young men, mown down by some of the 700,000 soldiers in the Indian army who occupy Kashmir. Further attacks mean that well over 100 people have been killed in just over 100 days since 11 June.

Many hundreds, some as young as 14, have been injured; many will never walk or see again. Doctors describe injuries caused by inhumane torture and by the use of pellet guns, banned under international law. Across the country hundreds have simply ‘disappeared’.

During the curfew/bandh (strikes) the empty streets are peopled only by khaki-clad, lathi-[large stick] and machine gun-carrying soldiers; rolls of razor wire are like some dystopian tumbleweed. Everywhere the walls shout: “Indian dogs go back”, “Go India go” and, of course “Azadi” (freedom).

No-one dares to leave their house during the curfew days.

The schools have been shut for three months. Exams have been postponed. Young people’s futures are on hold indefinitely.

Initially, women could venture out for food and necessities but sexual harassment, the snatching of headscarves and the abuse has made this impossible. They dare not let their children out the door. Broken windows and shot out street



Closed shops and empty streets of Srinigar under the curfew.

photo CWI

lamps are the calling card of the soldiers. Water provision has also been targeted. Women tell of soldiers barging through their homes and beating their children. They fear that if the young men go out they will never return.

This is what happened to Merajud-Din Lone, a 22 year-old father and vegetable seller, the sole breadwinner in his family. At 10.30am on 3 August he was shot in the heart as soldiers chased a group of unarmed protesting boys.

His family and his young widow Daisy, who now have to worry about their very survival, have been frustrated in every attempt to seek justice. No-one from the authorities has spoken to them. This is not an unusual story in Srinagar. This is just one family’s hell.

Self-determination

FOR ORDINARY Kashmiris, Azadi is the only goal. Politicians discuss so-called ‘peace packages’ but these are no more than tawdry tokens. Sonia Gandhi, president of the ruling Indian National Congress Party, promises an ‘economic package’ of jobs but this has no impact.

Almost everyone I spoke to, from civil rights activists to students and workers, said that economic packages which do not address their national aspirations will never satisfy.

The very right-wing, nationalist BJP makes demands such as “total peace” before talks take place. It is an ardent opponent of any reasonable autonomous package or settlement and demands more troops be sent in. Anti-Pakistan sentiment and the threat of ‘Islamic terrorism’ are the mainstays of its propaganda.

The traditional left parties, such as the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), participate in state governments alongside Congress and other parties and do not make serious demands on troop withdrawal.

The occupation has claimed about 70,000 lives. But everywhere, the hospitals, the homes of grieving families, the shops, the streets, people want to voice their demands: ‘Stop the killing, get the army out, the right to self-determination and independence from India, Pakistan and China.’

While there is no trust in the government there is hope that resistance in the valley can have an effect.

The Hurriyat is an alliance of political, religious and social organisations. Geelani, one of its leaders, announces the dates for bandhs, a type of general shutdown strike. While support is uniform there is no evidence of mass participation in the decision-making process.

The government retaliates and at-

tempts to assume control by imposing curfews at the same time.

Ehadjan, not a stone-pelting youth but a 52-year old policeman, was at Shri Maharaja Hari Singh hospital to receive treatment for kidney damage after four days of severe torture.

He had thrown a shoe at the state chief minister during a flag unfolding ceremony. He, like others, is desperate for the eyes of the world to focus on the daily mass torture and incredible denial of human rights that is life for the masses of Indian-occupied Kashmir.

Most people fear that the Indian government’s propaganda is widely accepted outside Kashmir. While this may be the case in general, some young people are starting to discuss the issue and to connect it with other aspects of the reality of life for the majority in ‘shining India’.

David Cameron, British prime minister, visited Bangalore in June to declare Britain ‘open for business’ with the wealthy elite of India. The Financial Times entreated with him to avoid two elephant traps – speaking about poverty and speaking about Kashmir.

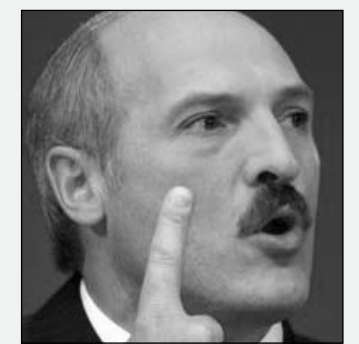
He heeded the FT well and actually described so-called Indian democracy as “a beacon to our world”. This must be a warning to the working, poor and young people of Kashmir, of India and of the UK.

the committee for a workers international

THE COMMITTEE for a Workers’ International (CWI) is the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated. The CWI is organised in 40 countries and works to unite the working class and oppressed peoples against global capitalism and to fight for a socialist world. For more details including CWI publications write to: CWI, PO Box 3688, London E11 1YE. email cwi@worldsoc.co.uk.

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Rob Jones, CWI
10 September



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Khalid Bhatti, Socialist Movement Pakistan (CWI Pakistan) 19 September



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Editorial from Socialist magazine, issue 7 (Autumn 2010)



16-year old Ardol was shot in the legs by the occupying forces.

photo CWI

‘Death of democracy’ in Sri Lanka

EIGHTH SEPTEMBER 2010 will be marked as a ‘Black Day’ in the history of the capitalist democratic system in Sri Lanka.

Siritunga Jayasuriya,
United Socialist Party
(CWI, Sri Lanka)

On that day, the Rajapakse government passed the 18th amendment to the constitution of Sri Lanka. Despite all the burning issues of the working class and other oppressed people, including the Tamil community in the north and east, the government passed the 18th amendment as an emergency bill in the Sri Lanka parliament.

The government brought this amendment to the constitution mainly to remove the two-term limit imposed on a person who has held office as president.

The Rajapakse government did

not have the two-thirds majority in the parliament needed to pass a constitutional amendment. To achieve the required number of votes, government forces used various tactics to bribe opposition MPs from the United National Party, the Muslim Congress and the Tamil National Alliance. 17 MPs from the opposition parties voted for the amendment mainly for various personal benefits.

The biggest betrayal was carried out by the leaders of what remains of the once-large traditional left parties – the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the Communist Party (CP) plus the small Democratic Left Front (DLF) led by Vasudeva Nanayakkara.

These are all part of the present government along with Rajapakse’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). During each and every past election, the SLFP and these so-called left

parties promised the people of Sri Lanka that they would abolish the Executive Presidency system, which was introduced by the JR Jayawardene government back in 1978.

Betraying the entire oppressed people in Sri Lanka, the leaders of these three parties voted in parliament for this dictatorial amendment.

This was in blatant defiance of the decisions made by the central committees and political bureaus of these parties to fight in parliament against the strengthening of the presidential system. This is another instance of them showing their cowardly opportunistic politics.

Forces against the 18th amendment declared 8 September as a ‘Day of National Protest’. On 7 and 8 September in Colombo, all opposition parties, trade unions, and civil organisations collectively launched

a massive protest against the efforts of the government preparing a constitutional and legal framework to establish a dictatorial regime in Sri Lanka.

During these two days, tens of thousands of people gathered in Colombo and took part in anti-government rallies, marches etc.

On 8 September the government brought its followers to Colombo to support the proposed amendment. People from various parts of the island were brought to Colombo in government-financed transport. Additionally, police and military forces were mobilised heavily to stop the peaceful anti-government protests.

However, those who fight to defend democratic rights in Sri Lanka were able to defeat the government’s efforts to stop the democratic protest against it and make the day of national protest successful.