

Facing The Musharraf Dictatorship - An Activist Narrative

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The book in pdf format for free on the LPP website:

<http://www.laborpakistan.org/images/farooq's%20book.pdf>

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Acknowledgements

Farooq Tariq

It was 12 October 1999. As usual, I was at the Labour Party Pakistan, secretariat in Lahore. Around 6 pm, Farooq Sulehria called me to break the news that Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif has removed the army chief General Pervez Musharraf who was flying back to Pakistan from his visit to Sri Lanka. Sulehria asked me to issue a press statement to explain LPP point of view. "Wait and see the response of the army," I told him.

A journalist by profession, Farooq Sulehria was at home and his television was on. He called me again after an hour to tell that the television transmission has stopped and the TV screen has went blank. "This is army taking over", I told him. "How do you know"? "I have lived through two army rules and this could be the third one" I replied. I had faced three military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan (1958-1969) General Yahya (1969-1971) and General Zia-ul-Haque (1977-1988). As student activist from my early days, we raised slogans against Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan. But it was the military rule of General Zia ul Haque to which we fought energetically all the 11 years of his dictatorship.

By 8 pm it was clear that army has taken over. But there was no formal reaction from any political group yet. The Pakistan Television (PTV) started broadcasting war songs. I went out on my motorbike to observe the state of affairs. LPP office was just opposite to PTV building in Lahore. I saw army troops there. I went to Governor House on the main Mall Road of Lahore. The army trucks were there.

Around 8pm, I went to the office of Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, the head of People Democratic Alliance (PDA), Pakistan Peoples Party was part of it. There were jubilations. The PPP activists were happy that Nawaz Sharif is gone. I asked Nawabzada Nasarullah Khan, is he happy with the military take over? Although smiling, he said, let's wait for the military general's speech and his priorities. Meanwhile one PPP supporter brought in some Benazir Qulfa, a popular local flavor of ice cream to distribute among those present in the office. I was getting irritated by this behavior.

I decided to go back to my office. I hurriedly collected record

of LPP membership and other important documents to put them at a safe place. The Army rule could mean seizing of the political parties' offices. We had a short meeting of leading comrades and decided to oppose the military rule. Although, we had been opposing Nawaz Sharif power period from 1997 till the day but we were not the one who would welcome the military take over for any reason or justification whatsoever.

I went back home around 10pm. Waited for the speech of General Musharraf. It was full of same old excuses that democracy was not functioning. The General was telling that my plane was hijacked and they were not letting my plane to land and so on.

I immediately wrote a press release opposing military rule and went out to deliver it to Daily Jang and other newspapers. Army trucks were every where but not many people were on the roads. I was very much afraid to be stopped by military personnel and be caught red handed with the press release, opposing the rule. It was around 11.30pm when I arrived at the front desk of Daily Jang.

The next day daily Jang printed only a few lines of LPP statement. But we were satisfied as we knew that every word of the newspapers will be read that day. LPP was one of the very few political parties that opposed the military rule from the day one. On 13 October, I wrote a lengthy article explaining the reasons of military take over and that why we must oppose it. The article was perhaps the first explanation available on the internet.

Very next week, our weekly paper, *Mazdoor Jeddjuh* (Workers Struggle) office was raided and army men took away all the copies of the paper. The title story was "No to army rule". The paper was started in 1980 from Amsterdam, by our small group of Pakistani comrades in exile due the military dictatorship of General Zia ul Haque. So, it was not new for us. We had such treatment several times before as well, not only at the hands of the military rulers during the eighties but also by the civilian government of Mian Nawaz Sharif during 1992.

This was the beginning of our struggle against military rule of General Musharraf. I was arrested over 9 times during the nine years of Musharraf army rule. Numerous police cases were registered against me and other activists of LPP. My house and party office was raided many times during this period by the police to arrest me. Sometimes they were able to catch me, at other times the police raids were ended in failure as I successfully managed to hoodwink them.

During this period I often used to receive threatening telephone calls not only from the police officers but also from army officers and sometimes from intelligence agencies. LPP activists were also threatened by religious fundamentalists several times. All this was due to LPP's staunch opposition to the military rule and its relentless efforts for building an alternative to the politics of the rich and feudal.

This book is not a narration of General Musharraf's 9-year army rule rather a saga of our resistance to the General. This is a story of the decisive last 18 months of Musharraf rule. Some of the articles and diaries I wrote during these 18 months are included in this book. Written at the thick of the activities, it is more like a running commentary of a cricket match.

I must thank Dianne Feeley, editor "Against the Current" USA for editing some articles included in this book. My friend Merrilyn Treasure from "Green Left Weekly", Australia, edited the final draft of the book. Pierre Rousset of ESSF, France who was really an expert in expanding the networks for effective solidarity campaigns for my release, every time, particularly during 2007. Abdul Khaliq Shah, LPP Lahore, spent time with me to chart out the initial recommendations for the book. Naveed Butt a teacher at University of Punjab, Lahore and a known artist of Pakistan designed the title of the book. I must thank my friend and comrade Khalid Malik of Labour Education Foundation to give all the necessary technical advices and support for the printing of this book.

My partner Shahnaz, daughter Mashal and son Abdullah were the real source of inspiration and help during this difficult period. Without the moral and economic support of my four brothers, Mian Ahmad Yaseen, Mian Ahmad Saeed, Mian Javeed Ahmed and Mian Rauf Ahmad, my three sisters Shama Asif, Dr. Ribina Sajid and Yasmeen Afzal, I would have not survived facing the military dictators during all 40 years of my activism. My three brothers-in-laws, Mian Asif Sharif, Sajid Amin and Dr. Mohamed Afzal were equally supportive and have been more close to me than my sisters. My mother Fatima Begum and father Choudry Abdul Ahmed, both died in 2005, extended their full backing to my activism. However, it was my mother late Fatima Begum who was a consistence supporter and a guide to me. It was her kind behavior that attracted me to the politics of working class in the initial period.

My teacher, friend and comrade Maqbool Babri and his partner Majbritt Babri had always been in the forefront to help our working class cause for a just and equitable society, free of exploitation. The family had been saving me by providing practical shelter and help at critical times since my university days in the seventies. Be it my resistance against religious fundamentalists in university of the Punjab or my struggle against dictators, like General Zia and Musharraf, I found the family always there to support me. So is the case of my friend, Furrukh Suhail Goindi and his partner Rima Goindi.

My special thanks to Asma Jehanghir, Chairperson Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Whenever, I was arrested and sent to jail, I was never worried to be long inside, the reason was Asma. As a senior advocate, she would always be there in the courts, arguing for me and other comrades' release.

Our relations were more than that of lawyer-client. Asma Jehanghir respected our struggle against the military dictatorship. In fact, it were our informal and formal meetings that led to many political changes in Pakistan. In June 2000, we discussed to bring all the political parties at one platform to oppose the Musharraf dictatorship. Committee for Restoration of Democracy was formed and we invited all the main opposition parties at Lahore Press Club on 12 October 2000, to mark the first year of Musharraf dictatorship. Over 1000 attended. Two months later, Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) was formed. So was the case of several historic gatherings of social and political activists on the issues of women rights, Hadood Ordinance, War on terror, Lawyer's movement and Mumbai terrorist attacks.

When 16 of us were arrested in April 2002, protesting against Musharraf's fraudulent referendum, Asma was at District Courts, Lahore very next day, arguing for our release. So respected she is with legal fraternity that the judge ordered to release us on bail immediately, from the court room. She even presented her own property documents as personal guarantee for our bail. It was a rare gesture of solidarity on her part. So was the case of Hina Jilani advocate, Asma's younger sister and Shahtaj Qazalbash, the convener of Joint Action Committee For Peoples Rights, Lahore.

My special thanks also to Rabbyia Bajwa advocate, a young budding lawyer's leader, determined to be heard by the judges in all circumstances.

Abid Hassan Minto, convener Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the alliance of left parties in Pakistan, was always ready to help whenever I was arrested. He would organize his supporters to be part of the protest demonstrations. During my June 2007 arrest, the regime had to withdraw the three-month detention order against me, before he could appear in the Lahore High Court the next day as my advocate. Above all, the LPP activists and supporters, particularly our brave women comrades, around the country and our supporters worldwide had it possible that I continued to face the dictatorship for all nine years. As my dear friend Toni Usman from Norway would comment after every release of mine, "please do not go to jail, you may be ok in jail but we are not, we can not sleep until you are released".

At number of times LPP activists all over the country risked their lives to provide all sort of help to our activism. When I was released from Kot Lakhpat Jail Lahore in 2001, there were many LPP members and supporters to welcome me at the gates of the jail. The leaders of Pakistan Peoples Party and Muslim League, with whom I spent my jail days, were surprised to see the affection and love of LPP activists for me. There is no leader or main activist of LPP who had not been to jail or was afraid to go to jail during Musharraf dictatorship period. I salute them all.

Farooq Tariq

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