

'Crisis for the regime is very deep' in Pakistan

Thursday 19 April 2007, by [McILROY Jim](#), [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 12 April 2007).

In late March, Green Left Weekly's Jim McIlroy spoke to Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan, in Lahore. The LPP is a revolutionary socialist organisation working with other forces to end the dictatorship of General Pervez Musharraf, and seeking to unite workers, peasants, women and youth in the struggle to bring about socialism in Pakistan. The interview took place amidst the campaign by lawyers and their supporters to reinstate the suspended Chief Justice of the Pakistan High Court, Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry.

Lahore,

Asked about the background to the current political conflict, Tariq said: "The military government, which has been in power for seven years now, is in deep trouble, and is trying to suppress the opposition. The crisis for the regime is very deep.

"Musharraf sacked the chief justice in the hope he would get away with it, as he has done [with acts of repression] in the past. He has been arresting people, killing people, and carrying out a neoliberal economic agenda, without much resistance till now.

"For example, Musharraf had Akbar Bugti [leader of Baluchistan's Jamhoori Watan Party] murdered on August 26 last year, along with a number of his supporters.

"Now, the chief justice's sacking has sparked a nationwide movement. Initially, it was limited to the lawyers' community — and never before have there been so many lawyers demonstrating together in every part of the country. The demonstrations of the 'black-coats' have been very determined and militant."

According to Tariq, "Musharraf did not expect this. It shows the existence of a real split at the top of society as well. The judiciary, known as very pro-military in the past, is showing real signs of opposition to the regime."

Political parties have also taken part in the movement. "The Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy (ARD), an alliance of 35 parties and groups, has participated. The main parties involved in the ARD are the Pakistan People's Party of Benazir Bhutto and the Muslim League, led by Nawaz Sharif (former prime minister of Pakistan who was overthrown by Musharraf).

"The regime is getting weaker, becoming more unpopular by the day. Even the capitalist media has turned against the regime as well."

Tariq explained that "so far, the movement of the advocates [lawyers] has gained tremendous, largely inactive support from the masses, not yet mobilised. But this is the first time for some while that an issue generating mass sympathy has not been initiated by the [Islamic] fundamentalists. The

fundamentalists are trying to be part of the movement, but it is not seen as a religious issue.

“Unlike other countries, advocates have always played a progressive role in Pakistani society. Under the military regime of Zia ul Haq (1977-86), the premises of the courts became the hub of democratic activities. Many advocates were arrested at that time, opposing the government. They are repeating this history now.

“The inner arrangements of the Bar Associations are very democratic, with elections every year, usually won by opponents of the regime. The Bar Associations have never accepted Musharraf as a legitimate leader.

“Young advocates have taken the lead now. Facing their first political repression, they have been real fighters.”

Tariq described the “painful decision” that the LPP made to postpone its congress, which was scheduled for March 24-25, in order to participate more effectively in this movement. “We want to participate fully in this campaign because we see in it an opportunity to expose the real nature of the regime, which is very repressive, and to help develop the present mood of rebellion among sections of the conscious sector of society.

“So LPP policy is, on the one hand, to strengthen the mass movement against the regime, and on the other hand, to build the left opposition to the regime as well. We are the only left party that has consistently opposed the regime with modest activities, made possible according to our resources.”

According to Tariq, Pakistani society is “dominated by the rise of religious fundamentalism, because of the aggressive actions of US imperialism. The ongoing occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq is promoting religious fundamentalism in Pakistan. The left will not be an alternative force if it just uses words, and not actions, against the military regime.”

Asked about the future of the movement, Tariq replied: “The military regime is facing a difficult time. It is losing support among the masses, because of its fast-track implementation of neoliberal policies. The government claims that per capita income has increased from US\$480 (1999) to \$1000 (2007). It claims that the economy is growing, that there is more money in the coffers. And it argues that the present growth will in the end eradicate poverty — the so-called ‘trickle down effect’.

“The truth is that all independent surveys have shown that poverty has grown in Pakistan, that there is more unemployment, and greater monopolisation of the economy. We have seen a collapse of law and order and security; more murders, suicides, attacks on women. Street crime is increasing everywhere. All social indicators describe a collapse of Pakistani society as a developing country.”

Tariq concluded by stressing that the LPP had exposed the massive corruption involved in the privatisation programs of the Musharraf regime, and that public consciousness was increasing in Pakistan around the need for the dictatorship to fall in order for the social conditions of the people to improve.

P.S.

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