

The liberation of Farooq Tariq and other detainees: A success for solidarity in Pakistan and the world

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Two weeks after having been jailed, Farooq Tariq, general secretary of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) was freed from prison on June 19, 2007. More than six hundred other people who were imprisoned for participating in demonstrations in recent months had already been freed. Last to be freed, Farooq was also the only national leader of a left party to have been thus placed in detention in June.

After the massacre of Karachi on May 12 and 13, 2007, and with the wave of repression unleashed on June 4, the military regime of Pervez Musharaf wished to bring a definitive halt to the democratic mobilisations provoked by the suspension of the president of the Supreme Court, judge Chaudry. [1] It is evident from the brutality and illegality of the arrests, the three month detention orders issued a posteriori, the measures of intimidation, the unacceptable conditions of existence initially imposed on the prisoners... If the government finally freed them after a fortnight, it is because it was forced to do so.

In Pakistan

The death in detention, in Kot Lakhpat, of Sarmad Mansoor, a member of the Pakistan People Party (PPP), placed the government in difficulty. Its responsibility was indeed clear. This man, aged 52, had been arrested while being cared for in a district hospital in Gujarat. He was transferred to the prison clinic, which was not equipped to treat him. He died of a heart attack on June 14. In the prison, all the political prisoners began a hunger strike in protest while the scandal swept the country.

In Pakistan, the pressure for the liberation of the prisoners was very strong. Farooq Tariq, in particular, received widespread support. First and foremost from progressive lawyers, including the Bar Association of the High Court of Lahore, and from representatives of the Pakistani Social Forum. Nearly all the country's trades unionists published press released demanding his liberation. A coalition of seven progressive parties to which the LPP belongs, the AJT or Democratic Movement of the Peoples mobilised on his behalf. Most of the main opposition parties demanded that he be set free, including the Muslim League of Nawaz (PML-N), the PPP and the Tehrik Insaf (Justice Movement), led by Imran Khan. The same goes for Qazi Hussain Ahmad, president of Jamaat-e-Islami, [2] the most important religious fundamentalist party, although Farooq is well known for his Marxist and secular views.

Numerous activist demonstrations were organised throughout the fortnight of detention, in defence of Farooq Tariq and other detainees (the biggest in Lahore, Karachi and Faisalabad). There was plentiful press coverage, especially during the “vigil” of June 17 in Karachi.

In the world

At the international level, the solidarity appeal, once launched, allowed support to be gathered in numerous countries in a very short space of time (more than 450 signatures in a few days, on every continent). [3] The email lists once more proved their use! The appeal was circulated through lists associated with the global justice movement (French, European and world forums), political-academic lists (like that of “Historical Materialism”) or party-based lists (network of radical parties, Fourth International), before being taken up in a cascade on other specific lists.

All of these email lists drew a veritable web which allowed us to reach simultaneously personalities, every kind of organisation, various networks and activists on the ground. Solidarity was then built from top to bottom as well as the other way round - it spread. The fact that Farooq had been personally very involved in international mobilisations obviously also counted for a lot in the success of the campaign. As the news of his detention spread, the signatures for the appeal arrived at a higher rate, with the first delegations appearing in front of Pakistani embassies (Greece), while a European day of action was being prepared.

It was in this national and international context that the regime began to free the detainees. On June 20, one of the most renowned lawyers in Pakistan, Abid Hassan Minto, was to present a petition in favour of Farooq Tariq. The government preferred to release him the day before. Thus on June 19, hardly out of detention, Farooq was able to tell a press conference about the conditions under which he had been arrested — and the degrading treatment that the political prisoners were subjected to in the prison of Bahawalpur. [4]

If Farooq Tariq was freed on June 19, whereas his incarceration was planned to be much longer, and if the other detainees were also freed earlier than that, it is probably above all because of the situation in Pakistan itself. But the campaign of international solidarity has also played a role. It constitutes moreover an encouragement for activists who are struggling in very difficult conditions — and a clear warning to the government: we will remobilise tomorrow, in still greater numbers, if it again proves necessary.

P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] See: [Vague de répression au Pakistan — Farooq Tariq placé en détention](#)

[2] Qazi Hussain is also president of the MMA coalition.

[3] See [For the immediate release of Farooq Tariq and the other prisoners detained after the wave of repression of the democratic movement in Pakistan](#)

[4] See: Farooq Tariq, [The 15 Jail Days under Musharaf military dictatorship](#)