

Imran Khan and the fascist tactics of religious fundamentalists in Pakistan

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Imran Khan President Tehreek Insaaf (Justice Movement) went to University of Punjab Lahore on 14th November. This was his first appearance in public after his dramatic escape from the house arrest on 3rd of November. He is a leading figurehead of the movement against the military dictatorship in Pakistan.

Imran Khan was invited by some student organizations in the campus to address the students and lead a rally of the youth. He had hoped and rightly so, a massive reception by the students, who have shown quite a radicalization during the last 10 days of the imposition of the emergency. As he arrived in the campus on the morning of 14th November, he was warmly welcome by over 2000 chanting slogans "Go Muaharaf Go".

Imran had not realized that the intensity of the sensitivity of the Islami Jamiat Talab IJT, (Islamic Association of Students) by his sheer presence. The IJT leadership saw his arrival as a challenge to their total control of the campus. They have not allowed any other group of students to work openly and independently at the campuses since 1977. They have imposed their own Islamic traditions at the University. Male and female students can not sit together in the canteens and openly. In many class rooms, women are forced to sit alone. They have not allowed any other organization to put up posters or distribute leaflet. No other political leader is allowed to speak at the campus apart from the Jamaat-I-Islami, their mother political party.

Their grip on the campus has remained solid under their repressive measure for years. Many radical or progressive students had been physically beaten up, some time to death as well. Students were beaten up for just sitting together or organizing a day out with female students. The IJT had also good grip of the Academic Staff Association of the teachers. They also control the Senate, the decision making body of the university. They have also infiltrated many of their members and supporters to the manual jobs at the university and hostels.

The IJT has worked very effectively under successive military regimes. They never launched a movement against the military regimes and have learned to live with them. The student unions are banned since 1980. Still the IJT has a total control of the campus. They make decisions on the hostel seats, admissions and other privileges for their supporters. They have very workable formula with the military administration of the campus. "you do not touch us, we will not tease you". Although the Jamaat_I-Islami make a lot of noise of the rule of constitution but the place they control through their student organization was a classic scene of fascism.

Here comes Imran Khan in the University not realizing the real life of the university. While he was put shoulder high by the students in the presence of the local and international media, the IJT attacked. They pushed him and forced him to be locked in one room. He was hit, manhandled and pushed by the holy beard student's leaders of the IJT. Imran Khan was kidnapped for an hour by these thugs. For them, it was a usual treatment for any person defying their rules at the university. Within that hour, some students tried to get him released unsuccessfully. Later, he was bundled to a van and handed over to a police jeep waiting to arrest him outside the main gate of the university.

The IJT leadership then went to press telling that they will not allow any politics in the university and their campaign against the military regime has been damaged by the presence of Imran Khan. The ashamed leadership of Jamaat-i- Islami declared they will investigate the matter and apologized from Imran Khan.

This was Imran Khan who was very found of the religious fundamentalist parties and was advocating all the times to unite the forces against the regime including the religious parties. But for the last one month, his illusions about the Jamaat Ulemai Islam, the main religious party in Pakistan has been shattered by their tactics to continue support the military regime indirectly. He spoke against them openly. Now another close ally of Imran Khan ditched him to an extent that he is arrested and now facing anti terrorism charges by the regime.

Labour Party Pakistan had made good contact with the radical element of the Imran Khan party. I was approached by some leaders recently to have a proper meeting with Imran Khan on forming a united alliance. I met him briefly just before the imposition of the emergency in Lahore and agreed to have a detail meeting later in the week. The leaders of Imran Khan's party told me that they have worked hard to convince him that we do not go along the religious fundamentalists. But Imran Khan would not listen to them properly. He told the AFP from his police van after his arrest that he has been betrayed by a group of students. He must have learned a lesson but in a hard way.

LPP have a very clear cut policy of not working together with the religious forces on the question of anti imperialist or anti militarist struggle. In fact, we do not work together on any question. The religious fundamentalist are a new kind of fascist force. They want to turn the wheel of history backward. There is nothing progressive in their approach. The religion must not be part of the politics. The state must separate itself from religion.

LPP issued a press release today declaring that we will continue the struggle of Imran Khan and fight against the regime. We will do more against the military regime after his arrest. We will work hard to get him releases. We condemned the fascist tactics of the IJT. LPP also declared that we will enter the University of Punjab and will challenge the fascist control of the IJT. University of Punjab is no hereditary place of any group. It must be open for all and must have all the freedom for the students to sit together and talk together. LPP will announce the day when it will enter in the university publicly.