

Public Again after 20 days of underground life

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Since 23rd November, I am working normally. Most of the political prisoners were released and police raids were rare. According to Musharaf dictatorship, on 28th November, there were only 37 political prisoners in different jails and rest are released. The 37 include most of the main leaders of the advocate's movement. I remained underground for 20 days and avoided arrest while still active in the movement.

This is a temporary interval. The dictatorship has got what they wanted. They wanted to get rid of the independent judiciary before they could announce the general elections and before general Musharaf final decision on his election as president in uniform. To do that, they had to arrest over 10,000 political, social trade unions activists and revolting advocates.

They had a positive decision by the hand picked judges of the Supreme Court on the issue of the president ship of general Musharaf. The dictatorship has even allowed Nawaz Sharif, the former prime minister of Pakistan, to return after seven years of exile. Saudi Arabian kingdom has played some mediatory role. The details of the deal have yet to surface.

On 27th November, Labour Party Pakistan organized two events for the release of the political prisoners. At Karachi, over 60 activists of LPP were in front of Karachi Press Club for a vigil to demand release of political prisoners and solidarity with the journalists. The picture of the Karachi LPP vigil was printed all over Pakistan in front and back pages of most of the main newspapers. The majority of the sixty activists of LPP were women at Karachi vigil.

On the same day in Lahore, over 200 activists took out a rally to protest the ongoing arrest of the advocate leaders and to express solidarity with the struggling media. They went to Lahore Press Club and then to the office of GEO, the private television channel that is still off air under the direct orders of the military dictatorship. Surprisingly, there were no arrests at the two events. But in Lahore, a large contingent of police was accompanying the demonstrators. At Lahore demonstration, there were over 80 women participants.

I could not participate in Lahore demonstration as I was in Toba Tek Singh, my home town, for the filing of the nomination papers to contest election for the national and provincial parliaments. Although the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek, the left alliance, has decided to boycott the elections under the present conditions of repression, but LPP wanted to make the boycott more effective.

The strategy was discussed and approved by the leading bodies of the LPP to file the nomination paper, get it accepted and then boycott the procedure after launching a mass campaign to boycott it. The Musharaf dictatorship has announced general election to be held on 8th January 2008 after the imposition of the emergency and after getting rid of the independent judges.

The elections are just a farce under the present repressive conditions. We had done some home work for my elections at Tobe Tek Singh including opening an office at one of the main area of the city. We had organized several meetings including one of the women where over 150 women

participated. We had planned the fourth national conference at the city but had to postpone it for the second time. So it was not a good strategy to boycott the elections and do nothing.

For the national assembly constituency number 93, 12 candidates including myself have submitted papers to contest the elections. They are from Pakistan Peoples Party, Muslim League Nawaz and Muslim League Q, Mutihida Muslis Ammal the religious parties' alliance, Labour Party Pakistan and several independents. I went along with some of the senior leaders of the Left alliance to submit my papers to the returning officer who is an additional district judge. You had to be a graduate to contest the general elections. Less than one percent of the total population of Pakistan is graduates.

I was in Toba Tek Singh for two days and met some of the local party activists and friends to chart out the strategy. They all agree to boycott the elections.

Today on 18th November, I went to Lahore High Court to meet some of the leaders of the advocate movement. I met Sarfraz Cheema, the 32 year old secretary of Lahore High Court Bar Association who spent 17 days in jail and was released few days before. He told me about the brutalities of the police against the advocates. The police entered in their office to destroy the computer and fax machine on 5th November. Over 700 advocates were arrested on the day including him.

Later on the day, I spoke in one of Action Aid Pakistan seminar on poverty alleviation in association with Women Workers Help Line. The other speakers included Dr. Mubashar Hasan the former federal finance minister under Bhutto, Dr. Abdul Hai Baluch president of National Party, Rabia Bajwa advocate, Hasan Nasir from Revolutionary democratic Workers Committee, a part of Left Alliance and Bushra Khaliq secretary Women Workers Help Line. Earlier, Fikre Zwadie, the country director of Action Aid Pakistan welcomed the speakers for this political session of the seminar. All the speakers were against the emergency and for a boycott of the general elections.

Dr. Mubashar Hasan commented in his speech that Farooq has been arrested all the times because of the repressive nature of the regime.

I must thank all my friends and family in Lahore who has helped me in the most difficult period of repression. Without their full scale help, I would have not been out of jail. I also thank LPP members and supporters for all the help they could lend.

I also must thank all those friends and supporters from overseas for reading my mails and some time commenting with encouraging words. They include John Pilger (UK), Pierre Rousset (France), Tariq Ali (UK), Eric Toussaint (Belgium), John Hunt (UK), Phil Frampton (UK), Peter Boyle (Australia), Sue Bolton (Australia), Merrilyn Treasure (Australia), Silla Vriesma (Netherlands), Elisabeth van Hoval (Netherlands), Lidy Nicpal (Philippine), Srilata Sawminathan (India), Roger Silverman (UK), John Reiman (USA), John Throne (USA), Richard Miller (USA), Ahmad Shawki (USA), Roland Ekbohm (Sweden), Jan Hodann (Sweden), Toni Usman (Norway), Farooq Sulehria (Sweden), Asim Ali Shah (UK), Michel Eggermont (Netherlands), Hans Van Heijningen (Netherlands), Joost Kircz (Netherlands), Saqlain Imam (UK), Pam Curry (Scotland), Comrade Shahid (USA), Roger Silverman (UK), Sandeep Chachra (Thailand), John Samuel (Thailand), Rashid Titumir (Bangladesh), Taimur Rehman (UK), Frank Hazur (India), Kuldeep Kumar (India), Mohan Kumar (Australia), Tarek Fatah (Canada), Alvin Dizon (Philippine), Chetan Patel (UK), Toqeer Ahmad (Canada), Dianne Feeley (USA), Qamarullah (UAE), Linda Waldren and Ray (Australia), Kenji Kunitomi (Japan), Dr. Mark (Russia), Silvana (Italy) and many more I like to mention but it is getting already a long list.