

A historic Long March that fell short of picketing Parliament - Lawyer's leadership on the road from resistance to reconciliation

Monday 16 June 2008, by [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 15 June 2008).

We started our Long March from Lahore around 6pm on 12 June 2008. Four vehicles were carrying around 100 Labour Party Pakistan activists. The destination was Islamabad where the leaders of the lawyer's movement announced a picket of parliament. This was to put pressure on the Pakistan Peoples Party Government to fulfill their promises to restore the top judges.

The judges had refused to take oath under a Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) after General Musharaf announced an emergency on 3 November 2007. The taking of oath under PCO would have meant to legalize the Musharaf dictatorial measures.

Pakistan Peoples Party came onto power after the general elections of 18 February. PPP had promised to restore the top judges within 30 days of coming into power. However, they failed to fulfill their promise and wanted to put some conditions on the independent judiciary before they are get their job back.

We arrived at Islamabad on 14 June at 2am. The 44 hours spent to cover, a distance of around 300 kilometers, was not a very good speed. On average, we drove at a speed of 7 kilometers an hour. This was due to the massive presence of ordinary people all the way to Islamabad. They were reception camps and many thousands people were queuing many hours to receive the Long March and say to them a good luck.

No one had any rest but attended all the public meetings, replied to all the slogans against Musharaf regime, put stickers, spoke to people, waved hands all the time and walked some time ten kilometers along thousands.

The mood was euphoric. They all wanted Musharaf to go. I have never heard so much muddy language against a ruler as was used by many who saw this opportunity to express their real inner feeling. They all were happy that at last something is going to happen. "Go and get Musharaf out, we are with you" was a comment we heard very regularly. It was an all out anti Musharaf consciousness expressed all the way.

Imagine people queuing up in thousands even after 12 pm. We attended a public meeting at 4am at Gujrat where few thousands have refused to go home until our caravan arrive and speak to them. This is a city where the leader of Musharaf supported Pakistan Muslim League was defeated despite all his best efforts. Here we saw for the first time the flags of Pakistan Peoples Party within the crowd that were waiting for the participants of the Long March.

PPP leadership had advised its members not to attend this long march. The Peoples Lawyers Forum, a PPP front among the advocates, had announced a complete boycott of the event and many PPP leaders were making jokes of the Long March. They were using very hurtful remarks about the Long March.

Javed Bhatti called me, an LPP activist, who told me that some private television channels are commenting about the "low turn out" of the Long March. I was surprised about this dirty tactics of PPP leadership who had used some of its journalist supports to propagate this lie. This was all contrary to the factual position.

However, the PPP activists in hundreds had defied the main leadership to become part of the lawyer's movement. This was a welcoming sign and the speakers at the public rally at 4am recognized the importance of this participation.

I had started using my mobile to write every few hours a running commentary on the long march and was posting to Labour Party Pakistan supported email list "Socialist Pakistan News (SPN)".

However, here in Gujrat, my revolutionary tempo had a break. I lost my mobile and so was the hard labour of at least six months to collect all the telephone numbers and emails addresses. The leaders of Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union at Gujrat offered us a cup of tea. I had almost lost my voice because of the consistent sloganeering. While I was using some hot water to freshen up my throat, my mobile was taken away within seconds and the sim was thrown out immediately. It took few hours before I recovered from this great shock.

Those who had erected the reception camps offered a lot of drinks, food and biscuits on many places. We were quite pleased with this gesture.

At Jehlum, around 6am we had a meeting of all the comrades of LPP and discussed our strategy so far and the improvement. It was a very good road side meeting which brought good results in shape of more active participation of all the comrades.

We entered Rawalpindi around 2pm and saw some LPP flags welcoming the Long March. We also saw an LPP flag waving on the main truck of the lawyer's leadership, a truck that would lead us to the parliament. It was the work of Rawalpindi comrades.

Here we saw the red flags of other Left groups like the Peoples Rights Movement, Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party, Awami Jamhoori Ittehad, Awami Tehreek and National Workers Party. While the green flags of Jamaat Islami and Muslim League Nawaz were the major part of the caravan, but it was difficult to ignore the red flags as well. Flags of Imran Khan Tehreek Insaaf were also seen all along the route.

It took us around 12 hours from Rawalpindi to Islamabad. Alia, an activist of People Rights Movement inspired many thousands by her creative slogans and speeches. We all were now out of our vehicles and gathered around the truck of PRM who had good arrangement of loud speakers. All Reds were there. A good unity action by all the Left groups.

We were the last one to reach the parliament area. The reason was that none of us had a rest or a proper hot food for the last eighteen hours. Comrades wanted to eat something before we reach for the final destination. Here the comrades from Rawalpindi had also joined us. Over 100 of us started walking to the parliament from Aab Para Chouk at around 1.30am. It was around two kilometers. We all had our red flags and started the final chanting of slogans.

We had heard already that over 100,000 had arrived before our main caravan to reach at the main venue. At Rawalpindi, it was an ocean of heads. Everywhere, there were people waving flags and chanting slogans.

As we arrived at the main area where over 100, 000 had gathered already, we started moving to the front of the gathering and raised slogans. We saw thousands of lawyers in their suite lying on the

ground because of long distance they covered to come here. Some have already erected the camps in anticipation of few days of picket. For them, it was now or never situation.

We came very near to the main platform and Mian Nawaz Sharif was just going to speak at the time. He spoke well about the issue of the judges but in the end, he advised the lawyer's leaders to rethink about the picket of the parliament. He in fact asked them not to go ahead for the picket and that it was ok what they have done.

We immediately realized that the leadership of lawyer's movement had been in discussion with PMLN and that they had not announced publicly what they will do at the end of the Long March. The impression given by the leaders of the movement was very clear. "It is now or never".

A picket of lawyers in thousands would have spoiled the uneasy relationship of PPP and PMLN, the two main parties of the capitalists and feudal. The PMLN is in power in Punjab and had come out of the central government when PPP had not restored the judges as promised. However, they did not want to go very far in this regard. The chief minister of Punjab Mian Shahbaz Sharif had already come out openly against the picket of parliament.

Aitzaz Ahsan, president Supreme Court Bar Association announced the end of Long March while speaking to thousands. It sparked an immediate reaction by the young lawyers who wanted go all the way. Many wept and tears in their eyes on this open reconciliation policy of the main leadership of the lawyer's movement. The leadership had moved quickly from resistance to reconciliation. No one agreed to the arguments of Aitzaz Ahsan that we do not have the resources for the picket.

Much more could have been gained if the leaders of the lawyer's movement would have stood according the predominant rebellious consciousness. It was a gross tactical mistake to loose this opportunity to put more pressure. It left a very bitter mood in the end and a movement divided on the issue. A bitter end in short terms of a historic gathering. It was a crisis of the leadership. It may be the beginning of the more and more conciliation by the leaders of the movement.

Despite the conciliation of the lawyer's leaders in the end of the Long March, this was one of the great events of the movements in Pakistan against the military dictatorship. It brought hundreds of thousands in the street against militarization. It helped developed new layers of political activists It was a great manifestation of the working class joining hands with the middle class. Not only those who participated will not forget it but by those as well who joined to welcome the caravan. It has put a lot of pressure on the parliament but it could have been done decisively.

We arrived back in Lahore on 14 June evening. However, the comrades who had started their participation on 9 June from Sind arrived back to their homes on 16 June evening. For them, it was week long on the roads. So were the case that started their Long March from Quetta and other cities of Baluchistan.

Farooq Tariq

spokesperson

Labour Party Pakistan

40-Abbot Road Lahore, Pakistan

Tel: 92 42 6315162 Fax: 92 42 6271149 Mobile: 92 300 8411945

labour_party@yahoo.com www.laborpakistan.org www.jeddojuhd.com