

What about General Musharaf?

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No one in the newly elected parliament is talking directly about General Pervez Musharaf. After Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani of the Pakistan Peoples Party took the oath of office, administered by Musharaf on 25 March he spoke about "the need for cooperation of the president." But General Musharaf has no right to be president of Pakistan. He is a dictator and must go.

Yousaf Raza Gilani ordered the release of the judges in his first speech. How could he not? The PPP failed to win a number of seats because they did not demand their reinstatement. The reality is that no one can stop their reinstatement. Thanks to the strengthening of the Pakistan lawyers' movement not even General Musharaf imposition of the emergency decree on 3 November 2007 stopped the demand.

Yet in his first speech, Prime Minister Gilani did not say a single word about General Musharaf. He did please the Bhutto family by demanding a probe of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's judicial murder. In 1979, Bhutto was hanged by the orders of the Lahore High Court, with the decision subsequently upheld by the Supreme Court Yet in his speech Mr. Gilani only demanded that parliament apologize to the nation. Why parliament? Why not the generals and the judges who conspired to hang Bhutto?

There have been two occasions since Bhutto's murder that the Pakistan Peoples Party has come to power. During those periods Mr. Gilani served as a minister under Benazir Bhutto and as a speaker in parliament. Why didn't he raise the issue then?

Back then there was a deal with the military generals: No truth commission, no investigation, no arrests, no public hearings and no public trial. But now Prime Minister Gilani is raising the issue as if to reconfirm his credentials as a supporter of the Bhutto family. Yet what about Benazir Bhutto's recent murder? Who is the single person most responsible for failing to provide proper security measures? General Musharaf. Nevertheless not a single word is uttered. How unfortunate that the new PPP leader is not ready to demand Musharaf resignation.

Another unfortunate fact is the PPP leadership's seeking collaboration from General Musharaf's allies, the MQM. Why this alliance? The PPP leadership wants to establish a government of reconciliation, which will be a government of the rich by the rich and for the rich, but in the name of the poor.

The PPP has no program that could solve any of the basic problems ordinary people have. The party's head, Asif Ali Zardari, was sure to reiterate in his recent interview with an American news channel that he wants to move ahead with privatization.

Also eager to demonstrate the PPP's willingness to continue neoliberal policies, the leadership welcomed the visit of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher to Pakistan. They want to show that they are good partners with U.S. imperialism in the so-called "war on terror." They are saying, "The plan will work. We are going as we planned, but unfortunately not with Benazir."

General Musharaf wanted to rig the election, but was unable to do so. For ourselves, we are happy that the Musharaf political forces are in retreat. But we cannot welcome a government that walks

hand in hand with the U.S. imperialism. We can celebrate the release of the judges, although this is more the result of the lawyers' movement than the PPP's leadership.

The present change of faces has come about because of the incredible sacrifices of the lawyers and many more political and social activists. These activists did not put their careers first but carried out their campaign for an independent judiciary. They boycotted the election for a principled reason. Red salute to those who boycotted this election and exerted maximum pressure on the regime. Red salute to PPP leader Aitzaz Ahsan, who boycotted despite his party's strategy.

Shall we congratulate those who are making compromises with the murderers? The German Social Democrats and the so-called communists did this in the early 1930s with the result that fascism came to power without a single shot being fired. Will the Pakistan Peoples Party alliance with MQM be paid with such a heavy price? Today even Mian Shahbaz Sharif of the Muslim League raises no objection to this unholy alliance. The Muslim League Nawaz is too busy preparing to assuming power in the state of Punjab.

Those who allow Musharaf to remain in the presidency are not respecting the wishes of the Pakistani people. He is a dictator who has used every dirty tactic to maintain his power. He is not a democratically elected president. The majority feel the so-called president has got to go.

Yet Amin Fahim, senior vice chair of the PPP, was angry about the anti-Musharaf slogans being shouted from the press gallery on parliament's opening day. He even called for the newly elected speaker Fahmida Mirza to take action. But the "Go Musharaf Go" slogans represent the voices of millions throughout Pakistan. We salute those who raised these slogans inside parliament.

I personally was not arrested repeatedly to see half of a democracy. "Democracy" under Musharaf was a farce, it was a fraud in past and it will be a fraud, if he is allowed to hold on to the presidency, in the future as well. We must continue our struggle for a real democracy and get rid of all the remnants of the military dictatorship.

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