

Introduction

“Right In There” - The LPP and the fight against Musharaff Dictatorship

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Introduction under the title “Right In There”) to: Farooq Tariq , *Facing The Musharaff Dictatorship - an activist narrative*, Edited: Merrilyn Treasure, Good Books, March 2009.

See: Farooq Tariq, [Facing The Musharraf Dictatorship - An Activist Narrative](#)

In April 2000, I was privileged to attend the first national conference of the Labour Party Pakistan in Lahore. As one of 13 international guests, I witnessed four days of political discussion and debate which left us all with a common impression that this was a party that was going to make a difference to politics.

First, there was a tangible political confidence in the hall of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan where the 138 delegates, from all around Pakistan, and 28 observers worked hard through four days of reports. Among the congress delegates were many seasoned trade union activists who had been involved in recent struggles, such as in the railways where the army had tried to quell two months of strikes and go slows.

There were delegates who recounted a heroic battle between railway workers and the army on the Peshawar Road in Rawalpindi. There were peasant leaders from the Sindh, Baluchistan and Punjab who had stood up to the ruthless assault of big landlords used to having their way. And there were valiant students who persevered on campuses still constrained by political restrictions from the days of the Zia ul-Haq military dictatorship and now also blighted with right-wing religious fundamentalists.

So this palpable confidence was founded on real experience of persistent and brave struggle. Second, this was a party that wasn't just talking about “left unity” - as many left groups do - but actually doing it. As I recorded in my notes then, many of the delegates had been members of other political parties, including the Communist Party, National Workers Party, Watan Dust Peasant Party, Socialist Party, Sindh Peasant Committee and People's Party. But they had all found

common cause in the LPP in rejecting the old orientation of most of the Pakistan left of looking to the “progressive” national capitalists for a “national democratic” alliance.

The delegates to the LPP conference were agreed that the Pakistani capitalist class — whether governing in military or civilian mode — had demonstrated that it was against the great majority of the population and in league with the big landlords and the imperialist capitalists. The delegates still had some differences about the exact political theory that explained this, but they were totally united in opposing the approach of the old left.

In a sometimes heated but ultimately comradely discussion, the delegates worked to bridge the political gaps between leftists who previously dismissed each other “Trotskyites” or “Stalinists”.

There was a lively discussion on the national question. Pakistan was carved out by the capitalist and landlord classes of the

Indian sub-continent to stop the advance of communism. The country’s borders contain several nations (or part of them), including the Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, Kashmir and the Siraiki nations. The Punjabi capitalist class clearly dominates Pakistan politically and economically and so there is an issue of national oppression. The LPP conference resolved to support the struggles of all oppressed nationalities and minority religions.

A major issue at the congress was the nature of General Pervez Musharraf’s military rule. Musharraf had seized power the previous October in a military coup against the government of Nawaz Sharif but, as Farooq Tariq explained, when Musharraf took power, many people had illusions in the new regime because the previous regime was so corrupt and repressive. However, the military had shown since then that it hadn’t “changed its spots”,

Just two weeks before this LPP conference, the military and police had raided the offices of the LPP and the homes of its leaders, who were forced into hiding for a week. The LPP was raided because it had dared to hold a peaceful demonstration in Lahore against the visit of then US President Bill Clinton. The raid was widely condemned in the local media and by progressive groups around the world.

Yet at that time, some of Pakistan’s old left leaders and non-government organization leaders were supporting the military regime. In sharp contrast, the LPP congress called for the military to return to barracks, for a democratic government based on worker and peasant representatives, and for free and fair elections in 90 days. It dismissed Musharraf’s offer of non-party political local elections as an attempt to cloak military rule in “democratic garb”.

Musharraf went on to make himself president of Pakistan, and in the wake of US President Bush’s declaration of the so-called “War Against Terrorism”, he became the beneficiary of more than \$10 billion

in US military aid – at least \$700 million he is alleged to have stolen for himself! However, eight years later, Musharraf has been humiliatingly forced into resignation under the pressure of a massive popular movement galvanized by a militant response to his sacking of judges who refused to do his will.

The LPP comrades were “right in there” (as they say in Australia) in this movement, defying one of the world’s most brutal armed forces and showing a militant lead all the way. They fought side-by-side with the most militant lawyers’ movement the world has ever seen! And, at the same time, they were also organizing among the workers and the peasants battling feudal and military landlords. As I wrote on behalf of the DSP, earlier this year, in a letter of congratulations to these brave Pakistani comrades:

“Congratulations to the fighting masses in Pakistan for their latest victory! Given the history of Pakistan has been so bloodied by military dictatorships, such a humiliating end to the political career of the latest military dictator is a great victory for people’s power.”

“This was a victory made in the streets by masses that braved the guns, batons and bayonets of the military. The whole world watched this valiant struggle progress, critically around the sustained mass response to Musharraf’s removal of the ‘inconvenient’ top judges who refused to keep doing his bidding.

“An angry mass response to an outrageously anti-democratic act by a ruler is not an uncommon thing in our times. What is less common is a sustained mass resistance, one that does not fade away after a protest rally or two. It was a sustained mass resistance that we saw in Pakistan and it was that sustained mass resistance that finally forced Musharraf to resign.

“Only the braveness and resilience of the masses and their fighting political leadership can account for this.

“Of course dirty deals have been done by the new PPP-led government to smooth Musharraf’s exit into a comfortable retirement villa somewhere.

“But as Comrade Farooq Tariq’s message signals, the fight to bring the dictator to account, to restore the removed judges and to end the neo-liberal policies that Musharraf has forced on the Pakistani people goes on. As does the fight to smash the deadly military and political alliance with US imperialism.

“Congratulations! “Down with dictators, down with imperialism! “Working masses of the world unite!”

This brings me to the role of Comrade Farooq Tariq. The LPP clearly gathered and developed many great leaders, only a few of whom I have had the privilege to meet. But I remember those I have

met, and treasure the conversations we shared. In the stories brought back from visits by other DSP comrades, I've also heard about these many other leaders, young and old. However, Farooq Tariq, who was its secretary general until the last LPP conference, clearly was a comrade who played a critical role in bringing the LPP together and building it into what it is today. My comrade and partner, Pip Hinman, noticed in her visit to Karachi for the 2006 regional World Social Forum, the clear love and respect of many comrades (from the LPP and other groups) for Farooq Tariq.

I had met Farooq before the 2000 LPP conference as he had visited Australia earlier but meeting him on his home ground really consolidated some impressions of him.

Farooq is a warm man. I will always remember him waiting to meet me at the border crossing from India – itself an extraordinary experience! Farooq's warm welcome made me feel at home in a place that otherwise struck me as a strange combination of an ancient, almost "biblical", scene (complete with donkey!) and a military parade ground.

A lot of lefties can spout political theory, make rousing speeches, etc but to give real political leadership in the revolutionary movement demands the deepest and strongest humanity. This famous quote of Che Guevara sums it up: "At the risk of sounding ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by feelings of love."

Farooq is a brave comrade. His years of struggle against dictatorship and his in-and-out history with Pakistani jails (all for political stands) attest to this. But my firsthand insight into Farooq's plucky spirit came when we were briefly detained by Indonesian police along with several other foreign guests at a conference on globalisation near Jakarta in 2001. First, there was Farooq's hilarious failed attempt to evade arrest – via the conference toilet – and then over the subsequent couple of days' detention, Farooq demonstrated his experience how to deal with bullying police. His pluckiness even earned briefly him a sort of short-term pass out, which he promptly used to go out and buy us some tasty food from stall holders outside the police station. I've also seen him in action in a demonstration in Sydney (against the detention without trial of refugees). This is not a comrade who shies away from confronting the forces of the state – indeed the opposite.

Farooq is also a wise comrade and, while principled in his politics, he is clearly by nature a builder and not a splitter. I've experienced and appreciated this in the course of his many visits to Australia and in various political correspondences. Here in the DSP, we've had our own challenges, including in recent times a pretty hard and protracted internal dispute. Farooq has always played a role in trying to help us stay as united as possible while retaining a respectful distance to avoid interference. I deeply appreciate this. But this is more than evidence of the wisdom and skill of a single comrade, it reflects another important characteristic of the LPP itself – its genuine internationalism.

Farooq has said to me that he learnt from his earliest contact with the DSP that while international solidarity and collaboration – especially between revolutionaries – is priceless, we cannot build serious parties in different countries without independent political leaderships. But I suspect that is only part of the story, and that the truth is that the LPP, like the DSP, has learnt this from its own political experience.

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P.S.

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