

## **Pakistan: 'A victory for democratic forces'**

Monday 2 April 2007, by [McILROY Jim](#) (Date first published: 29 March 2007).

Lahore,

"Today was a victory for democratic forces, not only for the Labour Party Pakistan, but for all the other parties who were able to go onto the streets in support of democratic rights", LPP general secretary Farooq Tariq told Green Left Weekly's Jim McIlroy in Lahore on March 26, following a round of demonstrations.

"The LPP organised rallies in 11 cities to express solidarity with the advocates' [lawyers'] movement for democracy and justice. We had 300 people in Lahore, more than that in Karachi, and hundreds in other towns around Pakistan. Comrades were arrested in Multan before the rally there.

"In Lahore, police tried to stop the march midway on route to the Lahore High Court, but we were still able to reach the main venue. They tried to seize our red flags. Police had harassed us, and attempted to pressure us to cancel our rally, under threat of being arrested. But the LPP comrades were not daunted, were ready to be arrested if necessary."

Tariq explained that the LPP was planning another round of larger rallies to coincide with the nationwide mobilisations on April 3, when suspended Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry faces court. "Today was the beginning of a movement to overthrow the Musharraf military regime. We will work together with the left alliance, and the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy [ARD — the alliance of the major opposition parties against the government].

"Today was a defeat for the military regime, which tried to stop the LPP march in Lahore. They threatened us with dire consequences, but we didn't budge an inch. It was a war of nerves with the police, and we won."

Noting that the ARD rally in Lahore attracted some 5000 people, Tariq said, "The regime is being weakened by this rising mass movement".

The slogans raised by the LPP at the rallies included "Musharraf, your time is up!"; "You and I have been in hunger because GHQ [General Head Quarters] has looted all the resources"; and "Take back the reference against the chief justice, no restrictions against the judiciary".

Explaining that the LPP had only three days to prepare the rallies and had to postpone the party's national congress, Farooq said, "But the movement is growing. People along the route in Lahore were happy and supportive of our march. And we were warmly welcomed by the crowd of Pakistan People's Party supporters when we arrived at the High Court. There was also a good speech of welcome to us from the president of the Bar Association.

"We want to build this movement as a really mass-based mobilisation. A crack in the regime has been forced. Now, the government cannot control the movement of the advocates, joined by the political parties."

According to Tariq, "Privatisation in Pakistan has been the real looting and plundering of the public sector. For example, the state-owned Habib Bank was privatised in 2004 for US\$370 million. The

real assets of the bank, according to its own sources, were US\$9.5 billion!

“In an exclusive interview with suspended CJ Chaudry in the March 23 Daily Dawn newspaper, he said he was going to take notice of this Habib Bank privatisation. In other words, he was threatening to expose massive corruption by the regime. This is his real crime in the eyes of the government.”

Tariq said that “We will be very happy if international workers’ organisations can coordinate with this movement and hold demonstrations in front of Pakistan embassies around the world. We call on all our international friends to do what they can to organise protests in front of Pakistani institutions to support our struggle against the Musharraf regime.”

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