

Life underground for a Pakistani socialist

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“It was agreed that I will not come out in the open but will be active in organising the movement until my arrest at my post. We will not accept the dictatorial measures, we will organise demonstrations and will ask comrades to be ready for more arrests...”

On 3 November 2007 I was in Toba Tek Singh, a city around four hours from Lahore, attending a preparation meeting for our fourth national conference due to be held in the city on 9-11 November.

On hearing the emergency has been declared I decided to travel to Lahore (where I live). This was against the background of my three arrests in three months and 23 days spent in jails and police stations. The Labour Party Pakistan has become a target for the military regime because of our active participation in the lawyers' movement. Several comrades have been arrested.

As I arrived in Lahore I heard that police had raided my house and were looking for me. My partner Shahnaz Iqbal told them that I was not home and would not be at home because I know that I would be arrested.

I was given a few mobile phone SIMs and was advised not to use my regular mobile number. All of the private television channels were off the air. There was only official television, broadcasting the official propaganda. After midnight, General Musharraf came on the official television with his usual demagoguery about the national interest and “Pakistan first”.

He told us that he has removed the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan because his decisions have promoted terrorism and suicidal attacks in Pakistan... [The truth is] he had imposed the emergency rules to prolong his power period and to avoid the Supreme Court decision that might be against him.

Next day ... I put on my regular mobile telephone, forgetting that I am underground. There was immediately a call from a friend and I replied to him. This was a mistake. I was told by my friend to change my location immediately. I went to a park three kilometres away from where I was staying and spoke to some comrades on my new telephone and discussed the political situation. I called my family. My daughter and son asked me not to come home and told me that they are okay.

A meeting of the Joint Action Committee for People's Rights was called at the office of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan to discuss a strategy to oppose the dictatorial measures. The chairperson of the Commission Asma Jahanghir was already detained at her house. Her office called me to tell the comrades to come for the meeting. I told them I would not be there and that if the police saw me they would immediately arrest me.

Khalid Malik, director of the Labour Education Foundation, and Azra Shad, chairperson of the Women Workers Help Line, were among around 70 people who went to this meeting. Comrades who were a little late for the meeting saw police everywhere around the HRCP office. They contacted people inside on the phone to tell them to be ready for the arrests. So the laziness of three comrades saved them from being arrested!

Police went inside and broke the doors. They asked women to leave and men to stay to be arrested. They were all bundled away to the nearest police station. This incident shows the intensity of the police brutality and the [goal of the] military regime to silence any opposition voice. It was the first time since the establishment of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan office in 1986 that police have entered the building. It was considered to be a safe place and that police would not dare to enter.

In the evening I made another mistake on my regular telephone. Bad habits die hard. I spoke to a journalist from a private TV channel about the arrests. I immediately realised my mistake and left where I was to stay at another one for the evening. As I arrived at the new place I received a call around 11.30pm that police had entered my home and looked for me everywhere. The next morning my partner told me the police had come with some intelligence officers in plain clothes. They ordered her to open the door. When police entered my home, only my daughter (13), son (7) and my partner Shahnaz were at home. The police opened every room, cupboards, bathroom, and went to the rooftop. They were desperate to arrest me.

I was upset after hearing the news but did not call home for security reasons. It was hard, but I had to be patient, I was told by my friends.

Today is Monday. We have decided to bring out the weekly paper Workers' Struggle on time and today was the last day of the paper production. We did not work at the usual office of the paper. We brought the equipment, computer and printer and so on, to a new place to work together.

We five together worked on the paper. I wrote the main article... I used a new telephone line to hear about the arrests of lawyers all over the country. More than 700 have been arrested. Police entered the Lahore High Court building for the first time in history and arrested the lawyers after severely beating them up. I was writing about a new history of police atrocities under a military dictatorship.

We decided to fight back against the military regime and to organise the movement. It was agreed that I will not come out in the open but will be active in organising the movement until my arrest at my post. We will not accept the dictatorial measures, we will organise demonstrations and will ask comrades to be ready for more arrests. Here I am sitting in an internet cafe at 6pm to write this. I had to travel over 20 kilometers to reach my place for this evening.

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