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Pakistan

"Pakistan is not a heaven for left ideas"

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The elections of 18th of February in Pakistan were a severe sanction of General Musharaf. Farooq Tariq is spokesperson for the Labour Party of Pakistan. He was put into the prison several times last year and he explains us the difficulties to implement left politics in a country of 160 million of inhabitants, surrounded by Afghanistan, Iran, India and China.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/farooq5678.jpg>]

Farooq Tariq

Farooq Tariq: The Labour Party of Pakistan has been part of the advocate movement in Pakistan, which started last year. This movement started to support the chief of justice who was asked by General Musharaf, the military dictator of Pakistan, to resign from the supreme court. The chief of justice had become an obstacle in the implementation of the liberal agenda. He canceled some privatisation deals, he made a lot of decisions in favour of poor women, who were active in solving some conflicts of the communities. He acted as a human rights activist. So he became very popular among ordinary people of Pakistan.

The Labour Party of Pakistan, which is one of the main left wing parties in Pakistan, became part of the advocate movement to support the chief of justice. Once, the police asked me to cancel a rally we organised in support of the advocates movement. I refused. They tried to prevent the rally, we crossed the police barriers. We pushed them back. It was a big news in Pakistan. After this demonstration, Labour Party became more known. We all had our red flags and the majority of us were women, fighting women. We have a very good base amongst working class women in Lahore. We learnt this kind of demonstration from a peasant movement. During its campaign in 2001 for land rights, we discussed how to demonstrate and we concluded: if men go in the front, the military will just kill them, but if women and children go and demonstrate, they will hesitate to shoot, and if they shoot, they will pay the price.

In June, I was arrested and put in jail while it was 52 degrees (centigrade). I remained in jail for 18 days in a small cell alone without any visits. I was totally isolated from the party. In September, I was arrested again. I was charged under the anti-terrorist act. The sentence was death. I was released after four days on bail. I am still on bail on that case.

Musharaf has been defeated

After the elections of 18th of February 2008, the situation is a bit better, because Musharaf has been defeated decisively by the people of Pakistan in the polls. During these elections the Pakistans Peoples Party of the assassinated Benazir Butto got nearly 36% of the votes. Second was the Pakistan muslim league, the party of the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. He is the one that was prime minister and was overthrown by general Musharaf in 1999. Some fundamentalist parties, that obtained 13% in the elections of 2002, got a serious loss. They only obtained 3% of the votes. The overall vote was against the Musharaf supporters.

Many persons have a lot of illusions in the Peoples party of Butto, because of the important reforms in the 1970s. It nationalised nearly 35% of the industry and gave a lot of money for social development. That was a golden era for the working class in Pakistan. But it's just a bourgeois party, that has collaborated with the military government and with the US imperialism. Benazir Butto was speaking the language of Bush, saying: "I will help the war on terror in Pakistan" That means more bombing, more repression and more killings.

"Most of the leaders of the Labour Party have gone to jail because of their democratic struggle."

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The Labour Party of Pakistan, that we have found in 1997, has become a nationally-known small party. Many activists in the social organisations and trade unions are members of our party. We have nearly 3000 members all over Pakistan. Pakistan is not a heaven for left ideas. It's a theocratic state, totally dominated by religious ideas. 99% of the population is moslim. We don't talk big tall slogans of revolution that only socialism will solve everything. We are a socialist party, but we are involved in day to day problems of the people. We take on issues and fight on it. We take up issues of land rights. We have founded the anti privatisation alliance of Pakistan. We take up issues as woman rights, human rights, against child labour and we make a campaign around that. We always bring together different groups, different trends and we are organising networking. Most of the leaders of the Labour Party have gone to jail because of their democratic struggle. So our opposition to general Musharaf has earned us a good respect, which is now translated into more members, more contacts, more financial support. We are often invited by private TV groups to have a debate. Journalists take our comments by phone. We are becoming popular, but we are not yet in the parliament. Maybe we could have been this time, but we boycotted the elections. But in local elections, more than 100 councilors from the LPP are elected all over of Pakistan.

The strategic position of Pakistan is important for the US imperialism because Afghanistan is next door and they have installed the unpopular regime of Karzai over there. Karzai is facing a lot of problems from the Taliban who controls nearly two thirds of Afghanistan. They forgot any lessons of democracy and support here a military dictatorship. They had the illusion that by doing this, General Musharaf would stop the rise of religious fundamentalism. But we say that religious fundamentalism can only be defeated by political means, not by repression. Bush is talking against religious fundamentalism, but his policies are promoting this fundamentalism. A democratically elected government in Pakistan, a civil government, can make peace with the religious groups by discussing the problems. It should also demand that the North Americans must go out of Afghanistan. NATO must leave Afghanistan. That's the center of gravity. If they are there, there will be no solution.

Watch the video of the interview with Farooq Tariq at: <http://snipurl.com/21ve9>