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Pakistan

Baba Jan and his comrades: a look back over five years of an international campaign

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We described the struggle of of Baba Jan in the pages of this review, *l'Anticaptaliste*, in November 2014. We were already mobilizing at the time to obtain his release. In fact, the international solidarity campaign began in 2012: there were high points and times when the campaign was not so active, but it has never stopped.

Baba Jan was a leader of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) and after a merger he became one of the members of the AWP leadership. His unpardonable crime is to be a very popular figure in Gilgit-Baltistan, a semi-autonomous Himalayan state under Pakistani rule. He must be put out of circulation, for good.

We have more than once feared for his life. Baba Jan was imprisoned for supporting the demands of the people of Ali Abad in the Hunza Valley, after the disaster caused by the formation of an artificial lake due to a landslide. The secret services put pressure on him to join a bourgeois party. When he refused, they picked him up. This was one of the few cases in which the solidarity movement rejoiced at the return to prison (alive) of an activist! A victory – one-off.

In detention, Baba Jan was tortured and his life was in danger. It is easy to have someone murdered in jail. The mobilization in Pakistan and the international campaign got him released on bail, nearly a year after his imprisonment. Another victory - temporary.

When the court ordered him to be detained, Baba Jan had the choice: to go into exile or to obey. He did not want to leave his comrades, prosecuted on the same charge as him, and he rejoined them... Along with them, he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

He remained, in prison, a widely-respected activist. By succeeding, in 2014, in uniting the Shia and Sunnite prisoners in a joint strike for the respect of the regulations (the quality of the food, medical check-ups), without any violence. In 2015, although he was in jail, he came second in his constituency in an election to the state assembly, far ahead of the third candidate.

These two victories came at a price. The government knows that if Baba Jan stands for election again, he will win. So for them there is no question of letting that happen. The role he played in the prisoners' movement earned him a second sentence equivalent to life imprisonment!

In the course of the defence campaign, "lasting" victories have been won. Prisoners other than Baba Jan have been released - this was the case for six of them in 2015.

The figure of Baba Jan has a thousand facets. That of the climate activist, for his commitment after the disaster of Ali Abad. That of a defender of human rights. That of a national personality who fights the oppression exercised by the Pakistani government and the Chinese hold over Gilgit-Baltistan. That of a political activist who follows his path in all circumstances. So many reasons why we are defending him - and why the authorities do not want to release him. All appeals against his conviction have been dismissed.

As a last resort, the Supreme Court must rule on the question of procedure. There is no lack of procedural irregularities! The international campaign has been relaunched, with unprecedented success. In record time, more than 500 signatures have been gathered, coming from 45 countries, including many members of parliament, mayors and other elected officials; intellectuals and academics; cadres of trade union, social and associative and feminist

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movements; organizations for the defence of human rights, ordinary citizens...

A further (temporary) victory has been won: the suspension of the sentence of two of the 14 who had been convicted, who jointly won their appeal, and the postponement of judgment for the others (including Baba Jan). The defence demanded this postponement so that prominent lawyers could come forward. The Court will therefore sit just after the present period of Ramadan - which leaves us some time to broaden the campaign further.

Let us add this postscript: the international campaign could not have taken place without an intense and persistent mobilization of Baba Jan's comrades - and the support of important personalities, lawyers and human rights organizations - in Pakistan itself.

Send signatures via [Essf](#).

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