

Past, Present and Future of Left Movement in Pakistan

Monday 19 September 2005, by [LPP](#) (Date first published: 2005).

Contents

- [The origins](#)
- [The Left Movement in Pakistan](#)
- [The left in the 1980's](#)

The origins

The left movement in Pakistan traces its origins in the Indian communist movement, which, in turn draws its inspiration from the Russian revolutions of 1905 and particularly that of October 1917. Lenin himself developed a great interest in India. And long before Lenin, Karl Marx had also shown a great interest in what he called 'an interesting country' and a 'good future ally'. He wrote quite a few articles on the Indian subcontinent especially during the 1857 war of independence, which ended in defeat.

The defeat strengthened and consolidated the imperialist basis for a century to follow. An era of imperialist exploitation, plunder and repression had begun. However, the exploitation and plunder requiring an industrial base and an infrastructure also gave birth to a vast proletariat. Intensified exploitation also generated resistance by the peasantry. Early in the 20th century, trade unions and strikes started appearing while the biggest provinces of Punjab and Bengal were in total revolt as the peasantry had rose up against imperialist Britain's exploitation.

Indian revolutionaries who went in exile had also established contacts with their European comrades. It was through these contacts that Russian revolution of 1905 had shown a new way forward to Indian revolutionaries.

In 1911 these exiled revolutionaries formed Kairti Kissan Party in the USA. Soon it had established itself in the USA, Canada and Europe. The Russian revolution of October 1917 also shook India. In 1920, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed, its leader M.N. Roy participated in the meetings of Third International and played a revolutionary role. In 1934, the CPI was banned because of its rapidly spreading influence. Its popularity had scared the imperialism. The ban did not prove any hurdle in spreading the communist ideas. Communists still worked tirelessly under different umbrella organisations.

Meantime, the Third International under the leadership of Stalin had gone through a whole period of degeneration. From the 'Third Period' to 'Popular Fronts' and from a non-aggression accord with Hitler to an alliance with the Allies, the Comintern had taken many somersaults. A total degeneration of Soviet Russian bureaucratic clique manifested itself in its bankrupt theory of 'socialism in one country' and the 'two-stage theory of revolution'.

The CPI blindly followed the Stalinist line betraying both the Indian proletariat and the revolution.

When World War-II began, the CPI opposed it until Stalin signed an accord with the Allies.

The CPI refused to lead the fight against British imperialism, firstly because Stalin had become an ally of the Allies; and secondly, according to the 'two-stage theory'; India had yet to undergo the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution under the leadership of the Indian bourgeoisie.

On the other hand, teeming millions of youth, revolutionaries and freedom fighters were offering heroic sacrifice to rid their homeland of British imperialism. From 1940 to 1945, ten thousand freedom fighters were martyred; tens of thousands were sent behind bars while tens of thousands were flogged. But for the CPI these freedom fighters were 'fifth columnists'.

1946 proved the year of revolution. The Indian subcontinent was in total revolt. Mass uprisings, strikes and a mood of revolt across the Indian subcontinent marked the beginning of 1946. The proletariat was leading the revolt. On February 10, navy sailors went on strike. To show their solidarity with the sailors, the workers of Royal Air Force went on strike.

On March 1, Sepoys revolted in Jaipur. On March 18, in Dera Doon, Gorka Sepoys revolted. Karachi, Bombay, Madras and many other cities were in the grip of general strike. On April 3, the Delhi Police, the police in the entire province of Bihar, also revolted. The month of May witnessed the strike observed by 100 thousand rail and postal workers. On 23rd May, 400, 000 industrial workers joined this strike as well. During this wave of strikes, the CPI was playing the role of strike-breaker.

Not drawing any lesson from the defeated revolutions of China (1925-27) and Spain (1934 - 37), the CPI remained blindly committed to the Stalinist 'two-stage theory' in the hope of a Bourgeois Democratic Revolution which never came.

The ideological blunder coupled with a shameful alliance with British imperialism alienated the CPI from the working class. Both were going in opposite directions. This state of affairs benefited Congress and the muslim League. They led the revolt and a movement that could end the imperialism as well as the capitalism and feudalism, but it proved only to be a movement of national liberation.

The teeming millions paid a heavy price for CPI's blunders. Not merely the chance of class liberation had been missed but the Indian subcontinent was plunged into bloodshed. History witnessed the biggest riots and even biggest migrations leaving behind indelible stains of blood. In 1947, the British left India. The CPI supported the partition and ordered its Muslim cadres to migrate to Pakistan.

The Left Movement in Pakistan:

The Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) not only inherited cadre from CPI but the ideological legacy as well, i.e. the 'two-stage theory' of revolution. Following their theory, they joined the Muslim League. In the Muslim League, they supported the bourgeoisie against the feudal lords. But the Muslim League was and had always been a party of the Muslim feudalists. These feudals soon managed to rid their party of these 'infiltrators'. Their purges drove the CPP to another extreme. Instead of organizing the working class for a revolution, it sought a shortcut - a coup. Here too the CPP depended on a liberal section of the bourgeoisie in the persons of Gen. Akbar and his mother-in-law, Begum Shahnawaz. They discussed a coup plan with the General.

This coup attempt, known as the Rawalpindi conspiracy case, was only a discussion and it was unearthed in 1951 before it was executed. The government banned the CPP along with its student

and trade union wings. At the time of the ban, it had a membership of 200. Following this ban; the CPP members formed the Azad Pakistan Party. A radical nationalist, Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, led this party. In 1957, Azad Pakistan Party merged with some other so-called liberal progressive groups to form the National Awami Party (NAP). The NAP had a reformist program instead of a revolutionary one.

Anti-imperialism, secularism, regional autonomy and industrialization, were the key features of its program. After merger, the communists dissolved their independent identity and did not organize any class movement independently.

In 1958, as the capitalist crisis worsened, the workers took to the streets. A working class movement had begun across Pakistan. It also affected the peasantry. In the same year the NAP leader Maulana Bhashani (who then belonged to East Pakistan, now Bangla Desh) formed an All Pakistan Peasants Association (Kull Pakistan Kissan Association). A working class movement began in Lahore that gripped the whole country. To crush this movement, Gen.Ayub imposed a martial law on October 26, 1958.

Sino-Russian Conflict and its impact on the Pakistan left. The avoidance of class struggle and Marxism was the reason behind Sino-Russian bureaucratic conflict. From 1956 onwards, the Sino-Russian conflict became grave. This conflict was a set back to the international working-class movement, disillusioning a mass of conscious working-class fighters. But it also divided the working class as a whole.

Despite its bureaucratic deformations, the Chinese revolution of 1949, because of its success to end feudalism and capitalism, had a great attraction for the colonial world. The Chinese revolution proved contagious for Pakistan. How could it be otherwise for Pakistan had common frontiers? Maoism attracted a big chunk of workers, youth, intelligentsia especially students.

One big reason for the tilt towards Maoism was an aversion against Stalinism's impotent 'two-stage theory' that was stopping the Pakistani left from striking for revolution at a time when revolution was a battle cry. However, the Chinese bureaucracy was no different from the Russian one. It also had its own priorities and ideological deformations. The preceding years exposed the real character of the Chinese bureaucracy. It gave a big support to military dictator General (later on a self-appointed Field Marshal) Ayub Khan. In 1965, Chau En-lai congratulated Ayub Khan on his success in the sham polls.

The so-called election was not even based on adult franchise but on 'Basic Democracy'. A few thousand so-called elected representations of local bodies had to elect the president. Ne Chu, head of a visiting trade delegation, also termed the military dictator Ayub Khan as the people's representative. When a war broke out between India and Pakistan, the same year i.e. 1965, it was termed a people's war by the Chinese bureaucracy, which gave full support to Ayub Khan's dictatorship and Pakistani chauvinism.

When Marshal of the Peoples Army, Chun Lee, visited Pakistan after the war, he made a mockery of communist democracy, terming Ayub Khan's system of Basic Democracy akin to the commune system.

Pakistani Maoists started supporting the military dictator Ayub Khan. They also declared Ayub Khan's foreign policy as progressive utterly forgetting the Marxist point of view on foreign policy that foreign policy is mere a continuation of a government's internal policy. The ruling classes adopt certain foreign policies, and for that matter internal policies, in order to safeguard and prolong their rule.

Later on, Marshall Lee also termed India as an 'aggressor', not bothering to elaborate if he was referring to the Indian ruling class or the Indian working class.

In 1967, a trade delegation from China visited Pakistan. The statement given by the head of the delegation is interesting reading. He said: "Led by General Ayub Khan, Pakistan has made a great development in the fields of agriculture as well as industry. The day is not far when Pakistan will achieve total economic independence" (Pakistan Times 29-10-1996). The policies of class collaboration that the Chinese bureaucracy had adopted were nakedly manifest in Pakistan during this period. The Russian bureaucracy meantime was not playing any radical role either. It was supporting the Indian bourgeois.

The Russian line for a Pro-Moscow left during this period could be gauged from an extract from a party-organ monthly Outlook. In its issue of April 1964 is: "Our newly emerging bourgeois will come in conflict with the international bourgeois. Driven by economic compulsions, Habib Ullahs, Sehgal and Walikas will have to turn to socialist block for trade. This process will end western monopoly on our economics. This is where we are heading for. And I will be the biggest idiot if I oppose General Ayub for this door opening towards left". (Outlook 25-4-1964).

On another question, the same issue suggests that had masses been conscious, the basic democracies could become training institutions for soviets. The pro-Moscow left dissolved itself in so-called liberal, progressive bourgeois parties. The left itself remained divided into Pro-Moscow and Pro-Beijing wings. The former would support one section of the bourgeoisie, terming it progressive while latter would support the other section of the bourgeois terming that as progressive.

The left during this period failed to see the unprecedented economic growth internationally. The post -World War II boom also affected Pakistan. A process of significant industrialization had begun in a big way for the first time, giving birth to its gravedigger - the proletariat.

The left during this period, instead of organizing and associating itself with the new layer of the proletariat was hunting progressives to support among the bourgeoisie. Its flirtation with the working class was confined only to sloganeering. That was why when a revolutionary movement, the first of its kind, began in 1968-69 in Pakistan - and many explosive revolutionary events swept away the military dictatorship which had made dictator Ayub the richest president of the poorest country - the left was taken aback.

The revolutionary movement of 1968-69 and the Left: During this movement that went on for few months, two parallel powers were in operation. On the one hand, workers and peasants were controlling the country. On the other hand, due to the absence of proletariat leadership, the bourgeoisie was in control of the state apparatus.

The movement had begun as a protest against a hike in the price of sugar. The students joined this protest. A student of Rawalpindi Polytechnic College, Abdul Hameed, was shot dead in a protest demonstration. This spark ignited the whole society. Now the proletariat joined the movement. The workers were taking over the mills and factories, the peasantry had risen up, and strike committees had appeared controlling the cities.

In the industrial district of Faisalabad, the district administration had to seek the permission of local Labour leader Mukhtar Rana for the supply of goods through trucks. All censorship had failed. Trains were carrying the revolutionary messages across the country. Workers had invented new methods of communication. It was all a new phenomenon. But it had not come from the heavens. It was the industrialization, exploitation and oppression widening the gulf between rich and poor which brought this change. In the 1960s, the ruling classes had intensified their plunder. For

example in 1965, according to Delhi-based weekly Links, Ayub family's assets were estimated at Rs. 250 million. It did not include the wealth transferred abroad in foreign banks (Links 19-5-1968).

Similarly, the 22 families owned 66 per cent of industrial capital, 80 per cent of banking, and 97 per cent of insurance business. In contrast, the average monthly income of a working-class family was Rs. 780.

In 1967, Railway workers were the first to take action, going on strike. This was an important strike, for three reasons:

- 1) The official union had opposed the industrial action.
- 2) The un-official union controlled by communists had also opposed it since they were supporting 'anti-imperialist' Ayub Khan.
- 3) Railway workers formed workers committees and started their action.

The government resorted to all kinds of repression but it had to grant some of the demands before the strike was called off.

The working class, peasantry and students all were in total revolt. But the left still caught up in its 'Two-stage theory', was dreaming of Bourgeois Democratic Revolution led by progressive bourgeois.

Professor Muzafar Ahmad, a communist leader of National Awami Party (NAP) explains the left's position in Outlook. He said when he talked of favorable objective conditions; he in fact did not mean objective conditions for socialism but bourgeois democracy. '*Consciousness in Pakistan is in no way socialist therefore revolution must pass through stages*', he adds. '*We definitely need a revolutionary party but in the next stage*', he concluded.

The Formation of Pakistan Peoples Party and the Left: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) was formed on September 1, 1967. Its program was radical socialist and a communist leader, J-A Rahim, had written its basic manifesto. Meantime, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto appeared in political arena as a challenge to the Ayub dictatorship. The communists (both Stalinists and Maoists) were supporting the Ayub dictatorship while Bhutto was representing the masses' feelings.

Bhutto, himself a feudal lord from Sindh, had been a foreign minister in the Ayub Cabinet. Being an intelligent bourgeois politician, he raised the slogan of socialism and joined hands with some leftists to form the PPP. When the Ayub dictatorship started targeting Bhutto, he became a symbol of resistance, strengthening his popularity and his grip on the party. In fact, the PPP's popularity was a sequel to 1968-69 revolutionary movements.

Even prior to the 1970s first ever-general election on adult franchise-basis, the masses had joined this party because of its socialist program. The Labour leaders who became powerful and strong because of the 1968's movement joined this party.

The Pakistani left as usual failed to understand the unfolding events. They found a radical bourgeois in Bhutto and started supporting Bhutto. Instead of organizing and launching class struggle, the left developed working class' illusions in Bhutto and the PPP. They reconciled with feudals and capitalists in the PPP and even presented them as leaders. Hence the PPP became a working-class party with feudals as its leaders who used socialist sloganeering. Instead of organizing the PPP on a radical socialist program, it was organized on bourgeois democratic basis, which led to a right wing turn by the party. It was again their ideology that stopped left organizing the PPP on revolutionary basis. The left, again, was working in Pakistan in line with the foreign policy of Moscow and Beijing.

When the PPP came to power in 1972, many communists joined the government. However, the PPP did not bring about any fundamental change, save some radical reforms. This disillusioned the working class. The proletariat took to the streets during the period of May-Sept 1972. The movement was especially strong in Karachi. The government decided to crush the movement. A demonstration of workers was fired on in Landhi, Karachi leaving dozens dead. This angered the communists who had joined this government. Some of them resigned in protest. Perhaps they had forgotten the fact that capitalist governments, no matter how at times radical they may appear, always repress the proletariat.

Disillusioned by Bhutto and the PPP, the left went looking for other more progressive bourgeois figures, leaving the working class, having illusions in PPP, at the mercy of its feudal and capitalist leaders.

The left failed to offer any alternative during this period. Hence when disillusionment grew, it was right wing religious fanatics and reactionary forces that became an alternative to the PPP. In 1977, a movement began against the government spurred by economic conditions and US intervention. The left did not understand the nature of the movement nor did it analyze the nature of the movement's leadership.

The left termed it a movement for democratic liberties and urged the working class to join it. In a statement from Hyderabad Jail on April 12, 1977 Miraj Mohammad Khan, Sher Mohammad Marri and Ata Ullah Mengal said: *"We appeal to the workers, peasants, students, intellectuals and toiling masses to join the ongoing peoples movement which is a movement of democratic liberties. We believe this movement will rid our motherland of the dictatorship."*

They hoped to rid 'our motherland' of 'dictatorship' through religious fundamentalists. Labelling the Bhutto regime as a dictatorship was incorrect, both socially and politically. And the hope of democracy from religious fanatics backed by the USA - was irrational.

Their illogical analysis and hopes were soon dashed to ground when in 1977 a real military dictatorship 'rid' the motherland of Bhutto's 'dictatorship'. It was the left that suffered worst of all during this military regime led by General Zia Ul Haq.

The left in the 1980's:

The 1980s were the years of resistance against dictatorship. The proletariat offered heroic resistance and an unprecedented fight back. For the left it was a decade of mergers and alliances. Bhutto was hanged in 1979 showing that the bourgeoisie wouldn't tolerate even some reforms and that imperialism will go to any length to crush the working-class movement. Bhutto's hanging once again popularized the PPP and it became a symbol of resistance against dictatorship. A united front - the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), was formed. The PPP, right wing, liberal and left all joined hands on this platform.

A united front against dictatorship is not a wrong policy, but the left, instead of presenting a transitional program and linking it up with socialist program, reduced it to social democratic demands.

By this time Communist Party (Stalinist), Workers Peasant Party (MKP a Maoist party) and Socialist Party (a Stalinist party) had some good mass bases in different areas. But they never used their bases to launch an independent and organized struggle.

The national question during this period became even sharper because of ruthless oppression of the regime in Sindh, NWFP, and Balochistan. But the left failed to take a Leninist stand on the national question because the Leninist stand on national question was not Moscow's line.

In 1986, the Pakistan National Party, a faction of the MKP, National Democratic Party and Awami Tehrik, merged to form the Awami National Party. It was again an attempt at a class collaborationist alliance with illusions in the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois nationalist leaders were the main leaders of the new party. Soon the Pakistan National Party dissociated itself from the new merger followed by Awami Tehrik and a section of the MKP.

In 1987 the Qaumi Inqlabi Party (QIP) was formed, again as a result of mergers among different left and bourgeois nationalist parties. However, after one year it disbanded. In 1988, Qaumi Mahaz-e-Azadi and Workers Party Awami Jomhori Party (AJP) merged. But hardly a few months had passed, when, on the eve of 1988 general election, the merger split. The Qaumi Mahaz-e-Azadi led by Meraj Mohammad Khan left the party. The issue was: should AJP support Benazir or Nawaz Sharif?

In 1986 a new element entered the politics of the Pakistani left - it was the Struggle Group, a group of activists who called themselves supporters of the monthly publication, Mazdoor Jeddojuhd. The Struggle Group formed in 1980 in the Netherlands, had an entrust policy, working inside the PPP, since it was a period of fight back for democracy and because the working class had many illusions in the PPP. In 1986, the main leadership ended exile, as there were limited liberties available now under military dictatorship, and returned to Pakistan.

Post Soviet Union Left:

The collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union shattered the Pakistani left. It almost disappeared. Meantime, the military regime came to an end following a military leaving Gen. Zia and others on board dead. Fresh elections were held in 1988. Benazir came to power but she badly disillusioned the working class. Disillusionment with the PPP and the break-up of the USSR generated feelings of hopelessness and desperation. The stalinist left in Pakistan, as elsewhere in world, turned to social democracy. The early 1990's were a period of counter-revolutionary consciousness in Pakistan giving birth to the rise of fundamentalism.

The Struggle Group, however, did not lose faith in the ideals of socialism. It ended the entrust policy in view of its correct perspective that working class would leave the PPP from now on and an alternative should be built. To build this alternative party, it launched Jeddojuhd Inqlabi Tehrik (JIT) in 1993. The JIT was a movement for the formation of a workers party by the trade union movement. In 1997, after some success, it formed the Labour Party Pakistan.

The Stalinist parties by now had shrunk to small groups. For the sake of survival the Communist Party and MKP merged in 1997 to form Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party (CMKP), which again, split recently.

On June 3, 1999 another three parties, the Awami Jamhoori Party, the Pakistan National Party and the Socialist Party, merged to form the National Workers Party (NWP).

Both CMKP and NWP still believe in Bourgeois Democratic Program while NWP has adopted a program far from a revolutionary program. At present the LPP, CMKP and NWP are the three main parties. Besides these three, there are some left groups having no influence. However, none of the left parties has a mass basis. The left as a whole is hardly recognized as a force at present in Pakistan. However, the Labour Party of Pakistan, LPP, has achieved some success since its formation in building a semi-mass base in the interior-Sindh.

There exists a big gap on the left. The LPP is successfully filling the gap.

At present it has a membership of over 1500 but it is not a very consolidated membership. Future down sizing, privatization, poverty and ever increasing joblessness will make workers take to the streets. The left will get a big chance to organize these radicalized masses. But at the same time fundamentalists may appear as a big danger as they are more organized and stronger

P.S.

Published on the website of the LPP. © Pakistan Labor Party.