

The Emergence Of Bangladesh

CLASS STRUGGLES IN EAST PAKISTAN (1947-1958)

Badruddin Umar



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Sani H. Panhwar (2023)

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Since it is not for us to create a plan for the future that will hold good for all time, all the more surely what we contemporaries have to do is the uncompromising critical evaluation of all that exists, uncompromising in the sense that our criticism fears neither its own results nor the conflict with the powers that be.

Karl Marx

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PREFACE

The idea of writing on the social, economic, cultural and political developments in East Pakistan since 1947 first occurred to me in the mid-1960s when I was teaching in the Department of Political Science at the University of Rajshahi. With that end in view I began to collect materials and interview people from 1966 onwards. As that work proceeded, I found at hand some valuable materials on the language movement in East Bengal and became interested in the subject. Finally, a three-volume history of the language movement and contemporary politics in East Bengal (1947-52) was Published between 1970 and 1984.

During that period and afterwards, I wrote hundreds of articles and a number of books on the social, economic, cultural and political situation in East Pakistan and also on other subjects, but I never again seriously thought of writing a connected account of East Pakistan's history from 1947 to the end of 1971.

However, the idea returned to me when I noticed that a massive campaign had started since the induction of the second Awami League government in Bangladesh in 1996 to grossly distort the history of the political struggles of the people of this country beyond all proportions. The ruling clique, including their intellectual servitors, resorted to this massive falsification of history by changing and rewriting school and college textbooks and by other means and this exercise began to produce profoundly negative effects on the intellectual developments of the new generation. In fact, study of history as a distinct discipline and subject has been virtually abolished from the school textbooks and what little is being taught in the name of history is falsehood.

This falsification was affecting not only the thinking and education of students but also the political ideas of the people of this country at large. Faced with this situation, I urgently felt the need for writing a factual, as well as analytical, history of this land from 1947 to 1971. Thus, in spite of many practical difficulties and limitations I decided to undertake the writing of a short history of East Pakistan.

Since it was not possible for me, owing to my other responsibilities, to devote a great lot of time for this work at one stretch and complete it for publication in book form, I decided to write it bit by bit simultaneously with my other work. But even then I had another problem. A work like this could not be completed by me if I was not under any real pressure to do so. So I decided that I would serialize the work in some newspaper or periodical which would keep a certain pressure on me to write regularly.

I spoke about it to Enayetullah Khan, editor of *Holiday*, a well-known *Dhaka Weekly*, and he readily agreed, Thus it started. I began to write regularly in weekly *Holiday* from

August 1998 and the work was called 'Class Struggles in East Pakistan and the Emergence of Bangladesh'. The first part of the work, which constitutes the present volume, was completed in eighty-three installments.

For publishing the work in book form its name was changed. It was considered that 'The Emergence of Bangladesh - Class Struggles in East Pakistan (1947-1958)' would be a more appropriate title of the book.

In this brief study I have tried to give a factual and objective account of the basic social, economic, cultural and political developments in East Pakistan on the basis of available documents, and at the same time I have tried to analyze them with a view to reveal the character of these developments.

From the beginning Pakistan was an unstable state. The physical distance between the two wings of Pakistan, between the East and the West, and the very considerable differences in the social, cultural and political life and traditions of the peoples of these two wings were a great potential threat to its stability. Added to these were the differences in the economic conditions of the two parts and the imbalance in the structure of power. All these factors, from the very beginning, decided the course of political developments which logically and inevitably led to the disintegration and partition of Pakistan. The final break-up of the state was hastened and brought about by the attack of the Pakistan Armed Forces on the whole people of East Pakistan on 25 March 1971.

An attempt has been made in the following pages to describe the relations between the two wings and the circumstances which led to the disintegration of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent state. The present volume covers the period from August 1947 to October 1958. The second volume will cover the period following the military *coup d'état* of General Ayub Khan to the surrender of the Pakistan Armed Forces, deployed in East Pakistan, to the Eastern Command of the Indian Army in Dhaka on 16 December 1971.

I take this opportunity to thank Enayetullah Khan, editor weekly *Holiday* of Dhaka, for giving me the opportunity to serialize this book in his paper and also N.M. Harun of the same paper for extending his cooperation in many ways. I must also thank those who helped me in many ways while writing this book. Hasibur Rahman also rendered valuable help to me in finalizing the manuscript of this book.

Badruddin Umar
Dhaka
13 May 2003

Chapter One

PAKISTAN AND THE MINORITY QUESTION

The partition of India, and consequently Bengal and the Punjab, in 1947 instead of solving the religious minority problem, which was its ostensible objective, consolidated firmly the rule of religious majorities in what previously constituted British India. There was nothing surprising in this, because the 1940 Lahore Resolution of the Muslim League proposed to create separate states in the Muslim majority areas of east and west India. Thus, in real terms, there was no question of solving the religious minority problems in India either for the Muslims or for the Hindus and other peoples in the declared objectives of either the Indian National Congress or the Muslim League. What became quite clear during the Indian independence movement in the 1940s was that both the Congress and the League were trying to consolidate the interests of the Indian feudal-bourgeois classes belonging to the Hindu and Muslim majority communities respectively. The former under the garb of a united India in the name of Indian nationalism, and the latter in the form of separate states for the Muslim minorities of India, who actually constituted majorities in the eastern and western parts of Northern India.

What was quite amazing during the struggle for independence in the 1940s was that the Muslims of the clearly Hindu majority areas in India, like the United Provinces, Bihar, Assam and the southern provinces, joined the ranks of the Muslim League in large numbers in demanding Pakistan which, according to the Lahore Resolution itself, did not include their areas. This was a tragic historical example of how emotionally-charged, powerful political propaganda can sweep away minimal common sense, judgment and even considerations of thoughtful self-interests, and create political blindness in the masses, and also in the literate and highly educated sections of the people.

The pretensions of the Congress to Indian nationalism, supposed to safeguard the interests of all sections of the people, irrespective of their religion, caste and language, broke down when the very important question of preserving the unity of the Punjab, and Bengal was raised at the time of independence. The Congress made a radical and formal departure from its long-standing position of secular nationalism when it demanded the partition of Bengal in the same language and for the same considerations which formed the *raison d'être* of the Pakistan demand of the Muslim League. Thus, after receiving a copy of the agreement on united Bengal signed by Sarat Bose and Abul Hashim, Mohandas Kararachand Gandhi wrote to Sarat Bose, 'There is nothing in the draft stipulating that nothing will be done by mere majority. Every act of government

must carry with it the cooperation of at least two-thirds of Hindu members in the Executive and Legislative.' This, however, proved to be a comparatively mild communal approach to what followed.

Gandhi and Sarat Bose subsequently exchanged angry telegrams when Gandhi, writing on the above-mentioned agreement, in a letter to Sarat Bose dated 8 June 1947, said,

I have gone through your draft, I have discussed the scheme roughly with Pandit Nehru and Sardar. Both of them are dead against the proposal and they are of the opinion that it is merely a trick for dividing Hindus and scheduled caste leaders. With them it is not a suspicion but almost a conviction. They feel also that money is being lavishly expended in order to secure scheduled caste votes. If such is the case you should give up the struggle at least at present. For the unity purchased by corrupt practices would be worse than a frank partition, it being a recognition of the established division of hearts and the unfortunate experiences of the Hindus.

Sarat Bose vehemently protested against Gandhi's accusation of corrupt practices and finally wrote a short letter to him summing up the attitude of Gandhi, and the Indian National Congress as a whole, at the time of partition, 'It grieves me to find that the Congress which was once a great National Organization is fast becoming an organization of Hindus only.' No stronger words could be used for the utterly fraudulent and essentially communal character of the Indian National Congress led by Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sarclar Vallabbbhai Patel and their kind in 1947.

The issue of the partition of Muslim majority Bengal and the very clear stand of the Congress leaders on it demonstrated that in spite of raising the bogey of Indian nationalism, the Congress was actually trying to consolidate the interests of big Hindu capitalists and landlords in the whole of India as a powerful religious majority. Also the Muslim League as an organization of the largest religious minority was trying to make the best out of a bad job by separating the Muslim majority areas in the east and west of India, leaving the interests of the minority Muslims to the 'goodwill' of the majority Hindus, in the Indian Union.

The people of British India, particularly the various minorities, were thus used by both the Congress and the Muslim League in the interests of the capitalist and landlord classes of their own religious communities with tragic consequences not only for the religious and other minorities, but for the entire people of what is now called South Asia.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah had a very narrow vision of the minority question, which is why he could not mobilize other Indian minorities, particularly important ones like the Sikhs and other major racial and linguistic minorities in Bihar, north-east India and in the

south. He could not even open a meaningful dialogue with either Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar or the Sikh leaders. This failure of Jinnah made it possible for big Hindu capital to consolidate its power through the Indian National Congress. under the deceitful garb of Indian nationalism.

Dr Ambedkar did not belong to any minority religious group. On the contrary, he was a tremendously powerful factor among the lower caste Hindus who constituted the majority in the Hindu community. Scared by the political wrests which were taking place among the scheduled castes, Gandhi formulated a policy to contain their anger and political restlessness by calling them *harijans* or the people of God and launched a shrewd and farsighted political campaign among them as a Hindu. He also brought out a paper called *Harijan* in which he regularly wrote of the plight of the Scheduled castes and tried to divert their attention from any separatist movement and keep them within the broad social framework of the Hindu caste system. But in spite of these efforts, Dr Ambedkar himself embraced Buddhism. He was followed by a large number of scheduled castes, or what was called lower caste Hindus, who too became Buddhists.

The scheduled castes constitute the majority among the Hindus but were, and still are, a much exploited and oppressed section of the Hindu community. In fact they were more exploited and oppressed by the caste Hindus than were the Muslims as a minority. So a political bond could easily have been forged between Jinnah and Ambedkar, if Jinnah and the Muslim League had not acted only as representatives of upper and middle class property-owning Muslims.

The breakdown of secular politics in India was reflected in the breakdown of Jinnah secular politics as the leader of only the Muslim community. The clearly communal turn of the Congress from the late 1920s would not have thrown Jinnah in the ranks of the communalist if he himself were a man of wider vision, if he had acted as an eye-opener to the other Indian religious, ethnic, linguistic and other minorities, and mobilized them against the thrust of big Hindu capital. Instead Jinnah, decided to act only as the representative of the Indian upper class Muslims, and increasingly tended to oppose the Congress from the Muslim minority position. This gave the Congress an advantage, which in the name of Indian nationalism and Indian unity was able to cover up its real identity as the representative of Indian big Hindu capital and consolidate all non-Muslim minorities, except some ethnic minorities in north-east India like the Nagas, under its umbrella. It led to the isolation of the Muslim League and Jinnah, and in spite of being communal themselves, made it very easy for the Congress to brand Jinnah as the arch communal factor in Indian politics.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) could also have acted as a powerful factor in taking up the interests of national minorities in identifying their specific interests and could have fought for them within the framework of their struggle for independence. The CPI arrived rather late historically as an effective political force since by then

communalism had already become a very powerful factor in Indian politics. But, if they had meaningfully linked up class struggle with the struggle of national minorities since the early 1930s, then the political developments in India could have taken a different turn.

In 1925, while comparing the Russian and Indian situations on the question of nations and nationalities, Stalin said,

Who could imagine that at least fifty ethnic groups used to inhabit the ancient Czarist Russia., By breaking the old chains and thereby showing light to many forgotten nations, the October Revolution. infused new life into them and opened up the path to new developments. In spite of propagating India as one nation, it must be acknowledged that during the revolutionary uprising in India many unknown nations will appear with their own language and culture.

The importance of various national minorities stressed by Stalin, and emphasized by Lenin earlier, was not properly grasped by the leaders of the CPI, though in their own way they tried to formulate a policy on the national question and unity of India as late as 1942. But in spite of making some efforts in that direction they floundered on the national question and failed to expose the communal designs and conspiracies of Indian big capital.

The resolution of the extended plenum of the CPI in September 1942, particularly Dr Gangadhar Adhikari's famous report on it and later CPI general secretary, P.C. Joshi's statement on the national question in his article in *Peoples War* in August 1944, made a partially correct approach to the national question. However, these failed to inspire and mobilize the people and play an effective role for two basic reasons. First, they did not extend the national question to properly embrace the various national minorities other than the Muslim religious minority. Second, instead of pushing forward their own strategy, they depended too much, in fact almost entirely, on Congress-League unity as the sine qua non of the solution of the national question. They thereby left the question, in real terms, in the hands of those who were already divided.

Gangadhar Adhikari's thesis on Pakistan could have been really helpful if it had been extended to other minorities. The minority problems would then have been sorted out not by dividing the country, but by restricting the exploits and gains of Indian big capital, which was predominantly Hindu, within the structure of a federal constitution. The failure of the communists, in this matter, was far more significant and disastrous than the failures of Jinnah, because they could have opened separate dialogues with Jinnah, Ambedkar, the Sikhs and others on the question of national minorities, Instead, they pursued a policy of uniting the hands of Gandhi and Jinnah as leaders of the two most important and dominant religious communities and depended in a ludicrous manner on the prospect of a Congress-League understanding under the given

conditions. It is because of this erroneous analysis of the Indian national question and the failure of policy that the communist movement in British India, or what is now called South Asia, suffered a terrible setback from which it has not yet been able to recover.

In British India, Annali always stood for a federal system of government, but, as has been said earlier, since he had no real comprehension of the national question, he could not put forward his federalist ideas in a manner which could be acceptable not only to the Muslims but also to various ethnic and linguistic minorities and even the broad masses of the Hindus, especially scheduled caste Hindus, who constituted the majority in India. Thus, India came to be partitioned into two sovereign and unitary states – the Indian Union and Pakistan – and the two parts of the latter stood separated from each other by a distance of about a thousand miles of Indian territory.

Muslims constituted a huge religious majority in East Bengal when it formed the eastern part of Pakistan in August 1947. Like India and the western part of Pakistan, East Bengal faced a minority problem worse than it did in British India. All the problems of minorities survived, and there was no sign of any attempt to improve the situation, which made it clear, that both the Hindu and Muslim majorities carved out British India with the help of their colonial masters to their own advantage, and to the utter detriment of the interests of the minorities of all descriptions.

Large scale migrations followed in the wake of partition. It took its worst form and proportion in West Pakistan and western India, particularly on both sides of the Punjab, where widespread riots broke out between Muslims on one side and Hindus and Sikhs, on the other, resulting in the massacre of tens of thousands of people and almost a total exchange of population.

Nothing comparable happened in East Bengal but a rapid but silent migration of the Hindu middle class population began even before 14 August 1947. Some scheduled caste Hindu peasants and peasants of tribal origin also began to migrate from the bordering districts. Compared to this, Muslim migration from India to East Bengal was much less in number and it was limited almost entirely to the middle class. Muslim peasant migration from rural West Bengal was almost absent, but later some non-Bengali Urdu-speaking Muslim workers came to East Bengal and settled in the jute mill areas of Khulna etc.

The non-Bengali workers employed in the railway service, opted for East Bengal. There was a large concentration of them in the north and there were some in the railway headquarters and factories in Chittagong. However, white collar railway workers and persons employed in government services were posted all over East Bengal, including Dhaka.

These non-Bengalis constituted a linguistic and racial minority group and in spite of belonging to the 'Muslim brotherhood' there was practically no significant social mixing between the local Bengalis and the emigrant non-Bengalis. With negligible exception, they remained a distinct cultural group and showed little interest in learning the language of the area where they had come to settle on a permanent basis. There was also no attempt by the government at policy level to integrate these two racial and linguistic groups socially, culturally and in other spheres of life. The upper stratum of this group was linked with the West Pakistan-based ruling class represented in East Bengal through the bureaucracy and the business and industrial communities.

Other than the Urdu-speaking emigrants from India, there were indigenous ethnic and linguistic minorities in various parts of East Bengal, particularly in the north and in Mymensingh and the Chittagong Hill Tracts like the Santals, Garos, Chakmas, Tripuras, Marinas etc. In spite of being distinct racial and linguistic minority groups, they never belonged to the mainstream politics of the Indian subcontinent and were never considered as a political factor of any consequence. In respect of minorities, there was nothing special about East Bengal. Scores of ethnic and linguistic minorities who constituted distinct nations and nationalities were spread out all over India.

At the time of handing over power to Indians, Muslims who constituted the most dominant and first minority in British India, turned into a religious majority in both parts of Pakistan. Thus the Bengali Muslims of East Bengal had no longer any special problem as a religious minority in Pakistan, but as a majority they had to face a number of religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities within the framework of the new state.

The transfer of power was, in a very real sense, a game of the majorities, and as such the interests of Muslim and Hindu minorities in India and Pakistan respectively, and the interests of scores of other minorities of British India remained an inconsequential matter to the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League and the British, who presided over the partition of India.

Chapter Two

REGIONAL IMBALANCE IN THE STRUCTURE OF POWER

In order to analyze the structure of power in Pakistan, as it existed at the time of partition, it is necessary to look at the four major constituents of the ruling class—the political leadership, the bureaucracy, the armed forces and the commercial and industrial communities.

The central leadership of the Muslim League was composed mainly of the representatives of the feudal landlord class and the business community. Jinnah himself was a bourgeois and his personal economic life was tied to the legal profession, but as the supreme leader of the Muslim League he was tied to the feudal aristocracy and the leaders of business. In the provinces the pattern of leadership was almost the same, with the difference that there the upper stratum of the middle class were more influential. Since the traditions of struggle—peasants' and workers' movements, cultural movements etc.—varied from province to province this made a difference in the composition of the provincial leadership, especially after the Lahore resolution was passed, and with the expansion and growth of the Muslim League.

Particular mention must be made of the situation in Sindh and Bengal. In the former province G.M. Syed had close links with the *haris* (landless and destitute peasants) who were one of the most exploited and oppressed sections of the Indian working people. He attempted to effectively curb the landlord leadership in Sindh. But in the battle for power within the Muslim League, men like Mohammed Ayub Khuhro and Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah soon threw him out. With the backing of Jinnah, they succeeded in ousting G.M. Syed from the leadership, and eventually he had to leave the Muslim League.

In Bengal the leadership of the Muslim League was in the hands of the Nawab family of Dhaka since its founding in 1906. They were effectively challenged by Fazlul Huq who could have pushed them out, but that did not happen. This was because Fazlul Huq was no organization man and a conflict arose between him and Jinnah in 1941 on the question of joining the National Defence Council appointed by the Viceroy of India Lord Linlithgow. Faziul Huq, Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan and a few other Muslim Leaguers joined the council without consulting the Muslim League. Jinnah called on all of them to resign. Sikandar Hayat and others did, but Fazlul Huq at first refused. Soon afterwards he also resigned from the Defence Council on the ground that it would not serve any effective purpose under the circumstances. He then addressed a letter to the Muslim League High Command informing them about his decision, and at the same

time sent to them his letter of resignation from the Muslim League in which he said that it was not possible for him to subordinate himself to the arbitrary wishes of a single individual.

Jinnah's position regarding the leadership of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League may be understood from the fact that even after the great victory of the Muslim League in the 1946 general election, neither Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy nor Abul Hashim, the two most powerful men in the Bengal Muslim League, were nominated from Bengal by him for membership of the Muslim League Working Committee. At that time Suhrawardy was the only Muslim League Chief Minister in India (Hidayatullah in Sindh and Sadullah in Assara led coalition ministries). Abul Hashim was the provincial general secretary who had played a large part in overthrowing the Nawab family from the Muslim League leadership and transformed the Muslim League organization in Bengal into one of a resurgent middle class. Khwaja Nazimuddin and Mirza A. Hassan Ispahani, in political wilderness after the 1946 election, were nominated instead.

At the time of partition, Liaquat Ali Khan suddenly announced election for a parliamentary leader for East Bengal, though this was not done in the Punjab. This in spite of the fact that after the 1946 general election Suhrawardy was unanimously elected leader of the Muslim League parliamentary party and Prime Minister in Bengal, and Jinnah assurance to him that there was no need for a fresh election for leadership of the East Bengal parliamentary party.

Thus, the clear purpose of this sudden move by Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan was to oust Suhrawardy and install Khwaja Nazimuddin as Prime Minister of East Bengal. Their support for Nazimuddin, among other factors, weighed against Suhrawardy and the former was elected leader of the new East Bengal parliamentary party and Chief Minister. This move by the central League leadership had serious adverse consequences for the Muslim League in East Pakistan.

The first organizational move by Nazimuddin and his protégé Akram Khan, president of the provincial League, was to see that the workers belonging to the Suhrawardy – Hashini group were kept out, so that they might not reorganize themselves within the Muslim League. Many workers, some quite important ones, belonging to the so-called left faction wanted, in the initial period, to work in the Muslim League, but Akram Khan refused to give them membership forms and the doors of the Muslim League were closed to them. This conspiracy adversely affected the Muslim League, because in the absence of the young and experienced workers it was, in a very real sense, cut off from the masses. Internal dissensions became quite serious and within the span of less than two years, by 1949, the East Bengal Muslim League organization was reduced to shambles.

Nazimuddin, Akram Khan and such other rightists had no standing in the Pakistan Muslim League. They were simply loyal servants of Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan and other non-Bengali leaders who dominated the central working committee. The plight of the East Bengal Muslim League was so miserable that Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, Muslim League president Chowdhury Khaliquzzaman, central minister Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar of the North West Frontier Province and a few others were elected from East Bengal to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. The leaders in no sense belonged to or represented East Bengal. On the contrary, they always acted against the interest of the people of this region and were forced on the East Bengal Legislature by the central leadership. Consequently, the Bengali members in the Constituent Assembly became a minority.

The leadership of the Muslim League was predominantly feudal in character. Although Jinnah himself was not a landlord he was surrounded by people who had considerable interest in land in one form or another. Jinnah himself had great authority in the Muslim League, but there is no instance to show that he actually acted against the Indian feudal interests. The basic feudal character of the leadership was more pronounced in the case of West Pakistan. This is because there was a significant difference in the land systems, socio-economic conditions and relationships, and the broad political and cultural traditions between the two wings.

In West Pakistan the feudal conditions largely survived after the partition of India. In Bengal, however, even before Pakistan came into being there was a considerable leveling out of the economic classes, in the sense that through various agrarian movements and land reforms the feudal structure of society underwent significant transformation. In each wing there was a rising middle class, but in East Pakistan it was more powerful mainly because of the relative ineffectiveness of the feudal interests. The power of this middle class explained why, within the framework of the Muslim League, the Bengal Muslim League was the most democratic organization. It was the only provincial unit which published a draft manifesto and a programme which was fairly democratic. Since this was within the framework of the Muslim League organization, it never became an official document of the Bengal provincial Muslim League.

The differences between the two wings were not of much consequence before independence, but it became pronounced in Pakistan. The two wings of the new state were separated by about a thousand miles, and along with the linguistic, ethnic and cultural differences between them were the very important differences in socio-economic conditions and opportunities of employment. Thus, the problems of the East and the West wings were not the same to start with, Equilibrium could have been established by conscious efforts, but it did not happen. The main reason was the most unequal distribution of real political power between the two wings. In spite of authority apparently exercised by the leaders of East Pakistan, they were rendered ineffective by the bureaucracy, the armed forces and commercial, financial and industrial interests.

In 1947, the Civil Service of Pakistan was composed mostly of West Pakistanis, optees and refugees from India, who were mainly Urdu speaking. Owing to this affinity of language (the upper class West Pakistanis who live in cities mostly speak Urdu) and social connections, the refugees felt a much greater sympathy for the West and a very great majority of them eventually settled there.

For various reasons, East Pakistan was a neglected area before independence, and the size of her educated Muslim community was very small. At the time of partition there was only one Indian Civil Service officer in East Bengal. Consequently, immediately after partition non-Bengalis occupied all the key positions both at the centre and in East Bengal. Important decisions had to be left in the hands of the civil servants who were more privileged than their counterparts in many under-developed countries of the world, including India, in the sense that they exercised considerably larger powers. This happened because the Muslim League, in spite being the ruling party, was extremely handicapped by a scarcity of competent men and inherent organizational weaknesses. Moreover, the fact that Pakistan did not inherit the establishments of British India in the sense that India did, aggravated the situation. Thus, at the initial stage, the civil servants were not only executive officers, but very influential as policy-makers as well. They never abandoned this role, and thus in major policy-making decisions, or in actual execution of policies, East Bengal did not have any effective say.

The composition of the army in 1947 clearly demonstrated its regional character. The officers and other members of the armed forces were almost entirely drawn from the Punjab, the North West Frontier Province and Balochistan. East Bengal had absolutely no representation in the higher ranks of the armed forces. This very fact had always remained a great source of imbalance in the body politic of Pakistan. The army in West Pakistan was a very profitable institution, and a large source of employment for officers and soldiers. Many others were attached to the army in contract services of various kinds. In East Pakistan its importance as a source of employment and gain was negligible.

Both wings of Pakistan were much poorer and industrially less developed than India. Before independence there were few investment opportunities in the areas which later constituted Pakistan, and Muslim investors were fewer still. The partition of India was followed by large-scale rioting in the Punjab and as a result there was a complete exchange of population between East and West Punjab. Thus, the large influx of refugees and flight of Muslim capital into West Pakistan created better investment opportunities there than in East Pakistan, where there was no such floating labor population and profit-seeking capital. Almost the entire Muslim capital flowed into West Pakistan. These capitalists came mostly from central India and from Gujrat, Kathiawar, Bombay etc. and had greater cultural, linguistic and ethnic affinity with West Pakistan.

The fact that the capital of Pakistan was situated in the West also accounted for larger investment in that part of the country. It was much easier for the people of West Pakistan to go over to Karachi and procure license, and secure other kinds of facilities for establishing new industries. For most of the middle class who had no capital to start with, and who wanted to go in for business and industry, this was the only way to advance their fortune. Owing to the physical distance between the two wings and the location of the capital in the West, the people of East Pakistan were largely deprived of business and other opportunities. The head offices of the State Bank, National Bank etc. were in Karachi and that, at the initial stage, deprived East Pakistani people of various types of banking facilities. The situation in the later period was not much different.

The central and provincial governments, which were dominated by the civil servants, totally neglected the improvement of the external economy of East Pakistan, and this was one of the important reasons why private investment in East Pakistan was almost negligible during the first decade of Pakistan.

In government expenditure, as well, there was an utter lack of attention and balance. Owing to greater industrial activity, West Pakistan had greater need of foreign exchange than East Pakistan but it did not export enough to pay for its imports. On the other hand, in spite of being initially somewhat at the same level of industrial development, East Pakistan had considerable export earning ability. Thus, from the very beginning, almost the entire foreign exchange earned by East Pakistan, from the export of jute, flowed into West Pakistan and this became a part of the official policy of the central government. Even the proceeds of sales tax in East Bengal were taken over by the central government by a special order, immediately after partition, and began to be appropriated by West Pakistan. The industrial development of Pakistan became a central government concern, which was virtually in the hands of West Pakistanis, who advocated the oneness of Pakistan's economy and diverted available resources to the West as far as it was politically practicable.

In a situation of such imbalance of power, it was quite natural in a feudal-bourgeois state like Pakistan, for the two regions to develop disparately, with inequalities, new contradictions and conflicts with the passage of time.

Chapter Three

NEW CONTRADICTIONS IN EAST PAKISTAN

In British India, apart from the contradiction of the Indian people with the colonial rulers, there were several internal contradictions as well. The most fundamental was between the exploiting and the exploited classes—between landlords and peasants, between capital and wage-labor. There were also others like ethnic, regional, linguistic and communal contradictions which played their roles in different areas and different periods of British-Indian history. Even with the partition of India, communalism survived quite powerfully in both the new states. Other contradictions also survived, though substantial changes in their ramifications added new dimensions to them.

In East Bengal, caste Hindus dominated the society economically, politically and culturally. With the partition of Bengal, the dominance of the upper caste and upper class Hindus ended almost overnight, firstly, because political power passed on to the majority Muslims and secondly, because the caste Hindus left their homeland in great numbers within an incredibly short time. This meant that landownership and money lending were no longer in the hands of the Hindus. The old class relations survived but, the communal character of the landlord and the usurer changed—Hindus were replaced by Muslims, Money lending at interest is prohibited in Islam, but to meet credit requirements of peasants for continuing production—it being more important than obeying the injunction of religion—the function of rural money lending was taken over by the Muslims.

The rural money lending system was a distinct financial institution, and was generally operated and managed, not by traditional landlords and *zamindars*, but by a special caste of Hindus. That institution broke down with the departure of that special caste—the '*sahas*', and money lending became a function of Muslim landlords or *jotedars*. They were not old traditional *zamindars* but were those who had, as a landowning class, surplus money. With the abolition of the permanent settlement, these landlord-cum-moneylenders combined the functions of both, and the *jotedars* could hardly be separated henceforward from moneylenders. The *jotedar-mahajans* or landlord-moneylenders thus emerged as the new rural elite in post-partition East Bengal. Consequently the Muslim peasants, both poor peasants and sharecroppers, and the rural wage-workers, found themselves in the same economic relations with the landlord and the usurer, with the difference that now they were no longer Hindus, but people belonging to their own religious 'brotherhood'.

This change took place not only in the rural areas and in the agricultural sector, but in all spheres of life and in all sectors of production and distribution, in industry and

business, and in various professions. The Muslim peasants, workers, artisans and other working people found themselves in the same relations with the propertied classes, albeit without the communal dimension. This meant that the political plank of the Muslim League broke down, and its position, as it was in British India, virtually became untenable and with the birth of Pakistan, the fate of the Muslim League as a communal organization was sealed.

The middle class Muslims found that no Hindus were around who could be identified and described as their exploiters and tormentors and instead, were faced with non-Bengali Muslims running the bureaucratic governmental machine, controlling business and whatever industry there was. They saw that the Bengali politicians of the ruling party were nothing but servitors of the West Pakistan-based Muslim League leadership and the central government.

The whole political perspective was thus transformed, and the communal contradiction which caused the partition of the country, was replaced by contradictions between the two regions and ethnically and linguistically different people who belonged to the Muslim community. These differences between the two zones of Pakistan were such that the contradictions were rolled into one, and it made the use of religious communalism in politics increasingly difficult.

The Muslim peasants, workers and the middle class people were taught to visualize Pakistan as a dreamland, where milk and honey would flow, everyone would get education and suitable job, healthcare would be a routine matter, and there would be a flowering of the culture espoused during the Pakistan movement. What really happened was that the Muslims of East Bengal, who constituted the vast majority of the population were quite confused and bewildered at the barrenness of the dreamland called Pakistan, where they had to go hungry and die of famine, where no surplus land was distributed among the poor peasants and sharecroppers, where very little new opportunities were opened up for the working masses and the educated sections of the people! and life in all aspects remained as tortuous as before.

During the 1930s and 1940s Muslims were taught by the Muslim League to consider the British and the Hindus as enemies. With independence and partition of India and Bengal, both disappeared and the West Pakistan based non-Bengalis, mostly Punjabis, made their appearance as the enemy, The Muslim peasants who physically saw their exploiters thought that they were being exploited and oppressed by Hindus. It was not possible for them to realize that the exploitation carried out by Hindu landlords and moneylenders were carried out not as Hindus but as exploiters, and that the Hindu religion as such had nothing to do with it. In fact there were Muslim exploiters too, though fewer in number, The Muslim League used this confusion in the minds of Muslim peasants, and in the absence of more powerful political propaganda to the contrary, the

Muslim peasants politically targeted the landlords and moneylenders, not as such, but as Hindus.

This also happened in other areas of economic life and other activities. Most business and industry was owned by Hindus and a majority belonging to various professions were also Hindus. The Hindus dominated the cultural life in Bengal and most newspapers were owned by them. Thus, the same type of confusion which prevailed among the Muslim peasants also took hold of the educated middle class and the same political mistake emerged out of the confusion.

There was of course another factor which played a very important role in strengthening the opposition against the Hindus. The latter, as a community, was much more advanced than the Muslims economically and in all spheres of life, and had been for about a century and a half. They were quite consolidated as a social force and were in a position to oppose any inroads which the Muslims tried to make in business, government service and in other areas of opportunity. This factor played a pivotal role in aggravating the confusion and made the basic error in the political approach difficult to correct.

Thus the religious and the economic identity of the exploiters got mixed up, and it was easy for the Muslim League to manufacture the theory needed for a separate homeland for the Indian Muslims – the two nation theory – which formed the central core of their political propaganda. That the exploitation was really being carried out by the propertied classes in India became evident and clear to many, soon after the establishment of Pakistan, when Muslims quickly replaced the Hindus as the exploiters in all spheres of economic activity.

In East Pakistan people became more and more conscious of their past mistake, but failed to derive any proper lesson from it. Their consciousness in this respect tended to make them increasingly anti-Muslim League, and finally anti-Pakistan, but it did not open their eyes to the real character of the West Pakistan based non-Bengali exploiters and oppressors to place of the British and the Hindus, they now saw the West Pakistanis and other non-Bengalis economically, linguistically and culturally linked up with them and tended to view their exploiters and oppressors not as owners of capital linked up with imperialism, but as non-Bengalis.

In this new context Hindus were replaced by West Pakistanis and non Bengalis, and the real character and identity of the exploiters remained hidden. The contradiction now appeared to be between the two zones of Pakistan, and between Bengalis and non-Bengalis. The Bengali chauvinist elements in East Pakistan fostered that confusion and theorized the mistake in the form of disparity – not between the basic economic classes, not between peasants and landlords, not between capital and wage labor, not even

between other forms of exploiters and exploited, but between the two zones of Pakistan, *i.e.* between Bengalis and non-Bengalis.

The nature of this new mistake was not realized by the Bengali Muslims of East Bengal until Pakistani rule ended and Bangladesh emerged as a new independent state in the region called East Pakistan.

Chapter Four

FAMINE: THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF THE PEASANTS

The onset of famine was discernible as early as in the first quarter of 1947, and particularly at the time of independence and the partition of the country. In August 1947, the Bengal Provincial Kisan Sava addressed an open letter to both East and West Bengal governments published in the 15th August issue of *The Peoples Age* (vol. vi, no. 7), the English weekly of the Communist Party of India (CPI):

The whole of Bengal is facing a severe food crisis at the moment when power is going to be transferred. But the nature of the crisis is different in the two Bengals. Food situation in East Bengal is very bad. The price of rice has risen above Rs 30. Rationing is being run only for six lakh people and there also stoppages of supplies are frequent. Rationing which was introduced in certain deficit rural areas were withdrawn much earlier. It is not being possible for the government to supply food either for distribution of relief or for reducing price. Consequently, both Hindus and Muslims have to go without food on a massive scale. The non-government gruel-kitchens which have been opened in Tripura Noakbali, Chittagong and different areas of Dacca remind us of the dreadful days of 1943. Information regarding death due to hunger are reaching continuously. People in large numbers are leaving their villages for the towns. A real famine situation is prevailing in extensive areas of East Bengal.

In fact, there was considerable chaos and disorder in the government systems of levy, cordon and supply and that made the situation more critical. Cordoning system was first introduced in the border areas of Bihar and Bengal during the 1943 famine. Immediately after partition, it was re-introduced in order to make internal procurement. The government of East Bengal wanted to procure rice and paddy from eight surplus districts out of seventeen, and divert them to deficit areas. But the system could not be worked satisfactorily.

Transferring grain out of any cordoned district was prohibited, and cordoning officers were authorized to expropriate the grains of those who tried to do so. The patrol parties under them were provided with boats and mechanized speedboats. Since the surplus districts of Khulna and Barisal were coastal areas, cordoning officers of those districts were provided with sea-going launches or mechanized boats. But in spite of this, transport facilities were generally poor and inadequate, and whatever was there could not be properly utilized because of the absence of any integrated policy and

administrative efficiency. Moreover, factionalism within the ruling Muslim League organization made the situation worse.

In spite of some grain procurement in the surplus districts these could not be transferred to the deficit areas in time and thus much of the stock began to rot in government godowns. A part of the rotten or half-rotten grains were distributed through the rationing system and this created much hardship and resentment among the people.

The government imposed a ban on businessmen from buying grains from surplus districts, and the inability of the government machinery to take grains to the deficit districts, made the supply situation critical. This led to a situation where businessmen in the deficit districts could make internal purchases, hoard grains and sell them at black market prices. Naturally, this pushed up the price level not only in the deficit districts but also in the districts which were surplus.

Certain peasants, called *dawals* or *bhagalu* always went to Barisal, Khulna and Sylhet, in search of work during the harvesting season, from the districts of Faridpur, Comilla (Tripura) and Noakhali. These peasants or rural wage-workers took their wages in the form of a portion of the harvested grain, mostly for personal consumption at home. The cordoning system put a stop to this. An arrangement, however, was made for government permission to some of these peasants to take home only twenty maunds of paddy, which was only a part of their total earning. The rest of it had to be sold within the surplus districts at lower prices, This made them poorer at the end of the season in contrast to being better off in the years before independence.

Also in spite of the cordoning system, rice was being smuggled into India by some businessmen, thus reducing the total supply of grain in the market. In the surplus districts fixed government price for paddy was Rs 8 per maund, whereas in India the price of paddy was much higher. So those who had surplus grain would sell them to smugglers at higher price. Thus the surplus grain, instead of reaching the deficit districts found their way to India. All this led to opposition against the cordoning system, and a movement for its abolition started as early as December 1947.¹

The provincial food minister, Afzal, was himself opposed to the cordoning system, and he discussed this with the central food minister, Pirzada Abdus Satter, when the latter came to Dhaka on a visit to East Bengal at the end of 1947. The Muslim League Parliamentary Party decided to withdraw the cordoning system from three districts – Mymensingh, Barisal and Narundi in January 1948.² But even this failed to ease the situation for two reasons. First, in spite of this withdrawal it was decided that surplus

¹ Interview: Kamruddin Ahmad, Tafazzal Ali; Diary of Tajuddin Ahmad, 20 December 1947.

² *East Bengal Assembly Proceedings*, 2nd Session, 1948, Vol. 2, p. 123.

grain would be sold only to certain neighboring districts. This meant that the cordoning system was virtually re-introduced in a different form. Second, after the abolition of the cordoning system, businessmen began to buy grains in the surplus districts. on a large scale. Added to this was the private purchases of panicky people who had some money at hand. All these combined to aggravate the crisis, though immediately after lifting the cordoning from surplus areas, price of rice fell for a short time in the deficit districts, to rise again to the previous level or even higher.

In 1948 the food crisis continued and became more extensive. On 11 June it was reported to the Provincial Assembly, by the provincial Prime Minister Nurul Amin, that the average price of rice in the first week of June was between Rs. 20 and Rs. 29. He also said that there was enough rice in the government godowns and this was being released to the affected areas for sale. Referring to the very high price of rice, Nurul Amin told the Assembly,

It was expected that businessmen would observe the rake of business and remain satisfied with reasonable profit. Unfortunately, as a consequence of our initiative to give maximum freedom to business, we have very liberally given licenses to all persons who submitted proposals for business. Now it appears that many people have entered this business for earning unreasonable profit.³

What Nurul Amin did not mention in this connection was that a very large number of the new entrants in the business were men who either belonged to or were connected to the ruling Muslim League. Referring to the withdrawal of cordoning from three surplus districts under pressure from a section of the people, he said that the results were unfortunate because it had not helped in improving the situation. On the other hand, it adversely affected government procurement in the other surplus districts.

The Congress parliamentary party was generally opposed to the cordoning, levy and rationing system. In the Assembly debate in June 1948, Dhirendranath Datta speaking on behalf of the Congress, described the government procurement system or levy as robbery. He also opposed the rationing system on the ground that only eight lakh people in the urban areas were under the rationing system and the rest were not covered by it. He said that either the government should provide ration for the four crore people or they should totally withdraw rationing from the urban area.⁴

Opposing the Congress demand for withdrawal of rationing system Nurul Amin said that such a step, instead of easing and improving the situation would aggravate it further. According to him if rationing was withdrawn from Dhaka, Chittagong, Comilla and Narayanganj, where great number of people lived and who had greater purchasing

³ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

power, then businessmen would bring in large quantities of grains from the rural areas to the towns, sell them at high prices and this would inevitably raise prices all over the country.

In fact the Congress, in demanding withdrawal of the rationing system, was looking after the interests of the wholesale grain merchants who were, at that time, mostly Hindus and whose business was being badly affected by government cordoning, levy and the rationing system.

It was normal practice in periods of crisis to introduce levy in order to procure grains for building government stock for maintaining the rationing system or for releasing grains in the open market for sale at fixed prices. But the levy system, as it was worked in East Bengal, failed largely to achieve this objective. Often the officers forcibly took away grain at low price even from those who had no surplus. This created great hardship and made the future uncertain for a large number of peasants. The opposition against levy in the countryside grew stronger, not only among the surplus farmers and well to do landowners, but also among the peasants. In this situation there was a way out for the *jotedars*, some of whom bribed the procurement officers and released lesser amount from their surplus and sold a part of that to the smugglers. But for the peasants there was no way out.

In principle there was nothing wrong in cordoning, levy and the rationing system as such, but great chaos was created because the entire administration was miserably inefficient. Many government officials and members of the ruling party were corrupt and the central government remained criminally indifferent to the sufferings of the people of East Bengal. The central government could have easily imported grains from outside in order to meet the deficit but they did not, although most of the foreign exchange of Pakistan was being earned from the sale of jute from East Bengal. The foreign exchange earned was being utilized in West Pakistan even at the time of the critical food crisis and famine in East Bengal from 1947 to 1951.

Consistent with the policy of the Pakistan Muslim League and the central government, the West Pakistani newspapers were also quite apathetic and indifferent to the food crisis in East Bengal. One rare exception was the weekly *Freedom* published from Karachi. Summing up the famine situation in East Pakistan and the policy of the central government, the paper said in an editorial on 10 July 1949,

What the government of East Pakistan has done by way of providing help has no value to the crores of people there—very little change is seen in their life after the terrible famine of 1943; added to that now there are disease, epidemics and unemployment. It is an unintelligible mystery that in the other part of Pakistan famine is raging large in the wake of a severe food crisis, when in this part there is enough food. Not only that, it is being possible to export a part of that food to

foreign countries. It is said that the 75 crore rupees earned from our trade with India has mostly been derived from the export of grains from West Pakistan. Are we going to build up Pakistan's prosperity on the dead bodies of our brothers, sisters and children? Are they not the inhabitants of East Pakistan whose backbreaking labor produces jute, our most valuable export items?

In March 1948, the food situation became very critical not only in the deficit districts, but in the surplus areas like Sylhet as well. The worst affected areas were Jagannathpur, Phulbari, Dharampasha, Baniachong etc., The Sylhet district Muslim League actively organized relief committees and distribution of relief in various affected areas, but they were severely handicapped by inadequacy of funds and grain. An All-Party Relief Committee was also formed consisting of the Muslim League, the Congress and the Kisan Sava, but soon this also became unworkable due to the same reasons.

At that time certain differences existed between the provincial government and the provincial Muslim League. This was reflected in the formation of separate relief committees, one by the government and the other by the provincial Muslim League. It may be mentioned here that during the famine of 1943, joint relief committees were formed with the Congress, the Muslim League, Communist Party and other social organizations at the provincial and local levels. In 1948, 1949 and 1951 nothing like that was done and any such attempt was opposed by the government.

Bagerhat sub-division in the Hulna district was a surplus area. But from November 1948 here too the food situation became quite precarious. A report published in the weekly *Sainik* on November 1948 said that in Morelganj, Kachua, Mollarhat and other areas the price of paddy was Rs. 50 per maund. Hundreds of people had died of starvation. Thousands of people were leaving their homes in search of food and work in other distant areas. The same report said that in the Munsbigunj sub-division of Dhaka rice was selling at Rs. 40 to 53 per maund. Compared to that the price of jute per maund was only Rs. 28 to 29. In Rangpur the price of *aman* rice was Rs. 29 and rice of other qualities were selling at Rs 35. In Noakhali there was famine condition.

In January 1949, there was no improvement in the food situation. It was reported in the daily *Azad* on 24 January 1949, that in the third week of that month price of rice was Rs. 40 to 42 in Brahmana, Rs. 36 in Chandpur and Rs. 40 in Sirajganj. In other areas of East Bengal prices were more or less at the same level.

The provincial Muslim League president, Akram Khan's paper *Azad* published an editorial on 25 January 1949, in which it accused the government of hiding information from the people regarding the unprecedented rise in the price of paddy and rice and held government officers and businessmen responsible for artificially raising up prices. The editorial also said that it was expected that the government would procure rice and paddy from surplus areas and arrange to distribute them quickly and at controlled

price to the deficit areas. Had they been able to do so, the price of rice would not have gone up like that. It was reported by responsible quarters, it said, that in many surplus areas procurement had not yet begun and in other areas no arrangement had been made to send the procured rice to deficit areas. Owing to certain government restrictions, businessmen were not able to buy rice in surplus areas and sell them in the deficit districts. Those who were doing so had to pay salami, or bribe, to government officials. The businessmen of the deficit areas were taking full advantage of the situation by hoarding rice and paddy and raising their price as much as possible.

This situation led to a rise in anti-government feelings among the rural people, mostly peasants. The same newspaper referred above editorially warned the government on 1 February 1949, that they should do something immediately before the rural labor forces took any action in an organized form.

Numerous reports were published regularly on the famine situation in the daily and weekly newspapers of Dhaka and other towns. From these reports it was clear that the food situation in East Bengal was extremely precarious everywhere in 1949. On 16 May of that year, central food minister Pirzada Abdus Sattar held discussions with the provincial government in Dhaka on this issue.

A government press note said that the provincial government demanded 1,40,000 tons of rice from the central government but the latter promised to supply only 70,000 tons. It was astonishing that in the face of such widespread and acute food shortage, the provincial government asked for only 1,40,000 tons of rice and the central government cut even that by half.⁵

The central government had, in fact, always insisted on internal procurement and purchase, but neither the provincial nor the central government gave any thought to import of grain from abroad to meet the shortage. This, undoubtedly, was a very strange affair, because in case of a general shortage throughout the province, internal procurement, levy etc., could never meet the total demand of min. This indicated how, even when confronted with such a national calamity, the provincial government lacked any definite policy and remained utterly callous, and the central government maintained a criminal indifference to the question of life and death of forty million people of East Bengal.

On 1 February 1949, Khwaja Nazimuddin, the governor-general of Pakistan, addressed a public meeting in Paltan Maidan at Dhaka and said that due to crop failure in Sindh and West Punjabi they had appealed to the International Food Council for food. Some amount of grain had already arrived, and some more was in the pipeline.⁶ This

⁵ *Azad*, 18 May 1949.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2 February 1949.

announcement by the Bengali governor-general was made in front of an audience who needed imported food more desperately than their 'countrymen' in the West. This grotesque figurehead of the Pakistan government, in fact, symbolized the impotence of those Muslim League politicians from East Bengal who occupied high positions in the central government.

On 9 February 1949, Nazimuddin addressed another public meeting in Mymensingh in which he admitted that the food crisis was very serious in East Pakistan, and food prices were beyond the buying power of the common man. He accused businessmen for creating the situation and supported the government policy on levy and cordoning.⁷ The *Azad* published an editorial on 24 June 1949, called 'Hijrat to Assam' which said,

In the recent session of the Dacca district Muslim League Council, among other things, the food crisis was also discussed. It has been stated in a resolution of the above Council that in the face of extreme economic hardship, many Muslims are going to Assam. The Council has requested the East Pakistan government to take active steps so that this *hijrat* may be stopped.

The devastating economic condition of Bengali Muslims of East Bengal can well be imagined when they had to leave their country for unknown destinations in Assam in India in less than two years since the establishment of Pakistan.

In 1950, the harvest was good, and prices of rice and paddy came down considerably, but the prices of other essential commodities remained quite high. However from the beginning of 1951 the food situation again deteriorated. In that year salt crisis was added to the food crisis making the sufferings of the people almost beyond tolerance. The price of salt went up to Rs. 16 per seer. The daily *Azad* on 3 October 1951, expressed its concern over the rise of salt price suddenly to 12 anna and then to as 2 per seer, But soon it leapt up to Rs. 16, creating unprecedented hardship for everybody but particularly for the peasants, whose per capita consumption of salt is much higher. At the time of this suffering of the people, the Bengali central minister for commerce, Fazlur Rahman told the daily *Pakistan Observer* on 31 October that all reports of the salt crisis were highly exaggerated.

The main reason for the salt crisis was prohibition on production of salt in the coastal areas of East Pakistan, excessive excise tax on salt and failure of the government to import required amount of salt from West Pakistan. Local salt production was prohibited in order to promote business interests in West Pakistan.

Compared to the magnitude of the suffering which the people had to undergo, there was no powerful organized resistance movement against the famine and no organized

⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 February 1949.

relief work under united all-party relief committees. The most powerful criticisms came from the newspapers irrespective of their party affiliations. The first organizational protest against the food policy of the government was made by the Democratic Youth League⁸ formed in September 1947 by the so-called left leaning workers of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. They formed relief committees in some districts, though no such committee was organized on a provincial scale. Various organizations like the Kisan Sava, the Students Federation and the Muslim League also organized relief committees. But none of those committees could function satisfactorily and for long mainly due to scarcity of funds and relief materials,

Public meeting and resistance movements were organized at various stages and various areas of East Bengal including Sylhet, Mymensingh, Barisal, Patuakhali, Rajshahi, Ishurdi, Rangpur and Dhaka. A protest demonstration clashed with police in Barisal in June 1948, and several workers were arrested, including Monorama Bose.⁹

On 11 October 1949, Liaquat Ali Khan, prime minister of Pakistan, came to Dhaka. The Awami Muslim League called a protest meeting at Armanitola Maidan and announced a demonstration programme following the meeting on the same day. The district magistrate of Dhaka requested Bhashani to cancel that programme, but the latter refused. The Awami Muslim League meeting was held at Armanitola Maidan, presided over by Maulana Abdul Humid Khan Bhashani and addressed by Shamsul Huq, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others.¹⁰ The police attacked, tear gassed and dispersed the demonstration that followed and in the course of three to four days, a number of Awami League leaders and workers including Bhashani, Shamsul Huq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were arrested.¹¹

On 12 October, Liaquat Ali Khan addressed a public meeting at Paltan Maidan and delivered a stern warning to the 'divisive forces' that were trying to create trouble in Pakistan. The same day the Awami Muslim League called a strike in Dhaka City which was partially successful.¹²

Though the food crisis and famine condition of 1947-51 was not as severe and devastating as the famine of 1943 in which 3.5 million people perished, yet it was very extensive and caused great hardship and misery to millions of people in East Bengal. Hundreds, and even thousands, died during that famine and people in very large numbers lost their land and homes, in all areas, particularly in the southern and eastern

⁸ Printed Circular Na. 2. Democratic Youth League. For further reference: Badruddin Umar, *Purba Banglar Bhasha Andolon O Tatkalin Rajniti* (Language Movement of East Bengal and Contemporary Politics), Vol. 2. pp. 93-6, Jatiya Grantha Prakashan, second edition 1996.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

¹⁰ *Sainik*, 21 October 1949.

¹¹ *Azad*, 16 October 1949; *Naobelal*, 20 October 1949.

¹² *Azad*, 13 October 1949.

districts and in Rangpur. Added to this suffering was the disillusionment of people in general, and the peasantry in particular, who had dreamt of a happy, trouble-free and peaceful life during the Pakistan movement and were now facing annihilation and the threat of it in the new homeland for the Muslims.

The political impact of this disillusionment of the peasants was first registered in the bye-election in Tangail in 1949, when the Muslim League candidate Khurram Khan Panni was badly defeated by Shamsul Huq and subsequently in the language movement of 1952. It registered again in the decisive defeat and rout of the Muslim League in the general election of 1954.

Chapter Five

THE BEGINNING OF MIDDLE CLASS RESISTANCE: THE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT OF 1948

Soon after the announcement of the Mountbatten dispensation on 3 June 1947, the attention of a section of Muslim League workers with left leanings, including some seniors, was turned to the new realities of the situation. During the Pakistan movement they had little time to reflect on what was to be done for reconstruction of the society after the establishment of Pakistan. Confronted with new challenges, they had no sense of direction and plan for political work. The quick developments after the appointment of Mountbatten as viceroy and governor-general of India, and the speed with which he began to push his plans for the independence and partition of India created an atmosphere of uncertainty, and it became difficult for them to keep pace with the rapid changes. The partition of Bengal and the return of the old leadership to power led them quite early on to think of politically organizing themselves on a democratic basis.

In July 1947, a small group of workers assembled in Dhaka and formed an organization called Gono Azadi League (Peoples Freedom League) and published a manifesto entitled *Ashu Dabi Karmasuchi Adarsha* (Immediate Demands Programme and Ideology).¹³ The manifesto laid out that,

The independence of a country and freedom of the people are two distinct matters. A country can gain independence from a foreign rule; but that does not mean that the people of that country have gained freedom. Political freedom has no value if it cannot bring economic freedom to the people. Because without economic freedom, it is not possible to have social and cultural developments, therefore, we have decided that we will continue our struggle for the economic emancipation of the people of East Pakistan. With this end in view, we are presenting our ideals and program before our countrymen.

This manifesto was, in fact, a follow up of the draft manifesto of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League which failed to gain official acceptance because of opposition from the right faction of the Muslim League, including H. S. Suhrawardy.

In spite of the smallness of the group their declaration represented the sentiments of a new generation of progressive workers who would play an important role in the political developments in East Bengal, immediately following the establishment of

¹³ Badraddin Umar, *Purba Banglar Bhasha Andolon O Tatkalin Rajnity*. Vol. 1, fourth edition, Jatiya Grantha Prakashan, 1995, pp. 17-8.

Pakistan. The Gono Azadi League, however, could not develop as a political organization and their activities were limited to resistance against political repression by the Muslim League government. In 1950, the name of this organization was changed to Civil Liberties League.

Soon after 14 August 1947, a number of political workers including Ataur Rahman (Rajshahi), Kazi Mohammad Idris, Shahidullah Kaiser, Akhlaqur Rahman, Ekramul Huq, and Abdur Rashid Khan met in Calcutta for consultations with Abdallah Rasul, and others, of the Communist Party. Some of the workers mentioned above either belonged to or were closely associated with the Communist Party at that time. It was decided that in the changed circumstances it was necessary to initiate a non-communal and secular movement, and an appropriate organization had to be formed.¹⁴

In July, discussions were held in Dhaka among progressive political workers of all shades, including those who were in no Azadi League, for the formation of a wider organization. Workers of the left Muslim League and those associated with the Communist Party joined hands and decided to call a conference of democratic workers. They made contacts with others in various districts.¹⁵

On 31 July, a reception committee was formed with Kafilluddin Chowdhury as president and Shamsul Huq as secretary. The date for the conference was fixed for 24 August, which was subsequently changed to 6th and 7th of September. A draft manifesto for the conference was adopted in a meeting on 5 August in which, among others, Mohammad Toaha, Oli Ahad, Najmul Karim, Aziz Ahmad, Tassadduq Ahmad and Tajuddin Ahmad were present.¹⁶

The government was bitterly opposed to the conference as they thought that this was a conspiracy against them. Sporadic attacks were made on progressive workers involved in the organizational work of the conference, particularly on students, by hooligans engaged by the Muslim League. On 31 August, a meeting of student representatives from all educational institutions was convened to form a new student organization. The previous day Naimuddin Ahmad, Aziz Ahmad, Tajuddin Ahmad and a few others met separately and decided not to use the word 'Muslim' in the name of the new student body.¹⁷

On 31 August, at the appointed time, students began to gather in the Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall when some students from Kaltabazar area belonging to the Shah Azizur Rahman group attacked them, and a pandemonium was created. Order was somehow restored by the intervention of Mahmud Hossein, provost of F.H. Hall, and the meeting

¹⁴ Interviews, Ataur Rahman (Rajshahi), Shahidullah Kaiser, Abdur Rashid Khan.

¹⁵ Interviews, Kamruddin Ahmad, Oli Ahad, Shahidullah Kaiser, Ataur Rahman.

¹⁶ Tejuddin Ahmed's diary, 31 July 1947 and 6 August 1947.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 August 1947.

began. It continued for about an hour, when again some hooligans armed with sticks, iron rods etc., came in a truck, entered the Hall and tried to disrupt the meeting. For the second time Mahmud Hossein intervened and the hooligans were driven out. But in that disturbed situation, the Dhaka city organizing committee for the proposed student organization could not be formed. The truck in which the hooligans came was later identified as belonging to the civil supply department of the East Bengal government. Tajuddin Ahmad noted the number plates of the vehicle and met the civil supply minister Nurul Amin and demanded that those responsible for using government transport for attacking the students be punished. But no action was taken against them.¹⁸

Since the Muslim League and the government were opposed to the conference scheduled for 6 and 7 September, they did not allow it to be held at the Dhaka District Bar Library Hall, the usual venue for such meetings and conferences. No other public place was available, so finally it was decided to hold the conference in the house of Khan Bahadur Abul Hasnat, former vice-chairman of Dhaka municipality.

The conference began on 6 September, with Tassadduq Ahmad presiding. The following day resolutions were adopted on the charter of peoples' demand, a manifesto of sorts of the proposed organization, Resolutions were also adopted on the food crisis and on the formation of the Democratic Youth League.¹⁹

While explaining the objectives of the workers' conference, Shamsul Huq reiterated that 'the main purpose of the East Pakistan workers' conference was to prepare a programme for a united youth organization and to arouse the workers to take responsibility of building this organization countrywide.' He also said that 'the manifesto of the Youth Organization has been prepared on the basis of the democratic principle of economic, social, political and cultural improvement and development of the youths'.²⁰

It was decided to form an organization called Pakistan Democratic Youth League. The East Pakistan organizing committee of this new political body was formed with twenty-five members, though there was no possibility of a West Pakistan committee at that time. The conference was not reported in any newspaper because of government, and non-government intervention.²¹

In spite of the initial enthusiasm, the organization did not make much headway. They brought out a bulletin called *Democratic Youth League* edited by Akhlaqur Rahman and Aatur Rahman, but its publication came to an end after a few issues. The decision to

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31 August 1947.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 September 1947.

²⁰ Badruddin Umar, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 24-5.

²¹ Aatur Rahman, Kamruddin Ahmad, Tajuddin Ahmad.

hold an enlarged conference after six months could not be implemented. In September 1948, a youth conference was held in Ishurdi in which the economic and political situation was discussed and a number of resolutions were adopted on the abolition of zamindari, labor movement etc. Later a pamphlet entitled *To the Pakistani Youth* was published, which admitted that after some initial activities, the *Democratic Youth League* had become practically defunct.²²

The real issue which stirred the middle class youth in that period was the language question. A resolution for making Bengali the medium of instruction and official language was adopted in the conference of the Youth League. However, the language issue was taken up, as a distinct and major concern, by the Dhaka University students, and a cultural organization called Tamaddun Majlia who took some initial steps to present the issue in a systematic manner Tamaddun Majlis published a pamphlet in Bengali called *Pakistaner Rashtrabhasha Bangla Na Urdu?* (Pakistan's State Language Bengali or Urdu?). The contributors to the pamphlet were Professor Kazi Motahar Hossain, Abut Mansur Ahmad and Professor Abul Kasem of the Tamaddun Majlis.²³

The first language movement action committee was organized on the initiative of the Tamaddun Majlis at the end of 1947.²⁴ This organized effort was made to counter the provocative statements on the language question made by Fazlur Rahman, who was then the education minister of the government of Pakistan. He was going around making speeches and statements for having Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan.

The weekly organ of the Tamaddun Mailis, *Sainik*, and the weekly *Naobelal* of Syihet edited by Mahmud Ali, took a very firm stand in favor of Bengali. The Muslim League president, Akram Khan's daily paper *Azad* also supported Bengali in spite of the fact that the central government was strongly opposed to it. Many other newspapers, particularly Bengali language papers, and the English daily *Pakistan Observer*, belonging to Hamidul Huq Chowdhury and edited by Abdus Salem came out strongly in favor of Bengali. The only daily which consistently opposed Bengali was the English language daily *Morning News* edited by Khwaja Naruddin.

At the time only Urdu was being used in coins, postal stamps, and Bengali was excluded even from the subject list of the Public Service Commission examinations. In addition, Urdu and English were the only two languages used in the recruitment examination for the Pakistan Navy in East Pakistan. All these were sufficiently provocative to arouse the educated sections of the people in East Bengal to the defense of their mother tongue-Protests began not only in Dhaka, but all over the country. Even

²² Badruddin Umar, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

the leaders of the Sylhet District Mahila Sodality (Women's Association) took a leading role, in Sylhet, in organizing opposition to the government language policy.²⁵

The first session of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly began on 23 February 1948. On the same day a Congress member from East Bengal, Dhireadranath Datta, tabled a resolution to make Bengali a language of the Assembly, along with Urdu and English. The resolution was immediately opposed by Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, Chief Minister of East Bengal Khwaja Nazimuddin, Ghaznafar Ali Khan, Tamizuddin Khan and others in strong language and rejected by the House. Opposing the resolution Nazimuddin said, 'Most of the inhabitants of East Pakistan think that Urdu should be accepted as the only state language'.²⁶ It was natural for Nazimuddin to take that stand because he belonged to an Urdu-speaking feudal aristocratic family of the Nawabs of Dhaka and was unlettered in Bengali. This statement was seriously criticized by *Azad* and the *Pakistan Observer* and other newspapers. A student protest strike was organized in Dhaka on 26 February and the students of the Dhaka University, Engineering College, Medical College and various other schools and colleges demonstrated in the Ramna area. Later, in the afternoon, all of them assembled in a meeting in the Dhaka University premises. They criticized Nazimuddin, denounced the government language policy and demanded introduction of Bengali as a state language of Pakistan. An all-party committee called the State Language Committee of Action (SLCA) was formed for resisting government policy and organizing the language movement. The Committee was constituted of two representatives each from the Gono Azadi League, Democratic Youth League, Tamaddun Majlis, Salimullah Muslim Hall, Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall, and other Dhaka University halls as well as the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. A resolution for a general strike, all over East Bengal on 11 March, in protest against the rejection of Bengali as a language of the Constituent Assembly was adopted.²⁷

The strike resolution was widely publicized in the newspapers published from Dhaka and other areas of East Bengal. The students of Dhaka and the district towns of Narayanganj, Rajshahi, Jessore, Faridpur, Chittagong and other areas responded enthusiastically. They took out processions in support of the strike and held meetings on the day. In Dhaka and Jessore students clashed with the police while picketing for the strike. Arrests were made in other areas as well.

During the strike, on 11 March, Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Shaokat Ali and many others were arrested.²⁸ A government press note on the 11 March strike said,

²⁵ *Nuobelal*, 11 March 1948.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4 Mardi 1948.

²⁷ Tajuddin's diary, 2 March 1948; *Naobelal*, 4 March 1948.

²⁸ Badruddin Umar, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-8.

Some saboteurs and a group of students went on strike today to observe the strike called for protesting against the decision not to have Bengali as a language of the Centre. All the Muslim areas and most of the non-Muslim areas refused to observe the strike. Only a few Hindu shops were closed... it is now clearly understood from the information obtained after searches that a deep conspiracy is now on for creating division among the Muslims and creating chaos in the administration for undermining Pakistan.

This press note was published in all daily newspapers the next day. How on the very day of the strike the government had laid hands on information which made it clear to them that the strike and demonstrations were the results of a deep conspiracy is incomprehensible. But there was no doubt about the fact that the government was trying hard to give the movement a communal character and even indicate Indian involvement in it. The latter was quite apparent when they imposed a ban on *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and *Swadhinata* the Bengali daily of the Communist Party of India.²⁹ In protest against the police repression, students all over East Bengal went on strike from 13 to 15 March.³⁰

The first session of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly was scheduled to be held in Dhaka on 15 March. A day before the Muslim League Parliamentary Party met in Bardwan House, the official residence of the East Bengal prime minister. A large number of students demonstrated against the government on both days till late into the night. A general strike was called by the SLCA for 15 March.³¹ Then, for two main reasons, the government gave up its hard-line against the movement and proposed negotiation with the SLCA. First, the opposition against the government language policy was mounting. Secondly, because Jinnah was scheduled to arrive in East Bengal on 19 March it would have created a very difficult situation for the government if the agitation continued during his visit.

The SLCA decided to negotiate with Khwaja Nazimuddin for an agreement on the language question, and a meeting was held in Burdwan House (The Bengali Academy is now housed here) on the morning of 15 March. The Committee was represented by Kamruddin Ahmad, Abul Kasem, Mohammad Toaha, Syed Nazrul Islam, Aziz Ahmad, Abdur Rahman Chowdhury and a few others.³²

After much discussion an eight-point agreement was finally signed in which all the terms of the SLCA were incorporated, including the admission that the language agitation was not the act of saboteurs and Indian agents. It was decided to release all who were arrested on 11 March, to lift the ban on newspapers, not to take any action

²⁹ *Anrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 14 March 1948.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 16 March 1948; Tajuddin's diary, 14 March 1948.

³² Kamruddin Ahmad, Abu Kasem.

against those who participated in the movement, to withdraw Section 144 from all areas, to introduce a resolution in the East Bengal Assembly for making Bengali one of the state language, introducing Bengali as a language of the Constituent Assembly and for giving Bengali equal status with Urdu in all central government examinations.³³

On 16 March, all political prisoners arrested on 11 March were released from Dhaka central jail as well as from prisons outside Dhaka.³⁴ In April, Khwaja Nazimuddin went back on his promise and refused to put forth a resolution to have Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. However, he did move a resolution for making Bengali the medium of instruction and the official language of East Bengal after English.

On 19 March, Jinnah arrived at the Tejgaon airport on his first, and last, visit to Dhaka (he died on 11 September 1948). The enthusiasm of the people was dampened to some extent because it came in the immediate wake of the language movement. Nevertheless a large crowd assembled in the Race Course Maiden (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) on 21 March to hear him. Jinnah warned the Bengalis against the activities of the subversive elements and conspirators who were out to destroy Pakistan. Sporadic protests were made from among the crowd, and in response Jinnah repeated what he had already said.³⁵ He expressed the same views on the language question at the Dhaka University special convocation held to honor him on 24 March. Abdul Matin, A.K.M. Ahsan and a few others shouted 'no', 'no' in protest, but Jinnah remained unmoved.³⁶

In the same evening Jinnah held a meeting with the SLCA. Shamsul Huq, Kamruddin Ahmad, Oli Ahad, Abul Kasem, Mohammad Toaha, Tajuddin Ahmad, Lily Khan, Naimuddin Ahmad, Shamsul Alam, Aziz Ahmad and Syed Nazrul Islam were present. The meeting turned out to be very bitter, and ended in a fiasco because Jinnah would not concede an inch on the language question, and some members of the SLCA, particularly Oli Ahad, were very rude to him.³⁷

On 28 March, on the eve of his departure for Karachi, Jinnah addressed the people of East Bengal on the radio, in which he expressed the same views on the language question. As the supreme leader of Pakistan, people expected a democratic attitude from him. But they were deeply disappointed by what he said.³⁸

With his visit the first phase of the language movement came to an end, though it remained a live issue throughout East Bengal. It was revived with great strength and

³³ *Ibid.*, East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 18 March 1948.

³⁴ Mohammad Tosha, Ramesh Dasgupta, Shaokat Ali.

³⁵ Tajuddin's diary, 19 March 1948; Mohammad Ali Jinnah's speeches as Governor-General, Pakistan Publications, Karachi, pp. 85-8.

³⁶ Abdul Matin, Abul Kasem.

³⁷ Tosha, Oli Ahad, Tajuddin Ahmed, Kamruddin. Ahmad; Tajuddin's diary, 24 March 1948; *Jugantar* Calcutta, 2 April 1948.

³⁸ M.A. Jinnah, speeches as Governor General, p. 107.

fury immediately after Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin's infamous speech on the language question at the Dhaka Paltan Maidan on 27 January 1952.

Chapter Six

THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA

The decisions taken at the second congress of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in February–March 1948, greatly influenced the subsequent history not only of the communist parties of India and Pakistan, particularly East Pakistan, but also the history of the entire subcontinent. It is, therefore, necessary to consider the internal social and political situations in these two countries, as well as the writings and observations of the Soviet and Yugoslav communist parties and the Cominform, the international forums of the communist parties of the world.

After the announcement of the Mountbatten dispensation on 3 June 1947, the central committee of the CPI met in Bombay in the last week of June in which they reviewed the dispensation in detail, and discussed the Indian bourgeoisie and the Nehru question. On the basis of these reviews and discussions they arrived at certain decisions which were published as a *Statement of Policy*.³⁹ The statement said that the Mountbatten dispensation was, in the true sense, a conspiracy for preserving the influence and control of British imperialism in the Indian subcontinent and was thus a betrayal of the Indian national interest. They also criticized the Jawaharlal Nehru government for accepting it but said, that in spite of these criticisms and with all its limitations, it was a definite step towards the advancement of the democratic movement in India. Accordingly they decided to extend their support to the Nehru government.

The confusion in this statement of policy is clearly noticeable, and at the root of this confusion lay their attitude to Jawaharlal Nehru whom they characterized as the leading figure of the left wing in the Indian National Congress and as a person who was capable of guiding the democratic movement in India. Proceeding under the illusion of the same idea, they stated that the British government would try to influence the right wing of the Congress through their contacts with the Indian feudal interests and big business. But the rightists were comparatively weak inside the Congress, so they decided to align themselves with the Congress 'left' led by Jawaharlal Nehru. The statement made in this context said, 'In the area of building the Indian Republic on a democratic basis, the Communist Party would proudly extend full cooperation to the national leadership in order to pave the way for Indian unity.' Extending their policy to Pakistan, they said that the Communist Party also thinks that in order to implement any democratic programme in the subcontinent it is necessary to unite the forces of the left within the Congress and the Muslim League as well as the other progressive forces. The

³⁹ *Peoples Age*, the English organ of the CPI, 29 June 1947.

opinion and advice of Rajani Palma Dutt of the British Communist Party also influenced, to some extent, the decision of the CPI.

On the basis of this decision, the central committee of the CPI declared that they would observe Independence Day as a 'national festival' together with the Congress and the Muslim League. The rising communal tension in India and Pakistan, particularly in the Punjab, created a situation in which the question of national unity of the various communities, particularly Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, became very urgent. Later in a review of this position, on the eve of the second congress, B.T. Ranadive a member of the CPI Polit Bureau said that the stand of the Party on national unity was necessitated by the deteriorating communal situation in the subcontinent. This urgency of the unity question, as it was felt by the CPI leadership, made it easier and possible for reformist leaders like Puran Chandra Joshi (general secretary, CPI) to formulate a policy of cooperation with the ruling parties of both India and Pakistan, particularly the former. But the reactionary character of the ruling regimes in both countries became quite clear within a few months and eventually this policy of cooperation had to be abandoned.

In order to extend their support to the Congress and the Muslim League regimes in India and Pakistan, the Communist Party virtually withdrew all the programmes they were following just preceding independence. They even withdrew the Tebhaga (sharecroppers) Movement in Bengal in November 1947. Bhabani Sen, general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Committee, made an appeal to the peasants not to initiate any direct action in demanding two-thirds of the crop, because the new government was to be given an opportunity to fulfill their promise.⁴⁰ In fact, no promise was ever given to the peasants regarding 'tebhaga' by the new Muslim League leadership in East Pakistan and it was well known that they were much more tied to the feudal interests than the preceding Muslim League ministry in United Bengal. What was amazing was that earlier, in September 1947, the same Bhabani Sen had published a pamphlet entitled, *Purba Pakiataner Bhabishashat* (The Future of East Pakistan) in which he said,

Last year the League ministry ruthlessly repressed the tebhaga movement of six million sharecroppers. The paddy which the government armed forces forcibly took away from the sharecroppers and handed over to the *jotedars* are now in the black market. The godowns of the government Supply Department are empty. But now the government armed forces are not taking away that paddy from the barns of the *jotedars* for handing over to the godown of the Supply Department, which is why the rapid steps of famine are being heard in the districts of East Bengal. If Pakistan is kept under the wings of *zamindars* and *jotedars* like this, then it will not be long before it turns into a graveyard. But the people of Pakistan will have to live and live like human beings. It is possible to live like

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 November 1947.

that if the Hindu-Muslim people unitedly rescue Pakistan from the wings of *zamindars* and *jotedars* and make it a free Pakistan of the people.⁴¹

It is interesting to note that this pamphlet was published after the June meeting of the central committee of the CPI held in Bombay, in which a policy of cooperation with both the governments of India and Pakistan was announced.

The Communist policy immediately following the partition of India was, in fact, a policy of surrender. There is no other way of describing it when one considers that Jawaharlal Nehru was described by them as 'the voice of the people',⁴² and the fact that they had forwarded at that time a proposal for a 'united front from Nehru to the socialists and communists'.⁴³

A few months before this policy was announced by the CPI, the Soviet Party together with the Yugoslav Party and the Cominform had described Nehru as a rich man and his government as reactionary. What is quite surprising is that these views were not known to the CPI for some months. In June, shortly after the announcement of the Mountbatten dispensation, the Soviet theoretician A. Dyakov, in an article called 'The New British Plan for India' published in the Soviet paper *New Times* on 13 June 1947, said that the Mountbatten dispensation was, in fact, a well-planned conspiracy to keep the Indian subcontinent under British imperialist control. By submitting themselves to it the Indian leaders had compromised with imperialism and in this they had been forced by the Indian big commercial interests. Through this arrangement imperialism, and commercial interests, had tried to sabotage the revolution by dividing the home market between themselves. But in spite of this criticism by the Congress and the Muslim League, Dyakov refrained from giving any concrete advice to the Indian Party.

Following Dyakov's article an article by another Soviet theoretician, E. Zhultov, called 'Concerning the Indian Situation' was published in which he said more clearly and in a more straightforward manner that the Indian National Congress was nothing but a representative of the Indian big bourgeoisie and monopoly capital and by accepting the Mountbatten dispensation they had, in reality, entered the reactionary camp. He also said that the big bourgeoisie are afraid of the people much more than they are afraid of imperialism. But in spite of this, in both the Congress and the Muslim League, there are democratic and progressive workers who would be prepared to fight against the governments controlled by the big bourgeoisie. Regarding Pakistan he said that the meaning of Pakistan was not the same for the reactionary leadership and the Muslim people. The ordinary Muslims participated in the Pakistan Movement in order to have self-determination for themselves. He laid emphasis on the working class and said that only they were capable of performing the most advanced role in the social and political

⁴¹ Published by the Dacca District East Pakistan Communist Party from 15 Court House Street, Decca.

⁴² *Peoples Age*, 12 October 1947.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 19 October 1947.

situation existing in India at the time. In his article Zhukov proposed a strategy against imperialism and its allies, *i.e.* feudalism and monopoly capital.⁴⁴

Earlier in June, Soviet specialists met to discuss the Indian situation in a session of the Science Academy. There Zhukov expressed the same views, but he was opposed by both Dyakov and Balabuchevich who said that the Nehru government represented not only the big bourgeoisie but the middle bourgeoisie as well. They also described the latter as reactionary. But both Zhukov and Balabuchevich, while emphasizing the importance of the working class, considerably undermined the role of the peasantry in the freedom movement. Balabuchevich said that the peasants were most active in areas where they had direct contact with the workers. This view was not at all correct in the case of the revolutionary peasant movement of Telengana and the powerful peasant movement in North Bengal and in some other districts of the province.

The Soviet specialists declared that the new goal of Indian communism was the establishment of a people's democratic government in India, but there was no unanimity in their views regarding the character of this government.

In 1947, the Yugoslav Party opposed the idea of a peoples democratic state and advocated a hard-line programme through which socialist revolution could be hastened by uniting the bourgeois and socialist revolutions by the same thread. Thus the Yugoslav theoreticians were in favor of an all-out struggle against the entire bourgeoisie by not limiting the programme to a struggle only against feudalism and monopoly capital.

The Yugoslav leaders expressed the same views in a meeting of the on inform. In 1947, Edward Kardeli, writing in the Yugoslav Party's theoretical organ, said that the 'national bourgeoisie' in every colony was reactionary, were compradors of foreign imperialism, and because of this in order to win the national liberation war it was necessary to defeat the national bourgeoisie along with all other reactionary forces, Success, according to him, could be achieved only through armed revolutionary struggle.

On the question of Nehru, whatever the official line, there was no unanimity in the CPI. Even during the festivities of independence, B.T. Ranadive warned the people in an article in the *Peoples Age* on 15 August against the rightist and compromising character of the Nehru government. Also, since August 1947, the articles of the Yugoslav theoreticians began to appear in the *Communist*, the theoretical organ of the CPI. The Peoples Publishing House of the CPI published a pamphlet by Kardelj, in 1947, called *Problems of International, Development: A Marxist Analysis*, in which he said that the bourgeoisie in its entirety had joined the reactionary camp. Kardelj's view greatly

⁴⁴ G.D. Overstrest and Marahall Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp. 254-5.

strengthened the position of the hard-line leftists and they began to press, for the renouncement of the strategy of loyalty to the Nehru government. To those who were directly involved in the peasant armed struggle in Telengana, the official line was viewed with disapproval, as did some others. This passive disapproval developed into active opposition with changes in the internal situation.

In order to curb the influence of the communist dominated All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the ruling Congress formed a new trade union organization called the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC). This made it necessary for the CPI to formulate a more militant and hardline trade union programme, which was inconsistent with the Party's official line of loyalty. This created pressure within the working class movement to revise the official line with regard to the Nehru government. Thus, it happened that with both the peasant and the working class the official line became increasingly unworkable.

In September 1947, a session of the Cominform was held in Poland where Zhadnov, of the Soviet Party, said that imperialism was creating and aggravating the crisis in the colonies. Also that they were trying to keep India and China tied politically and economically to them. He also said that it was dangerous for the working class to underestimate its own strength and to exaggerate that of the enemy. He, however, refrained from characterizing the entire bourgeoisie of the colonies as reactionary and advised the communist parties to pursue the democratic socialist ideal without saying anything about the need for a direct struggle against the former.⁴⁵ Kardelj, in his speech, repeated his views on the democratic and socialist revolution and emphasized the need for integrating both struggles in an indivisible strategy. Kardelj speech, along with Marshal Tito's report to the second congress of the Yugoslav Party was published in the *Communist*.

The resentment against the aggressive and reactionary policy of the Indian National Congress and, the views and advice of parties of the international communist movement, placed Joshi's leadership in a very critical position and opposition to his policy began to build up around B.T. Ranadive.

In the second week of December 1947, a meeting of the central committee of the CPI was held in Bombay. A week earlier the Bombay government imposed certain restrictions on the *Peoples Age*.⁴⁶ This created a favorable condition for the anti-Joshi group who then strongly attacked the policy of loyal opposition pursued by Joshi. Puran Chandra Joshi was not formally removed, but his strategy was virtually rejected by the central committee and resolutions were adopted for radical changes in the programme of the CPI, Specific resolutions were adopted on the question of Nehru, the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁴⁶ *Peoples Age*, 7 December 1947.

Indian National Congress and the Indian bourgeoisie and a decision was taken to convene a party congress for approving a strategy against the entire capitalist system and for making necessary organizational changes. Ranadive and the other extremists gained a clear upper hand in the central committee before the convening of the congress. A sub-committee was formed to draft a political report for members of the Party. A list of members was also prepared for the election of a new central committee. Each provincial committee called a provincial congress for considering the political report and for electing delegates to the CPI congress. All preparatory work was completed within a short time of about ten weeks. The second congress of the CPI met on 28 February in Calcutta for six days (28 February-4 March).

According to the report of the *Peoples Age*, 919 delegates were elected, but 632 were actually present at the congress. Of them 566 were full-time workers and mainly party organizers, Seventy-five delegates were elected from Tolengana, but finally only four reached Calcutta because they were in the midst of an armed struggle and probably considered it unwise to leave their area in such big numbers.

In spite of the partition of India, the CPI had not been formally divided. So 125 delegates from East Bengal attended the second congress including Nepal Nag, Krishna Binode Ray, Moni Singh, Khoka Ray and Mansur Habibullah. Five delegates including Sajjad Zahir, Ata Mohammad, Jamaluddin Bokhari and labor leader, Ibrahim, attended the congress from West Pakistan. These nine delegates constituted the central committee of the Pakistan Communist Party. In a separate meeting, Sajjad Zahir, Khoka Ray and Krishna Binode Ray were made members of the Polit Bureau. Sajjad Zahir was elected general secretary.⁴⁷

Representatives from Australia, Burma, Ceylon and Yugoslavia were present at the congress. No representative was sent by either the Soviet or the British Communist Party. The Australian, Burmese and Ceylonese party representatives did not participate in any debate, but both the Yugoslav delegates, Vladimir Dedyer and Radoven Hakovic, played an important role in the congress. What they said was not opposed by even Lawrence Sharky, the Australian delegate or the general secretary of the Burmese Party, Thakin Than Tun. So an impression was created, among the Indian delegates, that what the Yugoslavs were saying had the approval of the Cominform. Thus the Titoite line gained a clear ascendance and greatly influenced the deliberations and decisions of the second congress.

There was nothing new in what the Yugoslav delegates said, but what was really surprising was that no mention was made to the theoretical formulations of Mao Tse Tung's New Democracy or the strategy followed by the Chinese Communist Party.

⁴⁷ Moni Singh, *Jiban Sangram*, Part 1, p. 89 and Khoka Ray, *Saregramer Tin Dashak*, p. 70, both published by Jatiya Shahitya Prakashani, Dhaka

B.T. Ranadive was familiar with the theoretical position of the Yugoslavs and he actually drew largely from it while preparing the political report. In the report he reiterated that by uniting with the Anglo–American imperialists, the Indian bourgeoisie had engaged itself against the democratic camp led by the Soviet Union. Therefore, in order to establish a peoples democratic government, the strategies for democracy and socialism would have to be tied together, an uninterrupted struggle had to be waged, and it would be necessary to organize and lead the vast masses of the people. He then proposed a Peoples Democratic Front consisting of the workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and intellectuals.

Puran Chandra Joshi was rather indifferent to the experience of Telengana owing to his reformist attitude, but Ranadive put great emphasis on it in his report and was of the view that it had created a 'qualitative' change in Indian politics. He went so far as to say, 'Today Telengana means Communist, and Communist means Telengana'.

The second most vocal delegate at the congress was Bhabani Sen, general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Committee. In November 1947, his stand was a compromise with the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League in India and Pakistan and he advised the Kisan Sava, the Party and the peasants to suspend the Tebhaga Movement in Bengal. But a few weeks later, in February–March 1948 he made a frontline appearance as a spokesman for the extremist political line along with B.T. Ranadive. Bhabani Sen made a long speech in the congress explaining Ranadive's strategy. On the Kashmir question he said that the Party support for the inclusion of Kashmir in India was a big mistake, because it was not possible to achieve self-determination for any particular nation by the entire people of that nation. It was possible only through the revolutionary struggle of the workers and their allies. He said that the correct way to self-determination was the way of Telengana.⁴⁸ Speaking of revolution in the Indo–Pakistan subcontinent Bhabani Sen said,

The real solution of this question lies in the field of war. The heroic people of Telengana by their great example of struggle showed not only what will happen in the native states, but also showed what the future of India and Pakistan would be. Following that path the victorious people will have to advance towards the achievement of freedom and real democracy.

The speeches made by B.T. Ranadive and Bhabani Sen turned the opinion in favor of the Telengana Movement and it became so strong that a separate resolution in its support was adopted. These developments were a big blow for Puran Chandra Joshi. After the readings of the main reports and discussions on them, he admitted his mistakes, that by his 'cowardice', 'petty bourgeois vacillations', 'bureaucratic attitude'

⁴⁸ G.D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 272.

and 'right reformist' thinking, he had created a lot of confusion and, in a real sense, these were acts of betrayal of the Party.

The outgoing central committee nominated many members of the old committee including Joshi. But as a consequence of criticisms of his activities, and of his own self-criticism, he was the only nominee of the central committee who was defeated. The new central committee then elected Balchandra Trimbak Ranadive as the new general secretary of the Communist Party of India.

There was a long debate on the 'political thesis' advanced by the new leadership, based on the 'political resolution' adopted in Bombay in December 1947. This had already been altered partly after discussions within the Party and some amendments were also raised in the congress. But in the end Ranadive appealed to the congress to accept the thesis without further change and to authorize the central committee to make corrections according to the discussions that had taken place. His proposal was unanimously accepted. The new strategy and programme of the CPI were contained in the thesis. During the congress, the new central committee met and passed a separate resolution. In it they explained the decisions of the congress, and that the meaning of a Peoples Democratic State was nothing but dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore, a revolutionary struggle against the Nehru government was imminent.

The Titoite line, of the Yugoslav Party, not only influenced the CPI, but experience shows that Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. while following the same line were plunged into civil war. Thakin Than Tun, present at the second congress, had said that if the Anglo–American imperialists wanted to instigate civil war, they would have to face civil war and also, 'Comrades, 1948 is an extremely important year in the liberation movement. In this year the fate of the liberation movement in South-East Asia will be decided'.⁴⁹

The situation in South-East Asia was comparatively favorable for carrying out revolutionary armed struggle because under foreign imperialist occupation the people had fought, in an armed resistance struggle, against the Japanese fascists during the Second World War. Thus, they already had some experience of armed struggle, whereas in India, the people had no such experience except in Telengana. Moreover, the general situations in India and Pakistan immediately following independence and partition were far from conducive to an armed struggle. In spite of their reactionary character, the Indian bourgeoisie was very powerfully organized as a class, and with state power in their hands, they had the capability of suppressing any challenge to their authority.

On hindsight it is quite amazing that the theoreticians of the CPI totally failed to take into account the very clear power factors and the state of the existing production

⁴⁹ *Peoples Age*, 14 April 1948.

relations. Thus they failed miserably to analyze the actual situation in India.. In the absence of such analysis their revolutionary line was full of imaginary ideas and doomed from the very outset. P.C. Joshi's hopeless reformist policy was nothing short of a surrender to the Indian ruling classes. In order to justify their line the Indian communists involved themselves in the stupid exercise of separating Nehru from the Indian monopoly capital which he represented. Moreover, when they did realize their mistake, instead of undertaking a serious and realistic analysis of the Indian situation. they took a political somersault with the influence of the Yugoslav Party on B.T. Ranadive and the other left extremists proving disastrous. Hanadive's line was soon to become totally unworkable and would be rejected by the people both of India and Pakistan and also by the Cominform.

Another great mistake of the second congress was lumping India and Pakistan together as one unit. Much of their analysis rested on their attitude to Jawaharlal Nehru, a factor which was totally irrelevant to the situation in Pakistan. But both Joshi and Ranadive imposed their decisions regarding India on Pakistan, without any change or modification, immediately after partition, and then again at the second congress. It is true that till that time the CPI remained formally undivided, but this did not mean that exactly the same strategy could be applicable to both India and Pakistan.

The relations of class forces and the strength of the organization of the working people, the state of the party organizations, as well as the power of the Indian big monopoly capital, of the state and its armed forces, were not taken into consideration at all while evaluating the situation in India at the time. Nothing could be more futile than this blindness to obvious facts, and soon the organizations of the CPI and the East Pakistan Communist Party were deeply endangered more by their own stupid acts than by any repressive measures of the governments of India and Pakistan.

Chapter Seven

FORMATION OF THE EAST PAKISTAN COMMUNIST PARTY

At the time of partition there were three organizations in East Pakistan: the Muslim Leaguer the Communist Party and the Congress. The Bengal Provincial Congress decided not to have any separate organization in East Pakistan and consequently their activities were limited to within the East Bengal Legislative Assembly. The East Pakistan branches of the other two organizations were not formally reconstituted till later.

During the second congress of the Communist Party of India, the general line of the party was formulated and immediately afterwards a Pakistan Committee was formed with Sajjad Zahir as general secretary.⁵⁰ This committee, however, could never meet and for all practical purposes remained only on paper. The East Pakistan Committee was constituted on 6 March 1948, with Moni Singh, Khoka Ray (Sudhin Ray), Nepal Nag, Mansur Habibullah, Krishna Binode Ray, Phani Guhai Niranjana Gupta, Altaf Ali, Barin Datta (Madura Seism), Subir Chowdhury, Bibhuti Guha, Pramatha Bhowmik, Abani Bagchi, Mukul Sen, Maruf Hossain, Purnendu Dastidar, Yakub Mien, Abdul Kader Chowdhury and Amulya Lahiri as members, and Khoka Ray as general secretary.⁵¹

Before the formation of this committee, Bhabani Sen, the then general secretary of the Bengal provincial party, Abdullah Rasul and Mansur Habibullah came to Dhaka and addressed a public meeting at Coronation Park near Sadarghat in September 1947. Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin invited them to meet him and expressed the hope that they would continue to cooperate with his government. At that time the Communist Party of India was pursuing a policy of cooperation with the governments of India and Pakistan, and accordingly they had a generally cordial discussion with him.⁵²

At the time the East Pakistan Party was facing a serious crisis owing to large-scale migration of party members, members and active workers of their mass organizations, to India. Out of about 12,000 members of the Communist Party in East Bengal,⁵³ the vast majority came from Hindu families and because of family considerations they had to migrate. This process began immediately after partition and continued for some years, but the initial migration was on quite a large scale and this created a big shortage of

⁵⁰ Khoka Ray, *Sangramer Tin Dashak*, p. 70; Moni Singh; *Jiban Sangram*, Part I, p. 90.

⁵¹ Khoka Ray, *Ibid.*, p. 70-1; Moni Singh, *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁵² Ramesh Dasgupta (interview by Badruddin Umar).

⁵³ Moni Singh, *ibid.*, p. 89, Shahidullah Kaiser (interview).

workers making it difficult for the district committees to function. There was no possibility of an early improvement of the situation because recruitment in the communist party does not take place easily. Also, except for some stray cases, there was practically no migration of party members belonging to Muslim families from India.

In view of these difficulties it was decided that a few leading party members like Abdullah Raul and Mansur Habibullah, who belonged to West Bengal, would be transferred to East Pakistan. Both of them came to Dhaka before the second congress, Muzaffar Ahmed also came to Dhaka and opened a counter of the National Book Agency at Rathkhola. Abdullah Rasul returned to West Bengal soon afterwards, but Mansur Habibullah decided to continue to work in East Pakistan and was subsequently elected member of the East Pakistan Committee of the Party. It was difficult to find office accommodation for the party because of housing shortages. However, at the end of March a two-room office was opened at Captain Bazaar, in the ground floor of a building called Madan Palar Barrack.⁵⁴

According to Khoka Ray, a short congress of the East Pakistan Party was held immediately after the second congress on 6 March and a thesis, very much in line with that of Balchandra Trimbak Ranadive, was adopted for East Pakistan. Theoretically equipped thus, the Communist Party of East Pakistan set to organize themselves in the new situation.

The new strategy notwithstanding the Communist Party was not formally banned until 1954. But in view of the radical changes in the party line and policy, it was decided that except for a few party members others would not work openly and remain underground. In order to take as much advantage as possible of open work, apart from central office, an office for Dhaka city was established at Court House Street. An office of the East Pakistan Railroad Workers Union was also established near the central party office at Captain Bazaar. At that time the union was dominated by members of the party.⁵⁵

During the language movement in March 1948, both the central office and the city office were attacked and ransacked by Muslim League hooligans. With the exception of some books there were no papers, so they scattered the books and broke whatever furniture there was. Ranesh Dasgupta and Dharani Ray were arrested on 13 March, but both of them were released on the 15th. At first the government refused to release them because they were treated not as language movement prisoners, but as communists. When the other prisoners refused to come out of jail without them, they also had to be released.⁵⁶ Both of them now started working openly and the offices at Captain Bazaar and Court House Street resumed functioning.

⁵⁴ Khoka Ray, *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁵⁵ Ramesh Dasgupta, Munir Chowdhury (interview).

⁵⁶ Moni Singh, *ibid.*, pi 91.

By June, the programme of the East Pakistan Communist Party had been finalized and in order to make it public it was decided to hold a public meeting at the Coronation Park. Seven days prior to the meeting, a publicity campaign was launched by holding street corner meetings and announcement of the meeting through bull horns. Muneer Chowdhury, Sardar Fazlul Karim and a few others were involved in organizing the meeting.⁵⁷

The 30 June meeting of the Communist Party was presided over by Muneer Chowdhury, Ranesh Dasgupta and Sardar Fezlul Karim were selected as speakers with the latter speaking on the general programme of the party and on the domestic situation, and the former on the international situation and the role of imperialism.

About a thousand people gathered at the Coronation Park. Shah Azizur Rahman, the pro-government Muslim League student leader also arrived with his companions, some of whom were known hoodlums and meeting-breakers. Their arrival created an uneasy situation and in that tense atmosphere, the meeting began and Sardar Fazlul Karim began to speak. Soon, in order to create trouble, chits began to be sent to the president asking various questions and the speaker was disturbed and interrupted by shouts from the hoodlums. The next speaker, Ranesh Dasgupta, while discussing the international situation, spoke about the necessity for Pakistan to leave the Commonwealth and become a Republic. The manifesto of the East Pakistan Communist Party could not be read out as decided earlier, but both the speakers explained and made references to it. Muneer Chowdhury's presidential speech was cut short, since serious disturbances were apprehended, and the meeting was dissolved. But Shah Aziz and his group began to shout and wanted to speak. A scuffle started and in the midst of the ensuing pandemonium, the Communist Party workers, apprehending an attack on their offices, left Coronation Park for Court. House Street. In the meantime, Shah Azizur Rahman and his group held their own meeting at the same place and made speeches abusing the Communist Party.⁵⁸

The same evening a large number of people surrounded the Court House Street office of the Communist Party and attacked it. About twenty party persons were in the office at that time, including Benoy Basu, Amulya Sen, Ranesh Dasgupta, Muneer Chowdhury and Sardar Fazlul Karim. They resisted and the scuffle continued for about half an hour. Since the Communist Party was not yet banned and they had the constitutional right to function openly, Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin sent two police constables to protect the Communist Party offices. The hoodlums could not enter the office as they had on an earlier occasion.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Ramesh Dasgupta, Munir Chowdhury (interview).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

In 1948, the government had no plans to outlaw the Communist Party, but they resorted to other repressive measures to obstruct the activities of the party. On 7 July, Ranesh Dasgupta and Dharani Ray were arrested and the party decided to further restrict their open activities.

At the time of the second congress, there were about 12,000 Communist Party members, but that number began to decrease rapidly from March 1948. Earlier the party offices in Dhaka and in the districts would be filled with workers but this thinned out and soon their numbers became negligible.⁶⁰ This was a natural consequence of the sudden radical change of policy and formulation of new strategy and tactics. It was a hard-line and its pursuit required a certain type of organization and workers. They were both found to be inadequate under the setup. For many years, since its foundation, the Communist Party functioned as an open party, except for the first two years of the Second World War, and so they had no organizational means to absorb thousands or even hundreds of workers in the underground system. Consequently, the workers had great difficulties in finding secure shelters. Most of the workers had to make their own arrangements, which was not at all easy in the circumstances, in both the countries, so soon after independence. Apart from these difficulties the other important factor was the composition of the membership of the party. A majority of the members had been liberally admitted and they had neither the commitment nor the making of revolutionary workers. For many of them party membership was more or less a fashionable matter and such elements could not be expected to face the hardships and dangers which entailed the pursuit of a revolutionary line.

All these factors largely contributed to the disappearance of a considerable number of party members from the beginning of the new struggle.⁶¹ Among the party members who remained within the fold of the party and continued their work many were arrested, mostly because they could not find secure shelters. Thus, the prisons of East Pakistan began to fill up with members of the Communist Party who had commitment and dedication and were able organizers. The activities of the party was, thus, seriously handicapped.

Among the peasants the situation was somewhat better. First, because the majority of the 12,000 original members were from the rural areas and migration from the peasant areas was not as massive as it was in the case of middle class people, particularly the upper caste Hindus. Second, the activities and organization of the communist dominated Kigan Sava were mostly concentrated in areas populated by tribal people where it was easier to get shelter in the houses of party members as well as of sympathizers. Third, in such areas the conditions for organizing struggles for a fair share of the crops, for reducing rent and for other rights largely prevailed even

⁶⁰ Samar Singh of Faridpur Shahidullah Kaiser (interview).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

immediately after the establishment of Pakistan. So the main area of communist activities after partition happened to be the areas populated mostly by tribal people, who were non-Muslims, except in certain areas of Sylhet, where there was a strong movement among the Nankars.

Chapter Eight

REORGANIZATION OF THE TRADE UNIONS

Soon after the partition of India, the biggest trade union federation of India, the communist dominated All India Trade Union Corse (AITUC) met in Bombay on 5 September 1947.⁶² They adopted the following resolution on reorganization of the Trade Union Congress:

Consequent upon the division of India into two states and the problems arising in this context, permission is being given to the trade unions within the boundaries of Pakistan by the Central Council to organize their separate central trade union organizations. They are also being empowered to nominate a temporary committee with the following either by co-opting them or by any other way they consider fit and to review various questions and take decisions on them: East Bengal – Comrades A.M. Malek, Faiz Ahmed, Mohammad Ismail, Nepal Nag and Dinen Sen. West Punjab – Comrades Fazal Illahi Qurban, Mirza Ibrahim and Ramesh Chander, Sindh – Comrades Narayan Das Bechar, Sobo and J. Bokhari.

The General Council is confident that if a decision is taken to constitute a separate organization in that came in order to coordinate the common experiences and for helping one another an organization may be set up. The Central Council also declares that, whatever is the decision, the general objective of socialism of the working class will remain unaltered and the division of India into two states will not damage class unity and solidarity of those workers who have established lasting relations between the various groups and communities during their general struggle against capitalism under the flag of the All India Trade Union Congress.⁶³

A conference of the East Bengal group was held in Narayanganj on 27-28 September 1947.⁶⁴ It was inaugurated by Khwaja Nazimuddin, the then Prime Minister of East Bengal. Other participants in the conference were Dr Abdul Mottaleb Malek, Maruf Hossain, Nepal Nag, Dinen Seri, Samar Ghosh, Aswini Dev, Amritendu Mukherjee, Mohammad Ismail, Anil Basak, Radhagobinda Sarkar, Shushal Sarkar, Aftab Ali, Faiz Ahmed, Sultan Ahmed and Professor Shibdas Gangruli. The East Pakistan Trade Union Federation (EPTUF) was formed with A.M. Malek and Faiz Ahmed as president and

⁶² Kamraddin Ahmad, *Labor Movement in East Pakistan*, Pragati Publishers, Dhaka, December 1969, pp. 34-5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

secretary respectively. Nepal Nag, Mohammad Ismail and Mohan Jamadar were elected vice-presidents and Anil Mukherjee and Gour Barman were elected assistant secretaries.

Since right after the partition of India the CPI, and the Communist Party of East Pakistan, had decided to pursue a policy of limited cooperation with their respective governments they pursued the same policy with regard to the labor movement and formed the East Pakistan Trade Union Federation.

The first meeting of the executive committee of the EPTUF was held on 29 September presided over by Dr Malek. In December, an international labor conference of Asian countries was held in New Delhi and Dr Malek was nominated by the EPTUF to represent it. The government of Pakistan approved the nomination and accordingly Dr. Malek, and Nepal Nag, as his advisor, attended the conference. At about the same time Aftab Ali was elected to the governing body of the International Labor Organization (ILO) as the first and only representative from East Pakistan.⁶⁵

After the inclusion of Dr. Malek in the East Bengal ministry as labor minister, a meeting was held on 24 October 1948 to consider his resignation as president of the EPTUF. The leftist members of the committee demanded the resignation of Dr. Malek from the reactionary ministry. Faiz Ahmed, on the other hand, said that it was to the advantage of the labor movement that Dr. Malek should remain minister for labor. Due to this serious difference of opinion a consensus could not be reached and a vote was taken, Faiz Ahmed won by a narrow margin. The leftists walked out of the meeting and as it turned out later, it was a walkout of the EPTUF itself.⁶⁶

The East Pakistan Railroad Workers Union was a communist dominated organization and in September 1947 it became affiliated to the EPTUF. Since at that time the East Pakistan Communist Party was organizationally related to the CPI, the Railroad Union was similarly linked to the Indian Railroad Workers Union. Thus when the latter called for a strike of the Indian railway workers, on 9 March 1949, the East Pakistan Railroad Workers Union also declared a strike on the same day in its support. However, this was done without the approval of the EPTUF, and the Federation, by a majority decision of their executive committee, denounced the Railroad Workers Union. Consequently, the communist members resigned from the EPTUF, but did not form a federation of their own. On 13 August 1949, the secretary of the EPTUF, Faiz Ahmed, expelled the East Pakistan Railroad Workers Union, Dacca District Cotton Mills Workers Union, Dacca Rickshaw Workers Union, Barisal Biri Workers Union and Inland Steam Navigation Workers Union, which were all controlled by the communists.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Whatever may be the apparent reason, the basic premise for the disruption of relationship of the communists with the EPTUF, lay in the change of line after the second congress of the CPI. Both in India and in Pakistan, the communist parties described the governments as reactionary and broke all relations of cooperation with them. Since they took the line of armed socialist revolution, it was not possible for them to function within the structural discipline of any mass-based trade union federation.

Dr A.M. Malek's resignation as president of EPTUF was not accepted in the October 1948 meeting, in spite of his inclusion in the Muslim League government of East Bengal. The second annual conference of EPTUF was held in Narayangani on 1 and 2 May 1949, presided over by Dr. Malek. About 300 delegates representing various labor organizations participated and messages of greetings were sent by Deben Seri, Mrinalkanti Bose and Santoshkumar Bose, the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Pakistan.⁶⁸ The chairman of the reception committee, Amar Banerjee, in his speech spoke of the fact that only 15 percent of the industries in the whole of Bengal was in East Pakistan. Crores of rupees from the profits of rice and jute trade were going into the pockets of black marketers and profiteers, and consequently no investments were possible. He said that necessary industries must be nationalized and *zamindari* must be abolished without compensation. He also demanded the release of workers who were detained in jails.⁶⁹

George Reed, a leader of the British Labour Party and the special commissioner of the South-East Asia region of the International Transport Workers Federation, attended the conference and in his address said that in the given situation it was the duty of the workers not to demand any increase in wages and to maintain peace by not disturbing the authorities in any manner.⁷⁰ These views, and the vituperations, against the communists and warnings against any associations with them by a number of speakers made quite clear the real character of the EPTUF. The attack against the communists was so open and dirty that even Aftab Ali strongly protested against it.⁷¹ Jogendranath Mondal, Dr Malek and others spoke, after Aftab Ali, and each of them advised the workers not to unite with the communist 'frauds' and go on strike.⁷²

In January 1948, a new labor federation was formed called Trade Union Federation of Pakistan (TUFP), This Federation included the Pakistan Telegraph Association, East Bengal Shop Workers Federation, RMS, Lower Grade Postal Workers Union and a few other trade unions, Nurul Huda, Kammiddin Ahmad and B.A. Siddiqui were elected president, general secretary and treasurer respectively. Nurul Huda was the president

⁶⁸ *Azad*, May 1949.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Naobelal*, 12 May 1949.

⁷² *Ibid.*

of East Pakistan Railway Workers League and Kamruddin Ahmad was the president of the All Pakistan Posta and Telegraphs Union at the time.⁷³

On 29 October 1949, the general council of EPTUF decided to change its name to All Pakistan Trade Union Federation (AFTUF). After prolonged negotiations between the APTUF and TUIF leaders, an agreement was signed for the formation of a single federation. Accordingly the two Federations were united on 30 April 1950 as All Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF).⁷⁴ Nurul Huda was elected the president of this new Federation, Kamruddin Ahmad became vice-president, Faiz Ahmed general secretary, Aftab Ali treasurer and Abdul Awal and Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury assistant secretaries.⁷⁵

At that time, although frequent reorganization of trade union federations were taking place, there was little proper trade union work. Through the efforts of Dr. Malek, the Pakistan Federation of Labour of West Pakistan (led by the Royist⁷⁶ Khatib) and the APTUF, were united into a single federation called All Pakistan Confederation of Labor (APCOL).⁷⁷ Khatib and Faiz Ahmed were elected president and general secretary respectively of the confederation.⁷⁸ It was decided that the activities of this new trade union organization would be conducted by two regional organizations called West Pakistan Federation of Labor and East Pakistan Federation of Labor. These two regional federations were given full freedom to conduct their affairs. There were ten members from each regional federation and a total of twenty-one including the president in the executive board of the confederation. This new all-Pakistan organization was created on the initiative of Dr. Malek specifically for the purpose of keeping the trade union movement beyond the control of the communists.⁷⁹

The East Pakistan Federation of Labor held its annual conference in Narayanganj on 14 and 15 April 1951. Dr. Malek reiterated in his speech that after the achievement of independence, capital, labor and government must try to maintain harmonious relationship with one another and the Federation should work towards this end. According to the president of the reception committee, Narmada Banerjee, the workers had now learnt to stand on their own and it was no longer possible for the exploiters to forcibly get anything done by them.⁸⁰

⁷³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Labor Movement in East Pakistan*, p. 37.

⁷⁴ *Sainik*, 23 April 1950.

⁷⁵ Kamruddin Ahmad, p. 37.

⁷⁶ Followers of M.N. Roy, one of the founders of the Indian Communist Party at Tashkent in 1921, and later chairman of the Radical Humanist Party.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p 38.

⁷⁸ Kamruddin Ahmad, presidential address, third annual session of the East Pakistan Federation of Labor, 14-15 April 1951, Paramount Press, Dhaka, p. 17.

⁷⁹ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Labor Movement in East Pakistani*, pp. 38-9.

⁸⁰ *Pakistan Observer*, 15 April 1951.

The president of the Federation, Kamruddin Ahmad, in his address said that the wages of the workers were extremely low and they were badly indebted. In the tea gardens and cotton mills housing condition and scarcity of drinking water were very acute. There was housing available for only about 30 percent railway workers. The housing situation had deteriorated due to the large influx of refugees from India who opted for East Pakistan. Of the 1,50,000 ship workers, 80 percent were from East Bengal. These Pakistani ship workers had got their jobs in Bombay and Calcutta and were still considered as foreigners and it was desirable that they be registered in Pakistani ports. He demanded that the principal office of the Welfare Directorate for Pakistani ship workers be shifted to Chittagong from Karachi and separate welfare committees be formed for Chittagong and Chalna. He also talked about the plight of the agricultural workers and said that the workers movement must also be extended to the rural areas among the peasants.⁸¹

This labor confederation, organized under the supervision of the Pakistan government had a short life. The conflict between Faiz Ahmed and Nurul Huda within the East Pakistan Federation of Labor reached a peak after the April conference and in June 1951, a new federation called the Pakistan Labor Federation came into existence.⁸² Nurul Huda, Nazir Mustafa and A.R. Sunnamat became its president, general secretary and assistant secretary respectively. After the formation of this Federation, East Pakistan Railway Employees League, Telegraph Association and Shop Workers Association withdrew from the East Pakistan Federation of Labor.⁸³

During all these formations and reformations of the labor unions, the communists remained silent spectators. There was, however, great restlessness among the workers in all industries and widespread strikes by workers. In fact, in each conference the government representatives and bourgeois trade union leaders exhorted the delegates, and the workers in general, not to take recourse to industrial strikes and maintain a harmonious relationship between capital, wage-labor and the government.

⁸¹ Kamruddin. Ahmad, presidential address, p. 17.

⁸² *Sainik*, 1 July 1951.

⁸³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Labor Movement in East Pakistani*, pp. 39-40.

Chapter Nine

RAILWAY, POST AND TELEGRAPH WORKERS UNIONS AND STRIKES

Railway Workers

The railway workers held a conference in Dhaka on 6 and 7 December 1947, to organize a new trade union of railway workers in East Bengal. Consequently, the East Pakistan Railway Employees League (EPREL) was formed under the leadership of advocate Nurul Huda.⁸⁴ For about a year this organization did little work among railway workers, mainly because at that time the communist-dominated Railroad Workers Union was the biggest and most powerful organization of railway workers. However, exactly one year after its formation on 6 December 1948, a large meeting of railway workers was held at Lalmonirhat in North Bengal. M. S. Huq, joint secretary of Pakistan Trade Union Federation and Abdul Frye, the joint secretary of EFREL, spoke on various problems the workers faced. In a number of resolutions accepted unanimously, the retrenchment policy of the government, irregularities in ration distribution, negligence in implementing the Pay Commission Report and police repression of the railway workers at Parbatipur were criticized. In another resolution, immediate housing provisions were demanded for railway workers. The housing problem had become very serious due to large influx of railway workers from India after the partition.⁸⁵

Another meeting of the Railway Employees League was held, again at Lalmonirhat, on 14 December 1948.⁸⁶ A big demonstration was taken out from the Railway Institute premises and slogans were raised against police repression, retrenchment, distribution of broken rice (*khude*) through ration shops etc. The meeting criticized the railway authorities that because of their short-sightedness thousands of railway workers were facing retrenchment. They also spoke of the serious situation in the grain shops, and that if rations were not distributed properly through these shops the health of the workers would be badly affected.

The EPREL held a protest meeting on 26 December 1948, at the Railway Institute in Mymensingh against the decision of the railway authorities to retrench 12,000 railway employees.⁸⁷ The meeting was attended by about 2000 railway workers and was presided over by Enamul Hug, editor of *Sainik*. M.S. Hug, Abdul Rye, Atiar Rahman,

⁸⁴ *Sainik*, 14 November 1948.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 December 1948.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 December 1948.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 January 1949.

general secretary Central Government Employees Association and Ali Ahmed, secretary Post and Telegraph Union, also attended the meeting. The general manager of East Bengal Railway had served retrenchment notice on 12,000 railway workers. Workers employed in 1922 and many on the verge of retirement were on list to be literally thrown out on the streets. The management of the grain shops was strongly criticized, and it was alleged that white oil was being supplied instead of edible oil, and broken rice instead of normal rice and that these were hazardous to the health of the railway workers.

In a resolution the authorities were urged to reconsider their decision to retrench the workers, and in case some of them had to be retrenched, to provide alternative employment for them, and that proper rations be distributed through the ration shops. The transfer of the president of the Mymensingh branch of the organization, Sayeedul Hug, was denounced as an act of repression and a resolution was passed demanding the cancellation of his transfer. The assembled railway workers expressed their full support to the Railway Employees League, and pledged to continue their struggle under its banner.

The Railroad Workers Union called a strike of railway workers in East Bengal in support of the strike of Railroad Workers Union of India. On the face of it there was nothing wrong in the fraternal gesture, but it clearly indicated the isolation of the communists from the developments which were taking place among the railway workers, their actual demands and the state of their minds. It also indicated that they had no realistic policy and programme to take the struggle of the railway workers forward. Consequently, they faced serious criticism and opposition from railway workers themselves, many of whom were already organized under the banner of the Railway Employees League, which came out openly against the strike.⁸⁸

In a statement on behalf of the East Pakistan Railway Employees League, its acting general secretary, Abdul Hye, in a newspaper statement said that the East Pakistan Railway Employees League had been fighting for the cause of the railway workers, and in their special session at Lalmonirhat they had decided to go on strike to force the government to accept their demands. They had also issued an ultimatum to the authorities and given them forty-five days' time for accepting their demands. In case the government ignored their ultimatum, they would fix a date for the strike when they met in their annual conference on 19 and 20 March 1949. In view of their own plan they accused the Railroad Workers Union's call for strike an act of sabotage and dissociated themselves from it.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ranesh Dasgupta (written note).

⁸⁹ *Sainik*, 4 March 1949.

The general secretary of the Trade Union Federation of Pakistan, Kamruddin Ahmad, opposing the strike of 9 March, said that the very fact that the East Pakistan Railroad Workers Union had called the strike on the same day that the Indian Railroad Workers Union had, clearly indicated that the communists had not yet accepted the partition of India and did not really recognize the Indian Union and Pakistan as two separate states. He also accused the Railroad Workers Union of attempting to sabotage the strike of the East Pakistan Railway Employees League for which notice had already been served. He appealed to the railway workers to ignore the strike called for 9 March. Both these statements were published on 4 March 1949.⁹⁰ Since all the government-sponsored trade unions were against the communists, the strike of 9 March provided them a very good opportunity to initiate propaganda action against them.

In 1947, before the partition of the country, the number of communist party members among the railway workers was not large, but their influence on the latter was considerable. In the general election of 1946, Jyoti Basu was elected from the railway constituency to the Bengal Provincial Legislative Assembly on a communist party ticket. In the post-partition period, there was large migration of railway workers from India and the situation changed. The influence of the communist party declined. Another reason for this change was the migration of non-Muslim workers from East Pakistan among whom there were a good number of party members and sympathizers. Moreover, many communist party workers were arrested by that time and the party was much more isolated from the people than any other period in the forties.

That the strike would end in failure was known to the communists, and in their desperate attempt to do something, some of them decided to indulge in terrorist acts of damaging and uprooting railway tracks and lines. They succeeded only in a village called Khoilkoier, between Joydevpur and Tongi. Abdul Bari, a leader of railway workers who was also a local leader of the area, organized this on his own initiatives.⁹¹ The government made elaborate arrangements for resisting and crushing the strike and mobilized police forces from all over the country and even withdrew forces from the Nankar areas in Sylhet in order to deploy them in different areas.⁹²

After the failure of the railway strike, and the Khoilkoier incident, the government resorted to terrible repression in Khoilkoier. A reign of terror was let loose and finally Abdul Bari was arrested in December 1949. The communist leader who was in charge of the railway strike in the Dhaka railway station was known as Kerani Saheb. He was arrested during the preparatory period of the strike. Both were released in 1951-2, and died shortly afterwards.⁹³

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Ranesh Dasgupta (written note).

⁹² *Naobelal*, 28 April 1949.

⁹³ Ranesh Dasgupta (written note).

Since early 1949, the government had launched an all-out campaign against the communists and all their organizations. As a part of this offensive, the general counsel of the EPTUF expelled the Railroad Workers Union from the Federation on 30 August 1949 as were other communist dominated unions.⁹⁴ After the failure of the 9 March strike and the expulsion, the Railroad Workers Union was virtually liquidated and the communists became politically and organizationally irrelevant in the working class movement in East Pakistan. It would take more than a decade before the communists were able to organize the workers in trade unions and play an effective political role.

The first annual session of the East Pakistan Railway Employees League was held in Dhaka at Paltan Maidan on 20 March 1949.⁹⁵ This session was attended by railway workers from all over East Bengal. In addition a large number of workers of the Post and Telegraph Departments and other industries also attended the conference. It was presided over by Nurul Huda, president East Pakistan Railway Employees League and president of the TUFF. The chairman of the reception committee, Azizul Islam, demanded that every citizen had a share in the wealth of an Islamic state and that the standards of luxury in the Islamic State of Pakistan be lowered. The secretary of Chittagong headquarters of the EPREL, Ishaq, said that whenever they raised any demands for food, shelter etc., they were branded as communists, but they had nothing to do with communism. The disparity in the living standards between 90 percent and 10 percent people in the country must be removed as early as possible. The secretary of the Dhaka branch of the EPREL, Abdur Rouf, said that they were deprived from enjoying leave, which the gazetted officers did, and that the railway officers were incapable of running the administration and were introducing provincialism in East Pakistan. The secretary of the Bhairab branch, Abdul Halim, put forth that they had got geographical independence, but their economic dependence still remained. Without the material and spiritual development of forty million oppressed people, there could not be any development of the Pakistan state.

Ganguly, a representative of Glass Workers Union, Prahladchandra Das, of the Shop Workers Association, B. Siddiqui, president of Post and Telegraph Union, also attended and spoke in the conference as a gesture of fraternity. Ganguly said that the conditions of all other workers were as miserable as that of railway workers and they should together initiate a united movement. Siddiqui let loose an anti-communist tirade but at the same time said,

Pakistan has been achieved by sacrificing the blood of the poor, but they now do not have enough to eat. The wealth of the country is not being distributed fairly. Some opportunist leaders and high officials are plundering the wealth of the country. We shall not tolerate this. injustice. Our government cannot tolerate any

⁹⁴ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Labour Movement in East Pakistan*, p. 36. 12.

⁹⁵ *Sainik*, 25 March 1949.

criticism whatsoever. But the right to criticize the government is a fundamental right in Islam.

At the end of the conference several resolutions were adopted. In one resolution all in-fights for power were denounced and it was resolved to limit the trade union movements to economic and cultural welfare activities. In another resolution it was said that if no satisfactory settlement was made in regard to pay commission recommendations, grain shops and retrenchments, the East Pakistan Railway Employees League would not be responsible for any untoward incidents that may take place in future. While introducing this resolution, Cherag Khan said, 'The greatest powers in the world are in the hands of the railway workers. So the consequences of any attempt to avoid responsibility by branding us as communists will not be good.' The conference elected Mohammad Nurul Huda as president, Cherag Khan as executive president, Mahhubul Huq as secretary and both Abdul Hye and M.S. Huq as joint secretaries.

In April 1949, Pakistan's communication minister Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar visited East Bengal. A reception for him was organized by the East Pakistan Railway Employees League in Dhaka on 6 April.⁹⁶ About 5,000 workers employed in railway and other industries were present. An address of welcome was presented on behalf of the EPREL by Abdul Hye.

There are four big problems confronting the railway workers today retrenchment, grain shop, housing accommodation and trade union rights. After the achievement of Pakistan, the people, particularly the workers had nurtured great hopes that the state of Pakistan would be ran according to the great ideals of Islam, but such hopes are being shattered by the shortsighted policy of the railway authorities. It cannot be denied that there was corruption in the grain shops. For that we congratulated the 'Gazdar Committee' when that was appointed to investigate that corruption. But we now naturally feel aggrieved when by closing down the grain shops the authorities are playing with the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers. Then comes the housing question. The way the railway workers are living in the goods train compartments and hovels, and in fact rotting, reminds us even in this twentieth century of cave dwellers. We heard assurances many times that the administration in Pakistan would be run on the basis of the great Islamic ideals of equality, brotherhood and freedom. But the railway authorities, by their hostile behavior, have falsified such assurances. The International Labor Organization has mentioned freedom of speech and organization as the life-blood of progress. But the government of Pakistan, by ignoring these promises, are trying to crush the labor organizations by all possible means. Not only that, some persons from the administration are

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 April 1949.

trying to sow the seeds of racial and provincial animosity for breaking the unity of workers. This policy of division pursued by the British can never be in accordance with Islam.

Several speakers including Nurul Huda and Mahbubul Huq, the president and general secretary of the organization spoke. Sardar Nishtar, while replying to the address of welcome, promised that retrenchments would be carried out only on the basis of the enquiry committee's report and surplus workers retrenched would be provided with alternative jobs. Referring to the housing problem he said that he was ashamed by the mismanagement and it would be remedied soon. He promised to discuss the various problems concerning workers with the representatives of the EPREL and let them know of the solutions through the newspapers. He did not mention anything about the grain shops or the rationing arrangements and there was considerable resentment among the workers on that count.

Nishtar also visited Chittagong. He travelled by train and in the important railway stations, railway workers in large numbers gathered and presented memorandums to him.⁹⁷ In Chittagong, the railway authorities themselves arranged a meeting for Nishtar and thousands of workers assembled at the Polo Ground but refused to attend the meeting. In order to save face and to appease the workers, Nishtar himself went to the Polo Ground and requested the workers to come with him to the front of the railway building where the other meeting was arranged.⁹⁸ They responded to this request of Nishtar. A delegation of railway workers consisting of Nurul Cherag Ali, Mahbubul Huq, M.R. Khadem and others met Nishtar and presented their demands to him. But no satisfactory reply to any of their demands was given and this created a lot of resentment among the railway workers.⁹⁹

Though the East Pakistan Railway Employees League was originally organized under the guidance of the government and its leaders were collaborating with the government, yet with the passage of time, as discontent and resistance to government policies increased, the organization began to assume an anti-government character and the leaders of the EPREL had to at least outwardly express solidarity with common workers. This also happened because after the 9 March strike there was no other organization which could act in their interest and the East Pakistan Railway Employees League emerged at that point as a representative organization of the railway workers.

Throughout 1950 and 1951, the condition of railway workers continued to get worse.¹⁰⁰ The Pay Commission which was set up by the government turned out to be a big farce and the workers lost all faith in the sincerity of the government. Housing condition

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 April 1949.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15 April 1949.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 April 1949.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 June 1950.

remained miserable, retrenchment and chaos continued in matters of employment, harassment of workers were on the increase, there were no health and educational facilities for the workers and their children, and inordinate delays were caused in releasing pension money of retired employees.

On 18 September 1951, the third annual conference of the EPREL was held in Dhaka.¹⁰¹ Some progressive workers also joined the organization. Chowdhury Harunur Rashid of Chittagong and onetime leader of Railroad Workers Union, Jasimuddin of North Bengal, actively took part in the reorganization of the EPREL.

Post and Telegraph Workers

The condition of the Post and Telegraph workers was even worse than that of the railway workers. The first annual conference of the Post and Telegraph Union was held at the Bar Library Hall in Dhaka on 6 March 1949.¹⁰² Representatives of various districts, leaders of Railway Mail Service (RMS) and the leaders of the PTUF were present. The representatives of the Union gave detailed descriptions of the miserable condition of the workers. Workers reacted sharply on hearing reports of misbehavior of high officials in Bogra and Comilla and of the corruption in matters relating to settlement of land. Representatives of the Peon Association reported the condition of the postal peons and discussed the Pay Commission. The delegates of the Narayanganj branch of the Telegraph Union emphasized the necessity of maintaining unity of the workers.

Seventeen resolutions were adopted in this conference on enhancement of pay, grain shops in the mofussil areas, removal of corrupt and badly behaved officials from service etc. In another resolution it was said that in case of non-acceptance of their minimum demands a decision for strike would be taken by ballot. The conference also resolved to join the APTUF. A new committee of the Post and Telegraph Union was formed with a Siddiqui as president and Abu Taher as general secretary.

The third annual conference of All Pakistan Postman and Lower Grade Staff Union with RMS was held at Sylhet on 12 September 1950. It was presided over by Nurul Huda, the president of the APTUF.¹⁰³ Delegates from various regions of Pakistan attended the conference. The chairman of the reception committee, Gopikrishan Chowdhury, described in some detail the condition of the lower grade postal workers. Nurul Huda, in his address said that it was the duty of the government to provide proper livelihood for the poor postal workers who render valuable service to the people and that whenever anybody tried to inform the people about the real plight of the workers, the reactionary representatives of vested interests denounced them as communists, traitors etc.

¹⁰¹ *Naobelal*, 4 October 1951.

¹⁰² *Sainik*, 11 March 1949.

¹⁰³ *Naobelal*, 21 September 1950.

After this annual conference, district conferences of Post and Telegraph Unions were held in various places. Of these the district conference in Sylhet was one of the most important.¹⁰⁴ It was presided over by Mahmud Ali, editor of *Naobelal*. In his speech the provincial secretary of the Union, Golam Murtaza, said that it was no longer possible to carry on work on the basis of any compromise with the government, because they had closed all doors of compromise. He called upon the members of the Union to prepare for the ensuing struggle.

Towards the end of 1960, in late December, a meeting was held in Chittagong, and it was decided that on the fifteenth day of each month the post and telegraph workers would observe token strike between 9 and 11 a.m. They began to implement this decision from January.¹⁰⁵ But when there was no possibility of realizing their demands through this token strike they decided, in March 1951, that they would observe a general strike on 2 April 1951.¹⁰⁶

On being informed of the preparations of strike, the post master general of East Bengal issued a press note against it and in reply the post and telegraph workers issued an appeal to the people for their cooperation in which they elaborately described the economic condition of the workers and the general circumstances of their movement.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 December 1950.

¹⁰⁵ *Sainik*, 7 January 1951.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 April 1951.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 April 1951.

Chapter Ten

STRUGGLES OF TEXTILE, CEMENT, DOCK AND OTHER WORKERS

Textile Workers

During the Second World War textile unions were organized in Bengal under the leadership of the communist party workers and these were, at the time, the most powerfully organized unions among all the communist-led working class organizations. In the district of Dhaka the textile workers played the most effective role in implementing the social, economic, cultural and political programme of the party. The textile unions of the Narayanganj unit of the Communist Party was very powerfully organized. The success of the textile workers strike in Narayanganj at the time of the general election of 1946 indicated the strength and influence of the Communist Party among the textile workers in Bengal.¹⁰⁸

Between August 1946 and August 1947, there were widespread communal disturbances and both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League used these as a political tool to promote their influence among industrial workers. The partition of the country had its impact on the textile workers and the situation worsened when warrants of arrest were issued against a number of them in connection with their earlier strike between March and May 1946. Some were actually arrested by the government in connivance with the mill owners.¹⁰⁹

Almost immediately after the partition of Bengal, about 400 workers of the No. 2 Dhakeshwari Mills were retrenched. Some of the textile workers left the country. But the influence of the communists in the textile unions remained considerable, and they were quite active. During the formation of EPTUF in Narayanganj, in October 1947, the Communist Party was able to play an important role. The communist-led textile unions along with railway, tea and other industrial workers worked together as a strong group led by Nepal Nag and Anil Mukherjee, both leaders of the Narayanganj textile workers, became vice-president and assistant secretary, respectively, of the EPTUF.¹¹⁰

A false murder case was initiated against Anil Mukherjee and a warrant for his arrest was issued. Therefore, it was not possible for him to work openly. At the time Nepal Nag, the most influential communist leader among the working class, became an important factor in the EPTUF. But their position suffered a serious setback after the second congress of the CPI when their relation with the government suddenly

¹⁰⁸ Ranesh Dasgupta (written note).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

worsened and they adopted a line of armed struggle for overthrowing the state. This made it virtually impossible for the communists to participate in the open mass or even class organizations and their armed struggle tended to take the terrorist path.

The government raided trade union workers in the communist dominated areas and leading workers had to go into hiding. Some were arrested. The EPTUF, which was dominated by pro-government elements, expelled the Textile Workers Union. At that time the Communist Party was not actually banned officially, but such was the scale of repression that no open movement or work was possible. They were hunted down and arrested. Thus, trade union work became impossible and even underground work could not be carried out. So whatever work was done came to an end by late 1949.¹¹¹

The President of EPTUF, Faiz Ahmed, could not bring the Chittagong National Cotton Mill Workers Union (CNCMWU) under its control till 1951. Towards this end they conspired with the government against that union and tried to break it up. On 4 May 1951, the government called a tripartite meeting at Narayanganj to resolve the differences between the workers and mill-owners. When the secretary of the CNCMWU, Satishchandra Bhadra, reached Narayanganj to attend that meeting, he was arrested. In protest¹¹² the vice-president, Sirajul Islam, and assistant secretary, Makhraj Rahman, issued a statement that since January 1950, six hundred cotton mill workers were struggling to get a minimum wage of Rs 30, dearness allowance of Rs 30 and overtime allowance and bonus. Except a few agents of the mill-owners 99 percent workers participated in the protest and thus Faiz Ahmed was unable to get any decision in the tripartite meeting.

Before the scheduled meeting at Narayanganj, a proposal was sent to Faiz Ahmed for consideration of the EPTUF in which they asked them to hold a meeting of textile workers representatives and formulate specific demands and also elect delegates for the Narayanganj meeting. They also informed Faiz Ahmed that no agreement contrary to the interests of the workers would be acceptable to them, if it was made without paying any heed to the proposal forwarded by them. In this statement, issued after the arrest of Satishchandra Bhadra, they also said that their union had unanimously decided to go on an indefinite strike from 7 May 1951, for the release of their secretary, and for pressing their demands.

At this point the government and the EPTUF became very hostile towards all the textile unions, which were outside their influence and control and consequently, trade union movement in the cotton textile sector was virtually destroyed.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Naobelal*, 10 May 1951.

Assam Bengal Cement Factory Workers

The Assam Bengal Cement Factory was the only cement factory in the whole of Bengal at the time of partition. It was situated in Chatak in the district of Sylhet, a part of East Pakistan, but its owner was an Indian. The ownership remained unchanged after 14 August 1947 and though the factory was in East Pakistan, everything concerning the factory, even worker-owner relation, was looked after and controlled by the government of Assam.

The workers of the Assam Bengal Cement Factory went on strike on 15 October 1947, in support for a number of demands.¹¹³ After the 15 October strike the Assam government appointed an adjudicator in the last week of November 1947, for settling the demands of the workers.¹¹⁴ The demands of the cement workers included re-appointment of retrenched workers, fixation of minimum wage at Rs 35, dearness allowance of Rs 45 for all, revision of the prevailing grade system, introduction of monthly wage instead of daily wage, provident fund for all, weekly holiday without wage cut, annual leave like government employees, general wage increase at the rate of Rs 5 per annum, provision for treatment during illness, brick-built residential accommodation for all, provision for regular ration, end to retrenchment, and recognition of their union etc.¹¹⁵

The judgment of the adjudicator was published after five months. There was no mention in it of minimum wage, wage increase, dearness allowance etc. The adjudicator accepted the unilateral right of the factory owner to retrench workers and so there was no question of their re-employment. There was no question of recognition of their union, though they accepted it in principle. In this connection the relevant law of the central Indian government was invoked and the report refrained from giving any clear judgment. After the publication of this judgment there was very sharp rise in resentment and opposition among the workers of the Assam Bengal Cement Factory.¹¹⁶

A meeting of the executive committee of the cement workers union was held on 16 March 1949 and on the same day Dijen Some, a leading worker of the union was arrested by the police. The factory management and some local smugglers were involved. The arrest created strong reaction among the workers and they gathered in a meeting to protest against the arrest and to denounce the government for this action.¹¹⁷

There had been no improvement in the condition of the workers since independence, and in spite of some trade union activities the owners remained free to exploit and

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Naobelal*, 7 June 1949.

repress the workers. In this they were always helped by the East Pakistan government and the police.

The ninth annual conference of the Assam Bengal Cement Factory Union was held in Chatak on 22 April 1951.¹¹⁸ The conference was presided over by Mahmud Ali, former general secretary of the undivided Assam Provincial Muslim League. A number of resolutions were adopted and a report on the condition of the workers and the exploitation and repression by the factory owners and the government was read out. Fourteen specific demands were formulated for presentation to the factory authorities and the government. It included minimum monthly wage of Rs 55, dearness allowance at the rate of Rs 35 per month, introduction of rationing, residential accommodation for all etc. A number of Sylhet Muslim League leaders were present in this conference and from among them Mahmud Ali, Nurur Rahman, Matsir Ali and Hasan Ali addressed the workers. Mahmud Ali was elected president of the Assam Bengal Cement Factory Workers Union replacing Abdul Bari Chowdhury who had died earlier. These Muslim League leaders of Sylhet had formally remained in the Muslim League but they actually represented a dissident group. Most of them later left the Muslim League.

Three meetings of the executive committee of the Union were held on 14 and 15 June 1951¹¹⁹ presided over by Mahmud Ali. In a resolution it drew the attention of the labor minister of Pakistan and the labor commissioner of the East Bengal government to the practice of direct retrenchment of workers, temporary removal and punitive warning without any proper ground. It was also resolved that if the company did not stop repression of workers in violation of all rules and laws then a very serious situation would arise and the company alone would have to bear all responsibility.

On 15 June, a delegation of the Union led by Mahmud Ali met the Chief Engineer Sheaffar and discussed the condition and demands of the workers. They complained against the factory physician, maintenance of the canteen and grain shop, dearth of sugar and kerosene oil etc. Sheaffar assured the delegation that he would look into their grievances and try to do as much as possible. But he expressed his inability to do anything in the matter of the punitive measures taken against the workers by the factory management.¹²⁰ The same day a general meeting of the workers presided over by Mahmud Ali was held and the secretary of the union, Matsir Ali, as well as Nurur Rahman, Habibur Rahman, Samru Mian, Rais Mian and Goswami spoke. They all emphasized the unity of workers. Mahmud Ali said that the Union should be liquidated if they failed to preserve unity.

A similar meeting was held on 12 November 1951, to protest against the rude and unjust conduct of the chief engineer and continuous retrenchment of the workers by

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 April 1951.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 June 1951.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21 June 1951.

him. They denounced the factory management for not keeping their promises given to the workers several times. They informed the assembled workers that in the face of such conduct of the management, they had appealed to the labor commissioner of East Bengal. The workers declared that they would continue the movement until their demands were met. Matsir Ali appealed to the workers to contribute one-day wage to the Union fund for strengthening the movement, to which they all agreed.¹²¹

In spite of all this the workers of the Assam Bengal Cement Factory Union could not organize any powerful movement to press for their demands. In January 1952, a delegation of Mahmud Ali, Matsir Ali, Muniruddin Ahmad and two others, met the labor commissioner on behalf of the Union, in Dhaka. After hearing them the labor commissioner, almost as a matter of routine, assured them that he would look into their grievances and remedy the wrongs done to them.¹²²

The communists had no influence in the Chatak Cement Factory Union at that time and there were no powerful opposition in East Bengal. The Muslim League leaders were like dissidents, but they had no real stake or commitment in the workers movement. They did have some link with the underground communist party of Sylhet. Occasionally they would attend meeting, express solidarity with the workers, make representations to the factory management and the labor commissioner. But they had no real interest in organizing a strong movement in support of the demands of the cement workers.

Chittagong Dock Workers

Thousands of dock workers in the Chittagong port had to work under very miserable circumstances, but in the absence of any well-organized and active union, the exploitation of dock workers was much higher than in the case of other workers. These dock workers were not employed by any particular company as no such company existed in the Chittagong port area. They were engaged by contractors, and paid on a daily basis and had no regular wage, job security or any other worker's rights.

On 12 and 13 August 1949, the dock workers were not paid anything though they did full time work. Before this, for about three months, the contractors had not made regular payments. So on 13 August, after being refused payment, 5000 workers went on strike from 7 p.m. to 12 midnight. The jetty superintendent promised the workers that if they withdrew the strike and went to work then all their dues would be duly paid. Thus assured the workers resumed work, but nothing was done to pay their wages. On the contrary they were asked to work on 14 August, the Independence Day of Pakistan although it was a national holiday. The workers reacted sharply and refused to work. They immediately went on strike, surrounded the house of the jetty superintendent and raised slogans against him. The superintendent telephoned the general manager who

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 15 November 1951.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 10 January 1952.

realized the seriousness of the situation, and arranged to pay Rs 5000 to the workers as wages. The contractors threatened the workers that they would bring in workers from outside if they again resorted to strike.¹²³

At the end of January 1950, the dock workers, in a meeting of the Mariners' and Employees Union, decided to go on strike if their demands were not met.¹²⁴ The meeting was presided over by Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury. But nothing was actually done to organize the strike, and the condition of the workers remained unchanged. In August, an open letter on behalf of 10,000 workers was sent to the labor minister and labor commissioner,¹²⁵ which highlighted the condition of the oppressed jetty and port workers. They thought it necessary to mention right in the beginning, that of the 10,000 dock workers 100 percent were Muslims. The exploitation and repression perpetrated on them by the foreign and local steamer companies and their agents and stevedores and the labor contractors had continued, and in fact, it had increased, after independence. They had bled by war, famine and destructive communal riots. Their only profession was selling their labor power, but there was no work for them for fifteen days of the month. The workers stated that they did not know who their real employers were though in almost all other ports of the world various companies have permanent workers' register. In the Calcutta port Kelen, B.I. Ilias and other companies paid two rupees and four annas wage for daytime, and five rupees eight annas for night, and eight annas for extra work. But the same companies paid them one rupee and eight annas and two rupees for the same hours of work. Also in all the ports of the world workers worked for not more than seven or eight hours a day, but in Chittagong they had to work for nine hours. There was no arrangement for treatment of the sick and no compensation for injury at work. Every night there were cases of injury and even death, and there was no arrangement for physical security of workers at work. Were they to accept such terrible oppression as law in Pakistan? They concluded by pointing out that by exploiting their labor the handful of foreign and local rich employers were pocketing crores of rupees and living a luxurious life, while the workers, who were the backbone of East Pakistan were not destined to have even two meals a day. They ended the letter by requesting that necessary steps be taken to alleviate their grievances, before they were forced to take any form of extreme action.

The letter was ignored by the government and the condition of the workers at the Chittagong port remained unchanged. The dock workers were so disorganized and weak that they had no way of reacting to government inaction. Ironically the traders in the Chittagong port went on strike on 9 and 10 November 1950, and on 11 November. After negotiation between the traders and the port authority, the latter assured the traders that their grievances and demands would be considered by them.¹²⁶

¹²³ *Sainik*, 26 February 1949.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3 February 1950.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 August 1950.

¹²⁶ Naobelal, 23 November 1950.

The port workers then forwarded an ultimatum to the chairman of the Chittagong Port Commission in August 1951. They asserted that no fraudulent conduct of the authorities with the workers would be tolerated regarding the Pay Commission, the nepotism and corruption by the higher port officials would have to be stopped, residential accommodation for all workers must be provided, the Chittagong dock workers would have to be paid the same wages as the Karachi dock workers. They said that if their demands were not met then they would go on strike.¹²⁷ At the same time the Chittagong Port Mariners' Association held a general meeting of the port workers with Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury presiding. Various problems of the dock workers were discussed and the policy pursued by the port authorities toward the workers was denounced. Attention of the port authorities were also drawn to the fact that the workers of Karachi port, RSN Company of Chittagong, IGN Railway Company Limited, Burmah Oil Company (Pvt.) etc. were getting higher wages and many facilities not available to the Chittagong dock workers.¹²⁸

The demands were also discussed in the executive committee meeting of the Port Mariners' Association and it was decided that if the authorities did not take immediate initiative in solving those problems, the workers would be forced to go on an indefinite and all-out strike. But in spite of these repeated attempts it was not possible for them take any strike action because they lacked proper leadership and organization.

Burmah Oil Company Workers

There was no oil industry in East Pakistan at the time of partition. The Burmah Oil Company imported oil and distributed it. The headquarters of this company was in Chittagong. The Burmah Oil Company (BOC) workers had a union. For three successive years company authorities ignored even the minimum demands of the workers and remained totally indifferent. So, on 15 January 1951, the workers called a meeting in the Double Mooring area of Chittagong with the purpose of calling a strike. More than a thousand workers were present and the meeting was presided over by Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury.¹²⁹

In his opening address the secretary of the BOC Workers' Union, Abdul Hai, spoke on the grievances and demands of the oil workers. He revealed that after the establishment of Pakistan, this workers' union had held discussion with the BOC authorities on the demands put forward by them. But the authorities did not pay any heed to these demands. In the pre-partition days petrol was sold at the rate of one rupee four annas, but in 1951 it was selling at four rupees four annas per gallon. In spite of this increase in the price of petrol, the wage of the workers remained unchanged. Thus, British traders were making huge profits by maximizing the exploitation of the workers. Abdul Hai

¹²⁷ *Sainik*, 5 August 1951.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Sainik*, 28 January 1951.

said that earlier the BOC workers union had forwarded the demands to the labor commissioner who as a mediator, between the workers union and the BOC authorities, fixed the daily wage at one rupee eight annas, monthly allowance of forty-five rupees and a house rent allowance of five rupees, subject to the approval of the BOC Board of Directors. Recently the manager of BOC had informed them that the Board of Directors had rejected their demands. For the last three years the authorities had done nothing to attend to their grievances and demand, and in fact, were trying to disrupt the unity and solidarity of the workers by employing agents. At the end of his address he said that in all countries of the world, the workers get a weekly holiday, but the BOC workers do not have any weekly holiday, though the higher officials did. The workers do not get any holiday even on the Independence Day of Pakistan. This act, in his opinion, actually amounted to a denial of the independence of Pakistan.

Abdul Hai then declared the earlier decision to go on an indefinite strike from 1 February 1951 as a correct step. Others also supported the demands of the workers and their decision to go on strike and promised to strengthen the movement. Maksudur Rahman and Azizur Rahman, both representing the Chittagong branch of Tamaddun Majlis, promised to render all possible help to them. The leader of the Chittagong Awami League, M.A. Aziz, while criticizing the barbaric policy of the BOC authorities, inaction of the Pakistan government and the Pakistan Muslim League, said that the British agents were unwilling to increase the wages of the workers by a few annas, but they spend five rupees per day on their dogs. At the end of the meeting Zahur Ahmad Chowdhury, in his presidential speech, sharply criticized the labor policy of the Pakistan government and denounced the Factory Law created by the British and demanded its abolition.

It is important to note that in most mills, factories, trading establishments workers were deprived of a holiday even on the independence anniversary of Pakistan. The government remained quite indifferent to this practice. It actually indicated a deep lack of concern for the toiling people by the new rulers of Pakistan.

It was decided that if the BOC authorities refused to meet the demands of the workers, then they would go on an indefinite strike from 1 February 1951. Since the authorities did not respond to the workers' demands, within the prescribed time limit, the workers went on strike and this continued for two weeks. This forced the BOC management to accept some of the principal demands of the workers. The daily wage was raised from one rupee and four annas to one rupee and six annas, wage including dearness allowance rupees eighty-six per month, twenty-seven days leave instead of seventeen days per annum. Holiday on Pakistan's Independence Day, right of workers to hold meeting outside the BOC company premises, one month's bonus for 1949-50 etc. and a few other small demands were accepted by the company authorities.¹³⁰ The success of

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 February 1951.

the BOC workers strike was the greatest victory of the workers' strike movement in the whole of East Pakistan to date.

Bata Shoe Workers

In 1950, after the February communal riots in both East and West Bengal, a large number of Bata Shoe Company workers came to East Bengal as refugees. They had no employment here and they appealed to both the Bata Company authorities and to the East Bengal government, but to no avail. Their condition was quite desperate and they launched a movement on the basis of certain demands.

On 20 January 1951, while a meeting of the provincial Muslim League council was being held at the Mukul cinema hall, Dhaka, the Bata workers arrived there in a procession. They had hoped that the Muslim League government would listen to what they had to say and put pressure on the Bata company authorities to accept their demands. But instead the Muslim League let loose their musclemen and hooligans on the workers. They were mercilessly beaten and some were seriously injured. The procession was broken up and dispersed.¹³¹

The Bata workers then began a movement for the boycott of Bata shoes, on 20 April 1951. Expressing solidarity with this movement the general secretary of the East Pakistan Youth League, Oli Ahad, made a statement to the press that the demand of the jobless Bata workers for setting up new Bata factories in East Pakistan and absorbing them was quite legitimate.¹³² This boycott movement continued for some time. It was reinforced by the arrival of workers retrenched in India. They appealed to the people not to buy Bata shoes and wore black badges while picketing in front of Bata shops. But neither the company nor the government took any steps for the rehabilitation of these workers and by the end of 1951, the movement of the Bata workers slowly disintegrated.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 28 January 1951.

¹³² *Pakistan Observer*, 20 April 1951.

Chapter Eleven

CONDITION OF WORKERS IN THE TEA GARDENS

Sylhet was the only tea-growing area in Eastern British India to be included in Pakistan. Most of the workers who worked the Sylhet tea gardens came from Bihar, United Provinces, Madhya Pradesh, Santal Pargana, i.e. from Central and Northern India. For generations they had worked in these tea gardens, losing all connections with their ancestral homes and staying on as permanent residents. At the time of partition, there were more than a hundred thousand tea garden workers in Sylhet.

The tea workers lived in the areas of their work and women and children also worked in the tea gardens. The women picked the tea leaves, and were engaged in other kinds of work as well but, were paid less than the male workers. The male workers were paid forty-four paises as daily wage, whereas the female workers were paid thirty-seven paises.¹³³

The tea garden workers were given two types of work-*hajira* and *tikka*. Generally the regular workers were given some specific job and a daily fixed wage. If after the completion of regular work, they had surplus time they could be engaged for extra work, called *tikka*. It could not be described as overtime, because this was minor work compared with the work they had to do in *hajira*. The wage for *tikka* was also less.¹³⁴

The tea workers union of this area was called the Surma Valley Tea Workers' Union, and its headquarter was in Kachar, which like Sylhet was another district of the province of Assam. During the 1930s there was no separate tea workers' union in Sylhet. Later, in 1945, a separate tea workers union called the Srihatta Jela Cha Sramik Union (Sylhet District Tea Workers' Union) was formed under the communist-led All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).¹³⁵ Prasanta Datta, Digen Dasgupta, Sudhansu Ghosh, Ajoy Bhattacharya and others of the Sylhet District Communist Party were the principal organizers. They were quite active in the tea garden areas up until 1950. Then their organization suffered a serious setback because of the pursuit of the B.T. Ranadive line in all areas of East Pakistan, including Sylhet.¹³⁶

In March 1950, the labor commissioner of East Bengal wrote the following in the East Pakistan labor journal about communist activities:

¹³³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Labour Movement in East Pakistan*, p. 34.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48-9.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹³⁶ Ajoy Bhattacharya (interview).

Persons engaged in destructive work are busy in forming groups and sub-groups among the workers, particularly among the tea garden workers and the textile workers. The existence of the groups engaged in destructive work is known from the distribution of objectionable leaflets supporting armed struggle and their advice to the workers to follow the example of China and Burma.¹³⁷

Until January 1948, the tea garden owners supplied rice to the workers. With the serious food crisis in East Pakistan and famine conditions in many areas, including Sylhet, the price of rice shot up and the East Bengal government informed the tea garden owners that they would not be able to supply rice to the tea gardens. The Surma Valley branch (re-named Pakistan Tea Association in 1948) of the Indian Tea Association decided that from then onwards the workers of the tea gardens would not be supplied any rice and instead, as a compensation, every adult worker would be given three annas as extra dearness allowance. The workers reacted immediately and began a movement against it under the leadership of the communists.¹³⁸

On 9 June 1948, a report published in the weekly *Janashakti* of Sylhet entitled 'Ration of the Garden Workers' stated that the owners of the Sirajnagar garden had stopped supplying rice to the tea workers and forced them to buy it from the open market at a very high price. When the workers protested the garden management used the police against them. A protest letter was sent to the *Naobelal* of Sylhet by Kaiser Rashid Chowdhury, the owner of the Sirajnagar tea garden:

Instigated by a few persons belonging to a political party, the workers refused to join work on 4 June. In order to avoid any undesirable situation, we stopped work on 5 June. The next day work started with a few workers. In the same afternoon, the Salar-e-Subah of the Pakistan National Guard, officer-in-charge of Kulaora police station and the Inspector of the Intelligence Branch reached the garden. After discussions with the workers, they were able to remove misconceptions from their minds. Very easily they got information about a group of dishonest people engaged in creating trouble in the tea gardens in the Pakistan region.¹³⁹

There was no doubt that by 'a group of dishonest people engaged in creating trouble in the tea gardens', the owner of the Sirajnagar tea garden meant the communists and people related with them. With increase in dissatisfaction among the workers of the tea gardens, the government appointed the managers of tea gardens as storing and procuring agents of rice, in order to facilitate the supply of rice to the workers. Although, the rice dealers and about 500 employees and workers under them became

¹³⁷ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Labour Movement in East Pakistan*, p. 45.

¹³⁸ *Naobelal*, 17 June 1948.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

unemployed, some sort of arrangement was made for supply of rice to the tea garden workers.¹⁴⁰

The Pakistan Tea Conference was held in Sylhet on 26 January 1949, presided over by Fazlur Rahman, the industry and commerce minister of Pakistan. According to a report there were 133 tea gardens in Pakistan (Sylhet) and the cultivated area under these gardens was 74,108 acres. The conference expressed satisfaction at the steps taken by the government in removing all impediments to the tea industry. The conference considered reports and resolutions of six sub-committees. Tea garden owner and Muslim League Assembly member, Modabber Hossain Chowdhury, objected to the inclusion of the Ispahani's in each sub-committee but no change was made. The Ispahani Company had begun to invest in the tea industry in a big way. A recommendation was made to supply four seers of rice per head per week to the tea workers.

To propagate communalism and place demands on a communal basis, an organization called East Pakistan Tea Garden Muslim Employees Association was formed. The annual conference of this association was held in the Srimongal Town Hall on 20 February 1949, presided over by Khwaja Nasrullah, the chief whip of the East Bengal government. The following report was published in the weekly *Naobelal* on the conference:

There are about 1300 employees in the tea gardens of East Pakistan. Of them the number of Muslims is only 148. In spite of making repeated promises for fulfilling the rightful demands of the Muslims in the tea industry, the white managers remained indifferent. A resolution was adopted for appointing one Muslim apprentice per 300 acres of land in the tea gardens of East Pakistan so that all future vacancies can be filled by appointing Muslims, thereby filling the 70 percent rightful quota for the Muslims and providing full opportunity to the Muslims in the of appointment as Assistant Managers.¹⁴¹

The secretary of Srihatta Jela Cha Sramik Union toured the tea gardens of Sylhet for about three weeks in October 1950, and reported¹⁴² that in most of the gardens rice was again being distributed through ration, but the quality of rice was extremely bad as a large amount of paddy and husk were mixed with the rice and workers had to buy it at seven rupees per seer. In the Teliapara Tea garden no one was given sickness allowance if he suffered from fever for more than three days. The workers refused to buy oil in the Khejuri division, because it was bad, and in the Phulchara garden the workers refused to buy *dal* (lentil), because it was smelly. The management of the Khejuri division later supplied good oil.

¹⁴⁰ *Naobelal*, 3 February 1949.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Naobelal*, 3 March 1949.

The influence of the Communist Party among the tea garden workers almost came to an end by 1950. At the time Purnendu Kishore Sengupta, Congress member of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, became the leader of the Srihatta Jela Cha Sramik Union. Under his leadership there was no activity among the tea workers. Taking advantage of the situation the government and the tea garden owners naturally increased their exploitation and control of the workers.¹⁴³

The annual conference of the Srihatta Jela Cha Sramik Union was held at Kulaura on 22 July 1951, presided over by Purnendu Kishore Sengupta. More than 150 delegates attended the conference. The worker delegates from various areas complained about the cost of rations and its bad quality. Even the quantity of ration was inadequate and in order to meet the deficit, the workers had to buy rice from the bordering areas. While bringing in the rice the Ansars harassed them.

A number of resolutions were passed in the conference mentioning various demands which included the establishment of child care units for looking after children during the work hours of the women, supplying of new knife and spade in those gardens supplying clothes to the women workers as was done before.

¹⁴³ Ajoy Bhattacharya (interview).

Chapter Twelve

PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS ON THE STRIKE PATH

During the Pakistan movement there were high hopes regarding improvement of living conditions and the quality of life in general. The primary school teachers too hoped for a better future. What happened was that the government, instead of assessing their condition and paying attention to their demands remained completely indifferent and even hostile to them. In order to assess their condition they began to hold meetings in various areas and discussed their problems. They felt that their condition had deteriorated in the new country and they were, in fact, worse off than in British India.

A statement regarding the condition of primary school teachers, and what the government had planned for them, was issued by Ahmad Hussain, secretary Pabna District Primary School Teachers Association, on 15 October 1948,¹⁴⁴

The cat will be out of the bag if we clearly state what is there in the new scheme. In fact, there was an instruction of the DPI which said that on the basis of population census of 1941, per two thousand people each one school will have to be closed down. On this basis there will be 493 schools in the Sirajganj sub-division. At present the number of schools run by the School Board is 641. In addition to these, the number of aided schools, girls' schools, ME schools and primary sections attached to *madradas* are 137. So, according to the government instruction, 285 schools will have to be closed down.

On the whole, as a result of the scheme, 40 percent to 50 percent schools in East Pakistan were closed down. In Natore sub-division alone the number was 400. From the above-mentioned account, it can be easily guessed how many primary school teachers were thrown out on the streets after being retrenched. On the other hand, the salary scale of primary school teachers are: 19 rupees 50 paises per month for third teacher, 27 rupees per month for second teacher and 29 rupees per month for first teacher.

The direct result of this extreme neglect of the primary teachers by the government is the starvation death in hospital of Nazimuddin, a teacher of Idgaon school of Chittagong. At the time of his death his three month's salary was due. For similar reason, in the same district, four more primary teachers died and two committed suicide.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted from Oli Ahad's address in the educational conference at Dhaka (15 September 1950), *Satyajug*, Calcutta, 1 October 1950.

A conference of the primary school teachers was held in Dhaka in the Salimullah Muslim Hall, on 27 March 1949.¹⁴⁵ The conference was inaugurated by Maulana Akram Khan and presided over by Abdur Rahman Khan. About 2500 primary school teachers from various districts of East Bengal attended the conference. Abdur Rahman Khan in his address said:

The success of our educational planning will depend on capable teachers. In order to have capable teachers, they will have to be paid proper salary.... These days a common wage laborer earns 2 rupees a day. The primary teachers must be paid at least that.

It is clear from this statement that at that time the primary teachers were being paid less than what was paid to the day laborers, who were themselves in great difficulty and distress. The general secretary of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association (EPPTA), Abul Fazal, presented a report in the conference:

So far the government has totally disregarded the Association. They have just ignored it. When the Association served a strike notice, the government, through their obedient newspapers and the administrative machinery of the education department tried to break their strength and solidarity.

It was also stated by him that as per a resolution adopted on 16 March 1948 by the executive committee of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association, an ultimatum was served to the East Bengal government to the effect that if they did not include the demands of the primary teachers in their next budget, then they would call a special conference of the East Pakistan primary teachers and be compelled to take an extreme step, which actually meant a general strike. When their deputation met the education minister, he said that the Pakistan state was still an infant and the teachers should wait.

The primary teachers of Porsha, Dhamaierhat, Patnitala etc. had not been paid their salary for the past two years. The president, vice-president and secretaries of the EPPTA met government officials of the education department three times, with no result. All attempts of the Dhaka district teachers for enhancing their salary also failed. Finally, the general secretary of the EPPTA made the following plea to the delegates to the primary teachers' conference:

Friends, the phase of entreaty and appeal has ended. With beggars' bowl in hand, you have always received neglect and indifference. It must be remembered that no one respects the weak. You have to advance firmly according to the instructions of the association.

¹⁴⁵ Full report of the Conference, *Sainik*, 8 April 1949.

On 27 April 1950, a conference of the East Pakistan primary teachers was held at the Chayabani Hall in Mymensingh.¹⁴⁶ As president of the reception committee of the conference, the chairman of the Mymensingh District School Board, Abdul Monayem Khan, supervised all arrangements of the conference. The conference was inaugurated by education minister Abdul Hamid and presided by Ibrahim Khan, the president of East Pakistan Secondary Education Board. A very large number of primary teachers from the various districts of East Bengal attended. Professor Mohammad Azimuddin and Abul Fazal were elected president and general secretary of the EPPTA respectively, for the following term.

The *Naobelal*, in order to draw the attention of the people and warn the government of the critical situation in the sphere of education wrote in an editorial,

About one lakh teachers get monthly salary of between 15 and 32 rupees. The prices of rice and other daily necessities are rising rapidly, and it can be easily imagined how these ill-fated ones are living with their children and families. These teachers were only demanding, according to Pay Commission Report, a salary equal to that of peons, guards and *chaprasis* and a provision for receiving the meager amount of their provident fund money at the far end of their life, so that with that they could manage their last days. Such was their minimum demand.¹⁴⁷

When, the government did not take any step to attend to the distressing condition of the primary teachers, the executive council of the EPPTA met on 27 October 1950, in Chandpur.¹⁴⁸ It was decided that if the East Bengal government did not fulfill their demands by 31 December, then from 1 January 1951, the primary teachers would go on an indefinite strike. It was also decided that on 2 December they would observe 'primary teachers day'. The council decided that an action committee would be formed in each district, consisting of nine members. In addition a provincial action committee would be formed with the president and secretary of the EPPTA along with Haji Syed Sultan (Chittagong), Abdul Ghani (Rangpur), Fattah Khan (Mymensingh), Mohammad Sakhawat Ali (Comilla) and Mohammad Ahmad Hossain (Pabna).

After the Chandpur meeting, preparations to carry out the resolutions began all over East Bengal. The East Bengal government resorted to all kinds of manipulations to face the situation. The government issued a press note on the demands and the statements of the teachers. In reply to this press note the president of the EPPTA, Mohammad

¹⁴⁶ *Naobelal*, 25 May 1950.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 June 1950.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16 November 1950.

Azimuddin, made a counter-statement, denouncing the misrepresentations of the government and describing the actual condition of the teachers.¹⁴⁹

In the press note concerning education, referring first to the critics of governmental indifference in the educational system, it has been said that all criticisms are the result of complete ignorance, and are destructive. But many such misleading matters have been introduced in the press note as will deprive our countrymen from knowing the real situation. In fact, it will create confusion in the minds of many. The failure of the education department is most pronounced in the case of educational planning. But still the press note has mentioned the reports of two education commissions and their work. It will be enough to mention the effectiveness of these committees that it consists of preparing only a few whimsical questionnaires by officials of the education department. After collecting the opinions of the Union Board presidents, District Board chairmen, MLAs and educationists, they have been suppressed under the files of the education department. No committee has so far been formed with specialists in education and till now no committee has felt the necessity of touring the rural areas of Bengal and acquiring direct knowledge of the condition of education.

Owing to the sluggishness of the education department, the primary educational system has been harmed most. Since the introduction of the free education system, it is for the first time that the said press note has directly denied responsibility of directing primary education. The control of an urgent matter like the primary education system, the first step in the making of a nation, is resting on the shoulders of the School Boards. The District School Boards have now become the parading grounds of certain types of politicians and businessmen. Most of the members have no ability to direct primary education. The real matter is that fixing the salaries of this type of free primary schools, orders for closing down of schools and retrenchment of teachers, preparing syllabus, preparing plans for development of primary education and everything else are done by the education department of the government. In addition to this, the chief inspecting officer of the district acts as the secretary of the School Board as a government representative. In spite of having most of the responsibilities, why is the education department trying to avoid responsibility of directing primary education?

By avoiding responsibility of directing primary education, the Education Department has conspired to deny direct responsibility of closing down schools and retrenching teachers on a large scale in the districts of Chittagong, Barisal, Pabna, Bogra, Rajshahi etc. In some districts eight existing training centers have

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 November 1950.

been wound up and replaced by one training centre. Whereas in the previous eight centers 200 to 300 teachers received training, now arrangement has been made in one centre for the training of only 100 teachers. However, have not the bosses of the education department understood till now that there cannot be any development of primary education simply by establishing new training centers, without providing for proper living salaries of the primary teachers.

'Primary Teachers Day' was observed on 2 December 1950, all over East Bengal according to the decision of the executive council of the EPPTA. The primary teachers took a vow that if the government did not accept their demands by 31 December then from 1 January 1951, they would go on an indefinite strike.

But the primary teachers could not go on strike, though the government paid no heed to their demand, and there was no positive response from them till 31 December. A conference of the East Pakistan primary teachers was held on 15 and 16 February 1951, at the Rangpur Town Hall.¹⁵⁰ The elected president of this conference, Abul Mansur Ahmad, could not come due to illness, and his written address was read out. On the first day, the conference was presided by Abdur Rahman, a primary teacher from Mymensingh, and on the second day by Motaheruddin Ahmad, a primary teacher from Barisal. About a thousand delegates attended the conference from all districts of East Bengal except the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

On 15 February, the following resolution was adopted in the teachers' conference:

The demands of the primary teachers, repeatedly ignored by the government, and approaches to the Muslim League being of no avail, the conference decides to go on strike. The primary teachers of East Pakistan would observe token strike on 4th, 5th and 6th March and continue indefinite strike from the first of April.

Another resolution of the conference was:

Under the pretext of observing 'primary teachers' day on the preceding 2 December, the president of Mymensingh School Board (Abdul Monayem Khan-Badruddin Umar) withheld the bills of many primary teachers, and has oppressed the teachers by threatening them in various ways. The conference draws attention of the government to this, and demands a remedy without delay.

The primary teachers observed token strike in all schools from 4 to 6 March. In some places resolutions were adopted demanding the resignation of the education

¹⁵⁰ *Naobelal*, 22 February 1951; *Sainik*, 28 February 1951.

minister.¹⁵¹ In all the meetings organized by the teachers, they raised their united voice in support of continuing an indefinite general strike from 1 April 1951. After the three-day strike of the primary teachers in March, the *Naobelal* wrote in an editorial,

The primary teachers repeatedly informed all the learned people from one end of the country to the other, their sorrow and distress. Lakhs of applications are lying in the bag of worn out letters of the government of this independent country. The primary teachers are standing on the crossroads of life and death—there is no alternative for them.¹⁵²

Within three and a half years of the establishment of Pakistan, there was considerable political and social restlessness in East Bengal. The *Naobelal* warned the government:

The ministers, inexperienced in ruling a country, cannot see the fearsome sight of the dark cloud. The wind which has started to blow will sweep away all straws. People are becoming conscious of their responsibility to end that long night. It is undeniable that the liberation movement of the people is closely related to the impending strike of the primary teachers. The primary teachers have decided to go on strike on the basis of their specific demands. Side by side, various organizations are engaged in movements for breaking their economic, cultural and social chains. One is related to the other by a natural bond. The leaders of the state may renounce their human faculties, but instead of trying to save their existence by resisting the momentum of the oppressed peoples movement and hitting them, it is necessary to remove the causes of the impending strike of the primary teachers. We are asking the helmsmen of the state to be alert in due time. A great crisis will appear if the situation is not considered in its real context ... We hope that the government will realize the gravity of the issue and prevent the fire of unrest before the teachers implement their extreme line.

The warning in this editorial proved prophetic when one looks at the subsequent developments - the language movement of 1952 and finally the general election of 1954.

In order to ward off the ensuing strike, the East Bengal government issued a press note in the end of March 1951, announcing their decision to raise the salaries of the primary teachers.¹⁵³ It said that in all areas where free and compulsory primary education would be introduced the teachers would get a consolidated salary in the following scale: Headmaster, trained matriculate and of higher qualification, 50 rupees and 8 annas to 65 rupees and 8 annas; assistant teacher, trained matriculate, 45 rupees and 8 annas to 55 rupees and 8 annas; Assistant teacher, trained non-matriculate or untrained matriculate, 35 rupees and 8 annas to 50 rupees and 8 annas.

¹⁵¹ *Naobelal*, 15 March 1951.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Naobelal*, 22 March 1951.

The press note announced that within the next ten years, compulsory primary education would be introduced everywhere in East Bengal. Further, it went on to say that the job of the primary teachers had been made transferable and in areas where compulsory primary education had not been introduced, the annual increment of pay of headmaster would be at the rate of two rupees and eight annas and that of the assistant teacher one rupee and eight annas only. The pay scale was to be made effective from 1 April, the day on which the strike of the primary teachers was scheduled to begin. Another carrot was dangled before them on the eve of the strike. The press note said that those qualified headmasters who were working would be appointed to the newly introduced post of assistant sub-inspector, and in the near future these assistant sub-inspectors could be employed in the higher post of inspector of the education department.

The pay rise mentioned in the press note was so small that it created a negative reaction among the primary teachers. However, their sharpest reaction was against the government decision to make their jobs transferable. All teachers had some social influence in their own area, and the provision for transfer would destroy this. The primary teachers were very ill-paid and most of them had to do some extra work, farming and other, in order to meet their regular deficit. The teachers were very angry, and the press note, pushed them even more strongly on the strike path.

After the publication of this press note, the executive committee met at 32 Old Mughaltuli on 23 March.¹⁵⁴ The meeting was presided over by Mohammad Azimuddin and attended by the vice-president of the EPPTA, Professor Abul Kasem, and about forty members from the various districts. This meeting directed the primary teachers to go on strike from 1 April and continue indefinitely. Moreover, they declared that until proper living salary was provided none of them would be transferred from their own localities.

The primary teachers in all areas of East Bengal began their strike and the executive committee issued the following instructions to the teachers:

- (a) In each sub-divisional town, all teachers will gather on 5 April and arrange meetings and demonstrations.
- (b) By April 7, each District Association will send, to the Central Association, one fourth of the action fee.
- (c) During the strike the people will have to be informed of the reasons for the strike by organizing meetings in all areas.
- (d) By 15th April, the District Associations will have to get their affiliations.
- (e) On the 15th of April the next 'primary teachers day' will have to be observed everywhere. On this occasion, money will have to be collected from the people for the strike fund. Hartals, meetings and

¹⁵⁴ *Sainik*, 1 April 1951.

demonstrations will have to be organized. Special attention will have to be given to the urban areas for observing the day.¹⁵⁵

This strike received extensive support from the people. The progressive students and youth actively came forward in support of the strike.¹⁵⁶ On 27-28 March, the famous founding conference of the East Pakistan Youth League was held in Dhaka, and in that the following resolution was adopted:

The conference considers the demands of the neglected primary teachers just and reasonable; supports the decision of the primary teachers to begin strike on April 1 and demands the acceptance of their demands.¹⁵⁷

The problem of education was considered quite important by students and young people, and they had already begun a movement for changes in the educational system. Thus, their support for the primary teachers' strike was not nominal, but quite active. The primary teachers themselves also organized meetings quite extensively all over East Bengal in support of the strike, and consequently a considerable mass support was built up in its favor.¹⁵⁸

A meeting of the executive committee of the East Pakistan Teachers' Association was held at Aganagar (Jinjira, Dhaka) Primary School.¹⁵⁹ It was chaired by Azimuddin, and satisfaction was expressed at the response of the teachers. It was also decided that 2 May would be observed everywhere as the 'primary teachers day' and a special conference of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association would be convened at Chandpur on 11 May.

On 27 April 1951, the East Pakistan Awami League called a meeting at the Armanitola Maidan, Dhaka, in support of the strike. The same day Oli Ahad, the general secretary of the East Pakistan Youth League, made a statement in support.

Primary teachers of East Pakistan are on strike from 1 April on the basis of their demand for a living salary. As a result of this strike, thousands of schools have closed down, and the doors of education have been shut on children. From the attitude of the government towards the demands of the teachers, it appears that it is a deliberate policy of the government not to care for the education of the people. We have observed that at all stages, the government is pursuing a policy of providing opportunities for education to a small number. In order to save education, this policy will have to be resisted at any cost. Today the Awami

¹⁵⁵ *Naobelal*, 5 April 1951.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3 May 1951.

¹⁵⁷ *Pakistan Observer*, 31 March 1951; *Naobelal*, 12 April 1951.

¹⁵⁸ *Naobelal*, 3, 17, 24, and 31 April; 3, 17, 24, and 31 May; 7 June 1951.

¹⁵⁹ *Sainik*, 29 April 1951.

League has called a meeting at the Armanitola Maidan to express sympathy for the demands of the primary teachers. We, the workers of the Youth League, are expressing our whole-hearted support for the demands of the teachers, and appeal to the people to raise their voice against the policy of the government.¹⁶⁰

During this strike, the English daily *Pakistan Observer*, in an editorial captioned 'Primary Teachers' said that money could be available for introducing a programme for free primary education if the government did not spend money on absurd programmes like introducing Arabic script in Bengali.¹⁶¹ A protest against this was published in the same paper on 25 May which said that these allegations were baseless and misleading, that the provincial government had not spent any money on introduction of Arabic script in Bengali. The plan was in fact, approved by the centre and the central expenditure on it was Rs 50,000.¹⁶² However, the clarification did not invalidate the basic allegation made by the *Pakistan Observer* editorial. Money, and public money, spent on an obscure and retrograde programme by the centre, and not by the provincial government, did not absolve either the central or the provincial government from their responsibility in neglecting primary education and the interests of the primary school teachers.

In protest against the government policy and statements regarding the strike, as well as to show support for the strike, the *Naobelal* in an editorial on 17 May 1951 said that on the forty-third day of the strike of 80,000 primary school teachers, the education minister of the East Pakistan government, while denouncing the strike, said that the primary teachers are government servants and they can always try to change their condition, but they cannot justly resort to strikes. Moreover, he said that the two crore rupees which were being spent annually on primary education was a waste in the absence of properly trained teachers. So the government had taken a ten-year plan to train the primary teachers properly. If the government would now need to spend fourteen lakh rupees extra on account of pay rise of primary teachers, then it would greatly affect the government treasury and harm the teachers' training programme. With these arguments, he tried to justify his call, which was a sort of order, to the primary teachers to end their strike and return to their jobs. The *Pakistan Observer* strongly denounced the statement and said that if the government failed to face the realities of the situation, then the people would force them to concede to their demand.

On 15 May, a special conference of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association was held at Chandpur in accordance with an earlier decision on 12 May.¹⁶³ In the absence of the elected president, Faiz Ahmed, Hatem Ali Khan presided. About 500 delegates from various districts attended the conference. The president of the EPPTA, Azimuddin, explained the reasons for the teachers' strike, and some speakers, on behalf of the

¹⁶⁰ *Pakistan Observer*, 27 April 1951.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25 April 1951.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 25 May 1951.

¹⁶³ *Naobelal*, 24 May 1951.

people, addressed the conference. The primary teachers' representative, Abdul Ghani, spoke on the demands of the teachers. Four resolutions were adopted on the strike.¹⁶⁴ They were:

- (1) For the improvement of primary teachers, particularly for the living wage of the primary teachers, allowance, provident fund etc., the primary teachers of East Pakistan are on strike for the last one month and fifteen days. Recently the honorable education minister of the East Bengal Government has issued a statement on the strike which is unsympathetic, hopeless and contrary to any solution of their problem, and as such this conference is directing the primary teachers to continue the strike with sincerity, firmness and in full faith until the demands raised by the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association are solved on honorable terms.
- (2) This conference of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association is empowering the executive committee of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association to raise the demands of the primary teachers in the meeting of the District School Board Association in Dhaka on 16 and 17 May.
- (3) This conference of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association is giving full powers to the executive committee to conduct all activities in this emergency situation.
- (4) This conference is requesting the teachers and the people to observe at all places a 'Monajat Day' for the success of the primary teachers in their fight for bread.

In many places of East Bengal, leading personages made appeals for funds to financially help the striking teachers. In many areas public meetings were held in support of the demands of the striking teachers.

Nevertheless, in spite of all that happened, a very surprising press statement was issued on 2 June by the secretary of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association, Abul Fazal,¹⁶⁵ in which he directed the primary teachers to join work and announced the withdrawal of the two-month long strike. In his statement, he let out the information that through the mediation of Abdul Monayem Khan, the president of Mymensingh district school board, the Prime Minister of East Bengal, Nurul Amin, had promised to meet the demands of the teachers. However, Abul Fazal did not mention any specific demand which Nurul Amin had agreed to, but expressed the hope that no step would be taken against any of the striking teachers.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Naobelal*, 7 June 1951.

This statement was a clear betrayal of the cause of the primary teachers and of their two month-long strike. Monayem Khan who terrorized the striking teachers in Mymensingh as the president of school board, and against whom the EPPTA itself also took specific resolution, could not possibly act as a mediator and render any real help to the striking teachers. Thus, after the end of the strike, not a single demand of the teachers was fulfilled and they had to suffer long hardship due to delayed payment of their salaries for the period of strike.

The weekly *Sainik* of the Tamaddun Majlis in its editorial on 3 June 1951, one day after the strike ended wrote:

The news of a settlement by negotiation between the Prime Minister and teachers' representatives along with a statement by the general secretary of the Primary Teachers' Association have reached us. In it he has announced withdrawal of the strike. For various reasons, this strike has assumed special importance. The long strike by eighty thousand teachers, who are the backbone of the country's educational life, is truly a great affair. The contribution of the East Pakistan Provincial Teachers Association, the only organization of the poor teachers, is incomparable in the primary teachers' movement The compulsory primary education, which has now been introduced in one union in each *thana* at an enhanced salary, and the declaration by the government to the effect that it would be extended everywhere, is a direct result of the movement of this Association. But still the question arises as to why the strike failed to realize all its demands.

So the historic strike of the primary teachers in spite of being two-month long, was unable to practically realize any of the demands for which they fought. On the contrary, their main activity and movement after the end of the strike consisted of struggling for the salary for the duration of the strike.¹⁶⁶

Continuing in a lukewarm manner, on 5 October, a meeting of the executive committee of the East Pakistan Primary Teachers' Association met at 32 Old Mughaltuli, presided over by Professor Abul Kasem of the Tamaddun Majlis. The meeting regretted that in spite of assurances, the salaries of the primary teachers for the period of strike was not given and a request was forwarded to the authorities for the payment of that salary without delay.¹⁶⁷

Although the strike by the primary teachers failed to achieve the immediate objectives of their movement, its political impact on the people was great. The compromise by the leaders of the EPPTA, and false promises on the part of the government, the failure of

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 August 1951.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18 October 1951.

the strike, the attitude of the government towards the primary teachers created a political awareness among them and turned them against the government. This new consciousness of the primary teachers was politically very important and significant, because in spite of their poverty, they had considerable social influence in the rural areas. Moreover, they had very close link and relationship with the students, whose anti-government attitude was shaped largely by the influence of these primary teachers. Thus, in the entire rural areas of East Bengal, both the teachers and the students were actually set to act against the Muslim League at the time of the Language Movement of 1952 and the general election of 1954.

Chapter Thirteen

MUSLIM LEAGUE DEFEAT IN THE TANGAIL BYE-ELECTION

After he came to East Bengal from Assam, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was elected from Tangail (Muslim) constituency of Mymensingh district. He defeated Khurram Khan Panni, a *zamindar* of Karotia, who then filed an application for declaring the election of Bhashani as illegal. On the basis of this application the provincial governor cancelled the election and the seat of that constituency was declared vacant. Moreover, four persons including Bhashani and Khurram Khan Panni were declared ineligible for seeking election till 1950 for non-submission of election accounts.¹⁶⁸

In 1949, the East Bengal government announced bye-elections for the Tangail constituency. Mushtaq Ahmad, Shaokat Ali, Shamsul Huq, Kamruddin Ahmad, Nawabzada Hassan Ali and a few others met at 150 Moghultuli, the old 'Party House' established in Dhaka in 1944 by the followers of Abul Hashim, the then general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League and decided to put up Shamsul Huq, as their candidate, against the Muslim League. They again met at the residence of Khan Saheb Osman Ali of Narayanganj and finally Shamsul Huq was selected to contest the Tangail bye-election.¹⁶⁹

The working committee of the East Bengal Provincial Muslim League nominated Khurram Khan Panni. This came as a great surprise to everybody, because by a previous government decision Panni, along with Bhashani and two others, was barred from seeking any election till 1950. In order to enable Panni to contest as the Muslim League candidate, the provincial governor, by exercising his special powers, had withdrawn the prohibition order only against Panni.¹⁷⁰

This arbitrary and totally undemocratic action of the Muslim League aroused great resentment and protest in the opposition political circles and also among people belonging to various professions and among large sections of the masses. *Naobelal*, in an editorial, said,

Who will be responsible if the people withdrew support from the Muslim League as a result of its undemocratic policy? Is it the people or those who have adopted a fascist line by renouncing the fair policy of democracy? We are passing on this question to the people of East Pakistan, who firmly believe in democracy, for an

¹⁶⁸ *Naobelal*, 5 May 1949.

¹⁶⁹ Shaokat Ali (interview).

¹⁷⁰ *Naobelal*, 5 May 1949.

answer. What alternative can be there to following a fascist line by a political organization which does not go forward with any real developmental plan for the country?¹⁷¹

Shamsul Huq announced his decision to contest the bye-election. This created a positive reaction in the opposition circles and many came forward to support the candidature of Shamsul Huq. The political workers of the old Bengal Provincial Muslim League, who centered around the 150, Moghultuli 'Party House', became the main organizers of his election campaign. Shamsul Huq contested the election as an independent candidate. Kamruddin Ahmad, Shaokat Ali, Aziz Ahmad, Hazrat Ali and Shamsuzzoha, Mohammad Almas and Mohammad Awal of Narayanganj were among those who were active in this regard. The chief organizer was Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad.

Financing the election was a big problem and its magnitude can be realized from the negligible amount of money raised. Almas collected Rs 500 from Narayanganj area, Sakhawat Hossain of the Chamber of Commerce gave Rs 50, Aatur Rahman Khan and Kader Sardar gave Rs 50 and 150 respectively. Some money was collected by others and the total amounted to Rs 1300. The large financial strength of the Muslim League was quite alarming. But what surprised most people was that this financial situation did not create any real difficulty and impediment during the election.¹⁷²

The students of the local schools and the Karotia College played an important role in the election. Without expecting or taking any money from Shamsul Huq's election camp, they toured many areas and campaigned against the Muslim League. They even attended the election meetings of the Muslim League and by their relatively large presence converted such meetings into the platforms of the opposition. In three such meetings in which the Prime Minister Nurul Amin and other ministers were present, Shamsul Huq appeared and challenged the government on various issues. It was possible for Shamsul Huq to address such meetings and denounce the Muslim League without being beaten up or facing any other difficulty because the number of opposition workers and supporters was much larger than that of the other side.¹⁷³

During the election, provincial Muslim League president Akram Khan, general secretary Yusuf Ali Chowdhury and Prime Minister Nurul Amin circulated an appeal to the voters that the enemies of the infant state were trying to destroy it and it was the duty and responsibility of the voters to vote for the Muslim League candidate and uphold the honor and banner of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Kamruddin Ahmad (interview).

¹⁷³ Shaokat Ali, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad (interviews).

The daily *Azad* owned by Maulana Akram Khan, commented on the election contest in Tangail on 23 April 1949,

It is known that two candidates are contesting for the seat in this election. Of these two Khurram Khan Panni Saheb has got the nomination of the Muslim League. His rival Shamsul Huq Saheb was engaged in propaganda work for the Muslim League as a follower of the then Provincial League secretary Janab Abul Hashim about two years ago. It was expected that as a Muslim League worker candidate Janab Shamsul Huq would leave the election contest in favor of Janab Khurram Khan Panni, the candidate nominated by the Muslim League. But that has not happened. He has revolted against the Muslim League and ignoring the nomination of the Muslim League is contesting against the Muslim League candidate.

We are of course not surprised at this revolt by Shamsul Huq against the League. Even earlier, he was much more a blind adherent of Abul Hashim Saheb than a real League-minded worker. Here it is unnecessary to discuss again the reckless activities of Janab Abul Hashim, with which the people of East Pakistan, especially the Muslim Leaguers have considerable acquaintance. What is there to be surprised that the blind supporter and disciple of Abul Hashim Saheb is now disobeying the instruction of the League in a reckless manner?

Shamsul Huq won the Tangail bye-election by a large majority, but the daily *Azad* described the victory as marginal. Immediately after the election Shamsul Huq, Mushtaq Ahmad and a local Tangail worker Badiuzzaman were arrested because of their involvement in an incident involving Mohan Mian (Yusuf Ali Chowdhury), Shah Azizur Rahman and a few others. The young police officer who arrested them said that there was no possibility of their being released on bail, because they had been instructed from Dhaka not to do so. The officer then advised Shamsul Huq and Mushtaq Ahmad to file a case against Mohan Mian and Shah Azizur Rahman. When they did, the same police officer went to the residence of Khurshid Alam, the sub-divisional officer of Tangail, where Mohan Mian and Shah Azizur Rahman were staying. The police officer informed the SDO that he had come to arrest his guests in connection with the same case in which Shamsul Huq and others were arrested. The SDO asked the officer to move for bail for his guests, but the latter said that it was not possible if the others were not granted bail in the same case. So, Shamsul Huq and Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad were released on bail, but the case continued for several years and was later mutually settled.¹⁷⁴

In spite of Muslim League opposition, Shamsul Huq was given a big and warm reception at Dhaka. He was taken from the Dhaka railway station in a procession via

¹⁷⁴ Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad (interview).

Nawabpur Road to the Victoria Park (now called Bahadur Shah Park), where a public reception was held.¹⁷⁵

After the announcement of the result of the Tangail bye-election, *Azad* published a long editorial called 'The Tangail Bye-election', which clearly indicated a rift within the Muslim League organization and leadership. The editorial of 3 May 1949, said,

The Muslim League nominated candidate has been defeated in the Tangail bye-election. This is an extraordinary and unprecedented affair in the history of Muslim League election history. It could not be given so much importance if a Muslim League candidate was defeated in a general election. Because at that time the efforts for winning the League in election were spread out in many directions. But one cannot get away with that kind of excuses at being defeated in a bye-election.

...But the question arises, why did it happen?-After the establishment of Pakistan certain activities of the League reduced its popularity and effectiveness. The old appeal of the League for achieving Pakistan is no longer there, though the appeal to preserve Pakistan is still meaningful. The incomparable leadership of the Quaid-i-Azam is no more. The internal weakness of the League and the greed for power of the various governments established by the League have created a situation in which faults, deviations and errors are being observed. The League particularly has to confront the people, but the power is wielded by the government. Everywhere the influence of the government is molding the activities of the League including the matter of nominating candidate for the bye-election. Consequently, not only the burden of their own errors and deviations, but also the sins of governmental activities have to be borne by the League.

...It is now clear that and in many areas, abominable practices have broken the dam of people's tolerance. The Tangail bye-election is a declaration of this truth. This defeat undoubtedly is a defeat of the League, but in one sense it is a show of no-confidence in the government. The presence of five ministers during the electoral campaign could not influence the results. Everyone will have to think seriously the significance of this incident. Everybody will have to accept the Tangail defeat as a sign of great danger. Whether the banner of revolt raised against the League will one day engulf the whole of Pakistan, and the League and Pakistan will be separated and destroyed will have to be considered. Let us hope this opens the eyes of all Leaguers this is our prayer today.

This opinion of a pro-Muslim League paper owned by the president of the Provincial League reveals quite clearly the state of disarray into which the Muslim League

¹⁷⁵ Kamruddin Ahmad, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad (interviews).

organization and government were thrown after the Tangail bye-election. Though the editorial mainly targeted the government without touching the president of the Provincial League, Akram Khan, yet the Tangail election was a clear show of non-confidence against both. Commenting on this the opposition weekly *Sainik* said in its editorial of 6 May 1949,

...The *Azad* said that this election is a no-confidence against the government. We say that it is a firm no-confidence against the League leadership including its president. It also declared that the people want the abolition of zamindari system without compensation. It is rumored that certain of the defeat of the League candidate, the League authorities are not announcing the bye-election in Chittagong The Tangail election has opened the eyes of the people. Now nobody is hesitant or afraid to stand or vote against any government candidate. The ministers went to Tangail on government expenses, and were insulted and humiliated. At one time all places used to resound with the slogans raised by students, peasants and workers in their favor. Not only that, all the meetings of the ministers were converted into meetings of Shamsul Huq.

In spite of the most disgraceful defeat of the ruling Muslim League in the Tangail election, its leadership learnt nothing. They remained steadfastly engaged in all the nefarious activities which had already gone a long way in liquidating their popularity and legitimacy in the eyes of the people. They now conspired not to allow Shamsul Huq to take his seat in the East Bengal Assembly. As was done in Bhashani's case, an electoral case was filed against Shamsul Huq. The provincial government constituted a tribunal with justices Aminuddin Ahmad, Enayetur Rahman and Shaharuddin. In the first meeting of this so-called tribunal, it was decided that Shamsul Huq would not be able to take his seat in the East Bengal Provincial Assembly as an elected member until the case was finally settled.¹⁷⁶ The case against Shamsul Huq was filed on the basis of an election leaflet signed by Maulana Bhashani who was at that time detained in an Assam jail, where he had gone to meet some of his friends and religious followers. A Shamsul Huq supporter, Hazrat Ali, went to Assam and got the leaflet signed by Bhashani in his favor. It was alleged that the signature of Bhashani was a forgery as it was not approved by the Assam jail authorities and endorsed by any official seal.¹⁷⁷ The distribution of that leaflet was stopped by Kamruddin Ahmad soon after it began. But by that time some had already been distributed and these fell in the hands of government supporters.

The election case continued up to 1950, and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy came to Dhaka to appear for Shamsul Huq before the tribunal. On 19 July 1950, the secretary of the home ministry, under instruction from the government, informed him that during

¹⁷⁶ Kamruddin Ahmad (interview).

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

his stay at Dhaka he would have to confine his activities only to matters relating to the case. He would not be allowed to go outside Dhaka or address any public meeting and he would have to leave East Bengal on 28 July immediately after the end of the tribunal's work. In case of any violation of the order he was liable to be arrested. On receiving the government order Suhrawardy told newspaper representatives that he was unable to understand why the Pakistan government was ignoring the fundamental rules of democracy.¹⁷⁸

Shamsul Huq's case lasted for about a year, at the end of which his election was declared void.¹⁷⁹ After the Tangail defeat, the Muslim League did not hold any bye-election till the general election of 1954 in which they were virtually liquidated.

¹⁷⁸ *Naobelal*, 27 July 1950.

¹⁷⁹ Kamruddin Ahmad, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad.

Chapter Fourteen

DEEPENING CRISIS WITHIN THE MUSLIM LEAGUE

The Tangail bye-election was the first major manifestation of the internecine conflict of interest and deepening crisis within the Muslim League, particularly in the East Pakistan. The old and experienced workers had all been practically driven out by Akram Khan, and other League leaders on the pretext that they belonged to the Hashim-Suhrawardy group of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, whom they denounced as anti-Muslim League. Apart from other factors this was the most important one which weakened the ruling party from the very beginning. In the period immediately preceding the partition, during the years of its rapid expansion, the Muslim League organization exercised more powers within the broad framework of the Muslim League and thus it could not be dictated to by the leaders of the provincial government. In East Pakistan the provincial Muslim League virtually functioned as a servitor of the provincial government.

The general secretary of the provincial League, Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, convened a meeting of the council of the East Pakistan Muslim League on 18 and 19 June at the Curzon Hall of Dhaka University. The report of the general secretary, situation in Kashmir, political and economic conditions of the country, organizational matters etc. were included in the agenda which was announced in the newspapers.¹⁸⁰ A few days before this scheduled meeting, the president of the provincial Muslim League, Akram Khan, tendered his resignation for the consideration of the provincial working committee.¹⁸¹ It was not the first time that he submitted his resignation. In the pre-partition period he had done it several times. Whenever he found himself in a difficult situation he tried to get out by submitting his resignation and remaining absent from important and critical meetings, only to withdraw his so-called resignation letter afterwards. This practice was widely known in Muslim League circles and even to outsiders.

Akram Khan's paper, *Azad* published an editorial on 18 June 1949, the first day of the council meeting, called "The Council Session" mentioning his resignation,

We consider it relevant and fit to discuss here the resignation of Janab Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan. From the very day of its founding Janab Maulana Saheb had been associated with the League, and fought sometimes as a soldier and sometimes at the head of it. So his resignation from the post of president of

¹⁸⁰ *Naobelal*, 9 June 1949.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 16 June 1949.

the provincial League does not mean dissociation with it. The League will never be, and cannot be, deprived of his help, sympathy and service. His decision to resign today is well considered and he has not wished anything wrong for the League. Perhaps he has done it for the betterment of the League. He may perhaps think that he will be able to serve the League better by remaining generally associated with it without being its president, and so we welcome his decision.

Akram Khan's resignation and this editorial, as well as subsequent incidents clearly proved that he was not really interested in relinquishing his post of president of the provincial League. He anticipated rough debate and disturbances in the council meeting and to avoid any possible confrontation and unwilling to discharge his obligation as president, he resorted to resignation with the most definite plan of withdrawing it as he had done more than once previously.

The above-mentioned editorial also referred to the crisis within the Muslim League in the following manner:

The League is being organized anew in Pakistan, but during this process a breakdown situation is developing within the League. Various types of disorders have also developed within the League organizations of the Frontier, West Punjab and Sindh. Looked from the outside East Pakistan seems to be very calm and consolidated, but here also there are internal troubles. Consequently, the League and the League government are also losing their popularity. This increasingly deteriorating situation has to be corrected. It has been proven from more than one recent incidents that the dissatisfaction of our countrymen will become more and more extensive, and in consequence the destruction of the League and the League ministry will become inevitable without ruthless self-purification. For this we have, in the past, uttered words of caution addressing the League and the government. But it will have to be admitted with great sadness that there has been no desired reaction to our warnings. However, there is no use discussing the past. The way to self-preservation will be found if this League council can go in for self-correction.

The president of the Pakistan Muslim League, Chowdhury Khaliquzzaman, arrived in Dhaka on 18 June to attend the council meeting. In an exclusive meeting with the representative of the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)¹⁸² he said that in the past they faced many impediments, but in every case they overcame them. In the same way they will have to overcome all impediments in future and preserve the unity of the state in future with the help of the same wisdom by which they achieved Pakistan. In reply to a question on the Tangail bye-election, Khaliquzzaman avoided the whole issue and said

¹⁸² *Azad*, 19 June 1949.

that it was not correct that the Muslim League had lost the confidence of the people. At the centre and in the provinces one-party rule of the Muslim League government still existed and the government is representing the people everywhere in a completely democratic manner. In reply to another question he said that the religious and economic objectives of the Muslims are the same and these two cannot be separated. He also said that in order to maintain general principles it was desirable to have close links between the administration and the advisory committees of the League so that the latter may play an effective role in these matters.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the session of the Muslim League council began at the Curzon Hall. In the absence of Akram Khan, it was presided over by the vice-president, Maulana Abdullah-hil Baqui.¹⁸³ Out of 400 Muslim League council members, 300 attended the meeting.¹⁸⁴ Chowdhury Khaliquzzaman was also present. From the very beginning there was considerable excitement among the participants.¹⁸⁵ Newspaper reporters were not allowed into the meeting, and this is where the trouble began. The general members demanded an explanation for not allowing the journalists inside the hall and in reply the president said that it was decided in a recent resolution of the provincial working committee not to allow newspapermen in such meetings.¹⁸⁶ This did not satisfy the members, arguments and counter-arguments took place between members on the floor and leaders on the dais. After prolonged discussion the matter was put to vote, and by a vast majority vote the council decided to let the newspapermen in. Only twelve votes were cast in favor of the official resolution. The result of this voting reflected the mood of the council.¹⁸⁷

The general secretary of the provincial League, Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, presented his written report¹⁸⁸ to the council in which he said that realizing the necessity of abolition of the zamindari system, the League working committee has requested the provincial government to do so in the next session of the East Bengal Provincial Assembly. In order to undermine the importance of the Muslim League defeat in the Tangail election, the report said that since August 1947, bye-elections were held in four Provincial and two Central Assembly constituencies, in which the League candidates were elected, unopposed from four. In one Central Assembly election the League candidate defeated Suhrawardy. In trying to explain the Tangail defeat the report said that abundance of various facilities in the opposition camp and their own over-confidence in victory and certain negligence on their part were responsible for the defeat of the Muslim League candidate. The subsequent proceedings of the council meeting demonstrated clearly

¹⁸³ *Naobelal*, 23 June 1949.

¹⁸⁴ *Azad*, 19 June 1949.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; *Naobelal*, 23 June 1949.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; *Naobelal*, 23 June 1949; *Sainik*, 24 June 1949.

¹⁸⁸ *Azad*, 19 June 1949.

that the vast majority of members did not endorse the explanations of their general secretary.

Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, in his report, said that in order to firmly establish Pakistan, all strength must be mobilized behind the Muslim League, individually and collectively, and unity will have to be established among the Muslims on the basis of Islamic brotherhood, equality and justice. He expressed his regrets for the weakening of this unity since the establishment of Pakistan. He said that Muslim League was the only organization of the Muslims and faith, unity and discipline were its ideals. After these general observations he mentioned certain difficulties and drew attention of the councillors to them. The nature of the difficulties revealed a great crisis within the organization and brought into the open the conflict between the Muslim League organization and their government.

Referring to organizational problems, Yusuf Ali Chowdhury said that he could not claim to have performed his organizational duties and responsibilities in a satisfactory manner. At each step he had to face difficulties. It was not possible to get any accommodation without government help and cooperation, and in the absence of that it was not possible to get any place where the provincial headquarters of the Muslim League could be housed. The sorry plight of the Muslim League in East Pakistan as the ruling party could very easily be understood by this single fact it was not possible for them to establish their office at Dhaka even after two years of being in government. The general secretary of the ruling party mentioned with regret that the government must realize that it is the creation of the Muslim League organization and it was the responsibility of the government to see that it maintains its popularity. This report clearly indicated that the ruling party was not only alienated from the government of their own making, but also from the people. The various aspects of this alienation were clearly demonstrated during the subsequent proceedings of this council session.

After the submission of the report large number of questions were put to the League leaders from the floor. They wanted to know the reasons for the resignation of the president, the reasons for not preparing a constitution of the provincial League, for not mobilizing all strength in the Tangail bye-election, for not forming any parliamentary board of the Muslim League etc. There were also questions on transferring drums for trade to India illegally by Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, a minister of the provincial government.¹⁸⁹ Maulana Baqui then manipulated the whole proceedings with great cleverness. He followed a democratic procedure by allowing anybody and everybody to put as many questions as they wished and this caused a big pandemonium. It continued till it was time for the *maghreb* prayers.¹⁹⁰ The president then announced that replies to the questions put forward from the floor would be given by the general

¹⁸⁹ *Sainik*, 24 June 1949.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

secretary, president and other leaders when the session would resume next morning.¹⁹¹ A subjects committee was formed in which one representative from each district was included. The provincial leaders were included in the committee as *ex-officio* members.¹⁹² The president then announced that Chowdhury Khaliqzaman would address the council and discuss the situations in the Muslim countries and particularly in West Pakistan.¹⁹³

Word was circulated among the councillors that Khaliqzaman would try to influence them to reinstate Akram Khan.¹⁹⁴ This created great commotion among them, and they demanded that the resignation of Akram Khan be discussed before Khaliqzaman's speech. Some members from the floor went over to the dais. Some other members objected to this and there was an outbreak of disturbance inside the Hall. Maulana Baqui, in order to control the disturbance, tried to speak but somebody snatched the microphone from him. A fight broke out on the dais and several members fell off the dais. Almost everybody was standing on their feet. Unable to bring the house to order, Maulana Baqui postponed the meeting till next morning.¹⁹⁵

Following the postponement more than a hundred members of the council held a meeting, outside on the lawns of the Curzon Hall, in protest against the way the leadership had conducted the proceedings of the council.¹⁹⁶ These members included Mohiuddin Ahmad of Barisal, member of the Barisal district board Shahjahan Chowdhury, Mohammad Wasek and Mahbubul Huq. Some members said that the volunteers engaged for maintaining discipline were, in fact, hired hooligans and they had hit Mohiuddin Ahmad and Shahjahan Chowdhury. Such acts by the League leadership were denounced as being a matter of shame and disgrace unknown in the history of the Muslim League. Some of them, in excitement, proposed boycotting the council session, but finally it was decided that they would continue their fight in a democratic manner in the sessions on the following day.¹⁹⁷

The session on 19 June was scheduled to begin at 10 a.m., and about a hundred councillors gathered on time on the premises of the Curzon Hall. No leader, including the president of the meeting, Maulana Baqui were around, and after some time they were told that the session would begin at 1.30 p.m. The reasons for the delay was anybody's guess.¹⁹⁸ It was, however, rumored that there would be no disturbance in the next session and no opposition to what the leaders say and do, because the members who expressed their dissatisfaction and anger the previous day had all been 'handled'

¹⁹¹ *Azad*, 19 June 1949.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Sainik*, 24 June 1949.

¹⁹⁵ *Azad*, 19 June 1949.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Sainik*, 24 June 1949.

by the leaders during the course of the night, and the general secretary was going to give a tea party for the councillors in the afternoon.¹⁹⁹ Some members even said that most of those who showed the greatest dissatisfaction and anger against the leadership in the opening session were themselves corrupt and could be easily bought by the leaders by doling out permits and licenses for kerosene oil, building materials and other such things. Most of them were *zamindars*, *jotedars* and businessmen and it was quite easy to buy them up.²⁰⁰

At 1.30 p.m., Maulana Baqui arrived at the Curzon Hall but no other leader was there and so the meeting was further delayed. It finally began at 3 p.m. and in spite of various comments by some members about the delay etc. the atmosphere was calm. The president gave a short speech in which he accused outsiders for fomenting the previous day's disturbance.²⁰¹ He read out a report from the daily *Ittehad*, owned by Suhrawardy and published from Calcutta. Reporting the first day's session the *Ittehad* said,

Most of the members demanded the presence of the newsmen in the meeting. Several ministers and the president Maulana Baqui appealed by saying that many confidential matters would be discussed in the meeting and in that case the fault and mistakes would be revealed before the peoples of the world.²⁰²

Maulana Baqui then asked the councillors whether the report was correct. They all said that it was a false report and neither any minister nor the president made any such appeal to them. Maulana Baqui then said that in a part of the report it was also said that some members attacked the dais and broke tables and chairs which was completely false. The councillors agreed with him and described the report as false.²⁰³ The councillors said all this in spite of the fact that such incidents actually happened and reports of it being true had been published not only in the opposition weekly *Naobelal* and *Sainik* but also in the *Azad*. It seemed that the leaders of the Muslim League had been able to obtain amazing success in the matter of handling the angry critics of the previous day's session.

Peace prevailed in the second day's session and it came to pass that within two years of Pakistan the vast majority of Muslim League leaders and front ranking workers present there, turned into commodities on sale at a price. The rot had already eaten up whatever vitality was there in the Muslim League soon after the establishment of Pakistan.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Azad*, 20 June 1949.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

After finishing his speech the president of the council session asked Chowdhury Khaliquzzaman, the president of the Pakistan Muslim League to address the councillors, but before that he said that the newspaper reporters would have to leave the hall, because decision had been taken not to allow them as per the wishes of the president of Pakistan Muslim League and the councillors. No councillor stood up to protest and the reporters quietly left the hall.²⁰⁴

Khaliquzzaman spoke on the conditions in Kashmir, Afghanistan and other Muslim states. He said that the Muslim states of the Middle East were acting as servitors of the British and American governments, and the people of those states were being badly exploited and deprived from the fruits of freedom. Summing up his discussion he finally said that the people of Pakistan would have to take the responsibility of liberating the peoples of the Middle East from the clutches of the Bey's and the Pasha's. He refrained from discussing the situation in Pakistan and the conditions of the people and the internal organizational matters of the Muslim League. He thus kept his grotesque speech entirely confined to questions of 'liberating' the Muslims of other states and did not consider it either necessary or worthwhile to talk about the Muslim League and the conditions and problems of the people of Pakistan.²⁰⁵ It clearly demonstrated that in spite of gagging the voice of the opposition in the council by bribing he was actually unable to face the real problems confronting the Muslim League and Pakistan. It further demonstrated the extent to which the Muslim League leadership had lost the legitimacy to rule the country and particularly a state which was created by them barely two years ago. The *Naobelal* commenting on the speech of Khaliquzzaman said that certain of the total failure of the conference, he had tried to divert the attention of the councillors.²⁰⁶

Though there was no disturbance during Khaliquzzaman's speech, a great deal of noise ensued when Abdul Monen Khan placed a resolution proposing to bring three branches of the Civil Supplies Department-procurement, movement and distribution-under the control of district magistrates, and abolishment of the Civil Supplies Department as soon as possible. The resolution was, however, passed by a majority vote, though the Prime Minister Nurul Amin and finance minister Hamidul Huq Chowdhury opposed it. The councillors frequently interrupted Hamidul Huq's speech, perhaps, because of his involvement in the illegal drum export business. A former minister of the Suhrawardy cabinet, Shamsuddin Ahmad of Kushtia placed an amendment which was rejected by the councillors.²⁰⁷

Akram Khan's resignation was not discussed in the council meeting. The provincial committee passed on that responsibility to the president of Pakistan Muslim League,

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Naobelal*, 23 June 1949.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

and Khaliquzzaman informed the council on the 19th that he would enquire into the reasons for the resignation and then give his decision. Khaliquzzaman 'completed' his 'enquiry' after the council meeting, and Akram Khan duly withdrew his letter of resignation before the former left East Pakistan.²⁰⁸

On the third day of the council meeting, on 20 June, the session began at 10 a.m. in the Dhaka district board hall. A large number of resolutions were passed which included prohibiting dance, cinema and drinking during the month of Ramzan, making of a new constitution, holding of Assembly elections as soon as possible and on abolishing the zamindari system.²⁰⁹ An amendment to the resolution on abolition of zamindari system without compensation by 1950 was defeated by 60-39 votes.²¹⁰ Nothing worth mentioning actually took place on the third day of the council session and the proceedings were nothing but a command performance.

Looking at the entire proceedings of this council meeting of the ruling party it is not difficult to say that the Muslim League had lost all legitimacy for governing the country, and that its political doom was not far away.

²⁰⁸ *Sainik*, 24 June 1949.

²⁰⁹ *Naobelal*, 23 June 1949.

²¹⁰ *Naobelal*, 23 June 1949; *Sainik*, 24 June 1949.

Chapter Fifteen

FOUNDING CONFERENCE OF THE AWAMI MUSLIM LEAGUE

On his release from Dhubri jail, Assam, Maulana Bhashani came to Dhaka and decided to carry political work in East Bengal. The political atmosphere had begun to warm up especially after the Tangail Bye-election. Since Bhashani was unacceptable to the leaders of the East Pakistan Muslim League, and he himself was also not keen to work with them, the political workers who were still centered around 150 Moghultuli became his natural allies.

Bhashani began to meet them regularly, and a meeting of former Muslim League workers was convened by him at 150 Moghultuli. Khondkar Abdul Hamid, Yar Mohammad Khan, Mushtaq Ahmad, Shaokat Ali and some others were present. They decided to convene a conference of former Muslim League workers and discuss the question of forming a new political party.²¹¹ Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy had come to Dhaka to plead the case of Dabirul Islam. His visit had been organized by Shaokat Ali. He left Dhaka immediately after finishing his work but told Shaokat Ali and others to organize a party like the Jinnah Awami League of West Pakistan, which he had formed at that time with Nawabzada Nasrullah and others. During political discussions with Bhashani, Shaokat Ali and others mentioned this to him.²¹²

A reception committee was formed with Bhashani as president and Yar Mohammad Khan and Mushtaq Ahmad as secretary and office secretary respectively to carry out the organizing of the conference.²¹³ The date of the conference was fixed for 23 and 24 June 1949, but it became difficult to find a suitable place. On the invitation of Kazi Bashir (Humayun) they decided to hold the conference at Rose Garden in Swamibagh.²¹⁴

During the preparation of the conference information was received that the East Pakistan government was planning to arrest Bhashani before the conference. The workers consulted Kazi Bashir and at his suggestion Maulana Bhashani shifted secretly to Bashir's house on the night of 20 June, where he stayed till the end of the conference.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Shaokat Ali (interview).

²¹² Shaokat Ali, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad (interview).

²¹³ Shaokat Ali, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad (interview).

²¹⁴ Mushtaq, Shaokat, Kamruddin Ahmad (interview).

²¹⁵ Shaokat Ali, Mushtaq (interview).

The conference began at 3 o'clock in the afternoon on 23 June in the hall on the first floor of the Rose Garden. About 300 workers attended this first session along with some senior members of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League who had already left the League or were nominally connected. These included Shamsul Huq, Abdul Jabbar Khaddar, Anwara Khatun, Ali Ahmad Khan, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad, Shaokat Ali, Fazlul Kader Chowdhury, Shamsuddin Ahmad (Kushtia), Aatur Rahman Khan, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, Ali Amjad Khan, Yar Mohammad Khan etc. Maulana Mohammad Arif Chowdhury, vice-president of East Pakistan Jamiat-i-Ulama-i-Islam, Maulana Shamsul Huq, joint secretary, Maulana Yakub Sharif, the owner of Provincial Library Abdur Rashid and others were also present. Representatives of railway, students and other organizations also attended.²¹⁶

Fazlul Huq also came for a short while in the first hour and gave a brief speech. He referred to the extreme distress of the people and the crisis of individual freedom and said that it was the duty of the youth and League workers to engage themselves in active political work. He also expressed the view that the party members, who were unable to raise various popular demands in the Assembly under party pressure, should be forced to do so under public pressure. Finally, he declared his own preparedness to fight for the people and left the conference.²¹⁷

After a long discussion a resolution was adopted for re-organizing the Muslim League as a mass organization. It was also decided that every adult man and woman would be considered as members of the new party to be called the Awami Muslim League, and they would have to pay no membership fee. They would be considered as members of the organization by simply signing a 'creed'.²¹⁸ From this it appears that it was not very clear to the organizers of the conference how they should actually proceed to organize the new party. Other resolutions pertained to the abolition of zamindari without compensation, general election on the basis of adult franchise, judicial inquiries into the activities of the ministers, release of student leaders, withdrawal of punitive orders against students, introduction of compulsory primary education without delay, withdrawal of sales tax etc. A separate resolution was adopted for convening an all-party food conference by the government, for instituting food advisory committees at provincial, district, sub-division and union levels. The conference also demanded that proper steps be taken to correct the unjust actions of the government relating to levy on food grains.²¹⁹

It was decided that the name of the new organization would be Awami Muslim League (People's Muslim League). There was much confusion about forming the organizing

²¹⁶ Shaokat, Mushtaq, Abdul Jabbar Khaddar, Khairat Hossain, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish (interview); *Naobelal*, 7 July 1949.

²¹⁷ *Naobelal*, 7 July 1949.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

committee, and finally Maulana Bhashani was empowered to select its members. He selected forty members, with himself as the president, Shamsul Huq as secretary, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as joint secretaries. The committee was approved unanimously.²²⁰ Shamsul Huq emerged as the second most important person in the new party. He was already a senior worker, but his electoral victory in the Tangail bye-election had raised his stature in the emerging opposition circles.

In addition to organizational work, Shamsul Huq presented a document called 'Basic Demands' (*Mool Dabi*) for the consideration of the conference. He proposed a set of programmes which after some modifications, was later published as the first draft manifesto of the Awami Muslim League.²²¹ In 1948, Shamsul Huq went to Burdwan in West Bengal and stayed with Abul Hashim for a number of weeks. There he made a copy of the first draft of Abul Hashim's book, *The Creed of Islam*, and requested him to prepare a draft manifesto for a new organization in East Bengal.²²² Abul Hashim's draft manifesto of the Provincial Muslim League was quite well-known, not only in pre-partition Bengal but all over in India, because some of its programmes were considered as quite radical in Muslim League circles. The manifesto which he drafted for the use of a future party in East Bengal naturally had similarities with his own manifesto. The document which Shamsul Huq presented in the founding meeting of the Awami League was also similar to it in some respects. It had certain progressive recommendations on some issues, but on the other, it embodied Islamic ideas.

On 24 June 1949, the Awami Muslim League organized its first public meeting in the afternoon at the Armanitola Maidan at Dhaka. About 4000 people attended the meeting which under the existing circumstances was a fairly big one. Some notorious Muslim League hooligans tried to create disturbance and break the meeting, but failed. They just broke some chairs and left the place. These attempts intensified the existing hostility of the people against the Muslim League.²²³

²²⁰ Shaokat Ali, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad (interview).

²²¹ Published in a pamphlet form by Shamsul Huq, first general secretary of Awami Muslim League.

²²² Abdul Hashim, Badruddin Umar.

²²³ Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary, 24 June 1949.

Chapter Sixteen

THE STRUGGLE OF THE PEASANTS

The All India Kisan Sava was a communist-dominated peasant organization, but a number of prominent non-communists were also part of its leadership. In 1942, there were considerable disagreements among the communist and non-communist members on war policy, and consequently Professor Ranga, Indulal Yagnik and some others left the organization. In 1945, the president of the All India Kisan Sava, Swami Sahajananda, resigned. Thus, the Kisan Sava, became an organization led and directed entirely by the communists.²²⁴

On 16 and 17 January 1948, a meeting of the central committee of the Kisan Sava was held in Burdwan. In the changed situation after the partition of India and Bengal, they decided to have separate organizations for India and Pakistan, called All India Kisan Sava and All Pakistan Kisan Sava. Mansur Habibullah was nominated as the convener of the latter. Conditions in West Pakistan at that time were such that it was not possible for them to organize the Kisan Sava on an all Pakistan basis. It was, therefore, decided to first organize the East Pakistan Kisan Sava and accordingly a committee was constituted with Moni Singh as president and Mansur Habibullah as general secretary.²²⁵

The committee convened, a conference at Lalmonirhat, in Rangpur district, which was attended by delegates from all districts of East Bengal. The conference was held secretly though neither the Communist Party nor the Kisan Sava had been banned because the government had begun to arrest communist and Kisan Sava workers in various places and an open meeting would have been a big security threat.²²⁶

This conference of Kisan Sava representatives lasted three days and a number of resolutions were adopted. The basic policy resolution was:

The Muslim League government led by the nawabs and zamindars would never abolish the zamindari system without pressure from outside. So in this predominantly agricultural country the peasants will have to be organized and the waves of mass movement will have to be raised to great heights so that it may spread all over East Bengal.²²⁷

²²⁴ Sunil Sen, *Agrarian Struggle in Bengal 1946-47*, Peoples Publishing House, India, 1972, p. 31.

²²⁵ *Peoples Age* (Supplement), 8 February 1948, p. 10.

²²⁶ Pramatha Gupta, *Je Shangramer Shesh Nei* (The Unending Struggle), Kalantar Prakashani, Calcutta, 1969, p. 111.

²²⁷ Pramatha Gupta, *Je Shangramer Shesh Nei*, Kalantar Prakashani, Calcutta, 1969, p. 111.

However, in spite of determined and strong movements in certain areas, an extensive peasant movement could not be organized. This was primarily because the Kisan Sava, instead of organizing the peasants on the basis of the actual problems faced by them, raised the political slogan of overthrowing the Pakistan state and concentrated its activities in certain pocket areas only.

Since the first days of Pakistan, there was serious food crisis in most districts of East Bengal and at times it assumed famine proportions. Famine, flood, epidemic and oppressive taxation made the lives of the peasants miserable. Shortage of cloth, kerosene, edible oil etc. and the continuous rise in prices of all essential commodities made it clear to a major section of the peasantry that Pakistan was not the dreamland they had hoped for. In order to carry forward the mass peasant movement it was necessary to explain the reasons for this to the peasants, raise the level of their consciousness and then to mobilize them for radical political actions and finally for overthrowing of the state. But instead the Kisan Sava, in line with the B.T. Ranadive thesis, tried to organize the peasants in certain areas for a armed political struggle. There was no other organization which could take up the cause of the peasants. Nevertheless, the Tangail bye-election proved that given the right motivation and a specific programme the peasants were prepared to rise and act in the appropriate manner.

The Nankar Movement

During 1948-50 the peasant movements, under the leadership of the communists, took place in the Nankar areas of Sylhet and in the tribal, scheduled caste and Santal inhabited areas of Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rajshahi and some other small pockets.

The Nankar system was an exceptional system in East Pakistan. The word '*nan*' means bread. It was a system of bread in exchange for physical labor. But the *nankars* were not ordinary domestic servants and were not given food from the house of the employer. Instead they were given a piece of land on which they spent a part of their labor and produced their own food. Thus, in exchange for a piece of land, they were bound to the landlord almost like a slave much like the serfs in Europe. There were no fixed hours for *nankar* labor and no overtime. They had no tenancy and occupancy rights and could be evicted from the *nankar* land at any time the landlord wished. This led to all sorts of exploitation. The honor of their women were often abused by the landlords. The *nankars* were in fact the most oppressed section of the peasantry in East Pakistan and had no legal protection whatsoever.²²⁸

²²⁸ Ajoy Bhattacharya, *Nankar Bidroho* (The Nankar Revolt), Punthipatra Prakashani, Banglabazar, Dhaka-1, 1971, pp. 13-4.

After the introduction of the India Act 1935 and during the provincial election of 1937, a peasant movement began to develop in the district of Sylhet. In 1937, Karunashindhu Roy was elected member of the Assam Provincial Legislative Assembly from Sunamganj as a Indian National Congress candidate and was liberal. He favored land reform and tried to introduce some motions to this effect in the Assam Assembly without success. Since there was no possibility of any legislation, the Kisan Sava began to organize the peasants and under their leadership the movement for land reform, particularly for the abolition of the Nankar system became widespread. Initially the principal objective of that movement was to force the Assam Provincial Assembly to make laws for land reform. This movement which started in 1938-39, in Sunamganj, continued till the partition of India and assumed a much more radical character after 1948.

In the post-partition period the chief organizers of the *nankar* movement were Ajoy Bhattacharya, Naimullah, Joad Ali and Abdus Sobhan. Ajoy Bhattacharya was arrested in September 1947 on the basis of a warrant issued against him by the Assam government for organizing the *nankar* peasants. After his arrest Surat Pal was deputed by the party to work in the Lauta Bahadurpur area. There were other important party leaders like Barin Datta and Rohini Das (district Kisan Sava secretary) as well as Chittaranjan Das.²²⁹

An incident around this time triggered a mass peasant movement in the area. Mukhles Ali, a *nankar* of Kanishali village under Golapgunj police station beat up a local zamindar, with a shoe. There was great commotion and the zamindars sent a deputation to the Provincial Muslim League Working Committee, which constituted an enquiry committee with Aulad Hossain, Abdul Bari (MLAs) and Syed Moazzemuddin Hossain, a former minister in the Suhrawardy cabinet. The enquiry committee met the local zamindars and representatives of the *nankars* and visited several areas of Golapgunj.²³⁰

Since the shoe-beating incident was the result of terrible repression of the *nankars*, many questions came up during the investigation. Consequently, the committee made certain recommendations to the Muslim League and the government which proposed to restrict, in a mild way, the despotism of the zamindars. Annoyed by this the zamindars convened a conference at Dhaka and demanded a settlement of the issues. In response to their demands a tripartite conference of the *nankar* representatives, the League representatives and one from the government was held in Dhaka. Finally an agreement was reached according to which more than a hundred prisoners, including communists associated with the *nankar* movement, were to be released, the landlords would be entitled to evict *nankars* from houses adjacent to the their residence, but they would

²²⁹ Ajoy Bhattacharya (written note).

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

have to provide another piece of land to the nankars in exchange. The zamindars would also have to bear the expenses of shifting. Half the land occupied by nankars would have to be handed over to the zamindars and in the other half occupancy right of the nankars would be acknowledged. An experienced settlement officer was to be appointed to supervise all land transfer, consider appeals by zamindars, fix values of nankar houses, decide on the rate of rent etc. Ismail Ali and Doctor Majid signed the agreement on behalf of the nankars of Phulbari and Dhaka Dakhkhin. The Communist Party was opposed to transfer of half of nankar land and so in spite of being a representative of Lauta Bahadurpur, Communist Party member Chittaranjan Das did not sign the agreement. On behalf of the government, it was signed by Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Habibullah Bahar, Syed Moazzemuddin Hossain and Abdul Hamid. Kali Saday Chowdhury (Dhaka Dhakhin) Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury (Bahadurpur) and Khan Bahadur Gausuddin Chowdhury (Daudpur, Sadar thana) signed on behalf of the zamindars.²³¹

After the agreement Ajoy Bhattacharya, along with others, was released from jail on 10 January 1948. The agreement was applicable only for the three areas and thus status quo prevailed in the other areas of the Sylhet district. There were delays in implementing the provisions of the agreement and attempts were made to ignore it altogether. Since the agreement did not cover other areas, the nankar movement continued, zamindari rent was stopped and there were clashes between the zamindars and peasants including nankars. In various areas police camps were not removed and the government justified it in the name of preserving peace.²³²

A few days after signing of the tripartite agreement, a former member of Krishak Sava, Ismail Ali, while explaining the decisions regarding the nankar-mireshdar (zamindar) conflict in a meeting, was arrested and detained in the lock-up at Golapganj thana. Next day he was released on bail from Sylhet, but it showed that in spite of the agreement incidents like this, which took place at Phulbari Baitighar Bazar on 1 January 1948, could happen even in an area specifically covered by the agreement.²³³

Another incident took place at Lauta Bahadurpur in April, 1948. While Ajoy Bhattacharya was speaking in a meeting of peasants at Bahadurpur, a certain Karam Ali appeared. He was known to have been actively connected with the eviction of Muslim peasants in Assam and after the partition of the country he came to Sylhet and was engaged in hostile activities against the peasants as a hired hand of the zamindars. His presence in the area created great excitement among the peasants and they beat him up severely. A number of policemen reached the area almost immediately and rescued him.²³⁴ The next day the police appeared in the area in large numbers and committed

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Naobelal*, 8 January 1948.

²³⁴ Ajoy Bhattacharya, *Naobelal*, 1 April 1948.

acts of plunder, mass beating and rape. Consequently, the peasants of Bahadurpur and five surrounding villages left their homes and took shelter in the jungles. Ajoy Bhattacharya was again arrested and the police entered and ransacked his house. About a thousand village people became refugees and remained in the jungles. Finally they were allowed to return to their homes after paying money to zamindar Muyeed Chowdhury. The major workers of the Krishak Sava and the Communist Party refused to do so and left the area for Saneshwar which became the centre of the nankar movement from then onwards.²³⁵

As early as 1 December 1947, the East Bengal government constituted a committee called the Chakran System Enquiry Committee with Manwar Ali MLA of Sylhet as president. In the middle of January 1948, a questionnaire was distributed with the objective of examining the various aspects of the nankar system.²³⁶ Practically nothing came out of it. Popular opinion was greatly in favor of abolition of this system, but because of the procrastination of the government, nothing happened. The government maintained its police camps in the nankar areas and continued various repressive measures against these peasants. They also indulged in large scale anti-communist propaganda in the area describing them as unpatriotic and as traitors to the country. In spite of being a Muslim League paper the *Naobelal* of Sylhet warned the government against such activities.²³⁷

Sailendra Bhattacharya, a worker of Sylhet district Krishak Sava, was detained in Sylhet jail. A report appeared in the middle of May 1948, that he was inhumanly tortured and beaten by the jail authorities. In protest, a joint meeting of Krishak Sava and the Communist Party was held in Sylhet on 22 May. In the same year in December a meeting was called by the Krishak Sava at the Govinda Park in Sylhet for demanding the release of Sailendra Bhattacharya and Shishirkumar Bhattacharya. That meeting was attacked by some Muslim League hooligans who broke tables and chairs and disrupted the meeting. The police appeared on the scene and instead of taking action against the hooligans, it arrested communist worker Bhupati Chakravarty and the secretary of the Sylhet district Students Federation, Barun Ray.²³⁸

In the same month Ali Haidar Khan MLA a powerful zamindar of Prithimpasha, organized a tiger-hunting expedition in the local jungle and issued orders for the peasants of the area to be present in the jungle for an indefinite period. It was harvesting time and so it was not possible for the peasants to comply with the orders of the zamindar, though a handful of them did join the shooting party in the jungle. No tiger was seen in the jungle and this infuriated the zamindar and he took it out on his tenants. Upon returning home he ordered his manager to gather the peasants who were

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Naobelal*, 15 January 1948.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Naobelal*, 27 May 1948, 16 December 1948.

then beaten mercilessly for not obeying his orders. Reporting the incident the *Naobelal* said, 'We cannot even imagine that such medieval barbaric repression can be perpetrated on the tenants in Pakistan in this twentieth century'.²³⁹

In order to suppress resistance against this type of zamindari oppression, police camps were established and maintained in extensive areas of Sylhet where police repression was worse than in other areas. Generally peasants did not think of registering any complaint to the authorities or file a case in the courts against the repression, bribe-taking etc. by the police, but in certain exceptional cases they did. According to a newspaper report of February 1949, Ebadullah of Sallah thana filed a case in the court of senior magistrate against the officer-in-charge (OC) of Dirai thana for accepting bribe. On the day of the hearing, Ebadullah was arrested by the same OC with the help of Sunamganj police and beaten up severely. He became unconscious but was dragged to the police station and detained in their lock up. It was about 6 p.m. and the magistrate was still in his court when he was informed about this by some eyewitnesses. The magistrate ordered the police to produce Ebadullah in his court and after some delay they did. The surgeons of the Sunamganj hospital examined him and gave him first aid and then he was taken to the hospital in a stretcher. In spite of the intervention of the senior magistrate neither the OC nor any other policeman was punished. The incident created great commotion in Sunamganj and the surrounding areas.²⁴⁰ This was not a solitary case. There were numerous such cases of police repression inside and outside the prisons.

During the near famine conditions in Sylhet and other areas of East Bengal, the government introduced a system of levy for compulsory procurement of rice. There were widespread malpractice by government officials who seized grain from even those peasants who had no surplus. The peasants were asked to deliver the levied grain to the government godowns at their own expense and were paid much less than the market price. The police were always at hand to help the government officials. Mass meetings and movements were organized against this arbitrary character of the levy and police repression. In order to counter this the zamindars and the Muslim League leaders of the area tried to spread anti-communist and communal hatred.²⁴¹

In April 1949, police camps were again established in Lauta Bahadurpur area and the repression of *nankars* by the *mireshdars* with the help of the police increased. A clash occurred between the peasants and the police in Saneshwar on 18 August and a reign of terror was let loose in the surrounding areas. Even before this incident the peasants were unable to stay in their homes, because the police raided their villages and beat the peasants, who were forced to spend nights in the nearby jungles. At this stage the

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1949.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 February 1949.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10 February 1949, 23 February 1949, 31 March 1949, 10 March 1949.

peasants finally decided that they would not allow the police to enter their villages and were determined to resist them.

On 12 August, some policemen were seen to be approaching Saneshwar by motorboat, and the peasants decided to resist. Consequently, when the policemen failed to enter the village, in a report to the Sylhet district authorities they declared that Saneshwar had become a rebellious area and they had not been able to enter the village because they were attacked by an armed force. On 17 August, it was reported to the people of Saneshwar that the DC, SP and DSP of Sylhet along with an armed police contingent had gathered in the house of the zamindar of Lautā and they were poised to attack the villagers. Everyone was worried and the people of the neighboring villages gathered here during the night. They were quite desperate and unwilling to disperse. Police attacks and oppression were so regular in the area that this time they were absolutely determined to resist them.²⁴²

There was no male leader of the Communist Party in the village at that time. Aparna Pal, Amita Pal and Shushama Dey were present. They tried to dissuade the peasants from any desperate action by saying that they had only sticks and the police had lethal arms and the fight would be totally disastrous, but could not. Thousands of people gathered in the open on the banks of the river before daybreak. In the morning the DC, SP and DSP reached the spot with their armed force and deployed them at a distance of about 250 feet from the peasants. Addressing the peasants the officers asked why they had gathered there. In reply the peasants said that they had gathered to resist the entry of the police force in the village because whenever they entered the village they ransacked their houses and inflict inhuman tortures on them. They said they wanted to speak only to the DC and would allow only the DC, SP and DSP to enter the village and inspect the damage done to their houses. During the course of this conversation the government side asked whether the others wanted Pakistan. They were also asked to raise the slogan of Pakistan Zindabad. The peasants said they wanted Pakistan and raised the slogan 'poor people's Pakistan Zindabad'.

On hearing this slogan the DC declared the gathering illegal, promulgated section 144 in the area and almost immediately ordered the police to open fire. The first peasant to fall was Charitra Das who was in the front line of resistance from the beginning. Five more peasants were killed on the spot. After the firing the police force scattered on the fields and began to beat up and indiscriminately torture the men and women. They held Aparna Pal, Amita Pal, Shushama Dey and some other women by their hair, kicked them and threw them on the ground. Aparna Pal was pregnant and miscarried. They were all arrested and brought to the house of the zamindar. The wounded were handled roughly and dragged along the ground mercilessly.²⁴³

²⁴² Shushama Dey (written note).

²⁴³ Full report by Shushama Dey (note).

The next day, on 19 August, some soldiers of the East Pakistan Rifles came to the Bahadurpur police camp and asked the peasants to surrender. They did so quietly. The men of the East Pakistan Rifles let some of them go and arrested the others and took them to the police camp. Shyamapada, the zamindar of Lautā, and a local Muslim League leader were present. After the incident a representation was made on behalf of the local Muslim League to the government in which they demanded that efficient and educated police officers be posted at the Baralikhā Thana and strict measures be adopted so that no police officer or village tout could take bribes from the communists. Also police camp should be removed from Bahadurpur to some other place and strong police camps be established in and around the rebellious villages.²⁴⁴

After the incident of 18 August the Hindu and Muslim zamindars of Saneshwar-Lautā-Bahadurpur and neighboring areas began to regularly attack the peasants with the help of the Muslim League workers, the police force, the Ansars and the personnel of East Pakistan Rifles (EPR). Since most of these village people belonged to the lower caste Hindu community it was easy for them to give a communal character to the peasant resistance, and in this they had considerable success.

On 21 August 1949, the men of the EPR again visited Saneshwar and neighboring villages, fully armed and prepared to attack the peasants. The peasants were terribly scared. They were not in a mood to fight back because their resistance in the area was broken earlier by the police and the EPR. So they shut themselves up in their homes on the advice of some middle class elders of the village, and later on being called to surrender, they came out and surrendered to the EPR. After their surrender, the peasants of Saneshwar, Ujirpur, Mehari and other villages were tortured and the women were raped and beaten. They also took money from them and ransacked their houses.²⁴⁵

Another incident took place in the area on 24 August. Three miles from Saneshwar Bazar there is a village called Harakunji with two other adjacent villages called Jugirkana and Panisail. Forty-five scheduled caste peasants were living in Harakunji and they were all tenants of the Muslim zamindars of Bahadurpur. For twelve years the peasants had been fighting a case against them for re-fixing the rate of rent; and the court finally gave judgment in favor of the peasants. They were not *nankars* and had nothing to do with the *Nankar Movement*. But in spite of this the zamindars, with the help of the EPR, viciously attacked them. Harakunji was surrounded by a few hundred Muslim peasants and about thirty EPR men. The peasants fled from their homes. Those who stayed behind were tortured inhumanly and the women were raped. The cattle,

²⁴⁴ Lala Saradindu Dey, Ajoy Bhattacharya, *Naobelal*, 1 September 1949.

²⁴⁵ Report by Jatindranath Bhadra MLA, *East Bengal Assembly Proceedings*, 18 January 1949, vol. IV, no. 1, pp. 150-1.

paddy, rice and whatever else was there was looted or broken. One scheduled caste peasant was beaten to death by them.²⁴⁶

After creating havoc for two hours in Harakunji, the perpetrators split into two groups and entered the neighboring villages of Jugirkuna and Panisail. The peasants of these two villages were not tenants of Bahadurpur zamindars, but in spite of this with the help of the EPR they did exactly what they had done in Harakunji. A large number of peasants fled to the fields, and at the end of the day the zamindars, and their accomplices, left the area in boats.²⁴⁷ On 27 August, three uniformed EPR men, accompanied by some local Muslims, entered three villages, Rangjhail, Anandapur and Supatak under Golapganj thana, attacked the villagers, looted whatever they could and severely tortured those who tried to resist them.

The Saneshwar incident came up for discussion in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly on 18 November 1949. The reports of the Congress members were factually more correct than those presented by members of the ruling Muslim League. But since the former tried to give it an entirely communal character, it was possible for the government side to do the same. Thus, while making a long statement, Prime Minister Nurul Amin tried to put the blame entirely on the communists and on the Hindus and defended the atrocities committed on the peasants. Some opposition members of the Assembly visited the areas and demanded judicial enquiry into the incidents. But Nurul Amin rejected their demands by saying that any enquiry conducted by a magistrate or a commissioner is a judicial enquiry. The commissioner of Chittagong himself visited the area and submitted a report which the Prime Minister described as a judicial enquiry report and gave his statement on that basis.²⁴⁸

After the Saneshwar incident, there was large-scale deployment of police and EPR forces in the centers of the Nankar Movement in Bianibazar and Baralikha thana. All the inhuman acts of oppression, beating, rape, plunder, fines, jails and court cases became a regular affair and it became impossible for outsiders to enter the villages.²⁴⁹ No leader or active worker of the communist party or the Kisan Sava could stay there and the people were quite helpless. The Muslim League and their government succeeded to some extent in building up an anti-movement sentiment and opinion among a section of the Muslim population. This made the situation worse. But at the same time the local zamindars, as well as the Muslim League leadership, realized that the lull in the movement was temporary and it could revive in the near future. This was because in spite of the terrible repression and oppression, communist influence on both Hindu and Muslim nankars was considerable. So they decided to abolish the nankar system and

²⁴⁶ Report by Nirendranath Deb MLA, East Bengal Assembly Proceedings 18 January 1949, p. 152. Also Jatindranath Bhadra, *ibid.*

²⁴⁷ J.N. Bhadra, *ibid.*, pp. 151-3.

²⁴⁸ East Bengal Assembly Proceedings, *ibid.*, pp. 166-70.

²⁴⁹ *Naobelal*, 15 September 1949, 13 October 1949.

even the most notorious zamindars and mireshdars of Sylhet refrained from opposing the government decision.²⁵⁰

Thus in 1950, the East Bengal government enacted a law abolishing the nankar system and with it ended the worst kind of feudal land relation and oppression which continued in East Bengal even after the departure of the British.

The Hajangs

The area inhabited by Hajangs extended from Susang-Durgapur in the north-western side of Netrakona sub-division of the district of Mymensingh to Chatak in the north-eastern side of Sunamgunj sub-division of Sylhet district. In the Hajang area of Sylhet there was no 'tonko' system, i.e. payment of fixed rent in kind, and, therefore, the peasant movement of the Hajangs of Sylhet was different from that of Mymensingh in some ways.

The Hajang area of Sylhet was within the zamindari of the Maharaja of Gouripur, Mymensingh. Oppression by the zamindar's kachari or rent administration office, eviction from land, manipulation of accounts of illiterate peasants, and various kinds of illegal extortions were the main problems of the Hajangs. These were the problems on which they enunciated their demands and began their movement in 1945, after the All India Kisan Sava conference at Netrakona.²⁵¹ The movement continued even after the area became a part of East Pakistan.

The biggest problem of the Hajangs was mortgage of land to the mahajans. The latter would take possession of the land documents and the harvest, without any legal basis, in case of non-repayment of interest. A movement was initiated in the area in 1946-47, under the leadership of the communists, and it continued after the partition of the country. The oppression by the mahajans reached a point when they began to seize peasant lands for non-payment of even 10, 15 or 20 rupees and appropriated the harvest as well. All the mahajans of this area were Hindus and the peasants, in spite of extreme oppression, considered it a customary practice and never resisted them. It took some time to convince the peasants that the entire practice was illegal and it was possible to stop it through a resistance movement. Finally, in 1947 a stage was reached when it became possible to activate the Hajang peasants, and thus a movement began to be organized in an area fifteen miles in length and five miles in breadth, from Mahishkhola in the western border of Mymensingh to Barochara, in the east.

Soon thereafter Sylhet became a part of East Pakistan. Police camps were established along the Indian border, at a distance of every five miles. Taking advantage of this situation, the mahajans fraternized with the policemen, bribed them and used them

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-107.

against the peasants. They brought Muslim peasants from outside, mainly from Assam, and installed them on the lands of the evicted Hajangs. The Kisan Sava workers tried to discuss the matter with the newly arrived Muslim peasants, but it did not yield any result. So they decided to fight to regain possession of Hajang lands which were occupied by the outsiders. Faced with the determination of the Hajang peasants and the preparations they were making for regaining control of the lost land, the Muslim peasants left the area.²⁵²

Encouraged by this easy success, the Hajangs began to organize themselves for bigger movements. Some well-to-do men of the Hajang and Garo communities possessed guns. The peasant forces of the Kisan Sava forcibly seized fifty guns and cartridges from them and deployed armed workers to guard the borders of the villages, as they apprehended attack from outside by the police and other forces.²⁵³

After the formation of the armed Kisan forces, a majority of them were shifted to the jungles across the border in Indian territory. This area was inhabited by the Khasia hill people who were ruled by a Raja who was called 'sim'. The Raja or local landlord was scared of the Kisan forces, but he refrained from resisting them. So the situation was quiet, except on such occasions the Indian border guards fired upon them. The Kisan forces never returned their fire because the Indian border police generally ignored them and were not actually hostile. However, in spite of this, Lala Saradindu Dey and Jatindranath Das were arrested by the border guards. They were both taken to Shillong from where they were released after being detained for several days. The two returned to their area.²⁵⁴

Due to the activities of the Kisan Sava, the Pakistani police forces also increased their vigilance and began to maintain a larger presence in the area. They began to conduct searches of Hajang houses during the day, because they were afraid to do so at night. Some occasional clashes occurred, but since the Kisan Sava workers maintained a defensive posture, no serious clash took place up to the beginning of 1949.²⁵⁵ Some employees of the local zamindars and mahajans began to act as touts or go-betweens by establishing relations with Hajang and Garo zamindars and mahajans. The Kisan Sava men decided to punish them, and accordingly, they killed three touts in the area and took their dead bodies to Indian territory across the border and left them there.²⁵⁶

The Kisan forces did not stay in the village during the day and came down from the hills only after dark. With the cooperation of the local peasants, they conducted the affairs of the village. The party would settle all disputes in the village courts and

²⁵² Ajoy Bhattacharya (note), Lala Saradindu Dey (interview).

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

discuss various social, economic and political matters with them. In fact, at that time the Communist Party and the Kisan Sava were indistinguishable and the communists would openly lead the movement in the rural areas.²⁵⁷ The leaders were Rabi Dam, Lala Saradindu Dey, Pramode Das, Kalicharan (Vaishnab) Hajang, Anima Dam (she married Moni Singh after the death of Rabi Dam in a confrontation with the police), Anit Garo, Brajendra Hajong, Uneshwar Hajang, Jatindra Das and Kunjalal Sarkar. The party regularly supplied rations to their armed forces. They established an arms factory where they would manufacture pipeguns, bombs, gunpowder, pipe pistols etc. There were about 150 men in the regular armed force, with Rabi Dam as the commander, and several villagers also had training in handling arms. They had about eighty guns.²⁵⁸

In 1948-49, when the East Bengal government introduced levy for building up government stock of food grains, the peasants of the Hajang area began to resist such compulsory procurement and decided to distribute the grains payable to the zamindars among the poor peasants. Accordingly a considerable amount of grain was distributed among the local peasants under the leadership of Rabi Dam. Pramode Das, Kalicharan and Uneshwar along with Rabi Dam went to a village called Mohanpur for grain distribution and were told that the atmosphere in the village was unusual and alarming because the local morols or village headmen had disappeared from the village. They suspected that they had gone to the police camps to inform them of the planned grain distribution in the village. Rabi Dam and Pramode Das went near the police camp but did not see any movement or preparation and decided that there was no immediate danger of attack. But on their return to Mohanpur, the villagers again warned them and said that there was every possibility of an attack. They also advised them to leave the village for the day. But instead of taking their advice, Rabi Dam decided to remain in the village for some more time.

Usually the leaders carried arms and were accompanied by armed guards, which is why the police kept a low profile in the camp. But on that day, 26 March 1949, Rabi Dam and others were not properly armed and were without armed guards. After dark when they were preparing to leave, police forces surrounded them and opened fire. Later it was found that the head of the house where they were trapped was an informer. However, even after being surrounded, it was possible for the leaders to leave the place. Pramode Das suggested this, but Rabi Dam refused to leave and instead crawled towards the policemen and actually caught one of them and stabbed him. Just then another policeman shot Rabi Dam several times and he died on the spot. Pramode Das was injured seriously and was carried to the police camp and then to Dharmapasha *thana* along with the dead body of Rabi Dam. Later Pramode Das was sent to Sunamganj and there he was kept under detention without trial. After this incident there were large-scale arrests.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Detailed description of the incidents from written note to the author by Pramode Das.

After the death of Rabi Dam and the subsequent arrests, the movement in the area disintegrated and could not be revived because of a change of political and strategic line after the publication in 1950 of the Cominform thesis which disapproved of the B.T. Ranadive line of so called armed struggle and the programme of overthrowing the state.

The Movement in Mymensingh

The district of Mymensingh became a centre of the Tebhaga Movement before the partition of India, which is why the annual conference of the All India Kisan Sava was held in Netrokona in 1945. Apart from the Tebhaga, a peasant movement was organized in Mymensingh against the tonko system and was widespread and powerful in the hill areas of the district.

The situation changed immediately following the partition, because the Communist Party decided to cooperate with the Pakistan government, and accordingly there was cessation of hostilities against the government. But in spite of the Communist Party and the Kisan Sava extending their hands of cooperation, the government decided not to reciprocate their gesture. Thus, when the Communist Party demanded the release of communists and Kisan Sava members, the government refused to do so. In March 1948, Khwaja Nazimuddin, declared his policy concerning political prisoners quite clearly in an Assembly speech in which he said,

All political prisoners except a few have been set free in Mymensingh. As far as I know, for certain special reasons-because they committed very serious crimes they were not released. The situation in that particular area was not such as could permit their release. But I can tell you this that they were all members of the Communist Party.²⁶⁰

After the second congress of the Communist Party of India, the communists also revised their earlier policy of cooperation and decided to organize the peasants for political action. The Communist Party and the Kisan Sava were not formally banned, but the government attacked them wherever they were found. Thus, the Communist Party and Kisan Sava members and workers had to remain in hiding and expand their underground activities. A conference of all district peasant representatives was held in the Lalmonirhat area of Rangpur district. After this conference, Moni Singh, Khoka Ray, Nagen Sarkar and Pramatha Gupta returned to their area and decided to organize the peasants first in Kishoregunj, which was an area quite advanced for peasant struggles.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ East Bengal Assembly Proceedings, 24 March 1948, vol. I, no. 2, p. 49.

²⁶¹ Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-2.

The main objective of the peasant movement in 1948 was abolition of the zamindari system. In order to rally the peasants to achieve this objective, the Kisan Sava organized a meeting in Karimgunj Bazar of Kishoregunj sub-division in July 1948. The government promulgated section 144 in the area, but the Kisan Sava which was called Krishak Samity in Bengali, decided to break section 144, hold the meeting and even fight with the police, if necessary.²⁶² The Samity leaders decided not to have more than one speaker because of the possibility of their being arrested. So Nagen Sarkar was chosen to preside and be the only speaker. It was a large gathering and the meeting was held, and no one was arrested. The success of this meeting encouraged the Krishak Samity leaders and they decided to hold the district peasant conference in Jashodal Bazar, two miles away from the Kishoregunj town.²⁶³

This time the government took a tough attitude and posted a large police force near the conference area and blocked all roads to Jashodal. In spite of police mobilization they decided to go ahead with the preparation for the conference and again selected Nagen Sarkar as the only speaker for that meeting. Nagen Sarkar was arrested a day before on his way to Jashodal, but the decision to hold the conference was not changed.²⁶⁴

The EPR arrived at the meeting place and began to terrorize the people by firing blanks and arresting two district leaders of the Krishak Samity, Dharani Banik and Wali Newaz as well as thirty workers. There were small skirmishes with the armed police, but the latter succeeded in dispersing the peasants who came to attend the conference. After this incident there was some frustration among the peasants and the Krishak Samity leaders faced criticism from the common peasants for their lack of proper leadership and direction and their failure to take correct decisions at critical moments. At that time a number of leading workers and leaders left the country for West Bengal. All these created a situation in which it was no longer possible to organize any big movement in Kishoregunj and the centre of Mymensingh peasant movement shifted to the Hajang inhabited areas.²⁶⁵

The Movement Against Tonko and Levy

A broad movement began to be organized for resisting forcible levy of food grains and against the tonko system in the Hajang areas. Generally the peasants were not against levy at the time of famine. They only demanded that they be allowed to retain such amount of grains as was needed for their own sustenance for the whole year, with the surplus being purchased by the government at market price for cash. On the basis of these demands, the Hajang peasants of Netrokona sub-division began their movement in 1948.

²⁶² Nagen Sarkar (interview).

²⁶³ *Ibid.*; Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*

²⁶⁴ Nagen Sarkar.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

A secret meeting of the district leaders of the Krishak Samity was held at Nagarpara village in Haluaghat in November-December 1948. It was decided to launch a movement against the zamindari system and bureaucratic oppression. It was also decided that no communal question would be raised during this anti-feudal movement. But there were certain misgivings voiced by some leaders about the advisability of an armed struggle at that stage. Sunirmal Sen said that it would not be proper to involve the peasants of the minority community in the movement immediately after the independence as it would provide an opportunity to the League government to mislead the Muslim people. Pramatha Gupta was of the opinion that at that time any movement taking place only in the organized Hajang areas would be a kind of 'vanguardism'. Jaladhar Pal thought that they had no real organization which could carry forward a difficult and protracted struggle for which, more time and preparation were needed. But in spite of these objections, it was decided to launch an armed struggle against levy and the tonko system in the Hajang areas of Mymensingh.²⁶⁶

The movement against the oppression of levy began to pick up in January 1949. The East Bengal government had begun to send Ansar and police forces to the interior to help the officers in collecting levy and they, on their own, began to physically torture, rape and resort to other methods. However, instead of successfully suppressing the movement, it fired the determination of the peasants to resist such oppression and carry forward the movement.

On 8 January 1949, the men of the local zamindar while taking away twenty maunds of tonko paddy from Nilchand Hajang, a peasant of Chaitanyagarh in Kalmakanda thana, were intercepted by the villagers who snatched away the paddy from them and carried it back to the house of Nilchand. This success encouraged the peasants and they then resisted the landlord's men from taking away tonko paddy from other peasants in the village of Bot Tala.²⁶⁷

After the Bot Tala incident, the officer-in-charge (OC) of Kalmakanda thana reached Bot Tala with six armed policemen, some *chowkidars* or village guards, and Ansars. They severely beat up five peasants and one of them told them where the grain was hidden. The OC seized twenty-five maunds of tonko paddy and stacked it in a bullock cart, but before he could move, he was surrounded by peasants who demanded that the paddy be returned. The officer refused and the Ansars lathi-charged and wounded a few peasants. This infuriated the village people and they attacked the Ansars and a hand to hand fight ensued. The police opened fire and wounded two peasants. The OC was unable to take the paddy which he had seized from the peasants. It was getting dark and police and the Ansars left the place. The next day forty armed peasant workers

²⁶⁶ Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

were sent to the area by the Lengura Krishak Samity with some medicine. The wounded peasants were transferred to another place for treatment.²⁶⁸

A new *kacharibari* or manager's office of the Court of Wards of the zamindar of Susang-Durgapur was established at Chaitanyagarh. On 26 January 1949, the *kacharibari* was occupied by the peasants of Lengura Mouja. The next morning there was a big gathering of peasants in the kachari premises, who then established a peoples' court (*gano adalat*) and tried a *tehsildar* or rent-collector, five *peyadas* (zamindar's musclemen) and peons they had detained earlier. They seized all papers of the kachari and burnt them along with all the land documents or *dalils*. They forbade the collection of all tonko paddy and arrear rent in the whole of Lengura Mouja. The manager of the kachari tried to regain possession of the premises with the help of the police, but it remained in the hands of the peasants. Twenty Hajang women also seized two cartloads of paddy from the zamindar's men.

In the Charupara village of Maijpara union in Susang-Durgapur thana, government officials faced resistance when they were taking away 100 maunds of paddy forcibly from Bishweswar Sarkar. The government officials were forced to leave without taking the paddy, and on Bishweswar's advice it was distributed among the Hindu-Muslim poor of the locality. By the third week of January this movement spread extensively and almost every day the peasants seized tonko and levy paddy as well as that taken from the peasants by the mahajans.²⁶⁹

On 28 January 1949, a meeting of about 5000 peasants was held in the field in front of the Lengura police camp. Peasants from far off places joined the meeting and adopted resolutions for the abolition of zamindari without compensation, abolition of the tonko system, participation of the local peasant committees in collection of government revenues and taxes and procurement of food grains. The resolutions were sent to the government authorities in writing. The Hindu-Muslim peasants of the entire Mymensingh district gathered in a similar meeting in Jashodal to press for the same demands. Such meetings were organized on a smaller scale in many other areas by the peasants.²⁷⁰

During the anti-tonko movement in 1946 two leading members of the Kisan Sava, Rashimoni and Surendra, were killed in confrontation with the Eastern Frontier Rifles on 31 January. Since then every year the day was observed as martyrs' day in the entire Hajang area of Mymensingh. In 1949, on the day, peasants from various areas assembled in Charuapara where the last rites of the martyrs was performed, and tributes were paid to them. Then they scattered in groups in various directions for propaganda work. They had red flags on the top of their spears, but were quite

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-6.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8.

peaceful. When one of these groups was passing in front of the Valukapara Church, about one and half a miles from the Ghoshgaon *hat* (weekly market), a group of soldiers blocked their way and tried to arrest some leaders and take them to the Kaloshindhu police camp. The group insisted that they had not come out for any confrontation and were carrying out propaganda work peacefully on the occasion of martyrs' day. The soldiers thinking they were unarmed and weak, began to fix bayonets in their guns.²⁷¹ Nayan Hajang, a peasant leader, asked his comrades to remove red flags from the spears and get ready to fight. Within moments the situation changed. One of them snatched a gun from a policeman attacked him with the bayonet. A hand to hand fight ensued between the peasants and the police. Three policemen were killed but there were no peasant casualties. The peasants managed to snatch two rifles from the police. This incident motivated the peasants in the whole area to get more organized and increased their confidence and determination to fight the forces of the government and the landowners.²⁷² However, the peasants confronted the forces of the government with disastrous consequences.

On 1 February, a group of peasant workers was suddenly surrounded by a big contingent of government forces consisting of thirty policemen and fifty Ansars on the banks of the river Nitai near the Kaloshindhu police camp while engaged in propaganda work. Immediately the peasants took shelter behind the bushes and the creek of the river. The police began to fire at them from a distance. No one from the peasants group was hurt, but two peasants who were returning from the Kaloshindhu hat were killed.²⁷³

Three days after this incident, the largest confrontation between the peasants and the police took place near the Lengura police camp where a few thousand peasants were holding a meeting. The police camp, consisting of thirty men of which fifteen were Punjabis, was adjacent to the *hat* and protected all around by a ditch. They were all armed with guns. No untoward incident took place that day. But on 4 February, it was different. At daybreak, two village touts falsely informed the *subedar* of the police camp that on the previous night the tonko peasants had completed preparation for attacking the camp at a convenient time during the *hat*, and seize all the arms and ammunitions.²⁷⁴ The *hat* began at about 11 a.m. and soon afterwards a team of twenty-five tonko peasants of the propaganda group reached the outskirts of the *hat* from the north. They were carrying red flags, drums, bugles and posters and were armed with choppers, kukri, etc. They raised slogans against the forcible seizure of paddy and for abolition of the zamindari system. The peasants who had gathered in the *hat* also joined them in raising the slogans. The leader of the propaganda team, Mongalchan, gave a short speech in which he said, among other things, that in order to perpetuate the

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 118-9.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-3.

zamindari system and continue the oppressions against the peasants, the police camps were multiplying and were being reinforced, levied paddy was forcibly taken away from the peasants and there were other acts of oppression against them. He asked the peasants to raise their voice against all this and prepare to fight to establish their rights.

Immediately after the end of this short meeting, Mongalchan left the *hat* with his group. The village path which they took ran about twenty-five yards from the police camp at one point. When the peasants team reached that point, they were fired upon from the police camp. The suddenness of the attack created great confusion among the peasants and they began to run in all directions. They were in the open and without any cover, so they lay on the ground immediately for protection. Mongalchan was fearless. He called out to others to resist the attack and asked them to crawl forward towards the camp. He was shot several times as he came close to the camp and was killed instantly. On seeing him dead, Augendra called the others to continue their advance towards the camp and they all somehow managed to get very near it but there was no hand-to-hand fight as the police attacked them with guns. Augendra was killed and the others began to retreat. Some peasants at the *hat* were hit by stray bullets and were wounded. Great chaos prevailed in the area.

As the news of the deaths of Mongalchan and Augendra spread to other villages, peasants from the neighboring areas began to arrive at the *hat*. They were armed with sticks, kukris, choppers, spears etc. and they raised slogans calling for avenging the deaths of their comrades. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon the police camp was surrounded by angry peasants from all sides. They had no firearms, but in spite of this about forty peasants dashed towards the police camp with whatever weapons they had. The police opened fire and the peasants fell one by one. The Hajang women also took part in the fight. Fifteen peasants, men and women, were killed in that engagement and there was no casualty on the police side. In spite of the largely unequal strength of arms, the police remained surrounded by the peasants till evening. At night the police left the camp for Susang-Durgapur. Twelve peasants, divided into two groups, waited for them in ambush on the path of their retreat. As soon as they crossed the open field of Jhigatal and reached Kalikapur, the peasant guerrillas attacked them with bombs. One policeman was killed and six others wounded. There was no casualty or injury on the peasant side. The next day more than a hundred policemen were deployed in the entire Susang-Durgapur area and a large number of peasants were arrested.²⁷⁵

Government control over the newspapers was so strong that practically nothing of these conflicts, confrontations and armed engagements between the peasants and the police appeared in the newspapers. So the people of East Bengal had no information of what was happening in the countryside. Occasionally badly distorted news items appeared which misinformed and misled the people about the situation in the Hajang areas of

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-3.

Mymensingh as well as other areas of such conflicts and confrontations. One such news item appeared in the *Azad* on the 4 February situation and put the blame falsely and squarely on the peasants and denounced the communists.²⁷⁶

After the incidents of 4 February, the peasants realized that it was not really possible to fight the government armed forces with sticks, bows and arrows, and spears. It was necessary to use firearms. So they began to collect arms acquired during the earlier struggles and intensified their propaganda work among the peasants to raise their consciousness to a higher level.

On 9 February, a group of peasants was confronted by the police when they reached Salmara after propaganda work in some neighboring villages. Without any provocation the police opened fire on the peasants, who immediately took cover behind the big sal trees and tried to defend themselves by counter-attacking with bows and arrows and spears. Fifteen policemen and a number of Ansars reached the place and added to the strength of the government forces. Afraid of being surrounded, the peasants decided to stop the uneven fight and left the place. The peasant leader Satindra Dhalu was killed and Shachindra Ghosh was hit by a bullet in the eye and then arrested.²⁷⁷

On 15 February, a report on the incident of 9 February was published in the *Azad* which, while accusing the peasants and the communists, said:

It has been reported that on 9 February Hajang communists of East Pakistan-Assam border in north Mymensingh attacked the police camp near Sengu in Durgapur thana and in the adjacent area of Haluaghat thana. The police forces counterattacked and opened fire. Consequently, one person was killed and six injured on the communist side, as reported. No information has yet reached us on the incidents in Lengura.

It appears that opposition to the tonko and food procurement policy of the government is at the root of the conflicts. Another report says that in the absence of the District Magistrate, the Additional District Magistrate promulgated 144 Cr.Pc in the thanas of Haluaghat, Nalitabari and Sribardi. It is also reported that additional police forces and E.B. Regiment Rifles have been sent to the said area. The situation is now comparatively quiet.

Some reports of these incidents were published in the daily *Anandabazar Patrika* and the *Hindustan Standard* with some comments. In protest a press note was issued by the government of East Bengal on 16 February 1949. It characterized the reports of the Calcutta papers as false:

²⁷⁶ *Azad*, 11 February 1949.

²⁷⁷ Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

The Hajang movement of that area has its local features. In 1946, their movement was so widespread and prolonged that, in order to bring the situation under control, the Bengal government had to send police forces to the area. Taking advantage of the backward condition of the people, the old movement against the tonko system has been revived again.

In a number of meetings the Hajangs under the communist leaders held meetings and took out processions against the tonko system, rent and procurement of paddy. They were armed with deadly weapons like spears, choppers, etc. Several times they also looted paddy. On 28 January, a certain *nayek* of the border police was killed by them. A police constable was severely beaten up by them. On 4 February last, a big crowd of communist Hajangs surrounded the police camp of Lengura thana armed with spears, choppers, etc. After having failed to disperse them, the police opened fire.

After two hours a bigger crowd assembled in the area. In order to disperse them, the police again opened fire. On 9 February, similar incidents took place in Durgapur and Haluaghat thana. The police opened fire only when the crowd threatened them and the situation was going out of control. So far thirteen persons have been killed. At present the situation is quiet.²⁷⁸

Suppression of non-government and anti-government newspapers and widespread arrests of opposition political workers were used by the government to repress the anti-government political forces. In such a situation it was not possible to organize any effective protests against the repression of the Hajangs and any attempts were brutally suppressed by the government and the hoodlums of the ruling party.

On 16 February 1949, in the Dhaka University campus, a student protest meeting was convened by the Students Federation, a student organization affiliated to the Communist Party, to protest against the police firings and killings of peasants. As soon as the meeting, presided by Bahauddin Chowdhury, began the Muslim League student hoodlums surrounded them and began to beat them up. They pulled the president and threw his chair into a nearby pond. The meeting was dispersed.²⁷⁹ Commenting on the incident *Naobelal* wrote:

Anybody can understand that those who break up meetings by hooliganism are not only the enemies of the Students Federation but of every democratic student organization. These are the people who acted as agents of the government during the language movement. These are the people who support the

²⁷⁸ *Azad*, 16 February 1949.

²⁷⁹ *Naobelal*, 23 February 1949.

zamindars in the matter of abolishing the zamindari system. Above all, they support the firings on the Hajang peasants as a matter of principle.²⁸⁰

By the end of February 1949, the number of armed sepoys were increased in the twenty-five police camps in the thanas of Susang-Durgapur, Haluaghat and Nalitabari. Ansar forces were also deployed in the area. On 15 February, at 1 a.m. a high ranking police officer with a large contingent surrounded the village of Haldigram in the Nalitabari area. This village was one of the secret centers of the Hajang movement. They waited for daybreak to attack. Party informers got news of this and the leaders present in the camp decided to leave the area immediately for some safe shelter.²⁸¹ Divided into two groups they began to move, but a local *chowkidar* of the village noticed their movement and immediately informed the police who opened fire. The leaders returned fire but decided to leave the place without engagement. One group reached a safe shelter behind the hills, but the other group could not and Robi Niyogi and Jaladhar Pal were wounded. A number of policemen were also wounded. The next day the police burnt the whole village and left the place.²⁸²

When this news reached the neighboring areas, the peasants were very agitated, and on 16 February they marched towards the police camps of Nonni, Baroamari and Nalitabari. The police forces met the agitated crowd with gunfire and they had to disperse. After that they destroyed a bridge which the police used for their own movement. Within a week, the forces of the police and the East Pakistan Rifles were increased and they intensified their repression on the people. Among other things, twenty-five peasants were arrested.²⁸³

Since the incidents of Lengura hat, a huge number of policemen kept the entire area surrounded and committed all sorts of physical repressions. They tortured the Hajang, Garo and Muslim peasants to extract information regarding the guerrilla forces and their leaders.²⁸⁴

One early morning in March, the Superintendent of Police (SP) of the Mymensingh district arrived in the village of Laksmikura in a jeep along with a truck-load of policemen. They surrounded the house of Chandra Sarkar, a local leader. Sarkar was not in his house and the SP tortured the women and even the children of the house for information about him. He could get nothing.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-5

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

Faced with constant attacks, the peasant leaders and fighters decided to change their tactics. They withdrew from populated villages and moved to distant areas in the hills. There they fortified nine guerrilla camps in Ambuluka, Dambuk, Berakhali, Meleng, Panihata, Rangchita, Chandubhuin and Halchati. They also established three small fire arms factories, where they began to manufacture muskets, muzzle-loaders, pistols and various types of hand bombs. The chief trainer in the factories was Sachi Roy who made bombs and guns with his own hands. He was killed in one of these factories in an accident while making bombs. His assistant, Purana Hajang, was badly injured and became an invalid.²⁸⁶

Dr Amiyo Dasgupta used to look after the sick and the injured and he was kept supplied with medicines and equipments as far as possible. Food-grains for the whole year was also stored. The villagers moved as close as possible to the camp, and even established some peoples' camp in certain areas. They cultivated their land during daytime and kept themselves alert during the night. They developed a warning system, and even small boys learnt to warn the villagers from the trees by using whistles.²⁸⁷

Thus, after making better preparations for the struggle, the peasants decided to attack the police camps and the homes of the local agents at night. This was about the middle of May. They began the operations by attacking three camps in Sankhola, Sarnoi and Hati Pagar with rifles, stenguns, muskets and bombs. The police were forced to retreat, but from then they arranged to guard their camps by illuminating the surrounding area with petromax light and by establishing sentry boxes.²⁸⁸

All through the period from May to September 1949, skirmishes and clashes continued between the peasant forces and the sepoys in the northern areas of Mymensingh. With the increase of police repression, the resistance of the peasants also increased. While the Ansars were forcibly carrying away paddy from Amir Khan Kura, two of them were killed. Their bodies were packed in jute bags and returned in the same cart. Paddy was taken from the *khamars* or farms of twenty-five mahajans of the villages of Kharnoi, Jhaljhalia, Jamgara, Sandhakura, Kangsa etc. This was then distributed among the poor Garo and Muslim peasants. The *khamar* of a mahajan in Bagpara was set on fire and destroyed.²⁸⁹

Collective fines were imposed on the villagers of Karaitala by government authorities. When they were carrying the sum thus collected, Sudarshan, accompanied by seven guerrillas ambushed them with bombs from behind a bush. Some policemen were

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

wounded and the Ansars and cart drivers fled in panic. But the police opened fire at the bush and this resulted in the death of Sudarshan and Hari Singh Dalu.²⁹⁰

The peasants took severe steps against the local agents who gave information to the police. Sometimes they were even given death sentences. In the villages of Kalikapur, Maijpara, Kangsa, Charupara, Dhansali etc. about thirty such agents were given death sentences. Their movable properties were distributed among the people, their houses were looted and burnt, and their guns and other arms were captured. In this way the guerrillas acquired twenty-five guns in the area. However, the landlords and *jotedars* who were not hostile to the peasants were left alone. A certain *zamindar* of Sherpur came with his men to the Bandarkata kachari to collect rent. The local peasants managed to arrest him and later sent him to the guerrilla camp. There he promised before a peoples' court that neither he nor any of his descendants will ever come to claim the zamindari rents. He was then set free and escorted to his own area.²⁹¹

During this entire period of struggle, the most gruesome killings took place in the village of Jagirpara in Kalmakanda thana. One night about 500 police and Ansars surrounded the village and because of the suddenness of the attack, the peasants had no opportunity either to escape or put up any resistance. That night forty villagers-men, women and children-were killed, most while asleep. Thus unable to concentrate their attacks on hidden guerrilla centers, they tried to weaken the guerrillas by attacking their support bases.²⁹²

The biggest confrontation between the guerrillas and the police took place in a village called Ranipur. The Cherakhali peoples' camp was situated in a very convenient place on the turn of a hill. The guerrilla camp was a little inside the hill area. One day policemen, after plundering the villages of Nalgara, Kamalpur, Sohagi etc. reached an open field in the village of Ranipur. From here they surveyed the situation in Cherakhali through binoculars. Some villagers came out to the border of the village to see what the police were doing and they were fired on. No one was hurt, but this created a lot of excitement among the peasants.²⁹³

On hearing the sound of gunfire, some guerrillas came down and with this the police changed their position, and the guerrillas, without considering the consequences, came out in the open to confront them. After about an hour's exchanges of fire, cartridges and hand bombs were exhausted on the peasant side, and they pushed forward for a hand to hand fight. Some were wounded on both sides, but in this unequal fight, ten guerrillas and three policemen were killed.²⁹⁴ A huge government force then occupied

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7. 68. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-9. 69. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-1.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-2.

the Cherakhali peoples' camp and resorted to inhuman tortures on the residents of the camp and the neighboring areas. They looted the houses of villagers and raped the village women, created a reign of terror in the entire area and arrested fifty peasants seven of whom died during detention in the Mymensingh jail.²⁹⁵

In August 1949, several leading communist workers were arrested in Mymensingh. On 7 August, Kotwali police arrested Mohammad Wajed Ali, Biswanath Bhattacharya, Ramesh Acharya and Raturam Chowdhury. The next day Somesh Acharya, Benimadhab Roy and Subodh Roy were arrested. The police seized some anti-government communist literature, one dagger and one knife from them.²⁹⁶

After these incidents the peasant movement slowed down, but continued till the first quarter of 1950. Near about that time three women couriers, while carrying some organizational documents and information were arrested while crossing the Someshwari river. Ashnamoni, Bhadra and Rahela were tortured for further information. Failing to get anything out of them, they were sent to the Mymensingh jail. Later they were taken to Rajshahi central jail where they suffered a long period detention.²⁹⁷ One night Ramani Kar was suddenly arrested on the banks of the River Kangsha while he was carrying some ammunitions. The policemen found 5000 rupees after searching his body. In order to misappropriate that money, they did not register the case at the thana or police station but killed him and threw his body in the *haor*, or big marsh, of Goatala.²⁹⁸

In 1950, the Kisan Sava and the Communist Party decided to observe Shaheed Day on 31 January, the date of death of Rasimoni and Surendra. It was also decided that tributes would also be paid to martyrs who were killed by the landlords and government forces since 1946. As a follow up of this decision the largest assembly of armed peasants in the entire Hajang inhabited area of the district of Mymensingh took place. A valley adjacent to a village called Chandubhuin was selected as the venue of the assembly. Armed guerrilla groups in all areas were instructed to gather there on 31 January. All peasants and other people were also urged to be present there during the occasion. Thirty guerrilla groups, each consisting of ten guerrillas, with rifles, sten guns, ordinary guns, muskets and hand bombs guarded the valley where 1500 peasants came from different areas armed with axe, spears, choppers etc. and carried red flags. Alerted by the red flags, the police tried to advance towards the valley, the guerrillas began to fire their long distance rifles and guns and threw bombs which created such a noise that the police did not dare to come near them. The peasants paid tributes to the martyrs and vowed to continue their struggle till the abolition of the zamindari and the tonko system. After the end of the meeting, the peasants fired 350 guns simultaneously three

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

²⁹⁶ *Azad*, 13 August 1949.

²⁹⁷ Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-3.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

times and the noise of bombs was added to it. Then the peasants who had come from distant areas left for their homes and the resolutions of the meeting were sent to the government by post.²⁹⁹

In February, 200 men of the EPR attacked a camp located on top of the Rangtia hill on the west side of Nalitabari on information by a secret source in the forest department. Ten guerrillas fought to save the camp but they had to retreat when resistance became impossible and the leader Kalia was seriously injured. A very young peasant, Jogendra Hajang, was killed in the encounter. The government forces occupied the guerrilla camp and captured medicines, food grains etc. In the same month, the guerrillas destroyed a truck carrying policemen, by throwing bombs from a hill top in Bagaura in Susang, wounding ten policemen. The guerrillas also attacked a police patrol with rifles and sten guns from the top of Bhabanipur hill, in the north of Susang, and killed two. These clashes between guerrillas and the government forces continued till the end of February 1950.³⁰⁰

The movement came to an end due to three reasons. First, the zamindari and the tonko system were abolished by the government in February and this was officially announced through a gazette notification on 13 February 1950. Second, large-scale communal disturbances and riots took place in the same month, and third, in conformity with the Cominform thesis, the Communist Party decided to withdraw its armed struggle.

On 10 March 1950, the revenue minister of the East Bengal government, Tafazzal Ali, speaking on the abolition of the zamindari and the tonko system in the East Bengal Assembly asserted that during 1949-50 there were disturbances in the Hajang areas of Mymensingh which were undoubtedly instigated and led by the communists. But he admitted that the tonko peasants or the Hajangs of Mymensingh had also reasons to be aggrieved. In 1940, tenancy rights were granted to these peasants within the framework of the Act of 1885 and according to section 112 of the Act of 1940. The amount of rent in kind was reduced a little through a special corrective survey in the area. But in spite of this, the tonko rent per acre was fixed at 3 maunds and 33 seers on average, which was eight times the money rent prevalent in the same area. The minister said that in order to rationalize the rent system and stop disturbances, they had decided to abolish the tonko system along with zamindari system or what was called the Permanent Settlement.³⁰¹

The Santals

In 1947, at the time of the partition of Bengal, Nababganj, Bholahat, Gomasthapur, Shibganj and Nachole thanas of the district of Maldah were included in the Rajshahi district, and a new Nababganj sub-division was formed with these five thanas. After the

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

³⁰¹ East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 10 March 1950, vol. IV, no. 8, p. 213.

end of the Tebhaga movement by the sharecroppers in 1947, it was not re-organized in any other area except Nachole. This thana was mostly inhabited by Santals who were the chief organizers and participants in the Tebhaga movement of the area. The centre of this movement was Chandipur of Nachole thana, the village of the Santal leader, Matla Sardar. The peasant organization and movement in the area was organized under his leadership. Matla Sardar would discuss political demands and present political views in the Santali language in a clear and forceful manner. He was the first member of the Communist Party from among the Santal peasants.³⁰²

Apart from Matla Sardar, there were some other leaders of Nababganj sub-division and other areas of Rajshahi who did organizational work in the Nachole area. They were Ramen Mitra, Ila Mitra, Animesh Lahiri, Shibu Koramudi, Brindaban Saha, Azhar Hossain and Chitta Chakrabarty. Because of the conditions at that time, all of them had to work as underground workers. But the influence and control of the Krishak Samity in the entire area was widespread and firm, and thus they could move more freely in Nachole than in any other place. Apart from the Santals, Hindus and Muslims of the area, also participated in the Tebhaga movement. This was a favorable situation and communalism was unable to create a dent in the movement.³⁰³

The manner in which the Tebhaga movement was developing and enlarging itself indicated unmistakably the power of the peasant masses. They came in thousands and joined the movement as volunteers. They patrolled the villages armed with spears, choppers, axes, bows and arrows etc. and maintained communication and contact between different areas. In Chandipur, the headquarters of the movement, volunteers between 400 and 500 would have their meals twice a day in the main camp. This was expensive but was run by the peasant volunteers themselves. On the strength of this movement and organization, *tebhagha* was virtually, though unofficially, established in Nachole and the authority of the Muslim League government weakened.³⁰⁴

The leaders of the Krishak Samity asked the peasants to gather in different areas for harvesting the *aman* crop and accordingly the peasants prepared themselves for the harvesting on 5 January 1950.³⁰⁵ The local *jotedars* were alarmed and sent a message to the Nachole thana for help. The OC of the thana, Tafizuddin, arrived in the area with three constables.³⁰⁶

This agitated the Santal peasants but, instead of attacking them, they retreated immediately and allowed them to advance further into the interior. The police entered a

³⁰² Satyen Sen, *Bangladesher Krishaker Andolan (Movement of the Peasants in Bangladesh)*, pp. 92-101; Azhar Hossain, Ramen Mitra (interview).

³⁰³ Satyen Sen, *Bangladesher Krishaker Andolan*, pp. 92-101; Azhar Hossain, Ramen Mitra (interview).

³⁰⁴ Azhar Hossain, Ramen Mitra.

³⁰⁵ Satyen Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-101; Azhar Hossain, Ramen Mitra (interview).

³⁰⁶ *Azad*, 12 January 1950.

strong belt of the peasants where they were surrounded from all sides. They tried to stop the peasants and break the encirclement, but this aggravated the situation. The crowd became unmanageable and the police opened fire. A peasant was killed. This infuriated them and they caught the OC and three constables, snatched their rifles, killed all four and buried their bodies.³⁰⁷

The Superintendent of Police (SP) of Rajshahi arrived soon afterwards with a contingent of armed sepoy and police to investigate the disappearance of the OC and constables. They tortured the Santal peasants, and with the help of some local men exhumed the bodies of the slain policemen and sent them to Rajshahi.³⁰⁸ After dispatching the dead bodies to Rajshahi the police resorted to large-scale arson in village after village, beat up the peasants, raped the Santal women, looted peasant homes with abandon and let loose a reign of terror in the entire area.³⁰⁹

The leaders of the Krishak Samity, except Ila Mitra, were not in Nachole when the killing of the policemen took place. Ramen Mitra along with Matla Sardar quickly crossed the border into India.³¹⁰ A number of Santal peasants were also with them. Within a few days of the 5 January incident Animesh Lahiri and Azhar Hossain were arrested from the house of the latter.³¹¹ Late at night on 8 January, Chitta Chakravarty was arrested in a village called Badarpur while he was delivering a speech to the Santal peasants. On the same day a large number of peasants were arrested near Rajshahi while trying to leave Nawabganj by train.³¹²

Ila Mitra, accompanied by about 400 Santal peasants, left Nachole in order to cross the border and enter India. But they had no clear idea about the route which they could safely take. They reached Rohanpur railway station expecting to catch a suitable train. Here, a temporary army camp was established for suppressing the Santal rebellion. The group was easily identified by the army and Ila Mitra, along with the Santal peasants, were arrested immediately. Although Ila Mitra was dressed like a Santal woman, she was easily identified.³¹³ They were all taken to Nachole thana and tortured. The details of this was described by Ila Mitra in the following manner:

They began to beat all of us mercilessly. We were taken to Nachole. I was exhausted and my body was aching from the beating. They kept me sitting in the veranda of a room. They gathered all the Santal workers who were with me and began to beat them in a barbaric manner so that I could see it with my own eyes.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.; Azhar Hossain.

³⁰⁸ *Azad*, 12 January 1950.

³⁰⁹ Satyen Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 103; Azhar Hossain.

³¹⁰ Satyen Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-5; Azhar Hossain.

³¹¹ Azhar Hossain.

³¹² *Azad*, 12 January 1950.

³¹³ Satyen Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-6.

While beating them they said, they wanted to hear only one thing from them - that Ila Mitra had herself asked them to kill the policemen. They said that they would release all of them if they just said that. Otherwise the beating would continue, and they would be beaten to death.

They did not say this only to scare them but were carrying it out as well. And what a sight it was! I had to see it with my own eyes. What torture! But how surprising, that the beasts were inflicting tortures continuously, blood was running down the bodies of the workers, but they made no sound, there was no expression of pain. They were silent, but I began to weep. I could not bear the sight. I was praying, that I could become unconscious. But it did not happen. I had to witness everything fully conscious. But I cannot help saying that in the midst of such distress my heart was full of pride for our valiant comrades. Not one not two, but each man kept his mouth shut and was silent. Even the beating could not compel them to open their mouth. How was it possible? I could never imagine that it could be like this.

I was startled by the loud noise of shouting. I looked up and saw that they were taking out Hayek from the group while continuing the beating. They were asking the same question-say that Ila Mitra ordered the killing of those policemen. If you don't say, we will kill you. I was looking at the face of Hayek-a strangely unperturbed face. He was staring into the void with his meaningless eyes, as if all that they were saying were not entering his ears. They became furious. Some of them flattened him on the ground, and began to kick him on his stomach and back with their military boots. I could see blood was oozing out of Hayek's mouth but they continued to roughen him for some time. A little later he lay as still as a log. One of them turned him over and said, leave him, he is finished. Then they turned to someone else.³¹⁴

The Santal prisoners were given neither food nor water, and their hands and feet were tied. Due to hunger, thirst and inhuman beating twenty-four Santal prisoners died in the custody of Nachole thana. From Nachole the remaining were transferred to Nawabganj jail, the same torture continued resulting in a large number of Santal peasants dying in the Nawabganj jail.³¹⁵ They were killed like flies, cats or rabid dogs with no human consideration.

The Santal prisoners who survived were then taken to Rajshahi central jail, where the same torture continued without mercy. They were kept in a small room, half-fed and without medical treatment. However, no one confessed and again a number of them died in custody.³¹⁶ Little of this was known at that time due to newspaper censorship,

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³¹⁵ Azhar Hossain, Abdul Huq, Ranesh Dasgupta (interview).

³¹⁶ Abdul Huq; Satyen Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

and as little is known today of this glorious resistance of the Santal peasants against the policies and repressions of the fascist Muslim League regime of the time, especially the high sense of honor they displayed even in the face of death. This heroism of the Santal fighters remains to this day the most glorious heritage of the people in their struggle against the fascist ruling classes in this country. From Nachole to Rajshahi central jail, Ila Mitra and the other prisoners were treated in the same manner. Even the local people and the ordinary prisoners, denounced them and treated them badly. The government propaganda had described the Santals as anti-Muslim, anti-Pakistan and anti-state elements.³¹⁷

At the Rajshahi central jail, Ila Mitra was kept in a solitary cell and a case was instituted against her and all the Santal prisoners. The responsibility of conducting their case was taken up by Kamini Kumar Datta, the famous lawyer and political leader of Comilla. Ila Mitra was considering what she would state in her deposition before the court, because it was a really delicate and difficult matter to state in detail of what actually happened to her, and the kind of torture that the police inflicted on her at Nachole and then at the Nawabganj and Rajshahi jails. At that time she unexpectedly received a secret letter from Manorama Basu of Barisal and Bhanu Devi of Khulna, both of whom were detained at the Rajshahi central jail at the time. They urged her to state everything that happened to her and asked her not to feel shy. The letter was helpful to Ila Mitra who finally rose above all inhibitions and stated in very clear language the inhuman torture and outrage on her honor that was committed by the brute policemen of the Islamic government of Pakistan.³¹⁸ Her deposition before the Rajshahi district court runs as follows:

I do not know anything about the case. I was arrested in Rohonpur on 7 January 1950, and the next day I was taken to Nachole. On the way the police beat me and then I was taken inside a cell. The SI threatened me and said that they would make me naked if I did not admit everything about the killing. Since I had nothing to say, they took away all my clothes and kept me detained in the cell completely naked.

No food was given to me, not even a drop of water. That evening in the presence of the SI, the sepoy's began to strike my head with the butts of their guns. At that time much blood was running from my nose. After that my clothes were returned to me and at about twelve in the night I was taken to the quarter of the SI, but of that I was not very sure. They tried many inhuman methods to force my confession in the room where I was taken. Both my feet were fixed between two sticks which they were pressing and those who were standing around were saying that I was being given Pakistani injection'. While continuing this torture,

³¹⁷ Abdul Huq, Azhar Hossain.

³¹⁸ Satyen Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-12.

they kept my mouth bound by a handkerchief. Failing to make me say anything by force, they were pulling out my hair. The sepoy carried me back to the jail, because after the torture it was no longer possible for me to walk.

Inside the cell the SI again told the sepoy to bring four hot boiled eggs and said, 'Now she will talk'. After that four or five sepoy forcibly kept me lying on my back, and one of them pushed a hot boiled egg inside my vagina. It seemed to me that I was being burnt by fire. After that I became senseless.

The said SI and a few sepoy came to my cell and began to kick me on my stomach in the morning of 9 January 1950, when I regained consciousness. After that a nail was pushed into the heel of my right leg. At that time lying in a semi-conscious state, I heard the SI mutter: we are coming back again at night, and if you do not make confession then one by one the sepoy will rape you. Late at night, the SI and the sepoy returned, and they issued the same threat. But since I refused to say anything even then, three or four of them held me and one of them actually began to rape me. Soon I became unconscious. When I regained consciousness the next day i.e. on 10 January 1950, I saw that my whole body was bleeding profusely and my clothes were wet with blood. In that condition I was taken to Nawabganj from Nachole. The sepoy at the Nawabganj jail gate welcomed me with strong blows. At that time I was completely limp, and so the court inspector and a few sepoy carried me to a cell. I was still bleeding and I had very high temperature. Possibly a doctor of the Nawabganj government hospital took my temperature. It was 105 degrees. When he heard about my profuse bleeding, he assured me that I would be treated by a female nurse. I was given some medicines and two torn pieces of blankets.

On 11 January 1950, a nurse of the government hospital examined me. What report she gave on my condition, I do not know. After her visit the blood-soaked cloth which I had been wearing, was changed and I was given a clean dress. This whole period I was under the treatment of a doctor in my cell. I had very high temperature and till then I had been bleeding profusely and I was losing sense intermittently.

In the evening of 16 January 1950, a stretcher was brought in my cell and I was told that I had to go to another place for examination. They struck me with a stick when I told them that due to extremely bad health condition it was not possible for me to move. I was forced to move on to the stretcher. After that I was taken to another house. I did not say anything there but the sepoy forcibly took my signature on a white sheet. I was then in a semi-conscious state and had high temperature. Since my condition was continuously deteriorating, next day I was sent to the Nawabganj government hospital. When the condition of my health

became critical, then on 21 February 1950 I was taken to Rajshahi central jail from Nawabganj and admitted to the jail hospital.

Under no condition did I say anything to the police and I have nothing more to say than what I have said above.³¹⁹

The transfer of Ila Mitra and the Santal prisoners to the Rajshahi central jail coincided with large-scale communal violence in East and West Bengal. The jail authorities and the police tried to create communal excitement inside and even outside the jail. The wife of the police officer who was killed on 5 January by the Santals would come to the jail gate at Rajshahi every day, abuse the Santals and Ila Mitra in bad language and describe the incident in a distorted manner. This created a great deal of tension among the prisoners, and some of them, along with the prison guards, tried to instigate prisoners against the Hindu detainees, including the political prisoners. The wife of the dead police officer, Tafizuddin, also did the same thing. Sometimes Ila Mitra also would be taken to the jail gate almost naked and they would tell the prisoners to have a look at the 'queen'.³²⁰

All these created such tension inside the jail that Hindu prisoners were unable to come out of their wards. To address the situation, the political prisoners submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Nurul Amin, and served a fifteen-day notice. They said that if the communal activities of the jail authorities and police were not stopped, then they would be forced to go on hunger strike. The Prime Minister did not reply, and so the political prisoners went on hunger strike from 2 February 1950. On 10 February, the district magistrate of Rajshahi met the political prisoners and assured them that they were taking steps to put an end to the communal disturbance inside the jail. After that they stopped the widow of Tafizuddin from visiting the jail gate; and jailor Mannan and his associates also stopped their communal propaganda.³²¹

Due to the extraordinary control over the press, nothing of the Nachole incident appeared in the media. The communists circulated English and Bengali versions of the court deposition of Ila Mitra through the workers of the Students Federation, but no daily or weekly newspaper picked it up for publication.

Prabhash Chandra Lahiri, Govindalal Banerjee and Monohar Dhali submitted some adjournment notices to the Speaker in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly on the Nachole incident and subsequent developments. On 6 February, during the session of

³¹⁹ Since this deposition of Ila Mitra was not published in any newspaper, it was distributed in the form of leaflet by the East Pakistan Communist Party in 1950. The English version of this along with its photocopy was first printed in volume I of Badruddin Umar's *Language Movement in East Pakistan and Contemporary Politics*. Later it was printed in Vol. II.

³²⁰ Abdul Huq.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

the Assembly they asked the Speaker about the adjournment motion and he was not unwilling to let them raise the motion. However, due to strong opposition by the Prime Minister he could not do so. The Prime Minister stated that the matter of killing of an officer and three constables was then under the jurisdiction of the court, so it could not be discussed in the Assembly. In reply to this, Prabash Lahiri said that they did not want to discuss the Nachole incident but what happened afterwards, and that was not sub-judice. But Nurul Amin said that what happened afterwards could not be discussed without reference to the main incident. Therefore, such a debate could not be permitted.³²²

Thus the entire Nachole incident and subsequent developments were neither published in any newspaper nor were they debated in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly and the government succeeded in maintaining their 'civilized' appearance before the people of this country and the world.

The Movement in Khulna, Faridpur and Jessore

Apart from the three districts of Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rajshahi, there was only one other district, Khulna, where the peasant movement was organized in certain of its areas in 1948-50. These included Shovna, Dhanibunia, Kalshira, Moubhag, Ghatbhog, Doba, Chitalmari and Mollahat. Of these places, the movement took the form of a sort of armed struggle in Shovna, Dhanibunia and Kalshira. These areas were also strong centers of the Tebhaga movement.³²³

The main political slogan in that area was that the independence of 1947 was false, and the aim of the peasant movement was the overthrow of the state and seizure of power. The main economic programme was abolition of zamindari without compensation, reduction of rent, stopping of *jotedari* and *mahajani* exploitation and oppression, distribution of government lands among the working peasants, distribution of surplus land of non-cultivating landowners to peasants, etc. This programme was summed up in the slogan: 'land to the tillers'. They considered seizure of land as a step toward the final seizure of power.³²⁴ However, the leadership of the movement was in the hands of the middle and rich peasants. Large-scale participation of rural agricultural workers and poor peasants in the movement was absent. But in Shovna and Dhanibunia, the movement was quite extensive for a brief period and except for a handful of zamindar-*jotedars* and their touts and henchmen, it received the support of the people of the entire area.³²⁵

Practically no non-communist person, or people who were not somehow associated with the Communist Party, joined the peasant movement in that period, which is why

³²² East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings. Fourth Session 1949-50, vol. IV, no. 6, p. 12, 6 February 1950.

³²³ Kamakhya Ray Chowdhury of Khulna (written note), Nagen Sarkar of Khulna (written note).

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

generally people did not distinguish between the Communist Party and the Kisan Sava. The leaders of the Communist Party in each locality also lead the movements organized by the Kisan Sava. The main fund was collected from the peasants and the Party would procure and supply arms. In the Khulna area, there were a number of leaders and activists, Bishnu Chatterjee, Shachin Basu, Kumar Mitra, Samar Mitra, Ratan Sen, Kamakhya Ray Chowdhury, Dr Abdur Rahim, Nagen Sarkar, Nakul Mallick, Afsar Morol, Keramat Moral, Bilayet Moral, Biren Biswas, Dr Ghanendra Kanjilal and Dr Atunendra Das. There were others as well and each one of them was under warrant of arrest and so they had difficulty in carrying out organizational work openly. But since they had considerable mass support in the area, they could freely move around.³²⁶

Police camps were established in the area of the movement and extensive arrests, filing of false cases, forfeiture of property, house search, beating and even rape were common. Some of the local touts helped the police in this. Such touts were killed in certain areas, and the police repression in such areas became extensive. Hajari Bala in Shovna, Satish Bain and Ramakanta in Dhanibunia were killed in clashes with the police. In April 1949, an armed conflict took place between the police and peasants in the Dumuria thana, and was the biggest encounter of its kind in Khulna.³²⁷

According to a newspaper report received through government sources on 24 April 1949, in an armed clash between the police and the peasants, police opened fire, and as a result three were killed and ten persons were injured including three policemen. The police had arrested two persons in the village of Darubunia on 14 April and they were going on to arrest two more in the neighboring village of Betbunia when about 500 peasants with ten or twelve guns resisted their advance. They snatched the two arrested persons from the custody of the police and exchange of gun fire followed. The condition of the two injured policemen was serious and they were admitted to the hospital. Additional police forces were deployed in the thanas of Dumuria and Batiaghata which was also considered a 'disturbed' area.³²⁸

On 20 December 1949, an assistant sub-inspector of police accompanied by three constables went to the village of Kalshira in Bagerhat sub-division, to search the house of a communist worker, Joydeb Brahma. They were attacked by the peasants and one constable was killed. The other two were wounded but they were able to escape with the help of Ansars and some local people.³²⁹ The news of this incident found its way to the West Bengal newspapers and a very distorted version was published, giving it a communal bias. Both the governments of India and Pakistan used the incident to create a major, and the most dangerous wide-spread communal disturbance in both East and West Bengal since independence. This disturbance resulted in the migration of a very

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ *Azad*, 1 May 1949.

³²⁹ East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, 10 March 1950, vol. IV, no. 8, p. 183.

large number of people from both Bengals within a very short period and, among other consequences, harmed the communist and peasant movement in East Bengal.

Some stray and brief movements were organized in a few areas in the districts of Jessore and Faridpur. In 1948-49, the communists did not participate in the anti-cordon movement, but Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his associates of the newly formed Awami Muslim League participated in the Gopalganj area of Faridpur.³³⁰ At the time of partition, the thanas of Tentulia, Boda and Panchagarh of the district of Jalpaiguri were included in the East Dinajpur district, and the thanas of Debiganj and Patgram of the same district were included in the district of Rangpur. In these and other areas of the districts of Rangpur and Dinajpur, there were some organization among the peasants. These were very important areas of the Tebhaga movement during 1946-47, but after partition the peasant movement under the Krishak Samity was comparatively very weak.³³¹

In a few places in Chittagong, very small-scale peasant movements took place, but in a village called Madorasa twelve peasants were killed in a clash with the police.³³²

Government Reactions

From the descriptions of the peasant struggles, it is clear that the Government of Pakistan and East Pakistan were quite determined to repress the communists and whatever movements they were involved in. They could do this with considerable success because at that time there was practically no other effective political opposition, and the Communist Party, by taking B.T. Ranadive's line of adventurism, isolated themselves from the masses, particularly the Muslims, who were not at all prepared to overthrow the Pakistan government so soon after achieving it. This was the reality in spite of all the repressions and exploitations of the government, and the fast decline of their popularity and legitimacy as an Islamic state in the eyes of the common people.

The newspapers mostly supported the government first, because they were themselves anti-communist, and secondly because there were various types of restrictions on them. But in spite of that the same newspapers often voiced, in general terms, their great apprehension about the efficacy of government measures, particularly their repressive policies against the communists, which even for them was difficult to endorse. They would occasionally warn the government and suggest other ways for fighting what they called the 'communist menace'.

Thus the *Azad*, in an editorial in March 1949, wrote, 'We want to tell the authorities that without being scared and exclusively dependent on repressions, they should hasten to remove poverty, illiteracy and social inequality. The most distant and slight possibility

³³⁰ Shanti Sen (interview).

³³¹ Pramatha Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

³³² *Ibid.*; Shukhendu Dastidar, Shudhangsu Bimal Datta (interview).

of communism in Pakistan will be removed if this can be done'. The significant point here is the exhortation not to completely abandon repression, but to refrain from depending on it exclusively. In the same month the *Naobelal*, commenting on the same subject, said in an editorial:

A class of persons among the people who are pressing the government for continuing repression, are in fact advancing the work of communism. If they are really anti-communist then they should compel the government to immediately and properly solve the major problems like education, food and the problem of living like human beings.

In May 1949, the government of East Bengal circulated a leaflet (No. EBGp, Wari,-49/50-967 W-10M) under the caption 'True Nature of Communism' among the people throughout East Bengal in which in order to expose the true nature of communism, they depended almost entirely on communalism. The leaflet was comparatively lengthy than the usual size of leaflets, and it was full of false and deceptive propaganda. It cannot be said that the leaflet generally failed to achieve its objectives, and it created certain reactions among the Muslim masses. Major mistakes made by the Communist Party and the Krishak Samity contributed considerably towards the success of the government propaganda.

The government was apprehensive that the influence of the communists was increasing among some sections of the middle classes like the students, teachers and others, and in order to curb this influence they decided to take certain definite steps in November 1949. A report on this was published in the *Azad* which said that communist principles and propaganda were vitiating the minds of the citizens and striking at the roots of the nation. So the government was taking necessary steps to suppress such activities. The government would keep an eye on all educational institutions so that no students or teachers can engage themselves in destructive activities against the state. If students or teachers of any institution engaged themselves in anti-state activities then their grants would be stopped or their affiliation would be cancelled. If any teacher is found to engage himself thus, he would lose his job and if any student is found to be guilty of the same, then he would be expelled from that educational institution and all avenues of employment for such students would be blocked. The newspaper report also said that it had been decided that if someone applies for a job anywhere he would have to submit a certificate from appropriate authorities to the effect that he had never engaged himself in any anti-state subversive activities.

These government declarations and proposed steps clearly indicated the extent to which they were scared of communists and it showed clearly their determination to suppress all activities which were suspect in their eyes. As a consequence of this policy and this attitude, all democratic activities were under attack as well.

Collapse of the Peasant Movement

The armed struggles of the peasants under the leadership of the communists lasted for about one and half years in East Pakistan, and it came to an end before the middle of 1950. The collapse of the peasant movement after such a short period of struggle was the result of the serious limitations and problems it had from the very beginning. The sudden change of line from peaceful struggle and cooperation with the government for solving certain immediate problems to a policy of armed struggle and attack on the state machine created a lot of confusion among the rank and file workers, as well as a part of the leadership. This led to the weakening of both the Communist Party and the Kisan Sava.

The slogan characterizing the independence of the country as false and the programme of overthrowing the state of Pakistan, instead of motivating the people, created a certain hostility among the Muslim masses, who in spite of being increasingly anti-government were far from wishing the liquidation of Pakistan. Thus, the sudden change of policy went a long way in isolating the Communist Party and the Kisan Sava from the people, and the government used this isolation to the maximum possible extent in formulating their line of attack on the communists as well as the peasant movements by the extensive use of communalism. This was effective because during this period all the major peasant struggles were concentrated in areas overwhelmingly inhabited by non-Muslim, tribals.

The Communist Party, instead of organizing mass movements and launching an armed struggle at the height of such movements, adopted the opposite line of developing mass struggles through armed struggles. Consequently, the organized areas were soon destroyed and that led to the rapid collapse of the peasant movements.

The Kisan Sava, while conducting peasant movements in different areas, had no definite programme of land reform and there was little awareness of the other major problems of the peasants which needed urgent attention. As a result of all these they had no definite organizational plan according to which they could organize the peasants in other areas in addition to the areas inhabited by tribal peoples.

The first phase of the peasant struggles in East Pakistan practically came to an end in early 1950, and it took about a decade to pick up again. But in the next phase the tribal areas mostly remained isolated, and there were very little activity among the tribal people unlike in the earlier period. In the second phase the peasant movements were organized by the Krishak Samity, a new organization under the leadership of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. This new peasant organization, like its predecessor, had no definite programme of land reform or anything relating to the various vital problems of the peasantry. Its principal work was agitational. It held periodical conferences in which peasant problems were discussed in very general terms, but very little emerged in terms of definite and concrete programmes.

Chapter Seventeen

HUNGER STRIKES OF COMMUNIST PRISONERS

In 1940, the British Government laid out certain rules, called the Security Prisoners Rules, under which some facilities and rights under which some facilities, and were granted to political prisoners. After the establishment of Pakistan, with the passing of the East Bengal Special Powers Ordinance, the Security Prisoners Rules were annulled. Political prisoners were from then on treated like ordinary criminals. Thus, the district magistrate of each area was given complete freedom to deal with political prisoners in any manner he considered fit. The East Bengal Assembly was first informed on 5 April 1949, by a spokesman of the concerned ministry that the district magistrates were legally empowered to decide who among the political prisoners be given second class or third class status. During the debate on the status of political prisoners, which took place on the same day, the minister in charge of the department, Mufizuddin Ahmad, said that in the absence of Security Prisoners Rules, the prisoners were governed by the Jail Code in which there was no provision for different treatment and separate arrangements for political prisoners. Therefore, in the absence of any specific rules, any officer other than the district magistrate-the jailor, jail superintendent and even lower officers did not hesitate to misbehave with political prisoners.³³³

In fact, the government of Pakistan virtually eliminated even the idea of there being political prisoners, because according to them anyone acting against the government was an anti-state element and as such they were nothing short of criminals. The question of conceding any special status to them did not arise. They were given out the same food provided to class three prisoners and criminals, they were not given any jail allowance, newspapers or permission to appear in examinations. They were not even allowed to wear their own clothes and were forced to wear the same jail uniform which ordinary criminals had to wear. They were not even provided any light after dark. It may be mentioned here that the government of East Bengal did not release any communist prisoners who were detained by the British-Indian administration before the establishment of Pakistan.³³⁴

In order to change the conditions inside the jails, the communist prisoners decided to go on hunger strike. There were also other reasons for this decision. Although the B.T. Ranadive policy had no direct connection with the hunger strike in the beginning, yet a majority of communist prisoners thought that political struggle in the form of hunger strikes could enthuse those outside the prisons and this would advance the struggle for

³³³ *East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Third Session, 1949*, Vol. III, No. 4, pp. 50-1.

³³⁴ Ranesh Dasgupta (written note), Maruf Hossain (interview).

democracy. After the decision to fully implement the Ranadive policy in all areas of political activities, the struggle inside the jails was further strengthened. It was decided that non-political prisoners also will have to be drawn into the hunger strike programme. Some communist prisoners were against this, because they thought that most of the non-political prisoners could be categorized as *Lumpenproletariat*, and nothing revolutionary could be achieved by directly involving such elements in their struggles. But those were the high days of the Ranadive line and the minority dissidents in this matter were branded as reformists and their opinion dismissed by the majority. However, it was not easy to involve the non-political prisoners in the hunger strikes, and except for a brief period in the Rajshahi central jail, there was practically no such participation in other jails.³³⁵

When the final decision for hunger strikes was taken simultaneously in various prisons of India, particularly in West Bengal, Alipur and Dum Dum central jails became strong centers of the hunger strike movement. The governments of India and West Bengal tried to handle such strikes in the most brutal manner. In East Bengal the decision to go on hunger strikes was taken sometime in early 1949 in Dhaka central jail and contacts were established with other jails. The first hunger strike began in the jails of East Bengal on 11 March 1949. There were about one hundred communist political prisoners in the Dhaka central jail. A strike notice was served to the jail authorities on their behalf by Ranesh Dasgupta. In reply the Inspector General of Prisons (IGP) informed them that such strikes were completely illegal and would be dealt with accordingly. The IGP also visited the prisoners in the Dhaka central jail and told them directly that they were traitors to the country and were not entitled to any considerations extended to political prisoners.³³⁶

Of the hundred communist prisoners, forty-nine began the hunger strike in the Dhaka jail on 11 March 1949. The same evening four of them gave up the strike and another three the next day.³³⁷ During the strike the jail authorities and representatives of the government paid regular visits to the prison and tried to persuade the strikers that their demands would be met if they withdrew the strike. The hunger strikers became increasingly weak physically and within three days, ten out of forty-nine broke their fast. On 15 March, the rest also decided to withdraw their strike.³³⁸

Nothing was done about the assurances given by the authorities. On the contrary, Mufizuddin, declared in the East Bengal Assembly on 5 April that no assurances were given by anybody to the political prisoners in the Dhaka central jail.³³⁹ Since there was no written agreement between the two sides and the hunger strike was withdrawn

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

³³⁸ Ranesh Dasgupta (note).

³³⁹ East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, *ibid.*

unilaterally, it was easy for the minister to deny the assurances which were given verbally to the striking prisoners. After the end of the strike, repression of the prisoners increased.³⁴⁰

In Dhaka the strike lasted for only four days, but at the Rajshahi central jail it lasted for thirty-eight days. They also withdrew the strike unilaterally and without any agreement. The first hunger strike in other jails lasted longer than in Dhaka, but everywhere the strike ended in the same way and everywhere repression inside the jails increased.³⁴¹

The second hunger strike began in May 1949.³⁴² This time party discipline was enforced more strictly and everyone was told that if any party person broke the strike without party approval, he would be immediately expelled from the party.³⁴³ On the eleventh day of the strike, the jail authorities began force feeding the striking prisoners, as they had become very weak and their condition began to deteriorate. On the twenty-fourth day of the strike, Mufizuddin Ahmad, Fakir Abdul Mannan and Monoranjan Dhar visited the strikers inside the Dhaka central jail and told them that their demands would be accepted by the authorities. They also requested them to give up the strike. On the basis of that verbal assurance they again decided to withdraw the strike.³⁴⁴ In Rajshahi central jail the second strike lasted for forty-one days. During this strike the political prisoners were charged with attempted suicide and forced into hard labor just like those who were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment.³⁴⁵

During the second strike, the students of the Dhaka University organized a meeting on 1 June 1949 in support of the striking prisoners and in protest against their repression.³⁴⁶ In the first week of June the government issued a press note denouncing the striking prisoners as anti-state elements.³⁴⁷ Prime Minister Nurul Amin repeated this in the East Bengal Assembly. He very emphatically argued that since the striking political prisoners were set to undermine and even to destroy the independence of Pakistan, they were not to be considered as political prisoners and the question of their being entitled to such a status did not arise.³⁴⁸

The attitude of the government displayed through these statements and remarks, as well as through their actual policy towards the political prisoners, expressed quite

³⁴⁰ Ranesh Dasgupta (note).

³⁴¹ Abdul Huq (written note).

³⁴² Abdul Huq, Ranesh Dasgupta.

³⁴³ Ranesh Dasgupta.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ Abdul Huq.

³⁴⁶ Tajuddin's Diary, 1 June 1949.

³⁴⁷ *Naobelal*, 9 June 1949.

³⁴⁸ *East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Fourth Session 1949*, Vol. IV, No. 5, pp. 94-5.

clearly the totally undemocratic and repressive character of the administration of a country which had attained independence from foreign rule less than two years before. The third hunger strike of communist prisoners began at a time when there was considerable pressure within the party to implement the Ranadive line. Thus, there was renewed determination in September 1949, in the Dhaka and Rajshahi central jails as well as in other jails. This time it was decided to involve the non-political prisoners in the hunger strike movement, but the idea had to be abandoned.³⁴⁹

The strike continued for forty days in the Dhaka central jail. In the end the prisoners returned from their cells to their wards. In the Rajshahi central jail it lasted for forty-five days.³⁵⁰ Each time the strike in Rajshahi went on for a longer time perhaps because the news of withdrawal of strike in Dhaka took some time to reach Rajshahi central jail through the party channel. At the end of the third strike Debesh Bhattacharya, Narayan Biswas and a few others were tried in the Dhaka jail for violation of jail rules.³⁵¹

Several prisoners refused to appear for trial on the advice of their lawyers. But Nadira Begum, who came to Dhaka central jail before the third hunger strike, was taken to the jail gate on 30 November 1949, before a sub-deputy magistrate for trial. She refused to answer any question and at one stage threw her shoes at the sub-deputy magistrate. After this she was severely beaten and dragged to the female ward. Here other prisoners admonished the male jail warders who were not supposed to enter the female ward. The female prisoners raised slogans and attacked the warders. The male prisoners were playing volleyball at the time, and on hearing the slogans from the female ward they also joined in. The jail police lathi-charged them and pushed them inside their wards. They rang the alarm bell and warned the prisoners that if the situation became worse, they would open fire on them. No one was willing to engage with the police in a violent clash.³⁵²

The next day the communist political prisoners served a new notice to the government of another hunger strike. They were fed up with repeated hunger strikes ending without yielding any results. So this time they were determined to continue their strike until their demands were fulfilled. They informed the government accordingly.³⁵³

The hunger strikers then placed a number of demands to the government and began their fourth strike on 2 December 1949. The demands were mentioned by Nurul Amin in the East Bengal Assembly on 17 December 1949.³⁵⁴ The first demand was immediate and unconditional release of all security and political prisoners. If that was not done

³⁴⁹ Ranesh Dasgupta.

³⁵⁰ Abdul Huq.

³⁵¹ Ranesh Dasgupta.

³⁵² Ranesh Dasgupta, Maruf Hossain.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, *ibid.*

then three to four rupees must be given per day to each prisoner, apart from necessary furniture and utensils, an initial allowance of Rs 250, personal allowance of Rs 50 per month until the completion of their trial, and the families of the prisoners must be given a monthly allowance of Rs 100 each with retrospective effect from the day of their arrest. Arrangement for dispatching letters be made, interviews every two weeks, proper accommodation and sports facilities were to be given. They demanded no less than class one status for the Hajang and other under-trial prisoners, second class status for all other political prisoners, improved food, provision for newspaper and radio, smoking allowance and abolition of censorship of newspapers and periodicals. While reading out the demands, Nurul Amin said that since the striking prisoners were enemies of the state, it was not possible for the government to accept their demands. But they would review the jail rules and see if anything could be done.

Unlike the previous occasions, the striking prisoners told the jail authorities that this time they would not leave their ward and go to the cells. But due to repeated hunger strikes all of them were very weak, and on the fifth day they became so weak that it was not difficult for the jail authorities to force them to leave their ward. Force feeding of hunger strikers began on the day after they were removed to the cells.³⁵⁵ While carrying this out, the warders would sit on the chest of the prisoners and Shibendra Roy was killed inside his cell during the feeding. The rod which they pushed through his nose damaged his internal organs.³⁵⁶ Other prisoners came to know of his death when the warders were taking out his body from his cell. It created such a commotion among the other prisoners that the jail warders and others of the jail administration did not dare come near them. It was a very cold winter day and they sent blankets etc. through other prisoners who left them in front of their cells. On 17 December, Nurul Amin stated in the East Bengal Assembly³⁵⁷ that,

Detained in Kushtia sub-jail a certain Shibendra Mohan Roy was transferred to Dhaka central jail on 16 November 1949. He joined the hunger strike on the evening of 2 December and died at night on 9 December 1949. The said political prisoner refused to receive any medical treatment from the very day he joined the hunger strike. He had to be fed forcibly. After the post mortem examination, according to the opinion of the doctor, he died of broncho-pneumonia. The next day the dead body of the said prisoner was cremated properly by the local Hindu cremation society, and the father of the prisoner was informed telegraphically.

Nurul Amin's statement was questioned in the Assembly by leader of the opposition Basanta Kumar Roy, who described it as 'very strange'. They also demanded judicial

³⁵⁵ Ranesh Dasgupta, Maruf Hossain.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, *ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

enquiry, but the government did nothing. No one, however, believed what the Prime Minister said.

After the death of Shiben Roy, civil surgeon Mohammad Hossain personally came to see the prisoners and told them that from now on he would personally supervise everything. No doctors would be present during the forced feeding of the prisoners. The prisoners were forcibly fed by the jail authorities with the help of the warders.³⁵⁸

During the fourth, strike, Fakir Abdul Mannan and other officers of the government visited the striking prisoners and held discussions with them. Nurul Amin's position became weak to some extent and he was inclined to make some compromise. The government said that those belonging to the middle class would be given class 'A' status, and those who came from peasant and working class families would be given class 'B' status. At first the prisoners wanted to reject the compromise terms, but soon they realized that if they continued the hunger strike there would be a large number of deaths and the strike would come to nothing. So they decided to accept the division of status and ended their strike after fifty-eight days. The prisoners in the female ward refused to agree with this decision and refused to break their fast. But they had to give in when the men broke their fast by drinking milk.³⁵⁹ In Rajshahi central jail the fourth hunger strike lasted for sixty-one days.³⁶⁰

After these hunger strikes twenty-five political prisoners were transferred to other jails from Dhaka. The secretary of Dhaka District Communist Party, Phani Guha, was one of them. He was arrested in 1949 and during the fourth strike he developed a perforation in his stomach. He died shortly after being transferred to Mymensingh jail. Later, in 1950, Bishnu Bairagi was beaten to death in the Khulna district jail.³⁶¹

Oppression of prisoners was much worse in Rajshahi central jail than in Dhaka. During the second hunger strike the striking prisoners were charged with attempted suicide and given special punishment. They had to work side by side with ordinary prisoners who were sentenced to hard labor. This gave an opportunity to the political prisoners to mix with the ordinary prisoners who were suffering as well. When the communists explained to them, in the light of their own experience, the exploitative and repressive character of the whole system, they listened to them with interest. They began to question why, was it that after the establishment of Pakistan, they have to work like cattle, beaten mercilessly and treated as underdogs and so on. This continued even after

³⁵⁸ Maruf Hossain, Ranesh Dasgupta.

³⁵⁹ Ranesh Dasgupta.

³⁶⁰ Abdul Huq.

³⁶¹ Ranesh Dasgupta.

the end of the fourth hunger strike and finally in March 1950, they decided to place certain demands before the authorities for improvement of their condition.³⁶²

Mansur Habibullah, with the help of two others, prepared a memorandum which was submitted to the jail authorities on behalf of the prisoners. The jail authorities totally ignored the memorandum and so a hunger strike of ordinary prisoners began on 5 April 1950. In support of their strike and as an expression of solidarity with them, the political prisoners also joined in on 7 April.³⁶³ The IGP, Amir Hossain, came to visit Rajshahi central jail on 9 April and asked the striking prisoners to give up the strike. Some prisoners actually gave in, but there were about a thousand of them who refused to give up. On 12 April, the IGP met the political prisoners and told them that it was because of them that the ordinary prisoners were continuing the strike. So they should give up the strike to restore normalcy inside the jail. The political prisoners refused to withdraw their strike.³⁶⁴

After making several other attempts the jail authorities assembled about 2500 prisoners in front of the jail gate and told them that they would accept most of their demands and there would be no more beating of prisoners. The strike was thus called off on the 15th. On the same day the IGP addressed the prisoners in the playground of the jail and warned them against the communists. The IGP then met the political prisoners in the evening and told them that they were creating trouble inside and outside the jail so they would have to pay dearly.³⁶⁵

On 24 April, at 9 a.m., jail superintendent Bill met the political prisoners during his weekly routine visit. With him were the jail physician, jailor Mannan, two deputy jailors, head warder and others. The prisoners of the Khapra Ward had just finished their morning tea and Hanif Sheikh, Mansur Habibullah, Abdul Huq and some others were discussing the jail order for their transfer to cell no. 14, which was a cell for the condemned.³⁶⁶ Bill began to talk to them from the verandah of the Khapra Ward, and then Abdul Huq, on behalf of the prisoners, told him that they would no longer eat the same preparations of pumpkin twice a day. Bill replied that they were all criminals, therefore they would have no other food. On being told that they would not move into the condemned cell, Bill said that they would have to.³⁶⁷ Hot exchanges between the two sides ensued and at one stage the prisoners caught Bill and drew him inside their room. At that time two deputy jailors were inside and the jailor was in the verandah. A fight broke out inside the room between the prisoners and others but the latter freed

³⁶² Abdus Shaheed, *Khapra Ward e Chobbish* April (24 April in Khapra Ward). *Ganashakti*, 26 April 1970 and Abdul Huq.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*; Mansur Habibullah (interview).

³⁶⁴ Abdul Huq.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ Abdus Shaheed, op. cit.; Shafiuddin Ahmad (interview).

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

themselves and came out.³⁶⁸ The jailor rang the big jail warning bell and the prisoners of the Khapra Ward tried to close the entrance of their room with whatever was on hand. The police fired sixty rounds of bullets inside the room through the sky windows. There was nothing inside the room which could give protection to the prisoners. So one by one the prisoners were killed. First, Hanif Sheikh, then a college student Anwar Hossain, Shukhen Bhattacharya, Delwar and Shudhin Dhar.³⁶⁹ After the firing the police entered the Khapra Ward and lathi-charged the wounded prisoners. The Superintendent of Police, Rajshahi, entered the room with a number of policemen. He had been informed on telephone by Mannan and Bill, that the political prisoners had come out of the Khapra Ward and were trying to break the jail gate with the help of other prisoners. But when the SP, a man from Hyderabad (south India), saw what had actually happened he was astounded. He angrily denounced both the jailor and the superintendent for giving him wrong information and wanted to arrest them. He said that he was in the army during the Second World War and had seen many deaths, but nothing like this.³⁷⁰

Among the injured were Kamparam Singh, Bijon Sen, Mansur Habibullah, Nurunnabi, Abdul Huq, Bhujen Palit, Amulya Lahiri, Babar Ali, Abdus Shaheed and others. They were all kept in the Khapra Ward without treatment. Later they were transferred to the jail hospital where Bijon Sen and Kamparam Singh died the same night. The bodies of the seven prisoners were removed by the jail authorities without even informing their relatives of their death. Later, Nurunnabi Chowdhury developed gangrene in one leg, which had to be amputated.³⁷¹

With this incident the struggle inside the jails came to an end. One of the reasons for ending the movement was the Cominform thesis which seriously criticized the Ranadive thesis. This thesis actually endorsed the views of those who were opposed to the Ranadive line from the beginning, or at various stages, of the struggle. The publication of the Cominform thesis not only defeated the position of Ranadive theoretically, it also weakened the position of those extremists who would have liked to continue the struggle. Later, it was reported somewhere that Mao Tse Tung expressed his surprise when he heard about the jail movement of the Indian communists, and wondered how could the Indian comrades go for this sort of struggle inside the prisons which were the most fortified bastions of the ruling classes and their state.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ Abdus Shaheed, Abdul Huq, Shafiuddin Ahmad.

³⁷⁰ Abdul Huq, Shafiuddin Ahmad.

³⁷¹ Satyen Sen, op. cit., Abdul Huq, Mansur Habibullah, Shafiuddin Ahmad, Abdus Shaheed.

Chapter Eighteen

CONSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENT AGAINST BPC RECOMMENDATIONS

A Constitutional Basic Principles Committee (BPC) was formed in the 12 March 1949 session of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. The committee submitted its interim report on 28 September 1950.³⁷²

The BPC, in its report,³⁷³ recommended a two-chamber house. The Lower House was called the House of Peoples, which was to be elected by direct votes of the people. The Upper House, the House of Units, was to be constituted by an equal number of representatives from each province. The two Houses would have the same powers in all matters including the administration of the central government. In case of a dispute between the two, a joint session of both Houses would be convened and a decision would be taken. Budget and money bills were to be discussed in both Houses. The joint sessions could be convened by the President and it would elect the President and have the power to remove the President. It would also discuss any no-confidence resolution brought against the central cabinet.

The administrative authority of the Federation would be vested in the President and would have complete authority over the Armed Forces. He would be responsible for conducting the elections. The President or the Head of the State would appoint the provincial governors. In matters of appointments and dismissals of provincial ministers the governor would have to act under the supervision and control of the President.

No act passed by the Central Legislature could be challenged or changed by the provincial legislatures. In case of any difference between the central and provincial legislatures, the former would prevail. The provincial administration would have to be conducted in a manner that would not create any hindrance in running the Federal administration. Power of the Centre and the Provinces would be divided into three parts departments under the Central Government, departments under the Provincial Governments and departments under both. All powers not included in any schedule would be vested in the Centre.

In any emergency situation the President would have the power to suspend the Constitution. The President would nominate the Prime Minister and while doing so he would take into account the acceptability of the latter in both the Houses. The President

³⁷² Report of the Basic Principles Committee, published by the Government of Pakistan, 1952, p. (i).

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

would appoint other ministers on the recommendations of the prime minister. The central ministers would be responsible to both Houses equally.

The Provincial Government would appoint as prime ministers members of the legislatures who command the support of the majority. The provincial ministers would be appointed by the governors on the recommendations of the provincial Prime Ministers. No case could be filed against the Governor regarding appointment or dismissal of any minister. The BPC recommended that the state language of Pakistan should be Urdu.

From the composition, powers and functions of the two Houses of Legislature and the powers vested in the President and the Provincial Governors in the recommended Constitution, all powers were to be concentrated in the hands of the President and the representatives of West Pakistan at the expense of East Pakistan. The Lower House was to be composed of representatives elected on population basis, and there would be a marginal majority of East Pakistan here. But for all practical purposes, that majority would be ineffective since nothing could be decided and settled by the Lower House alone. In every matter the majority consent of both Houses was required. In a joint session of both Houses, the representatives of West Pakistan would always be in a majority, because in the Upper House four provinces from West Pakistan and East Pakistan would each have equal representation. Thus, in the Upper House, East Pakistan would be in a permanent minority, and in the joint session the great majority of West Pakistan in the Upper House would ensure an unchallengeable majority for the latter.

Moreover, the President, who would have almost autocratic powers, would be elected indirectly by a joint session of both Houses in which the West would have absolute and clear majority. Thus, apart from any other provision, the composition of both Houses of Parliament and the powers of the indirectly elected President were enough to clearly demonstrate that the West Pakistan based rulers of Pakistan were determined to keep East Pakistan in a permanent minority situation and enforce an exploitative and repressive rule on the people of the Eastern zone. They did not mince matters when they recommended Urdu as the state language of Pakistan.

The recommendations of the BPC were so undemocratic and discriminatory against East Pakistan that even members of the Muslim League, Muslim League supporters and newspapers supporting the Muslim League openly opposed them. The *Azad* in its editorials on 30 September 1950, 2, 4 and 6 October 1950, criticized the BPC recommendation in the harshest possible language and said that a conspiracy was being hatched to impose a fascist rule on East Pakistan.

The *Naobelal*, in a number of editorials denounced the recommendations of the BPC and demanded their total withdrawal. Even the *Zamindar*, published from Lahore, said that

the BPC recommendations were more reactionary than the British-Indian Constitution of 1935.

When the BPC report was published the Dhaka University was closed. But in spite of this a student meeting was held in Fazlul Huq Hall on 5 October in which the recommendations were severely criticized and several resolutions were passed against them.³⁷⁴ An organization called the Working Committee for Establishing a Democratic Confederation was formed and it convened a public meeting at the Armanitola Maidan to protest against the BPC report. They also published a leaflet on behalf of the committee in which sentences like, 'We don't want a fascist constitution in Pakistan,' 'Down with dictatorship,' 'Recommendations of the BPC must be annulled,' 'We want a confederation,' 'Democratic rights must be granted to East Bengal', etc. were published.³⁷⁵

The 13 October public meeting of the Committee was presided over by Aatur Rahman Khan and was addressed, among others, by Shamsuddin Ahmad of Kushtia, Khairat Hossain, Hafizur Rahman, Rafique, Abdul Wadud and Shamsul Huda. A number of protest resolutions were adopted and were presented before the audience by Kamruddin Ahmad. The meeting was largely attended by the intelligentsia of Dhaka.³⁷⁶

All over East Bengal people rose against the BPC report. Students, teachers, journalists, businessmen, Muslim League supporters, and even supporters of Jamiatul Ulama-i-Islam extensively participated in the demonstrations and protest meetings.³⁷⁷

Faced with such widespread and strong opposition, the president of the East Pakistan Provincial Muslim League, Akram Khan, described the movement against the BPC report in a press statement as a game of self-seekers. The additional reason which goaded him to make such a statement was that the acting secretary of the provincial Muslim League, Shah Azizur Rahman, had called for observance of protest meetings all over East Bengal against the BPC report.³⁷⁸ In a separate statement Akram Khan declared this illegal and asked the people to boycott the protest. Shah Azizur Rahman withdrew and instead demanded a meeting of the Provincial Muslim League Council. He said that members of the Council must be given an opportunity to express their views on the BPC report and on basic constitutional questions. In reply Akram Khan, called a meeting of the Provincial Muslim League Working Committee in the official residence of Prime Minister Nurul Amin on 29 October.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary, 5 October 1950.

³⁷⁵ Leaflet of Ganotantric Confederation, *Protishtha Parishad*.

³⁷⁶ Tajuddin's Diary.

³⁷⁷ *Naobelal*, 26 October 1950.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Then some strange developments took place. Nikhil Purba Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League (All East Pakistan Muslim Students League), a reactionary student organization which supported the Provincial Muslim League, called a protest meeting in Victoria Park (Bahadur Shah Park) on 27 October. The intelligentsia of Dhaka City turned up in large numbers to participate. What was really significant was the fact that Awami Muslim League General Secretary Shamsul Huq, Aatur Rahman Khan, Oli Ahad, Tajuddin Ahmad, Manik Mian and Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad were present among the audience.³⁸⁰ A large number of Muslim League Parliamentary Party members had requested Nurul Amin to convene an emergency session of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly to consider the constitutional questions rising out of the publication of the BPC report.³⁸¹ The extent to which the report disturbed, aggrieved and activated people could be gauged from the presence of a large number of opposition workers and leaders in the protest meeting and the request of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party members to convene an emergency session of the Provincial Assembly.

The Dhaka University reopened on 29 October after vacations and a student meeting was held on the University premises during the recess. It was presided over by Mohammad Nurul Islam and addressed by Syed Mohammad Ali, Abdul Wadud and others. A resolution was read out by Mahbub Jamal Zahedi. A student action committee was formed to organize resistance against the constitutional conspiracies of the Muslim League government of Pakistan.³⁸²

There was great unease in the political circles of East Bengal as well, irrespective of party affiliations. A meeting was called in the office of the *Pakistan Observer* by prominent politicians and citizens of Dhaka in the first week of October in which a committee called the Action Committee for the Democratic Federation was constituted for directing a movement against the recommendations of the BPC report.³⁸³ This committee met in the office of The *Pakistan Observer* on 12 October, and was attended by Kamruddin Ahmad, Aatur Rahman Khan, Mohammad Toaha, Tajuddin Ahmad, Rafique, Abdus Salam (Editor, *Pakistan Observer*), Manik Mian and others. The participants discussed the details of the public meeting to be held at the Armanitola Maidan the next day. They also decided to try and form a joint front with the Provincial Muslim League. This was a very extraordinary decision considering the fact that since August 1947 the Provincial Muslim League was extremely hostile to the members of this Committee as they had been portraying the Provincial Muslim League as an anti-people organization. It was quite clear that the opposition politicians were not trying to form an alliance with the top brass of the Provincial League. In fact they had in mind the lower rank leaders and the broad masses of the workers of the League.³⁸⁴

³⁸⁰ Tajuddin's Diary.

³⁸¹ *Naobelal*, 26 October 1950.

³⁸² Tajuddin's Diary, 31 October 1950.

³⁸³ Kamruddin Ahmad (interview).

³⁸⁴ Tajuddin's Diary, 12 October 1950.

On 17 October, the Action Committee met at the residence of Sakhawat Hossain with Kamruddin Ahmad, Aatur Rahman Khan, Tajuddin Ahmad, Mohammad Toaha, Oli Ahad, Abdus Salam, Sakhawat Hossain and others. It was decided that an alternative constitutional proposal would have to be prepared and formally published and declared in a national convention to be held on 4 and 5 November.³⁸⁵ The meetings continued up till 28 October and in addition to those mentioned above Kafiluddin Chowdhury, Abul Kasem (Tamaddun Majlis), Manik Mian, Shamsuzzoha (Narayanganj), Aziz Ahmad, Mirza Golam Hafeez joined in occasionally. They met again in a well attended meeting on 1 November. In it the details of the convention to be held on 4 and 5 November were discussed. The main draft on the constitutional recommendation of the committee was accepted in the meeting, but some amendments were presented to be placed before the convention for consideration. Kamruddin Ahmad prepared the final list of those amendments.³⁸⁶

In the Grand National Convention, as it was called, a leaflet entitled 'Will Janab Liakat Ali Khan answer the following questions?' was published.³⁸⁷ The original draft, was in English. The leaflet raised nine main questions of which the last one was again divided into five parts. Some of the questions were:

1. The basis of Pakistan is the historic Lahore Resolution in which there is mention of autonomous and sovereign states for various areas, but why, in spite of that, those principles have been totally ignored in the recommendations of the Basic Principles Committee?
2. Do you not agree that East Pakistan being separated from the other part by a distance of two thousand miles it is necessary for its stability and prosperity to have complete autonomy in all spheres?
3. It has been said in the Objective Resolution that sovereignty belongs to the people. But does not the provision of the suspension of the constitution by the head of the state negate it and make the basis of the objective resolution subservient to the whims of the head of the state?
4. Does not the recommendation to make Urdu the only state language of Pakistan by ignoring the demand for Bengali of 62 percent of the population amount to autocratic and flagrant negation of that demand?
5. Is it not totally undemocratic to make the Provincial ministry answerable to the central cabinet, rather than to the Provincial Assembly?

³⁸⁵ Tajuddin's Diary, daily entries from 17 to 28 October 1950.

³⁸⁶ Tajuddin's Diary, 1 November 1950, 4 November 1950.

³⁸⁷ Published as a leaflet, not printed in any newspaper.

These and the other questions clearly indicated that the autonomy for East Pakistan was an active issue as early as 1950, and the basic position of the democratic struggle of the people of East Pakistani was stated quite unambiguously at its initial stage.

The Grand National Convention on constitution began in the afternoon of 4 November 1950, in the Dhaka Bar Library Hall presided over by Aatur Rahman Khan. About 400 delegates attended. In the first session the president, Aatur Rahman Khan, delivered a long, written speech in which among other things, he said,

The 'fundamental rights' as prepared by the Constituent Assembly and passed by it are unacceptable even in any amended form and they will have to be scrapped. If in the next session of the Constituent Assembly it fails to implement the recommendations of this Great Convention then you will have to decide on the tactical line for implementing these recommendations.³⁸⁸

On 5 November, A.K. Fazlul Huq addressed the morning session and tried to explain his own role in the Constituent Assembly and answer the criticism against him. The second session of that day continued till midnight and finally the basic principles were accepted after some changes in the first draft.³⁸⁹ In this last session of the Convention there was an open clash between the members of the Gana Azadi League which was formed as early as 1947, and in which the secular elements of the old Muslim League gathered, and the Awami Muslim League. The conflict had also arisen earlier in a meeting on 1 November, when Aatur Rahman Khan of the Awami Muslim League refused to have a presidium for the Convention and himself wanted to be president. With a view to maintaining unity for the Convention, the others did not want any confrontation, though Oli Ahad angrily left the meeting. But on the last session of the Convention the differences developed into an open clash.³⁹⁰

After the acceptance of the basic constitutional principles of the Convention, discussions took place on organizational matters. The old Action Committee was dissolved and a new committee was formed with Kamruddin Ahmad as the convener. At the time of this election the conflict between the two groups reached an extreme point, and after the election Shamsul Huq, Aatur Rahman Khan, Manik Mian, Rafique and others of the Awami Muslim League refused to accept the results, and left the venue.³⁹¹

In the preface of the proposals of the 'Democratic Federation' the following was said to be the basis of the recommendations made in the Convention:

³⁸⁸ *Naobelal*, 16 November 1950; diary, 5 November 1950.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ *Naobelal*, 1 November 1950, 10 November 1950; Kamruddin Ahmad (interview).

³⁹¹ Tajuddin's Diary, 5 November 1950; Kamruddin Ahmad.

When it was clearly understood in the 1946 Convention of the All India Muslim League that even in the event of the establishment of Pakistan, the province of Assam would not be included in Pakistan, and that there was enough possibility of Bengal and Punjab being divided, then on the request of Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah the amendment 'a state' was made instead of 'independent states'. Though without the annual general conference of the All India Muslim League that Convention had no authority to make that amendment, yet since in the next conference it was not opposed, we can accept it as an amendment of the Lahore Resolution. After the establishment of Pakistan no other amendment of the Lahore Resolution was made. So, the Muslim League members of the Constituent Assembly have no legal right to oppose that resolution. It is for this that the great National Convention of Dhaka formulated their basic principles on the foundations of the historic Lahore Resolution.³⁹²

Though it was said that the constitutional proposals were based on the Lahore Resolution, it was free from communalism. However, in the introductory section of the proposals it was stated that Sovereignty belonged to God, the creator.

The Convention made certain definite and positive recommendations³⁹³ on constitutional questions which were greatly significant and important with respect to the subsequent constitutional political struggle that followed. They recommended that the name of the state would be the United States of Pakistan. It would have two zones-East and West Pakistan. There would be a head of state of the United States of Pakistan who would be elected by majority votes of the Central Parliament. He would be the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, appoint one of the members of Parliament as Prime Minister, who would have the confidence of the majority of Parliament members. He would appoint the ministers on the basis of the recommendations of the Prime Minister, appoint the Election Commissioner, judges of the Supreme Court and the Auditor General.

The Convention recommended that there would be only one chamber of the Parliament. The sessions of the Parliament would be alternately held in the central capital and then in the capital of East Pakistan. From each zone, members of Parliament would be elected on the basis of joint electorate and universal suffrage, and by the same number of voters. The electorate of each area would have the right to recall their representative from the Parliament. The President would have to sign all money bills sent from the Parliament to him within three days. He would have to sign other bills within thirty days. The Parliament could remove the President, the Election Commissioner, judges of

³⁹² Resolutions adopted on 4 and 5 November 1950 in the Grand National Convention, published as a pamphlet by the Central Committee of the Democratic Federation, pp. 9-10.

³⁹³ Constitution of Pakistan, Basic Principles as adopted in the Grand National Convention, Dacca, published by Kamruddin Ahmad, Convener, Central Committee for Democratic Federation, 4 Zindabahr 1st Lane, Dhaka, 1953.

the Supreme Court and the Auditor General for misconduct and treason by a two-third majority vote.

The members of Parliament would not be employed in any lucrative job under the government. In any national emergency the President would have the authority to dissolve the Parliament on the advice of the central cabinet. He would also have the authority to dissolve the Parliament in case of a parliamentary impasse when no individual or party was able to form a government by commanding majority votes of the Parliament. In such cases a new election would have to be held within forty-five days of the dissolution of the Parliament.

They also recommended that the members of the central cabinet would be individually and collectively responsible to the Parliament. If any non-Parliamentary citizen of Pakistan was appointed as a minister, he would have to be elected as a member of Parliament within six months.

There would be a Supreme Court of Pakistan, and its session would be held alternately in the central capital and in the capital of East Pakistan.

The state languages of Pakistan would be Bengali and Urdu.

Defense and foreign affairs would be in the hands of the centre. The defense forces would have two units, of which one would be in East Pakistan and the other in the West. These regional units would be commanded by regional commanders and they would remain under the Commander-in-Chief at the centre. The defense forces of each region would be composed by men from that region. There would have to be a regional foreign ministry in East Pakistan. All residuary powers would be vested in the hands of the Province. The Centre would be able to impose taxes on certain items, but it would not be able to do so without the consent of the province.

Any amendment related to the Central Government or the Central Parliament would have to be passed first by a two-third majority in the Parliament of the concerned Province, and then by a two-third majority of the Central Parliament. Any other amendment could be made by a two-third majority in the regional Parliament. The Convention recommended that under no circumstances could the Constitution be suspended.

Two separate regional governments would be established in East and West Pakistan. Each regional head would be elected by a majority vote of the regional Parliament. He could be removed for treason and misconduct by a two-third majority vote of the regional Parliament. In case of removal of the head of the Province, the Speaker of the regional Parliament would take charge as head of the Province, but within forty days the regional Parliament would have to elect a regional head. The regional head would

appoint a member of the regional Parliament as regional Prime Minister who would command the support of majority members. He would appoint other ministers on the basis of the recommendations of the regional Prime Minister.

The regional Parliament would have only one chamber, and the members of that Parliament would be elected for five years on the basis of adult franchise and joint electorate. In case of an emergency the head of the Province would dissolve the regional Parliament on the recommendation of the regional Prime Minister. In that case the regional head would have to hold election of the regional Parliament within sixty days of the dissolution of the Parliament.

The Convention recommended that because of certain specific features of different areas of the Western region the specificity of the regional government of West Pakistan could be worked out by the people there by holding a separate constitutional convention of their own.

At the end of their basic recommendations on the constitution, the Convention, in a separate resolution, declared certain rights as fundamental rights of the people. They were included under three main heads.

A. (1) Everyone is equal before the eyes of law. (2) No one will be detained without trial in a court. (3) Any citizen who is not mentally abnormal will be entitled to vote when he attains the age of eighteen, and will be entitled to seek election for membership of Parliament when he attains the age of twenty-one. (4) There will be no provision of suspension of the right to habeas corpus.

B. Each citizen will have the following rights: (1) Life. (2) Education-free and compulsory upto a certain stage. (3) Work and livelihood. (4) Health assistance. (5) Shelter. (6) Wage, consistent with cost of living. (7) Trade union and formation of trade secretariat and strike for collective bargaining.

C. The state will ensure the citizens on the following matters: (1) Freedom of speech, freedom of newspapers, freedom of movement, thought, work, association, expression of ideas, prayer; and along with the freedom of conscience social, economic and political rights. (2) Equal rights of status and opportunity. (3) Personal honor. (4) Provision for old age. (5) Facilities for maternity. (6) Socialization of the forces of production. (7) No Legislative Assembly will be permitted to make any law which will help exploitation of workers, peasants and the common man.

These recommendations of the Grand National Convention constituted a landmark in the political struggle of the people of East Pakistan for their democratic and constitutional rights. It will be seen later that the recommendations made in this

Convention actually provided a framework which nurtured and developed the subsequent constitutional struggle of the Bengali bourgeoisie of East Pakistan. The movement against the constitutional recommendations preceded the language movement of 1952. The totally undemocratic recommendations aroused such resistance against them that it continued with great power after the Grand National Convention.

The central committee of the Democratic Federation asked students and all sections of the people to organize protest meetings and demonstrations all over East Bengal on 12 November. They also organized a meeting at the Armanitola Maidan presided over by advocate Aftabuddin Khan and addressed by Maulana Abdul Jabbar, Ali Ahmad Khan, Khairat Hossain and others.³⁹⁴ In response to a call by the Dhaka University Action Committee the students of Dhaka Medical College, Dhaka Medical School, Dhaka College, Jagannath College, Alia Madrasa and other schools observed strike against the BPC recommendations. Students from the other striking institutions gathered on the premises of the University for a joint meeting. This meeting was presided over by Abdus Samad, in which representatives of the pro-Muslim League Nikhil Purba Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League, pro-Awami League Purba Pakistan Muslim Chhatra League, pro-Communist Students Federation and Students Association spoke.³⁹⁵

After the end of the meeting the students took out a mile-long demonstration which passed through old Dhaka and the Nawabpur Road. The girl students of the Eden College also observed strike on 12 November, but they organized their meeting within the premises of their college and very strongly criticized the central government for the BPC recommendations.³⁹⁶

In other areas of East Bengal, outside Dhaka, protest day was observed extensively. The meeting at Sylhet deserves special mention because with Mahmud Ali in the chair, the Muslim Leaguers denounced the central government and the recommendations of the BPC.³⁹⁷

Thus, the BPC report deeply shook up the Muslim League organization of East Pakistan. Except very close and dependable members of the East Pakistani leadership of the Muslim League, the others, in various ways, opposed the report. It created a rift within the Provincial Muslim League and soon some of its leading members deserted the organization. Former education minister of Assam, Manwar Ali, and former general secretary of the Assam Provincial Muslim League, Mahmud Ali, were among them. The Muslim League workers in Dhaka, Comilla, Bogra, Pabna, Chittagong and other places carried out strong protests. Manwar Ali, in fact, issued a strong press statement in which, among other things, he said, 'For certain specific reasons, if necessary, East and

³⁹⁴ Tajuddin's Diary, 12 November 1950.

³⁹⁵ *Naobelal*, 23 November 1950.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Naobelal*, 16 November 1950.

West Pakistan may secede from each other and form separate regional "Pakistan Republic".³⁹⁸

Faced with the serious organizational situation in Sylhet, the Provincial Muslim League called a meeting to consider the recommendations of the BPC report. Parliamentary Secretary of the East Bengal Government, Nasiruddin Ahmad, addressed the meeting in the Jinnah Hall presided over by Dewan Abdur Rab Chowdhury MLA. Nasiruddin said that the BPC Report could be accepted with some minor amendments. The audience in the Jinnah Hall strongly protested his views. Mahmud Ali, Nurul Hossain Khan MLA, Abdul Latif MLA, Abdul Muhit Chowdhury, Habibur Rahman, Shah Ekramur Rahman and others spoke and Nasiruddin Ahmad was told on behalf of the people of Sylhet that the recommendations of the BPC were totally unacceptable.³⁹⁹

In the third week of November, thirteen members of the Muslim League Parliamentary Committee convened a meeting to consider the BPC recommendations. This meeting rejected the Report and informed the Central Government that East Pakistan should have a separate Constitution, and that except defense, foreign affairs and currency, every other department should be in the hands of the Provincial Government.⁴⁰⁰

The protests were not limited to within the Parliamentary Party only. The Provincial Muslim League was also very substantially divided on the issue. The crisis which was already developing within the Muslim League was actually aggravated by the BPC report. Even a staunch leader of the League, like Shah Azizur Rahman, openly opposed the BPC recommendations and demanded an immediate meeting of the Provincial Muslim League Council. But neither Akram Khan, the President of the Provincial League, nor the East Bengal Prime Minister, Nurul Amin, was willing to convene any meeting of the Provincial League Council or the East Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Party.⁴⁰¹

The pressure for holding such meetings were mounting within the Muslim League when the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, came to Dhaka. Both Akram Khan and Nurul Amin thought that the presence of Liaquat Ali would, somehow, restrain the rebellious Muslim League councillors and parliamentarians. They convened meetings of both the Provincial Muslim League Council and the East Bengal Muslim League Parliamentary Party. Their expectations proved right but in both the meetings, certain recommendations were made to the central government for changing the recommendations made in the BPC report.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 October 1950.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 November 1950.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 21 December 1950.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*

The East Pakistan Provincial Muslim League Council recommended that since the distance between the two parts of Pakistan was considerable, East Pakistan should be given special autonomy and a special schedule would have to be prepared in the Constitution. Secondly, since transport and communication between the two parts were separate, transport and communications would be a provincial subject. Thirdly, as far as possible, import-export trade should be in the hands of the province. Fourthly, industry and commerce departments should be under the government of East Bengal. Lastly, the procedure of constitutional amendment must be made easier.⁴⁰³ What was surprising in the recommendations of the Council was a complete absence of any reference to the upper house of the Central Parliament, the House of Units, the powers of the head of the state and the central cabinet, the state language, fundamental rights, etc.

After the Council meeting the Democratic Federation published a pamphlet in which they denounced these recommendations. However, later a number of specific recommendations were made by the sub-committee appointed by the Council. It recommended that Pakistan would remain one country, but because of the distance between the two regions, Pakistan would be a federal state, and East Bengal would have to be given maximum autonomy. Subjects with which the other part of Pakistan had no relation would be included in the Provincial schedule, and the number of items in the common schedule would have to be reduced. Provisions must be kept in the Constitution for raising complaint against the head of the state and other high state officials. Arrangement would have to be made for holding impartial elections by appointing an Election Tribunal constituted by the judges of the Federal Court and the High Courts. The area of emergency powers would have to be limited. The right of habeas corpus would never be curtailed for those who had not actually revolted against the state and had become hostile. In matters of jobs under the Federal Government, the employment proportion between the East and West Pakistan would have to be fixed in such a manner that half of all job situations would be filled by East Pakistani candidates. That would also be applicable in case of jobs related to defense. No government employee would be entitled to be a member of any Legislature. There was nothing in these recommendations regarding the two chambers of Parliament, state language, fundamental rights, etc. though these recommendations were mild improvement' on the recommendations of the Provincial Muslim League Council.⁴⁰⁴

Soon after the publication of this sub-committee report, the council of the Democratic Federation met in Dhaka. In a straightforward resolution they denounced the recommendations of the sub-committee and rejected them, detailing their reasons for the rejection.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 January 1951.

⁴⁰⁵ *Pakistan Observer*, 21 January 1951.

Once again faced with widespread opposition, from non-Muslim League quarters as well as from within the Muslim League, the Central Government decided to postpone any further discussion on the BPC report. They were actually terrified at the prospect of the anti-BPC report movement escalating into a full-scale national movement. They announced their decision on 21 November 1950, and a resolution tabled by Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan said that the postponement had been made in order to give an opportunity to those who wanted to make specific recommendations for amending the BPC report.⁴⁰⁶

The convener of the Central Democratic Federation Council, Kamruddin Ahmad, issued a statement to the press in the first week of December 1950. He strongly criticized the role of the East Pakistani members of the Constituent Assembly and said that they were overjoyed at the postponement, but had said nothing about total scrapping of the BPC report. He also criticized the statement of Liaquat Ali that the report was based on the Objective Resolution and that this did not mean anything because the Objective Resolution itself had been drafted in such a way that it could be interpreted differently with ease, according to convenience. At the end of the statement he asked the people to organize massive movements against the report on the basis of the resolutions adopted in the Grand National Convention.⁴⁰⁷

Indeed, the constitutional movement of 1950 created a significant change in the political consciousness of the people of East Bengal. Exploitation and repression of the people of East Bengal had begun as early as August 1947. Prior to the movement of 1950, the people of East Bengal did not properly realize the character of the Pakistan government and hence they blamed and criticized the Provincial Muslim League and the provincial government for everything that went against their interest. They also blamed the civil servants without realizing that they were actually agents of the Central Government. The constitutional movement taught them that they were quite wrong in the past when they appealed to the Central Government for redressing many injustices inflicted on them, because the Provincial Government was nothing but a mere agent of the Central Government.

From now on all basic movements against the exploitation and repression targeted the Government of Pakistan as their principal enemy and organized their resistance accordingly.

⁴⁰⁶ *Naobelal*, 30 November 1951.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 December 1950.

Chapter Nineteen

FORMATION OF THE YOUTH LEAGUE

The process of organizing the Youth League was initiated by Mahmud Nurul Huda, private secretary of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy when he was the Prime Minister of Bengal. In early 1951, on his return from Karachi, he held discussions with Anwar Hossain, a former leader of the pro-government Nikhil Purba Pakistan Chhatra League (All East Pakistan Students League), about forming a new youth organization in East Bengal. In Karachi he had met Miss Fatima Jinnah who liked the idea of forming such an organization, because it would advance opposition politics to some extent. At that time her relation with Prime Minister Liaquat Ali had deteriorated badly.⁴⁰⁸

They contacted Abdur Rouf, the then Secretary of Dhaka Municipality who was known to both Nurul Huda and Anwar Hossain, to see if it was possible for him to associate himself with them in their efforts to form a youth organization. They knew that Rouf was connected with the Communist Party (CP) and in fact, he used to do some technical work for the party at that time and it was not possible for him to openly carry out any opposition activity, but he agreed to help them indirectly as much as he could. Rouf discussed this with Anil Mukherjee who was a leading member of the CP, and he agreed to help. Soon afterwards Mohammad Toaha, another member of the CP, met Rouf and held discussions with him on the subject.⁴⁰⁹ After discussions with some others, an organizing committee was formed with Nurul Huda as president because it was he who had initiated the process. But Anwar Hossain and Abdur Rouf had no confidence in him and they wanted somebody like Toaha to act as secretary of the committee. Toaha suggested that instead of him Oli Ahad should be selected as the secretary and this was accepted.⁴¹⁰

The real complication arose regarding the selection of president because there was strong opposition to Nurul Huda. Among others, Abdus Salam, editor of *Pakistan Observer*, and Zahur Hossain Chowdhury, who also worked for the same English daily, opposed Nurul Huda's presidentship and threatened that if he was elected then no news of the Youth League would be published in their paper. Thus, instead of an organizing committee, a reception committee for the proposed founding conference of the Youth League was formed with Nurul Huda as chairman.⁴¹¹ Tasadduk Ahmed of Sylhet contacted Mahmud Ali, a former general secretary of the Assam Provincial

⁴⁰⁸ Interviews: Abu Sayeed Mohammed Abdur Rouf (Abdur Rouf), Nurul Huda.

⁴⁰⁹ Abdur Rouf.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Rouf, Huda.

Muslim League and editor of the weekly *Naobelal* of Sylhet. Like Rouf, Tasadduk Ahmed was also connected with the CP. Mahmud Ali came to Dhaka and held discussions with the organizers of the conference and it was decided that he would be the president of the proposed youth organization.⁴¹²

On 6 March 1951, a meeting was held in the Assembly Hall of the Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall to discuss the details of the conference, presided over by Badiur Rahman. Toaha explained the purpose of the conference and other details. Another meeting was held in a room of Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall on 14 March in which Syed Mohammad Ali, Habibur Rahman Shelley, Badiur Rahman, Maksud Ahmad and others were present.⁴¹³ Then a meeting was held at the Dhaka District Bar Library Hall to formally constitute a reception committee for the conference. Some hoodlums employed by the government tried to create trouble but the organizers had also taken enough precautions, so that they were unsuccessful. Nurul Huda was elected chairman of the Reception Committee, and the date for the conference was fixed for 27 March 1951. Since the government imposed section 144 in the city at the time of the conference, it was decided to hold the conference in the Bar Library Hall. But on 26 March, the organizers were informed by the government authorities that section 144 would also be applicable inside the Bar Library Hall as well. It was an unprecedented step, and it clearly showed the determination of the government to repress any opposition activity. It was then decided to hold the conference on the other side of the River Buriganga at Jinjira.⁴¹⁴

The conference was attended by about 200 delegates from Dhaka and other areas, as well as more than 1000 other people. In the beginning a resolution was adopted paying homage to the memory of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and those martyrs who gave their lives during the struggle for independence. It was followed by a recital from the Quran. Then, Abdus Salam, the editor of *Pakistan Observer* spoke of youth of the country who he said were suffering from a deep sense of frustration because their dreams were not fulfilled. Such an attitude could be quite harmful for the country and so the youth must overcome this.⁴¹⁵ Nurul Huda, in his speech strongly criticized the government and said that due to their fascist policy, personal freedom, and even the freedom of speech, does not exist for the people of East Bengal. He added:

These days the government cannot tolerate any criticism. They have taken steps to stop the country's advancement through their reactionary policies. The youth of the country have raised their voice against all these, and they are determined to resist this.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ Tajuddin's diary, 6 March 1951, 14 March 1951.

⁴¹⁴ Abdur Rouf, *Naobelal*, 5 April 1951; Tajuddin's diary, 26 March 1951.

⁴¹⁵ Tajuddin's diary, 27 March 1951; *Naobelal*, 5 April 1951.

He criticized the foreign policy of the government and referring to the future programme of action, he said, 'Our first task is to frustrate all war provocations for establishing peace and, secondly, to destroy imperialism'.⁴¹⁶

Mahmud Ali, who presided over the conference spoke next and said that the countries of the world were so integrally connected in various ways that it was no longer possible for any country to think about and do anything in complete isolation from the rest of the world. Thus, independent Pakistan had become politically inseparable from the rest of the world. The situation of our country, therefore, must be viewed and assessed in the perspective of the present day world. He said that the most urgent problem for the people was to provide them with food, clothing, shelter, health facilities, education, etc. Independence means nothing without the fulfillment of these basic needs. He also said that the burden of foreign exploitation weighed quite heavily on the people, and they were being squeezed by the foreigners. Their local agents, the government authorities and others, were working as their instruments. The people had come to realize this aspect of the situation and were preparing to resist them. He emphasized the role of the youth in organizing that resistance and gave a call to them to prepare for such a programme.⁴¹⁷

After the president's speech Abdus Samad, general secretary of the Nikhil Purba Pakistan Muslim Students League, presented a draft manifesto. It was decided to postpone discussion on this for the next session, and after that Khondkar Golam Mustafa moved a number of resolutions. In the first resolution it was said that the conference firmly stood for strengthening the basis of Pakistan and demanded that all persons charged with anti-state activities should be tried in an open court and punished. In the second resolution it was demanded that the Kashmir problem must be solved through an independent and impartial plebiscite. In a third resolution it was regretted that in spite of an earlier decision to introduce Bengali as a language of instruction as well as a language for official work, nothing had been done so far. It was also said that each province must be given the maximum opportunity for cultivating its language and literature.

The government was criticized in another resolution for their indifference towards the *mohajir* or refugee youth who desperately needed to be rehabilitated. A resolution was also adopted criticizing government repression of the workers of the Bata shoe factory and the Dunlop factory. The conference demanded the complete scrapping of the recommendations of the Basic Principles Committee and framing the constitution of Pakistan on the basis of the recommendations of the Grand National Convention. Another resolution demanded that the East Bengal Legislative Assembly be dissolved and election be held early next year on the basis of joint electorate and adult franchise.

⁴¹⁶ *Noabelal*, 5 April 1951.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*

A number of other resolutions were passed supporting the demands of the primary school teachers, and against interference in press freedom. The closure of certain tea gardens in Sylhet was criticized and a demand was put forth for scrapping the report on the tea industry by Brabant who was appointed by the central government.⁴¹⁸

After some discussions the resolutions were adopted. The first session of the conference ended at 10 a.m. The second session of the conference was also scheduled to be held at the same place. But towards the end of the first session, police forces reached Jinjira and it could not be continued. It was then decided to have the second session on the boats on the River Buriganga. It began at 11 p.m. and was attended by about 250 delegates, including five women delegates. They were able to take a microphone on the boat. The police did not try to create any further disturbance.⁴¹⁹

A discussion on the draft manifesto⁴²⁰ began and it was adopted after some minor changes. The manifesto covered many important national and international questions. It said,

We notice with great shame after five long years of the establishment of Pakistan that our country is still tied to the chains of the British Commonwealth. The control of British capital still continues on Pakistan's wealth and resources like jute, tea trade etc. Even today a handful of foreign and rich local persons are living in luxury by plundering our resources. We, the youth of Pakistan, are noticing with deep anxiety that there has not been the slightest development of our industries. The market of our country has been flooded by foreign goods, and with the help of a small number of rich people the rich foreigners are exercising absolute control over our domestic market.

The economy of our country is still at an under-developed colonial level. Eighty percent of the youth of our country are village peasants. This main force of the youth of our country is still oppressed under the wheels of feudal zamindari system. The government has abolished the zamindari system nominally. In practice zamindari has only been transferred. The cultivator has not been given any right on land. The youth, who are the life of the country, are deprived of education, deprived of land. There is no opening for them to make their life worthwhile The government has no initiatives to improve our condition.

⁴¹⁸ Tajuddin's diary, 27 March 1951; *Naobelal*, 12 April 1951.

⁴¹⁹ Nurul Huda; *Naobelal*, 5 April 1951.

⁴²⁰ This draft manifesto was published in the first week of March 1951 from the publicity office of the Youth Conference at 36 Rankin Street, Wari, Dacca. At that time it was called, 'Declaration of the Youth Conference'. The accepted final version of the manifesto was later published from the publicity office of Youth League 43/1, Juginagar (Toaha's residence), Wari, Dacca.

...That section of our youth who earn their livelihood by working in the railway, in the docks of Chittagong, by spinning in the cotton mills, by pulling rickshaws or by similar hard work as day laborers expected that in Pakistan we would get proper living wages, guarantee of jobs and education. But our real wage is decreasing, and our labor is becoming harder. There is no provision for education. We are faced with fearful unemployment and retrenchment, but a handful of rich people are making tons of money.

...We the middle class youth, dreamt that in Pakistan we would get employment, facilities for developing trade and commerce, get houses, get higher culture and a higher standard of living. But confronted with the cruel bashing of reality, our dreams have been destroyed.

It is interesting to note that in those days there were no hostility against the *mohajirs* or refugees a large number of whom were Urdu-speaking. The *mohajir* youth are mentioned in the manifesto,

We, the *mohajir* youth have lost everything for Pakistan. But today we have no future in Pakistan. The government is only giving us lip-service through the newspapers. But they have made no arrangement for our rehabilitation and for beginning a new life. We have come to Pakistan as destitute, and have remained unemployed, homeless and without food. Some are even forced to commit suicide.

About women the manifesto said,

We, the young women, hoped that through legislation the Pakistan government will liberate us from social oppression, provide for our education and give us equal status with men in every sphere of life. But we are still subjected to torture and deprived from the minimum opportunity of civilized existence. We observe with great shame that even one percent women, who constitute half of the youth, are not literate But a small Muslim state like Albania introduced free and compulsory primary education in 1945 and consequently only in the Peshawar district 75 percent illiteracy had been removed by the end of 1946. In the middle of 1946 in the district of Skutary 23,000 girls were enrolled in the primary schools. When our sisters in various other countries are advancing in education and applying themselves for social development, the young women of Pakistan, are destined for illiteracy, ignorance and social slavery.

Referring to the economic crisis and rise of prices of essential commodities it said,

The backbone of the economy of East Bengal and Pakistan is agriculture. Ninety-two percent people of Pakistan are peasants. ...The means of cash income of the

Pakistani people are being squeezed. On the other hand, they are being compelled to buy things for daily use at an exorbitant price.

On education and culture the manifesto said,

We, the youth of Pakistan expected that after the establishment of Pakistan the government would remove all vestiges of bad education and ignorance, but instead the percentage of literacy is still 11 percent in the country...

In addition to this, by ignoring the demand for the mother tongue of the various provinces they are trying to block the path of our cultural advancement. Especially, an attempt is being made to introduce Urdu by ignoring the demand of Bengali, the mother tongue of 62 percent people of Pakistan.

The manifesto actually made long references to government repression, imperialist wars, political use of religion by the ruling class and the government etc. In the end certain demands were placed under the caption 'Our Declaration and Demand', in conformity with the recommendations and resolutions of the Grand National Convention.

The presidential address, the resolutions and the manifesto of the Youth Conference of 27 March 1951, must not be considered merely as documents of that organization, but as reflections of the situation-social, economic, political and cultural-in the country at the time. In that sense it is a very important documentation of the period.

The second session of the conference began at around midnight. After some minor changes the manifesto was adopted unanimously and a decision was taken to form an East Pakistan Youth League (EPYL). A council of the Youth League was formed consisting of 125 members. The session, on the River Buriganga, ended at 2.30 a.m.⁴²¹

At 4.30 in the afternoon of 28 March a meeting of the EPYL Organization Council was held at 47, Thatari Bazar in which the Working Committee EPYL was formed with the following members: President: Mahmud Ali, Vice-Presidents: Khayez Ahmad (editor *Sangram*), Yar Mohammad, Shamsuzzoha, Abdul Majid, Daulatunnesa, General Secretary: Oli Ahad, Joint Secretaries: Abdul Matin, Ruhul Amin, Treasurer: T.A. Chowdhury, members: Nurul Huda, Mohammad Toaha, Matiur Rahman, Abdul Halim, Abdus Samad, Maqsd Ahmad, Khondkar Golam Mustafa, Kabir Ahmad, Abdul Wadud, A. Gafur Chowdhury, Pranesh Samaddar.⁴²²

⁴²¹ Tajuddin's diary, 27 March 1951; *Naobelal*, 5 April 1951.

⁴²² Tajuddin's diary, 28 March 1951; *Naobelal*, 19 April 1951.

A separate resolution was adopted in this Council session, calling on the West Pakistani Youths to rally themselves into a similar organization. The responsibility to establish contacts with the West Pakistani young people was given to Nurul Huda. The two-day conference of the Youth League was rounded off by a cultural function at Tejgaon. The whole area of the function was lighted by *mashal* (torches) and artists from various parts of East Bengal recited poems, presented songs and played musical instruments.

After the conference, the *Naobelal*, which always published news of democratic movements and on most occasions supported them, wrote an editorial captioned 'Rays of New Hopes' in which it said,

Recently the 'East Pakistan Youth League' has been formed at the East Pakistan Youth Conference. There is no doubt that the birth of this new organization will infuse new inspiration into our national life. The future of a country depends on the youth of the country. But the efforts of that youth must be well-organized and well-directed. We believe that East Pakistan Youth League will be able to direct the youth of the country in the right direction in order to raise the nation to the highest level of development. We know that the vested interests will attempt to frustrate its victory march, but its firm youthful commitment will, most surely, take it forward.⁴²³

After the formation of the Youth League, its organizers began work in their respective areas. Branches of the organization were formed in many districts and sub-divisions. In all such branches the death anniversary of poet Allama Iqbal was observed on 23 April 1951. Following this the birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore was observed on 13 May.

In order to proceed with organizational work properly, a meeting of the Organizing Council was held at Narsingdi of Dhaka district.⁴²⁴ The general secretary of the Youth League, Oli Ahad, said, 'Our immediate urgent task is to consolidate our cultural life and to fully establish our individual freedom from the control of the present ministry.' In one of the resolutions it was said that the Youth League was not a political party. It was an organization of the East Pakistani youth committed to establish various democratic rights of the young men and women of the country.

In a resolution, the meeting supported the democratic demands of the primary school teachers who were on strike at the time. It was proposed that extra taxes be imposed on the jute traders for increased allocation on primary education. In another resolution, the programme of the Dhaka University State Language Committee was endorsed and introduction of Bengali in the official work of the district and local boards and other

⁴²³ *Naobelal*, 5 April 1951.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7 June 1951.

government offices, and in the secondary education board and the University was demanded. In a separate resolution the meeting also denounced government acts of repression against newspapers and particularly against *Nawai Waqt*, *Pakistan Observer*, *Insaf*, *Sainik* and *Sangram*.

A meeting of the Youth League Council was held on 22 July in Dhaka and another on 26 October 1951.⁴²⁵ In the latter meeting they denounced a government press note issued on 1 October 1951, which had announced that Arabic, Urdu and Bengali would be taught to boys and girls at the primary school level.

The organizational work of the Youth League continued uninterruptedly and for the first time a breakthrough was made in the organized political activities of the anti-government forces. Thus when the first annual conference was held in Dhaka on 30 and 31 December, it was not possible for the government to prevent them from holding it at the Dhaka District Bar Library Hall. The conference was inaugurated by Principal Jogesh Chandra Ghosh of the Shadhana Oushadalaya and presided over by Mahmud Ali. The editor of *Pakistan Observer*, Abdus Salam, delivered his address as the chief guest. The president of East Pakistan Federation of Labour, Kamruddin Ahmad also addressed the meeting. The general secretary of the organization, Oli Ahad, presented his report in which he described the activities of the Youth League since its formation and also the situation obtaining in the country at that time.⁴²⁶

The new phase of the language movement began at the end of January 1952 with the address of Prime Minister Khwaja Nazimuddin at the Paltan Maidan in which he declared that only Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan. The formation and consolidation of the Youth League turned out to be a very important factor during the language movement because, though no single party or person was there to claim legitimately the leadership of the movement, the Youth League emerged as the most influential organization during the whole movement.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1951, 1 November 1951.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1952.

Chapter Twenty

POLITICAL PARTIES ON THE EVE OF THE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT

The internal crisis of the Muslim League, which surfaced in the East Pakistan Muslim League Council session held on 18 and 19 June 1949, could not be resolved and it aggravated badly. Akram Khan, consistently followed the practice of resigning whenever there was any crisis or even the hint of a crisis within the organization. He also did this before the Council meeting in 1949. Each time, however, he would be brought back as president in the absence of a suitable alternative. So as usual he returned as president in 1949 also, but resigned again in January 1951. This time a meeting of the Provincial Council was convened for electing a new president on 20 January. In this Council meeting,⁴²⁷ a resolution was adopted which authorized Abdullah-hil Baqui to act as president of the Provincial Muslim League and conduct all its affairs till a new president could be elected. But two members of the Council, Nurullah Chowdhury of Feni and Fazlur Rahman appealed to the Dhaka Munsif Court to issue an injunction against the decision. Accordingly, on 22 February the first munsif of Dhaka issued an injunction restraining Abdullah-hil Baqui from taking over as acting president. Then on 3 May he issued another order for staying the temporary injunction.⁴²⁸

The two dissenting councillors also appealed to restrict the general secretary, Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, and the treasurer and twenty-two other councillors from discharging their responsibilities. The munsif exempted them from his order and directed the general secretary and others to continue their work. An appeal was filed against the injunction in the Dhaka district court by the Working Committee of the Provincial Muslim League, and the judgment on that given on 23 May, declared the munsif's orders void and Baqui was reinstated as Acting President of the Provincial League.⁴²⁹

The crisis in the Muslim League existed not only at the centre, but in various other district and sub-divisional branches of the organization. On 21 and 22 July 1951, a conference of senior Muslim League workers was held in Sylhet under the presidentship of Taimur Reza Chowdhury, the newly-elected chairman of the Sylhet Local Board and member of the East Bengal Assembly. A resolution was adopted which expressed no-confidence against the Muslim League district and sub-divisional *ad hoc* committees and requested the Provincial Muslim League to appoint a supervisory

⁴²⁷ *Noabelal*, 10 May 1951.

⁴²⁸ *Pakistan Observer*, 4 May 1951.

⁴²⁹ *Noabelal*, 24 May 1951.

committee for conducting elections of the primary, sub-divisional and district Muslim League. Apart from this, Taimur Reza Chowdhury was elected convener of a temporary committee and authorized to negotiate with the Provincial Muslim League on the basis of the resolutions adopted in the Workers' Conference. Ninety-five other members were also elected to this temporary committee from the sub-divisions of the Sylhet district. For conducting day to day work, a small committee was appointed consisting of Taimur Reza, Nurur Rahman, Matsir Ali, Muniruddin Ahmad, Abdul Latif MLA, Sajjad Ali Chowdhury and M.A. Bari.⁴³⁰

On 19 August, another meeting of Muslim League workers was held at the Jinnah Hall in Sylhet.⁴³¹ Many workers of the Central and Provincial League, Muslim League councillors, members of district and sub-divisional Muslim League working committees including convener of Sylhet district Muslim League *ad hoc* committee, Muyeenuddin Ahmad Chowdhury attended the meeting. After long discussions on the organizational situation, a no-confidence resolution was passed against the Sylhet sub-divisional and city Muslim League *ad hoc* committees and the Provincial League authorities was asked to constitute a committee to hold organizational elections at various levels in the district of Sylhet. After the passing of this resolution Muyeenuddin Ahmad Chowdhury, Modabber Hossain Chowdhury, Abdur Rab Chowdhury MLA and Dewan Abdul Baset left the place.

The conference resumed its second session in the afternoon and a committee was formed for discussions with the Provincial Muslim League on reorganization of the Sylhet district Muslim League with A.T.M. Masud as convener and Taimur Reza Chowdhury, Ajmal Ali Chowdhury, Mahmud Ali, Abdur Rahim, Abdul Hadi and Ekramur Rahman as members. In spite of being elected as president of Youth League in March 1951, Mahmud Ali did not resign from the Muslim League before the language movement of 1952.

This crisis in the Sylhet district Muslim League was not local. It reflected the serious crisis within the entire Muslim League organization. The influential *Naobelal*, edited by Mahmud Ali, published a long editorial on the state of the Muslim League organization and said that the organization would be ruined if it was run arbitrarily through ad hoc committees without constituting properly elected committees. According to the decision of the 19 August conference the negotiating committee met the president and secretary of the Provincial League and also the Prime Minister. They promised to visit Sylhet to resolve organizational problems as early as possible. But nothing was reported subsequently in the newspapers on their visit. Elections of Sylhet Muslim League organizations were held at sub-divisional levels and these were followed by organizational splits and deepening of the internal crisis.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26 July 1951.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 23 August 1951.

Another reflection of the crisis in the Muslim League was the resignation of eight Muslim League members of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly: Farid Ahmad Chowdhury of Chittagong, Ahmad Kabir Chowdhury, Kabir Ahmad Chowdhury, Ali Ahmad Chowdhury, Ali Ahmad Khan of Brahmanbaria, Shamsuddin Ahmad of Kushtia, Chowdhury Aref of Barisal and Khan Saheb Osman Ali of Narayanganj. Soon after their resignation they were given a reception at the Dhaka District Bar Library Hall, presided over by Rafiquddin Chowdhury, the secretary of the Dhaka District Bar Library Association.⁴³² Prime Minister Nurul Amin issued a statement to the press on the resignation of the eight Muslim League MLAs, who then made a counter-statement accusing the Prime Minister and the Muslim League on various counts. They particularly referred to the Public Safety Ordinance and the repression let loose on the opposition by grossly misusing this ordinance.⁴³³

The developments within the Muslim League organization very clearly indicated that it was in a bad shape, and was in fact unable to face any crisis likely to emerge not only within their organization but in the political situation of the country.

Though the Awami Muslim League was formed in June 1949, it had very little organizational strength at that time. Maulana Bhashani and Shamsul Huq, the president and general secretary of the Awami Muslim League, and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, the president of the Jinnah Awami League, would address meetings at various places and issue press statements, but there was not much organizational activity. Suhrawardy was not a member of the Awami Muslim League, but he was very close to the leaders of the latter and they considered him their own man. So, whenever Suhrawardy came to East Bengal the Awami Muslim League workers organized meetings for him, and leaders of both the organizations addressed meetings from the same platforms.

The leaders of the Awami Muslim League, in the meetings in Dhaka and other places, demanded abolition of *zamindari* without compensation, free primary education, nationalization of jute trade, nationalization of principal industries, industrialization in the state sector, encouragement of cottage industries, extensive irrigation programme and end to corruption and nepotism.

On 26 April 1951, a meeting of the Organizing Committee of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was held under the presidentship of Bhashani. An appeal to the provincial government and to the people of East Pakistan was made to resist the appropriation of the resources of East Pakistan by the centre and to participate in an uninterrupted struggle for full provincial autonomy so that all subjects except foreign affairs, defence and currency could remain under the authority of the province of East

⁴³² *Sainik*, 18 November 1951; *Naobelal*, 22 November 1951.

⁴³³ *Naobelal*, 22 November 1951.

Bengal. They also adopted a number of resolutions consistent with the above appeal and demanded the release of all political prisoners and a general election by 1952.⁴³⁴

On 7 December, Suhrawardy came to Dhaka and he was given a reception on behalf of the Awami Muslim League and the Youth League. He returned to Karachi after a few days and came back to Dhaka on 23 December with two other leaders of his Jinnah Awami League - Pir of Manki Sharif and Khan of Mamdot. They addressed a public meeting at Armanitola Maidan and a workers' meeting in the evening. The Youth League extended organizational help for this. They also travelled to Rangpur, Barisal, Comilla, Mymensingh and the famine affected areas of Khulna.⁴³⁵

At that time Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in jail. On 1 December, the students of Dhaka University organized a meeting to demand the release of Sheikh Mujib and other political prisoners. The general secretary of the Awami League, Shamsul Huq, issued a press statement demanding the release of their organizing secretary Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Apart from these there were very little organizational activities of the Awami Muslim League, and they remained a very small organization.

At the time of the partition of India and Bengal, there were two political parties in East Bengal-the ruling Muslim League and the Communist Party. The latter decided to cooperate with the government in nation-building work at the initial stage. But soon they changed their line and worked out another for the overthrow of the government and the state. The Communist Party was not at all organizationally prepared for this sudden change of strategic line and its consequences were disastrous for them.

The B.T. Ranadive thesis which made a radical departure from the earlier strategy of the Communist Party of India and Pakistan, brought disaster for the entire communist movement and organization in East Bengal. In the working class and peasant areas, militant struggles followed the change of strategic line, but it was so divorced from the realities of the situation that soon it became unworkable. Consequently, the mass working class, peasant and student organizations related to the Communist Party were virtually liquidated. There were 12,000 members of the Party before partition. Some migrated to India for family or similar other reasons, but many were either killed or became so frustrated that they deserted the Party. Thus, in 1950, the membership of the Party came down to a mere 250.⁴³⁶ This happened before the second phase of the language movement and so they could not intervene very effectively in it. However, in spite of this setback, they were able to take part in organizing the East Pakistan Youth League in which they were the most important and powerful factor.

⁴³⁴ *Pakistan Observer*, 29 April 1951.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 December 1951; *Naobelal*, 29 December 1951.

⁴³⁶ Badruddin Umar, *Purba Banglar Bhasha Andolan O Tatkalin Rajniti*, Vol. I, pp. 268-70; Shahidullah Kaiser.

The organization of the Indian National Congress became ineffective immediately after the partition in August 1947. They seemed to have no programme to re-organize the Congress in Pakistan. But they had a sizeable number of members in the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, and they continued to retain their membership till the general election of 1954. They had no function outside the East Bengal Legislative Assembly.

Chapter Twenty-One

THE LANGUAGE MOVEMENT-AWAKENING OF THE MASSES

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the most widely loved and respected leader of Pakistan died on 11 September 1948. The same year he had visited East Pakistan. His death was followed by changes in the setup of the central government and Khwaja Nazimuddin was promoted to the position of Governor General, replacing Jinnah. On 16 October 1951, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated in Rawalpindi while addressing a public meeting. His death was also followed by changes and Nazimuddin was again selected by the ruling clique at the centre to fill up the vacancy caused by the death of the Prime Minister. Nurul Amin was elected Prime Minister of East Bengal in September 1948 and retained that position till the general election of 1954.

Khwaja Nazimuddin made his first visit to East Bengal, after being installed as Pakistan's Prime Minister, in the last week of January 1952. On 27 January, he addressed a public meeting at Paltan Maidan (the place now known as outer stadium), and in the course of his speech he characterized the demand of Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan as provincialism. He further said that Quaid-i-Azam had declared Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan, and he read out a part of Jinnah's Dhaka speech in which he had mentioned the language question. While denouncing those who demanded Bengali as a state language, he said that they were nothing but 'provincialists' and as such enemies of the Pakistan state.⁴³⁷

Nazimuddin then mentioned the initiatives of the government in introducing teaching of Bengali through Arabic script and said that in twenty-one experimental centers Bengali was being taught in Arabic script under government supervision. He also said that people themselves had taken initiatives in opening such educational centers in numerous places. This, however, had no factual basis at all. Nazimuddin was unlettered in Bengali, he could not even speak it properly, but he delivered his speech in Bengali, which had been written in the Urdu script. The Urdu transcript of his speech was prepared by Mizanur Rahman, a senior Bengali government officer. Before going into the details of what followed Nazimuddin's Paltan speech, it is necessary to mention the reactions and opinions of the East Bengal Muslim League leaders and top government officials to the Prime Minister's speech. It is necessary because it reveals the miserable gap which was created by that time between the central government and the government and Muslim League leadership of East Bengal.

⁴³⁷ *Morning News*, 28 January 1962; *Naobelal*, 31 January 1952.

Referring to Nazimuddin's Paltan speech the general secretary of East Pakistan Muslim League, Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, said,

We did not know anything beforehand about what Nazimuddin said in his Paltan speech on the language question. Nurul Amin and I were totally stupefied on hearing his speech. I think Mizanur Rahman prepared the transcript of the speech.⁴³⁸

According to the Prime Minister of East Bengal, Nurul Amin,

Prime Minister Nazimuddin came to Dhaka in 1952 January to attend the Muslim League Council meeting. He brought with him, from Karachi, a Bengali speech written in Urdu script. Some thought that it was actually written by Mizanur Rahman. I had no knowledge of the contents of the speech before it was read out at the Paltan Maidan meeting. I knew with absolute certainty that there would be disturbance after what he said on the language question.

Mohan Mian was sitting next to me on the dais, and I told him so. It was not an active issue, but Nazimuddin made it an issue out of the blue. After the meeting we told him that he had made a mistake by raising the language question. Later in a press conference at Dhaka, he tried to soften up, to some extent, what he said in his Paltan speech.⁴³⁹

What the chief secretary of East Bengal, Aziz Ahmad, said in this regard is quite significant:

I did not know anything about the matter, but later Nazimuddin asked me whether I saw the speech before he read it out. When I said 'no', he was very surprised and said to me that he had asked his private secretary to show it to me for clearance of the provincial government. If I had seen it before, I would have advised him not to make that statement.⁴⁴⁰

The important point here is the statement that Nazimuddin had asked his secretary to show his speech to the chief secretary, and not to the Prime Minister of East Bengal, for clearance by the provincial government. Such was the state of affairs in East Bengal where the non-Bengali chief secretary actually represented the central government and all dealings between the central and provincial governments were made through the bureaucracy and not through the political party or the provincial cabinet.

⁴³⁸ Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, General Secretary, East Bengal Provincial Muslim League (interview).

⁴³⁹ Nurul Amin (interview).

⁴⁴⁰ Aziz Ahmad, Chief Secretary (interview).

Nazimuddin's speech created widespread adverse reaction throughout East Bengal, but no protest was organized before 29 January when the first meeting was held in Dhaka University. Some posters of the Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action also appeared on the walls of University buildings. It was done on behalf of the Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action.⁴⁴¹ The same day a press statement by Oli Ahad, general secretary of the Youth League, denouncing Nazimuddin's Paltan speech was published in the Dhaka newspapers.

On 30 January, a student meeting was held under a mango tree presided over by Khaleque Nawaz, a leader of the East Pakistan Muslim Students League. The speakers demanded Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan as implementation of Nazimuddin's promise when he was East Bengal's chief minister. At the end of this meeting they decided to take out a demonstration. It was opposed by the workers and leaders of the East Pakistan Students League, but their opposition was overruled by others who were there in greater numbers. The demonstrators shouted slogans in front of the Prime Minister's official residence (the present Bengali Academy building). The demonstrators returned to the University premises and it was then announced that a strike would be observed in all the educational institutions of Dhaka.⁴⁴² The same day Nazimuddin addressed a big public meeting in Dinajpur and appealed to the people to unite and eradicate provincialism from Pakistan.

Immediately after the Paltan speech, a meeting of Youth League was held at their office at Juginagar.⁴⁴³ It was decided to form an All Party State Language Committee of Action. Accordingly, Youth League leaders Toaha, Oli Ahad and others contacted the leaders of the Awami League. The student front of the Awami Muslim League called an all-party meeting on 31 January, at the Dhaka Bar Library Hall, to consider the situation arising out of Nazimuddin's speech, and also to decide on a programme of action.⁴⁴⁴

The representatives of Youth League, East Pakistan Muslim Students League, Dhaka University State Language Action Committee, East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, Tamaddun Majlis, All East Pakistan Students League, Islamic Brotherhood, East Pakistan Mohajir Society along with some student representatives from various schools and colleges and prominent citizens of Dhaka attended the meeting presided over by the president of Awami Muslim League, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani.

The former general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, Abul Hashim, narrated how before partition the Indian National Congress characterized every demand of the Muslim League as communal. He described the attempt to have only

⁴⁴¹ *Sainik*, 3 February 1952; Abdul Matin (interview).

⁴⁴² *Morning News*, 31 January 1952; Gaziul Huq, *Smriticharan Ekusher Sankalan* 1980, Bengali Academy, p. 135; Abdul Matin.

⁴⁴³ Mohammad Toaha (interview).

⁴⁴⁴ *Azad*, 1 February 1952; *Morning News*, 1 February 1952.

Urdu as state language as unreasonable and arrogant. The general secretary of the Muslim Students League, Khaleque Nawaz Khan, said Nazimuddin's speech was a violation of his promise which he had made during the language movement of 1948. Former Finance Minister of the East Bengal government, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, said that the Muslim League was gradually isolating itself from the people. The general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, Shamsul Huq, said that Quaid-i-Azam himself said that it was the people who would finally decide the language issue. The others who spoke included Oli Ahad, Abdul Gafur of Tamaddun Majlis, Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, secretary of the Islamic Brotherhood and Abdul Matin, convener of the Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action.

In order to direct the state language movement a forty-member committee called the All Party State Language Committee of Action was formed. Kazi Golam Mahbub, general secretary of the East Pakistan Students League, was elected convener of the Committee. Through several resolutions the participants denounced Nazimuddin's speech, demanded Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan, supported the general strike call of students on 4 February, denounced the attempt to introduce Arabic script for Bengali, and demanded abrogation of the Public Security Act and release of all political prisoners including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

In 1952, the Communist Party of East Pakistan though not officially banned was practically unable to work openly. They issued a secret circular within the party on 2 February called, 'Establish the Right of Bengali Language and Equal Status of all Languages' in which they denounced the policy of the Pakistan government to have Urdu as the only state language and demanded that Bengali be one of the state languages. At the same time they also said that apart from Urdu all local languages of West Pakistan-Sindhi, Punjabi, Pushtu, etc.-should be given equal status as languages of the people of those areas. The circular also asked the party workers to take part in the movement for Bengali as a state language and mobilize the masses to this end.⁴⁴⁵

The Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action had earlier declared a province-wide strike on 4 February,⁴⁴⁶ Accordingly thousands of students assembled in the Dhaka University on that day and the meeting began at 11 a.m. presided over by Gaziul Huq and was addressed among others by Kazi Golam Mahbub and Abdul Matin. The workers of the Muslim Students League, according to newspaper reports, opposed any demonstration in the city and had carried out propaganda to that effect. In order to prevent an open division on the issue, Abdul Matin stood up and asked the assembled students whether they wanted to come out in a demonstration to which a majority of the students replied that they did. However, to avoid further discussions and any possible trouble, the meeting was quickly dissolved and the demonstrators

⁴⁴⁵ Badruddin Umar, *Language Movement Documents*, Vol. I, Bengali Academy, second edition, 1995.

⁴⁴⁶ Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*

came out and passing by the residences of the University Vice-Chancellor and the Prime Minister, paraded through the city streets.⁴⁴⁷

Although attempts were made by government authorities to prevent it, all educational institutions in Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chittagong, Comilla, Manikganj, Dinajpur, Chandpur, Feni and Narayanganj participated in the strike.⁴⁴⁸ The Dhaka University students in the meeting resolved to observe a general strike throughout East Bengal on 21 February.⁴⁴⁹ The same evening a meeting of the all Party Committee of Action was held and in the presence of Maulana Bhashani, Abul Hashim and several other members of the Committee the call for general strike was endorsed.⁴⁵⁰

On 12 February, editor of *Pakistan Observer*, Abdus Salam, published an editorial on the language issue under the caption 'Crypto Fascism' in which he made certain, derogatory remarks about the third Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Osman, and said that he gave a long rope to his friends and relations who were not worthy of any consideration. The editorial further said that nobody would deny that Khwaja Nazimuddin was a religious person but we all pray that he would not prove himself to be another Osman.'

It was a very thoughtless and provocative editorial and the government took full advantage of the opportunity provided by it. Akram Khan, Raghbir Ahsan, Maulana Shamsul Huq, Hafiz Sulaiman, Shah Azizur Rahman and others made fiery statements against it and in order to pay respect to the 'sentiments' of the people, *Pakistan Observer* was banned on the night of 12 February and its owner, former Muslim League provincial minister, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, and editor Abdus Salam, were arrested. They were later released on bail.⁴⁵¹ The real reason for banning this newspaper was that it was virtually the only daily newspaper which supported not only the language movement but also all democratic movements at the time. Thus, the completely unwarranted and thoughtless editorial of Abdus Salam, instead of doing any good, created some difficulties for the movement. The Board of Directors and the editorial committee of the paper apologized for publishing the remarks, but the government did not lift the ban.⁴⁵² They just could not afford to.

The East Bengal government issued a press note on 14 February with an official statement banning the *Pakistan Observer*. On 17 February, the Youth League denounced the government press note and the application of Security Act. Oli Ahad issued a press statement in line with this resolution. The students of the Dhaka University denounced

⁴⁴⁷ *Noabelal*, 14 February 1952.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ittefaq*, 10 February 1952.

⁴⁴⁹ *Azad*, 5 February 1952.

⁴⁵⁰ *Morning News*, 5 February 1952; Kabiruddin Ahmad, *Ekusher Itihash*, editor Hasan Hafizur Rahman, second edition, 1965, p. 223.

⁴⁵¹ *Morning News*, 13 February 1952, 14 February 1952.

⁴⁵² *Noabelal*, 21 February 1952.

the government ban on the paper. Among some other weekly papers the *Naobelal* in an editorial severely criticized the government for taking repressive measures against a newspaper without referring the case to the court of law.⁴⁵³

All over the country, efforts continued to give direction to the language movement. Dhaka University students and the University State Language Committee were the most active. State language committees of action were formed in Rangpur town, and Nilphamari and Domar in Rangpur district and in Pabna and Madaripur. In Narayanganj the committee was formed with Shamsuzzoha as president and Mafizuddin Ahmad as convener. In Comilla its president was Amir Hossain. In Chittagong the committee was formed mainly at the initiative of M.A. Aziz of Awami Muslim League and Azizur Rahman of Tamaddun Majlis. Apart from these, committees of action were formed in numerous other places and areas. A meeting of the executive committee of the Youth League was held in Dhaka on 8 February in which it was decided to extend all-out support to the All Party State Language Committee of Action. All branches of the organization were directed to observe the general strike on 21 February.⁴⁵⁴

In the first week of February the election of Salimullah Muslim Hall students union, Dhaka University took place. Mohammad Mujibul Huq was elected vice-president, Hedayet Hossain Chowdhury general secretary and Mustafa Kamal joint-secretary.⁴⁵⁵ The panel in which they were elected was constituted of pro-Islamic elements. During the language movement they played an important role centered around the Salimullah Muslim Hall.

In order to make the general strike of 21 February a success it was necessary to raise funds and so flag days were observed on 11 and 13 February. Not much funds were raised, but a lot of organizational activities took place. On 14 February the government announced that the Budget Session of the Provincial Assembly would begin on 20 February and continue till 11 March.⁴⁵⁶

A letter from the Dhaka central jail was received secretly on 18 February that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Mohiuddin Ahmad of Barisal had begun hunger strike in the jail for their release from detention and requested the launching of a movement for the release of political prisoners.⁴⁵⁷ Dhaka University students organized a meeting on 19 February presided over by Mukhlesur Rahman and addressed by Zillur Rahman, Nadira Begum, Shamsul Huq Chowdhury and others. A resolution was adopted in the meeting demanding release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mohiuddin Ahmad and all

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ *Morning News*, 8 February 1952.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1952.

⁴⁵⁷ Oli Ahad, *Jatiya Rajniti*, pp. 151-2.

other political prisoners. Apart from the resolution a committee called the University Political Prisoners Release Movement Committee was formed.⁴⁵⁸

A very important government action with very serious implications for the future course of the language movement took place at this juncture. The district magistrate of Dhaka, Haider, was transferred. With the rapid development of the language movement, chief secretary Aziz Ahmad thought that Haider was too mild an officer to handle the resistance and Qureshi was brought in to replace him. The latter was the DM of Faridpur at that time and was comparatively much junior and rather tactless. This decision was endorsed by Prime Minister Nurul Amin.⁴⁵⁹

A long circular called 'The State Language Movement', was circulated on 11 February 1952, by the secretariat of the East Bengal organizing committee of the Communist Party,⁴⁶⁰ which spelt out the stand of the party regarding the language question:

The demand for making Bengali as one of the state languages is a demand for national right of the Bengali nation. This demand is a birth right of the Bengali nation and a demand for democratic right. Therefore, the movement for state language is a movement for establishing the rights, and democratic rights, of the Bengali nation. But the state language movement is not a movement only of the Bengali nation. The state language movement is a movement for giving equal status to all the spoken languages of Pakistan-Bengali, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushtu, Baluch etc. It is a movement for giving equal status to the language and culture of all nations, it is a movement of all the people speaking different languages against a small reactionary-ruling clique.

Two points made in this part of the circular deserve particular notice. First, the people of Pakistan were referred not as belonging to one Pakistani nationhood, but as Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Pathans, Balochis and so on, which was in complete opposition to the official position regarding nationhood. Whereas the Pakistan government declared religion as the basis of nationhood, the Communist Party defined nationhood, on the basis of language. In other words, they substituted linguistic nationalism in place of religious nationalism. This was undoubtedly a correct position to take, and the communists were the only party in the language movement who very clearly stated this position. The second important point in this circular is their demand for equal right and status for all languages of the peoples of Pakistan belonging to both regions the East and the West. The two points together gave the language movement a truly democratic character, completely devoid of chauvinism.

⁴⁵⁸ Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 139; *Azad*, 22 February 1952.

⁴⁵⁹ Yusuf Ali Chowdhury.

⁴⁶⁰ Badruddin Umar, *op. cit.*

This circular also urged the party members to take the movement to the working peoples-peasants and workers-particularly the railway workers, who were strategically the most important section of the working class in East Pakistan at the time. An appeal was issued to make an all-out effort in order to make the general strike on 21 February a great success. In order to communicate the importance and urgency of this, the party issued another circular on 20 February called 'Respond to the Call of the All-Party State Language Committee of Action, organize province-wide strikes, *hartals*, meetings and demonstrations for equal status of all languages and for making Bengali one of the State languages'.⁴⁶¹

As per the announcement, the budget session of the East Bengal Assembly began on 20 February at 3 p.m. with Speaker Abdul Karim on the chair. Of the 123 members of the Assembly, 80 were present. As soon as the session began, Khairat Hossain demanded a discussion on the ban on *Pakistan Observer*. Opposing the motion, Nurul Amin said that the step had been taken in public interest, and added that the paper created such a situation that many untoward incidents could have occurred. Since the motion was not allowed, no discussion could take place on it.⁴⁶²

On Wednesday, 20 February, the District Magistrate of Dhaka, Qureshi, promulgated an order through a press note imposing 144 CrPC in the city of Dhaka for thirty days. The press note read as follows:

Whereas it is being observed that a section of people are trying to organize public meetings, processions and protest demonstrations in the Dhaka city, and whereas I feel certain in this matter, that this kind of procession and protest demonstration may disturb peace and order in the life of the people, I, S.H. Qureshi, CSP District Magistrate Dhaka, am prohibiting all such public meetings, processions and demonstrations without my permission according to 144 CrPC for thirty days from 20 February 1952, in the whole city area of Dhaka comprising Kotwali, Sutrapur, Lalbagh, Ramna and Tejgaon police stations.⁴⁶³

Justifying promulgation of 144 CrPC in this manner, chief secretary, Aziz Ahmad, said, We came to know through the intelligence department that the protesters would surround the Assembly House and would try to enter it forcibly. We promulgated 144 in order to prevent any such attack on the members during the assembly session.⁴⁶⁴

The plan of the All Party Committee of Action and the University Committee of Action did include surrounding the Assembly, but not to enter the Assembly and beat up the members. This story was created in order to justify the promulgation of 144. Nurul

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Morning News*, 21 February 1952.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁴ Aziz Ahmad (Chief Secretary).

Amin said that, 'The decision to promulgate 144 CrPC was taken at the official level, and I was not consulted about the matter'.⁴⁶⁵ At the time the provincial government was run according to the instructions of chief secretary Aziz Ahmad. All important decisions were taken by him, and he informed the Prime Minister only when he thought it necessary to do so. Nurul Amin further said that 'nobody at the time had any idea that the situation could take such a turn as a consequence of the promulgation of 144.'

The full text of the government press note was published on 21 February but it had been announced by the government, through mobile microphones in the afternoon and evening of 20 February.⁴⁶⁶ In the evening of 20 February, a meeting of the All Party State Language Committee of Action was held in the Awami Muslim League office at 94 Nawabpur Road under Abul Hashim, former general secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League. Among those who attended were Khairat Hossain MLA, Begum Anwara Khatun MLA, Shamsul Huq (Awami Muslim League), Mohammad Toaha (Youth League), Kazi Golam Mahbub and Khaleque Nawaz Khan (both East Pakistan Muslim Students League), Mirza Golam Hafeez (Civil Liberty Committee), Oli Ahad (Youth League) Mujibul Huq and Hedayet Hossain Chowdhury (vice-president and general secretary of Salimullah Muslim Hall Students Union), Shamsul Alam (vice-president Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall Students Union), Abdul Matin (convener Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action), Abul Kasem (Tamaddun Majlis), Abdul Gafur (editor, *Sainik*, Tamaddun Majlis), Shamsul Huq Chowdhury (East Pakistan Muslim Students League), Golam Mowla (vice-president, Dhaka Medical College Students Union), Ibrahim Taha and Syed Ishtiaq Ahmad (both of Islamic Brotherhood), Syed Abdur Rahim (president Rickshaw Union), Kamruddin Ahmed (Civil Liberty League), Shaokat Ali (East Bengal Workers Camp), Nurul Alam (East Pakistan Muslim Students League) and Akhtaruddin Ahmed (All East Pakistan Muslim Students League).⁴⁶⁷

The entire discussion in this crucial meeting centered around the programme of the following day and whether to break the 144 CrPC. The great majority were against violation of 144, but Oli Ahad, Abdul Matin, and Ibrahim Taha spoke in favor of violation.⁴⁶⁸ Those who were against the violation argued that the language movement had reached a stage when it could not be limited only to the student community. It had become a concern for all sections of the people. There was no organization in East Bengal at that time which could handle the situation which could develop after the violation of 144 and there was no organizational preparation. They further argued that the government would try to use the situation to postpone the date of the general

⁴⁶⁵ Nurul Amin.

⁴⁶⁶ Mohammad Toaha, Abdul Matin, Shahidullah Kaiser, Gaziul Huq, Habibur Rahman (Shelly).

⁴⁶⁷ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-50; Toaha, Kamruddin Ahmad, Khairat Hossain, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Abdul Matin.

⁴⁶⁸ Kamruddin Ahmad, Toaha, Oli Ahad, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Abdul Matin, Ishtiaq Ahmad (interview), Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

election which had already been announced for 1953. If that happened, then the country's democratic movement would be greatly harmed. These opinions were expressed by Shamsul Huq, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Abul Hashim, Khairat Hossain MLA and Kamruddin Ahmad.⁴⁶⁹

Oli Ahad, speaking in favor of violation, put forth that the government was continuing with their policy of repression and at every step they were resorting to repression against all forms of democratic movement. Last year they had imposed section 144 in Dhaka city at the time of the founding conference of the Youth League. If there was no resistance and 144 CrPC was not violated it would encourage the government to heap further repression and there would be no end to it.⁴⁷⁰ Abdul Matin said that 144 CrPC was imposed to oppose and destroy any democratic movement. So if they submitted to the government decision it would not be possible for them to advance in that direction at all. He also added that the University State Language Committee was the 'parent' body, and since it had decided to violate the All Party State Language Committee of Action had no authority to decide otherwise.⁴⁷¹ Mohammad Toaha working in the Youth League, but basically from the Communist Party, was in favor of violation, but he could not speak out very strongly, because he had not received any definite instruction from the party. Toaha later talked about his role in the meeting,

I said that 144 had to be broken, otherwise how could there be any movement. But for that there was no need for any voting. But I remained silent and did not talk much. I had been waiting for instructions. I said, the university students were the main force. We do not know their opinion. We should ascertain it. In fact, I was waiting for instructions. At that point Matin and others reached there and said that they wanted to violate 144. At the time of voting I received Party instruction, so I did not vote. Oli Ahad did not understand Party discipline.⁴⁷²

Shahidullah Kaiser, who was a leading communist worker at that time, had this to say about party line and party instruction,

Taquiullah gave instruction to Toaha, Oli Ahad, Dewan Mahbub Ali and Samad Azad to exert pressure for violation of 144, but they were also advised to accept the majority decision in case it was not possible to persuade others. But after some preliminary discussion it was found that the Awami League people and other members of the Action Committee were not willing to violate 144. So the party had to take a quick decision. It was decided in an emergency meeting of the party that under no circumstances the party would permit any division within the All Party Committee of Action. No extremism could be encouraged,

⁴⁶⁹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 148; Kazi Golam Mahbub, Kamruddin Ahmad, Abul Hashim, Khairat Hossain.

⁴⁷⁰ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9.

⁴⁷¹ Abdul Matin.

⁴⁷² Toaha.

because such an incident would be used with considerable advantage by the government. The party gave clear instruction to Toaha, Oli Ahad, Samad and Dewan Mahbub Ali not to create any pressure for violating 144. They were all members of the All Party Committee of Action. They were also told to explain before the Committee that in an emergency situation the general election scheduled to be held within a short time could be postponed, and it would be a great setback in the democratic life of East Bengal. All those of the All Party Committee who spoke against violation of 144 gave their arguments almost on the same line.⁴⁷³

The meeting of the All Party Committee continued till late into the night without any decision. Finally, Shamsul Huq moved a resolution for not violating 144 and cancellation of the programme set for 21 February. It was supported by eleven members including Abul Hashim, Kamruddin Ahmad, Khairat Hossain, Shamsul Huq, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Khaleque Nawaz Khan and Mirza Golam Hafeez and opposed by four members including Oli Ahad, Abdul Matin and Golam Mowla. Nothing has been established conclusively about the identity of the fourth member. It could have been either Ibrahim Taha or Shamsul Alam. Toaha refrained from voting.⁴⁷⁴

At that time the Communist Party was, in fact, opposed to any political adventurism. After their experience in the period between 1948 and 1950, they were cautious. Moreover, they knew that there was no appropriate organization which could properly direct and carry forward a countrywide movement. In such a situation a violent large-scale movement could end in a fiasco, and create a lot of problems for them and for all democratic movements in the immediate future. So at that point in time they were more inclined to undertake a united democratic movement against the ruling Muslim League, and for dislodging them from power through the general election. Actually, it was the fear of postponement of the general election which led the various parties, including the Communist Party and other individuals, to decide against a straightforward violation of the 144 imposed by the government.

Oli Ahad was a very active person as general secretary of the Youth League, and subsequently his contribution to the language movement was considerable. But his sense of discipline was rather poor. This was the reason why, in spite of the party decision and instruction to the contrary, he voted for violation of 144, and even after being defeated in the voting went on saying at the meeting, within the hearing of everybody, that whatever the decision of the All Party Committee, section 144 would be violated the next morning. Abul Hashim reacted and argued that in that case there would be no further need for an All Party Committee, and it would stand dissolved if 144 was thus violated. What Abul Hashim said was put in the form of a resolution and

⁴⁷³ Shahidullah Kaiser.

⁴⁷⁴ Toaha, Kamruddin Ahmad, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Khairat Hossain.

was passed by the Committee.⁴⁷⁵ In a third resolution Shamsul Huq was authorized to convey and explain the decision of the All Party meeting to the students in the meeting next morning at the Dhaka University.⁴⁷⁶

Students of Dhaka University, medical and engineering colleges visited various schools and colleges of Dhaka city on the morning of 20 February and exhorted the students to observe the strike. Their propaganda motivated and prepared the students for the programmes to be held on 21 February. Thus, when the government announced that section 144 had been imposed in Dhaka city thirty days from the evening of 20 February the students reacted sharply. There was great commotion in the student hostels and they gathered in their premises to protest and denounce the sudden imposition of section 144. Meetings were held in Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall and Salimullah Muslim Hall, presided by Abdul Momen and Fakir Shahabuddin respectively. In these meetings, the sentiments were in favor of violation of section 144. In Fazlul Huq Hall, there was another meeting of students including Habibur Rahman (Shelly), Mohammad Sultan, Kamruddin Shahud, Gaziul Huq, Zillur Rahman, S.A. Bari, Abdul Momen, Anwarul Huq Khan and M.R. Akhtar (Mukul). They decided to try to nominate Gaziul Huq as the president of the meeting to be held the next morning at the Dhaka University.⁴⁷⁷

The students present in these meetings were mostly either members of the Youth League or somehow connected with it. However, there was no formal decision of the Youth League for the violation since no emergency meeting of the League could be held to take a decision on the matter. One reason perhaps was that the person responsible for convening such an emergency meeting, the general secretary Oli Ahad, considered it wiser' for the students to go into the agitation state during the remaining part of the night, rather than sit in for a formal decision of the Youth League. But an analysis of the situation of 20 February clearly reveals that the reaction of the students against the imposition of 144 was quite spontaneous, as was the strike meeting and organizational steps for the programmes chalked out for the following day. The spontaneity was also quite noticeable during the incidents which took place one after another on 21 February.

The Budget Session of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly began on 20 February in the afternoon, as scheduled. In the meeting of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party held in the evening, most of the members put pressure on Nurul Amin to issue a statement accepting the demand for Bengali as one of the state languages. But the home secretary, Azfar, pressured him not to. In the end the meeting authorized Nurul Amin to take the necessary steps and he chose not to act according to the wishes of the majority.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ Kamruddin Ahmad, Kazi Golam Mahub, Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷⁶ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*; Kamruddin Ahmad.

⁴⁷⁷ Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-42; Habibur Rahman (Shelly), Ekushur Sankalan, Bengali Academy, 1980, pp. 57-8.

⁴⁷⁸ Shah Azizur Rahman (interview).

After the Parliamentary Committee meeting, the Muslim League Provincial Working Committee held a meeting with Maulana Abdullahil Baqui as president. On the language question Baqui supported Bengali, but in the end he, along with other Bengali supporters, became a minority.⁴⁷⁹ As far as Nurul Amin was concerned, it is difficult to believe that he really did not want Bengali and that he had no love for his mother-tongue unlike Nazimuddin who was Urdu-speaking and unlettered in Bengali. Nurul Amin loved his mother-tongue but he loved power more.

Before the events of 21 February took place, two pamphlets, one on behalf of the All Party Committee of Action and the other on behalf of the Dhaka University Committee, were published, explaining the language issue and the reasons for demanding Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. The first one was written by me on the request of Kazi Golam Mahbub, convener of the All Party Committee, and the second by Anisuzzaman on the request of Oli Ahad. In the second pamphlet, the name of the Youth League was mentioned as printer and publisher.⁴⁸⁰

On 21 February, preparations began very early in the morning to carry out the proposed programme in the University areas. Student leaders and workers from the University hostels and other educational institutions of Dhaka began to assemble around the mango tree, the usual venue of all University meetings. Kazi Golam Mahbub, Oli Ahad, Mohammad Toaha, Abdus Samad, Mohammad Sultan, Gaziul Huq, S.A. Bari AT and others tried to persuade the students on their viewpoint, i.e. to violate section 144 or otherwise according to their political stance. The general secretary of the Awami Muslim League, Shamsul Huq, also arrived and as per the decision and resolution of the All Party State Language Committee of Action, began to argue with the students justifying their decision not to break section 144 and not to create a situation which would do the movement more harm than good. The students surrounded him and most of them told him that they were in favor of violating section 144 imposed by the government. Some students also used insulting language against him and called him a traitor. All this showed the extent of excitement among the masses of the students.⁴⁸¹ The Awami Muslim League and Muslim Students League leaders and workers were opposed to the violation of section 144. So the debates continued quite excitedly as the morning advanced. The leaders of the Awami Muslim League and the Muslim Students League seemed to be very frustrated.

At 7.30 a.m., police forces under city DSP Siddique Dewan, took their position in the University areas. Masud Mahmud, Additional City SP of Dhaka, inspected deployment of police contingents at various points. At around 10 a.m., SP Idris sent further re-enforcement to the front of the University gate. Contingents of police forces were also

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ Badruddin Umar, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Anisuzzaman, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad, Mohammad Toaha.

⁴⁸¹ Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 146; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.* pp. 152-3; Mohammad Toaha.

deployed in front of the Medical College and Salimullah Muslim Hall gates. The constables were all armed. The police justified such heavy deployments, by saying that since early morning the students had begun to stop buses, rickshaws, motor cars etc. and were forcing them to observe strike. This was creating disturbance and the law and order situation was deteriorating fast.⁴⁸²

Before the 'Amtala' (meaning literally, under the mango tree) meeting formally began, the Vice-Chancellor Dr Moazzem Hossain, Proctor Muzaffar Ahmad Chowdhury, Provost Salimullah Muslim Hall Dr Osman Ghani, Dean of Arts Dr Itrat Hossain Zuberi, Head of the Department of Political Science Dr Newman, Head of the Department of Philosophy Dr Golam Jilani and some other teachers tried to persuade the students not to violate section 144. The students were, however, not in a mood to listen to their advice.⁴⁸³

It was known at a later time that the vice-chancellor and the teachers thus tried to persuade the students not on their own. The DM of Dhaka, Qureshi, told the Ellis Commission, which was instituted by the government to enquire into the incidents of 21 February, that at around 10 a.m., when the students were preparing to start their meeting, he telephoned the university registrar to request the vice-chancellor to try to persuade the students on behalf of the university authorities not to violate 144. Soon after that, vice-chancellor and other teachers and also Qureshi reached there and the latter personally requested the vice-chancellor to try to persuade the students not to interfere with road traffic and not to violate 144.

At that time there were about a thousand students within the University premises. When the vice-chancellor continued his exhortations, the students requested him to preside over the meeting. In reply he said that he could do so only on one condition - the students would have to agree not to violate section 144 and leave the University premises peacefully. The students refused to accept his terms and the vice-chancellor declined their offer to preside over the meeting. When the meeting began the vice-chancellor and the teachers did not leave the place. They remained standing a little away from the Amtala and continued to observe the situation.⁴⁸⁴

The Muslim Students League group wanted Kazi Golam Mahbub to preside over the meeting. But this was not acceptable, so the name of Gaziul Huq was proposed as president and accepted.⁴⁸⁵ As the meeting began Shamsul Huq, Toaha, Kazi Golam Mahbub and Khaleque Nawaz spoke and argued against violation of section 144. Opposing them Abdul Matin, spoke in favor of violation, and said that in the interest of the movement they wanted to violate section 144, but at the same time they wanted to

⁴⁸² Ellis Commission Report (ECR), para 19.

⁴⁸³ ECR, para 20; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 153; *Azad*, 22 February 1952.

⁴⁸⁴ ECR, para 20; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁴⁸⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 153; Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 147; M.R. Akhtar Mukul (interview).

maintain, again in the interest of the movement, the unity of the Committee of Action. So they were not in favor of such bitter arguments as might damage the unity of the Committee of Action.⁴⁸⁶

The meeting continued for about an hour. Gaziul Huq, as president, spoke in favor of violation and said that this was the way they wanted to accept the challenge of the Nurul Amin government. There was very little or negligible support for those who opposed the violation of section 144, and so in line with the majority opinion, Gaziul Huq announced that they would violate 144. That announcement created a lot of excitement among the students and they began to shout slogans in favor of Bengali as a state language.⁴⁸⁷ At that point Abdus Samad proposed that in order to avoid chaos and indiscipline they should form groups of ten, and such groups should leave the University premise one by one. His proposal was accepted and the students began to gather in front of the University gate in groups by 11 a.m.⁴⁸⁸

Gaziul Huq reported that Shamsul Huq accepted the decision and expressed his solidarity with the movement.⁴⁸⁹ Most of the others also joined the movement actively. A few days later Shamsul Huq was arrested and he remained in jail for a long time.

The students gathered near the gate after the decision but no one went out. There was a little disorder. No one was sure. Then the first group, led by Habibur Rahman (Shelly) moved out. Mohammad Sultan, Hasan Hafizur Rahman, Azhar and others were taking down the names of those who were going out in groups. They were all shouting slogans like *Rashtra Bhasha Bangla Chai* (We Want Bengali as State Language). Then Habibur Rahman, Ibrahim Taha, Abdus Samad, Anwarul Huq Khan, Abu Zafar Obaidullah led out the groups one by one. Some female students also came forward to cross the gate. Among them were Shafia Khatun, Sufia Ibrahim, Rawshanara Bachchu, Shamsunnahar and Sara Taifur. Earlier the police had actually created some obstruction by fixing big thick ropes from one end of the gate to the other.⁴⁹⁰

After the groups of female students, S.A. Bari AT, Shamsul Huq Chowdhury, Anwarul Azim, Sayeed Atiqullah, Syed Fazle Ali, Badrul Amin and others went out. Then there was a great rush of students trying to go out of the gate. With such a large number of students leaving the University premises and assembling on the road, the police began to throw tear gas shells at them. The students scattered for a while, but they gathered again in front of the gate. They had known that the police would resort to tear gas shelling, so they had arranged for several bucketsful of water near the gate for the

⁴⁸⁶ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 154; Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 147; Abdul Matin.

⁴⁸⁷ Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*; Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁴⁸⁸ ECR, para 21; *Azad*, 22 February 1952; Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸⁹ Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

⁴⁹⁰ Habibur Rahman Shelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59; Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, p. 82; Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

students to dip handkerchiefs and apply them to their eyes and faces. Some of them ran to the nearby water tank within the University premises.⁴⁹¹

The police arrested all male students who were on the road and were thus breaking 144. But they did not arrest any female student and allowed them to move towards the Medical College hostel.⁴⁹² The Ellis Commission Report on the events later reported that the names of those students who were coming out were read out from a roster list which proved beyond doubt that the entire arrangement for the meeting to decide on violation of section 144 was a fraud and everything had been decided beforehand. The police arrested ninety-one students and they were taken to the police station. But the space in the police vans was limited and the police were in a very awkward position. Realizing this the students became more violent and began to throw brickbats at the police.

The students then began to leave the University gate in waves and they ran towards the Medical College hostel to gather near the East Bengal Assembly House (Old Jagannath Hall). The Ellis Commission Report says that this move towards the Assembly House, prompted the sending of the Additional City SP there.

In the meantime, in reply to the brick batting by students, the police began to shoot tear gas shells within the University premises on such a scale that the entire area in and around the university was full of smoke. A tear gas shell fell near Gaziul Huq and he fainted. Some students carried him to the first floor of the Arts Building and handed him over to others. Later he left the University quietly and no one heard of him after that incident.⁴⁹³

According to the programme the students were to surround the East Bengal Assembly after breaking section 144. There was great excitement, and they threw brickbats at the police, who retaliated with tear gas shells as well as brickbats.⁴⁹⁴ Neither the students nor the police had any previous experience of the kind of developments taking place. There was confusion all around, but the students in large numbers ran along the road and reassembled in front of the Medical College hostel gate within a short time.⁴⁹⁵

The leaders of the University State Language Committee of Action and some other workers did not cross the gate and take to the road. There was a broken wall between the University and the Medical College Hospital behind Madhu's Restaurant. They used

⁴⁹¹ ECR, para 22; Abdul Wahab, representative of The Statesman, Calcutta, Ganashakti, Special 21 February number, 24 February 1970; Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, p. 82; Badruddin Umar.

⁴⁹² ECR, para 21.

⁴⁹³ Gaziul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 148; Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, p. 82; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁴⁹⁴ Abdul Wahab, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 155; Abdul Matin, Toaha.

this access. It would have been very unwise for them to get arrested. In order to be with the movement and give it direction as much as possible, they had to remain free.⁴⁹⁶

By 1 p.m. very few students remained in the University premises, and almost the whole body of students gathered near and in front of the Medical College hostel gate. A large number of non-students, people from the neighboring areas like Azimpur, also began to gather on the other side of the road, near the playground. As the afternoon advanced, the excitement among the students began to rise because they wanted to surround the Assembly Hall, but the police was obstructing their way and were manifestly quite hostile. The students strengthened their arsenal by fetching bricks and brickbats from near the Nurses' Quarters where some construction work was on. The people who gathered on the other side of the road were also not kindly disposed towards the police and a sense of unity prevailed between the students and the people.⁴⁹⁷

The Assembly session was to begin at 3.30 p.m. and around 3 p.m. the members and ministers began to arrive at the Assembly Hall. Some of them were stopped by the students who requested them to go inside the hostel and see the condition of students injured by tear gas shells and lathi charges. The police rescued minister Hasan Ali and Abdulla-hil Baqui, when some students stopped their car. Muslim League MLA Aulad Hossain was actually taken inside the hostel and he remained there for some time. Opposition Congress member Dhirendranath Datta and a few others were also taken to see for themselves the condition of the injured students. The police also showed them how their men were injured by brickbats from the Medical Hostel.⁴⁹⁸

As the time for the Assembly session to begin came near, the students became more restless, and the police also took a more hostile posture. They shouted some warnings, threw tear gas shells, and then suddenly opened fire on the students inside the hostel and on the crowd who had assembled on the other side of the road. One student and a boy on the roadside were killed instantly. Some were seriously injured.⁴⁹⁹ The body of the University student Salahuddin, who was hit on the head, was carried to the Medical College hospital. Barkat and other injured students were also carried to the hospital for treatment. Most of them fell in front of Shed No. 12 of the hostel. Barkat and Abdul Jabbar, both students of the University, and Rafiquddin died the same night. Abdus Salam, a peon of the customs department, died later. The identity of the boy who was killed on the other side of the road could not be ascertained. All the dead bodies were removed by the police at night and secretly buried in the Azimpur graveyard.⁵⁰⁰ A large number of students were injured. Actually the number of deaths outside the hostel

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; ECR, para 22.

⁴⁹⁷ M.R. Akhtar Mukul; Rafiqul Islam, *Bhasha Andolan O Shaheed Minar*, p. 223; Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, p. 84; Azad, 22 February 1952.

⁴⁹⁸ Statement of Dhiren Datta, E.B. Assembly Proceedings, 22 February 1952; ECR, para 22.

⁴⁹⁹ ECR, para 24; Azad, 22 February 1952.

⁵⁰⁰ Badruddin Umar; Azad, 22 February 1952.

compound was more than one, but in the confusion nothing could be ascertained about the injured and the dead.⁵⁰¹

Oil Ahad, Abdul Matin and some others were at the Madhu's Restaurant at the time of the shootout. Sometime after the firing incident some students prepared a leaflet and got it signed by Abdul Matin, who was the convener of the University Committee of Action.⁵⁰² As the news of the firing spread, men from all walks of life began to pour into the Medical College Hospital. Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, Professor Ayer of the Economics department and other teachers, Basanta Kumar Das, Monoranjan Dhar, Dhirendranath Datta and other Congress members of the Assembly visited the injured students. Dr Ellingson, Professor of Surgery of the Medical College, arrived soon after the shooting and operated on a large number of injured students and others till late into the night.⁵⁰³ Kazi Mohammad Idris, a well-known journalist, was there. He saw the body of Salahuddin with his skull blown off and secretly arranged with the help of a medical student, Halima Khatun, and photographer Amanullah, to photograph it. The photograph was later printed in leaflets as no newspaper dared to publish it.⁵⁰⁴

The shooting took place at the time when a meeting of the Muslim League parliamentary party was being held inside the Assembly Hall. The students began to shout from inside the Medical hostel compound, which was very near the Assembly Hall, and asked the members to come out. The bell rang for the Assembly session. Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, Dhirendranath Datta, Monoranjan Dhar, Shamsuddin Ahmad of Kushtia demanded immediate postponement of the Assembly session. They also demanded that Prime Minister Nurul Amin visit the Medical College hospital and see the actual condition of the injured and the dead. But he refused, and pandemonium broke out inside the Hall. Somehow the debates continued and there were hot exchanges between the opposition members and the Prime Minister.⁵⁰⁵ At one point Tarkabagish angrily left the Assembly Hall and he was followed by Khairat Hossain, Anwara Khatun and Ali Ahmad Khan. Tarkabagish actually entered the hostel compound through the barbed wire and gave an impassioned speech through a microphone which was set up by the students.⁵⁰⁶ The microphone was used continuously during the night, and people gathered around the area from various parts of the town to listen to these speeches.

After the shooting a control room was set up inside one of the sheds of the Medical hostel. There the leaders of the movement and communist workers like Shahidullah

⁵⁰¹ Azad, 22 February 1952, 23 February 1952.

⁵⁰² Mahbub Jamal Zahedi (interview), Abdul Matin.

⁵⁰³ Abdul Matin.

⁵⁰⁴ Kazi Idris (interview) for detail see Badruddin Umar, *Purba Banglar Bhasha Andolan O Tatkalin Rajniti* (Language Movement) Vol. 3, pp. 203-4.

⁵⁰⁵ Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish (East Bengal Assembly Proceedings, 21 February 1952).

⁵⁰⁶ Tarkabagish, *op. cit.*; Badruddin Umar.

Kaiser and others gathered on the initiative of Oli Ahad and a meeting of the language movement workers who were available at that time within the hostel began at 9 p.m. The meeting generally agreed that both the All Party State Language Action Committee, as well as the Dhaka University State Language Committee of Action, had become unworkable. Therefore, they decided to form a new Committee of Action, for the time being and for conducting immediate work, with the vice-president of the Medical College Students' Union, Golam Mowla, as the convener.⁵⁰⁷ Oli Ahad, Mohammad Toaha, Abdul Matin, Emadullah Joint Secretary of Youth League, and the newly formed committee decided that a *gayebi janaza* (funeral prayer without the dead bodies) would be held in the premises of the Medical College Hostel the next morning. Discussions also took place about the plans for the next day and other possible developments.⁵⁰⁸

Prior to this meeting and soon after the police firing, Abul Hashim, Kamruddin Ahmad, Shamsul Huq, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Abdul Gafur of Tamaddun Majlis and a few others met at the residence of Fazlul Huq. But before they could decide anything, they were informed that a meeting would be held at the Engineering College hostel and they were asked to attend. Kamruddin Ahmad accompanied by Kabiruddin Ahmad of Tamaddun Majlis went there. That meeting, attended by Oli Ahad, Toaha, Shahidullah Kaiser, K.G. Mustafa, Mahbub Jamal Zahedi and others, decided to form a new student action committee. Funding, immediate purchase of microphones, printing of leaflets and other matters of immediate concern were also discussed. The new committee was formed on the basis of the decision of this meeting.⁵⁰⁹ Late at night the office of the Youth League at Juginagar was raided by the police. Tajuddin Ahmad was there at that time, but he escaped through a back door and no one was arrested nor were any documents found.⁵¹⁰

In 1952, the daily *Sangbad* was a government paper edited by Khairul Kabir. Zahur Hossain Chowdhury, Syed Nuruddin, Tasadduk Ahmad, Sardar Zainuddin, Khondkar Golam Mustafa worked for it and Kazi Mohammad Idris was also associated with that paper. The government issued a press note on the incidents of 21 February, in which there was no mention of any death by police firing. The working journalists of the *Sangbad* refused to print that press note and finally Khairul Kabir went to the Prime Minister's residence and discussed the seriousness of the situation and requested him to ask the Home department to change the press note by admitting deaths. Nurul Amin telephoned the chief secretary, Aziz Ahmad, and home secretary, Azfar, and they agreed to issue another press note admitting death due to police firing.⁵¹¹ On returning to the *Sangbad* office, Khairul Kabir found that it was surrounded by about 200 students and others who were demanding that the correct news be printed in the paper

⁵⁰⁷ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 160; Abdul Matin.

⁵⁰⁸ Oli Ahad, *ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ Kamruddin Ahmad.

⁵¹⁰ Tajuddin Ahmad's, diary, 21 February 1952.

⁵¹¹ Khairul Kabir, Editor, *Sangbad* (interview).

otherwise there would be trouble. He told them that they would not submit to any censorship by the government or anyone else. Kazi Idris and some others associated with *Sangbad* demanded that the paper should be closed temporarily, but editor Khairul Kabir and others did not agree.⁵¹²

In the evening a students' meeting was held in the Salimullah Muslim Hall. It condemned the police firing and killing of students and others, and decided to wear black badges for the next forty days as a mark of respect to the language martyrs. The meeting also demanded exemplary punishment for those responsible for the police firing. Control rooms were set up in Salimullah Muslim Hall, Fazlul Haq Muslim Hall and in other student hostels of the University. From here the students began to address the people who gathered in the neighborhood and announced the plans for the *gayebi janaza* to be held the next day.

As soon as the news of the police firing and killings spread, a spontaneous general strike occurred. All shops were closed down and rickshaws and buses stopped running. The government employees of the East Bengal Secretariat immediately came out of their offices and denounced the firing. In all localities of Dhaka, small and scattered protest meetings were held spontaneously and people streamed in from all over and gathered near the Medical College hostel and the University Halls.⁵¹³

Immediately after the death of the students, the workers and artistes of Dhaka Radio Centre gathered at Abon Mian's restaurant, just opposite the radio station, and decided to go on strike in protest. Poets Farrukh Ahmad and Sikandar Abu Jafar, Abdul Ahad, Abdul Latif, Sayeed Siddiqui and other writers and artistes took active part in organizing the strike. Consequently, all programmes of the third session of Radio Pakistan, Dhaka, were cancelled and only recorded songs and music were played. Dhaka radio announced the deaths due to police firing and thus by the evening of 21 February the news had spread all over the country.⁵¹⁴

In response to the call of the All Party State Language Committee of Action, strikes and public meetings took place all over East Bengal. In Narayanganj and Chittagong there was complete strike. In Comilla all educational institutions remained closed. In Sylhet, Mymensingh and all towns of North Bengal, the response was the same.⁵¹⁵ In the evening of 21 February, the East Pakistan Communist Party published a cyclostyled leaflet called 'Build up a Great United Movement throughout East Bengal against the Barbaric Massacre of the Tyrannical Government of Nurul Amin'.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Khairul Kabir, Kazi Idris.

⁵¹³ *Azad*, 22 February 1952.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Azad*, 22 February 1952; Abdul Awal Bhuiyan (member, Taxi Owners Association).

⁵¹⁶ Badruddin Umar, *Documents*, Vol. I.

The newly formed Committee of Action decided that the *gayebi janaza* would be held in the premises of the Medical College hostel the next morning. Accordingly the *janaza* was held around 10 a.m.⁵¹⁷ At first there were a small number of students present but a very large number of employees came out from the government secretariat and thousands of others came to the Medical College hostel from all parts of Dhaka town. The total number of people who attended the funeral was about 30,000, according to newspaper reports.⁵¹⁸ An unknown elderly man from amongst the people was selected to lead the *janaza*. A brief meeting was held after the *janaza* presided over by Mohammad Emadullah. Other than the president only Oli Ahad spoke in the meeting. He said that they would give a fitting reply to the killings by the Nurul Amin government by establishing the full status of Bengali as a state language. Among others, Fazlul Huq and Abul Hashim were present at the *janaza*. Bhashani was away from Dhaka at the time.⁵¹⁹

The people who attended the *janaza* covered the entire area from the Medical College hostel to the Engineering College hostel near the Salimullah Hall and the roads in and around the area. Among the people present were workers, government employees, students and people from all walks of life. They were all very agitated and demanded further action. So a very big demonstration was taken out from the Medical College hostel towards Nawabpur Road via the High Court gate.⁵²⁰

A very large contingent of armed police force was already posted there, and as soon as the front part of the demonstration crossed the High Court gate, the police began to shoot tear gas shells and lathi-charged the demonstrators. Undeterred, the demonstrators wanted to push forward, though the majority of them were left behind because the police action split them up. At that point the police opened fire on the demonstrators. A very large number of people were scattered and they took shelter inside the Curzon Hall, Fazlul Huq Hall and Dhaka Hall compounds. However, they soon reassembled and the demonstration proceeded along Nazimuddin Road, Chawkbazar, Mogholtuli, Islampur, Patuatuli and reached Sadarghat. On the way many people joined the demonstration and the residents of roadside houses watched and waved at them. As the demonstration was passing in front of the Pogose school in order to take the Nawabpur Road, the police obstructed them and prevented them from reaching the Victoria Park (now Bahadur Shah Park). The police contingent stationed near Jagannath College was quite large and they attacked the demonstrators so violently that it was not possible for the demonstration to be remobilized. So the demonstrators began to return to the University areas in small groups, most of them taking the Nawabpur Road.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁷ Abdul Matin.

⁵¹⁸ *Azad*, 23 February 1952.

⁵¹⁹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 166; Badruddin Umar, *Language Movement*, Vol. 3, footnote, p. 221.

⁵²⁰ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-63; Kabiruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 228; Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁵²¹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*; Kabiruddin Ahmad, *ibid.*; *Azad*, 23 February 1952.

The reason for such severe police action in front of the Pogose school and near the Jagannath Hall was that a little before the demonstration reached Sadarghat, the Jubilee Press, where the strongly pro-government English daily *Morning News* was printed, was attacked and burnt down by an angry group of people. The press was situated in a lane off the Victoria Park.⁵²²

Another important incident took place in front and near the office of the *Sangbad* which was situated in Bangsal Road, and near it on the Nawabpur Road. Khairul Kabir, the editor of *Sangbad*, in spite of his assurance to the people the previous day, published certain news items which supported the government version of the developments. As soon as the paper came out, its office was surrounded by people from the neighboring areas. They abused the editor and the staff of the paper. That part of the demonstration which was at the front near the High Court was separated from the rear part, but went down along the Nawabpur Road. On reaching the *Sangbad* office, they also joined the people who were trying to attack it.⁵²³

The government took special measures to protect the *Sangbad* office and a strong contingent of police force was posted here. As the crowd was trying to move towards them, the police opened fire on the Nawabpur Road in front of the Khosh Mahal restaurant. One person was killed on the spot, and several others were injured. Before the firing, the police tear-gassed and lathi charged the crowd in an attempt to disperse those who were trying to move forward.⁵²⁴

Stray incidents took place all over Dhaka town. Though the Bengali language daily *Azad* did not write anything against the language movement and did not publish any pro-government version of the development and on the other hand supported the movement, yet a demonstration while moving from Lalbagh towards Azimpur attacked the *Azad* office by pelting stones and threatening the employees who were working there. However, there were some students in the crowd who were able to prevent them from making a sustained attack on the office. The demonstration then moved forward and the police lathi-charged it when it reached the Palassy railway level crossing.⁵²⁵

A big crowd, mostly of non-students, moved towards the Assembly Hall. At that time the Assembly was conducting its afternoon session. They were brutally lathi-charged. A large number of students and others gathered in the Medical College premises and the workers made speeches through the microphone. All papers were removed from the Youth League office. The police raided this office both on the 22 and 23 February. Since the addresses of various organizational offices and persons in different parts of the

⁵²² *Azad, ibid.*

⁵²³ *Azad, ibid.*; Khairul Kabir.

⁵²⁴ *Azad, ibid.*; Abdul Awal Bhuiyan.

⁵²⁵ *Azad, ibid.*

country were removed from the office and kept safely, it was possible for the Youth League to maintain contact with the outside and send messages, leaflets etc. to them.⁵²⁶

On 22 February, there was complete strike in Dhaka and the rail workers also joined in. In Dhaka and Narayanganj, strikes were observed in all railway workshops and locomotive sheds. At that time the railway workers were the most organized and active among the working people. Quite early in the morning railway workers came out on the streets and clashed with the police when they were demonstrating in front of the Dhaka Railway Station.⁵²⁷

In an interview to the *Azad*, the vice-chancellor of Dhaka University said that he and his colleagues were present at the place of the incident and they did not see any such provocation from the students which could justify severe tear-gas shelling. He also said that he did not see any student throwing stones at the police to which they were said to have reacted by lobbing tear gas shells at them. The Dhaka High Court Bar association in its meeting, presided over by Fazlul Huq, denounced the firing on students and others and condemned the killings. The Dhaka District Bar Association also held a meeting presided over by Abdul Latif Biswas and denounced the killings of 21 February.⁵²⁸

Special *monajat* (prayers) were offered in all the mosques of Dhaka for those who were killed the previous day. After that a few thousand *musallis* moved towards the Salimullah Muslim Hall and held a meeting which was also joined by others.⁵²⁹ A meeting was held in the Dhaka Medical College under Surgeon General Dr Ellingson, who assured the students that appropriate measures would be taken against police repression. He and the Principal of Medical College, Dr Abdul Wahed, met Prime Minister Nurul Amin the same day to discuss the matter.⁵³⁰

Thousands of people, came to Dhaka town from the surrounding countryside to express solidarity with the students and take part in the demonstrations all over Dhaka. This was a day when for the first time workers, peasants, office employees, students and people from all walks of life joined in a kind of uprising against the government, which in spite of the police forces and army nearby, was practically paralyzed.⁵³¹ The capital of East Pakistan was virtually in the hands of the common people who came out to resist the oppressions and atrocities of the Pakistan government. For the first time the common people realized that the government which came to power after independence

⁵²⁶ *Azad, ibid.*; Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary, 22 February 1952; Anisuzzaman (letter to the author), Toaha.

⁵²⁷ Kabiruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 228; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 172; Mohammad Sultan, *op. cit.*, pp. 80, 86.

⁵²⁸ *Azad*, 22 February 1952, 23 February 1952.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23 February 1952.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ Mohammad Toaha.

was not their friend. On the contrary their language, livelihood and even lives were not secure.

The second day's budget session began in the afternoon. Angry exchanges took place between Prime Minister Nurul Amin and some members of the Congress as well as Muslim League members like Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish and Khairat Hossain. The last two moved adjournment motions on the police firing, etc. Khairat Hossain also wanted to move a condolence motion, but the speaker Abdul Karim ruled it out. A violent debate followed. Finally, Nurul Amin moved a resolution which said, 'This Assembly is recommending Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan.' The resolution was considered utterly unacceptable to all others who had moved a number of resolutions on making Bengali one of the state languages. Nurul Amin was quite adamant. In the end he expressed sympathy for the victims of the firing, assured the House that he would see that no such unpleasant incident occurred again, and promised to restore the law and order situation to normalcy. His resolution, moved earlier, was put to vote and passed by a majority vote.⁵³²

All over East Bengal people demonstrated against the government. There was sharp and angry reactions against the police firing and killings even in remote areas like Morelganj in the famine-stricken district of Khulna.⁵³³

The people had thus come a long way from the 1948 language movement day when there was very little support among the common people of Dhaka. On the contrary then they were opposed to it, and even occasionally attacked students when they crossed the old railway line near the Nawabpur Road and entered the fringe of old Dhaka. This sea-change in the attitude of the people and the growth of resistance against the Pakistan government could only be explained by what happened to the people of East Bengal during the four years in between the two phases of the movement.

A government press note was issued on the incidents of 22 February 1952, and was published in the newspapers the next day. It said,

In the afternoon, the situation of the town came under control to some extent. Today, after the firing on the Nawabpur Road, forty-five persons were transferred to the hospital. Two were killed. The situation deteriorated in the morning and people crowded in certain areas of Islampur and Nawabpur. Taking advantage of this situation, some *goonda* type of people joined the crowd for the purpose of looting. Armed forces were brought in aid of the police, so that the situation could not deteriorate further. The crowd burnt the *Morning News* press. In order to disperse the unruly mob, the police lathi-charged and opened

⁵³² East Bengal Assembly Proceedings, 22 February 1952.

⁵³³ *Azad*, 24 February 1952.

fire on them, and as a result of that forty-five persons were admitted to the hospital. Two persons were killed.

There was complete strike in Dhaka on 23 February as well. All shops were closed and all sorts of vehicles were off the road. A clash took place between a group of people and the police in the morning near the veterinary hospital in Nazirabazar. Four persons were injured in lathi charges by the police. Two of them were in serious condition and were admitted in the hospital.⁵³⁴ The railway workers were also on strike so no train either moved in or out of Dhaka.⁵³⁵ Police and armed forces were deployed all over the town, but in spite of this thousands of people were on the streets throughout the day. Section 144 was still in force, but the government did not try to enforce it and maintained a quiet distance.

The Salimullah Muslim Hall students continued their information campaign throughout the day on the situation in Dhaka. They also read out leaflets and the pamphlet published on behalf of the All Party Committee of Action. At 2 p.m., a *gayebi janaza* was held at the Salimullah Muslim Hall. The vice-chancellor, provost of the Salimullah Muslim Hall, a number of university teachers and about 4000 people participated in the *janaza*.⁵³⁶ In the evening, a meeting was held at Salimullah Muslim Hall in which Fazlul Huq was present. He advised the students to maintain peace and promised to do as much as possible for acceptance their of demands.⁵³⁷

Throughout the day various student and professional groups held their meetings in different places. A meeting of female students was held in the University presided over by Shafia Khatun, vice-president of the university girl students union.⁵³⁸ Jagannath and Dhaka Hall students held a joint meeting and denounced the barbaric activities of the government and demanded the resignation of Nurul Amin as Prime Minister of East Bengal. In the evening a meeting was held at the Dhaka College Muslim hostel common room. Such meetings were also held at the Tibbia Habibia College and Alia Madrassa hostel. Similar meetings were held at the Dhaka University Iqbal Hall and other places.⁵³⁹ On the night of 23 February, the Tamaddun Majlis, in a statement, denounced the government atrocities and resolved to continue the struggle to establish Bengali as a state language. The Executive Committee of Islamic Brotherhood also demanded punishment for those responsible for the shooting in front of the High Court and other places.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

The workers of various banks, the executive committee of Dhaka Traders Association and other professional bodies held separate meetings and demanded a non-governmental enquiry committee.⁵⁴¹ Some organizations of West Pakistan also denounced the killings and demanded impartial enquiry into the incidents of 21 and 22 February. These organizations included the Pakistan Socialist Party and the Democratic Student Federation of Karachi.⁵⁴²

In order to end the transport strike, the DM of Dhaka, Qureshi, called a meeting of transport owners. At this time there was complete strike by transport workers on all routes, including the Dhaka-Narayanganj bus route; and the striking workers were in no mood to withdraw the strike. The meeting began at 10 a.m. at Dhaka Court Building. Transport owners N.A. Lashkar, Moti Sardar and Abdul Awal Bhuiyan were present. The meeting ended without any consensus, because the transport owners said that their vehicles would be burnt and destroyed if they tried to put them on the road. Moreover, the drivers were on strike and were not available. S.P. Idris also attended the meeting for a short while.⁵⁴³

In the meeting of the All Party State Language Committee of Action on 20 February, it had been resolved that in the event of the students breaking section 144, the Committee would stand dissolved. But the events which followed the killings made it clear that the new committee formed on the night of 21 February was unable to control the situation and it was necessary to revive and re-activate the All Party State Language Committee of Action. Accordingly, Kazi Golam Mahbub convened a meeting of the Committee at the Dhaka Medical College Hostel in which Abul Hashim, Kamruddin Ahmed, Toaha and others were present. The meeting decided that the students would go to their respective areas, take leaflets with them and take the movement outside Dhaka. Actually there were both spontaneous and organized resistance and movements everywhere in the country, but the students were sent out to establish a relation between the movement at Dhaka and in other parts of East Bengal, because it was generally agreed that the movement could not be otherwise sustained. They decided to call for general strike on 25 February in Dhaka and on 5 March in the entire province.⁵⁴⁴

In the meantime, the movement in Dhaka was conducted mostly from the control rooms of Dhaka Medical College hostel and the Salimullah Muslim Hall. There was a certain tension between the two control rooms, because the Salimullah Muslim Hall control room was dominated by pro-Islamic students, whereas the other was controlled by students sympathetic to communist workers and non-communal organizations.⁵⁴⁵ The students of the girls student hostel, Chameli House, collected some funds for the

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

⁵⁴³ Abdul Awal Bhuiyan.

⁵⁴⁴ Oli Ahad, op. cit., pp. 172-73; Abdul Matin, Kazi Golam Mahbub.

⁵⁴⁵ Abdul Matin, collection on 21 February, edited by Hasan Hafizur Rahman, p. 230.

movement from families living in the Azimpur government housing colony. On the evening of the 23rd, the women of Azimpur Colony held a meeting also attended by women from Kamalapur and other areas.⁵⁴⁶

Microphones were set up in the Jagannath College hostel, but the police took these away forcibly on the 25th and on the same day those in the Fazlul Huq Hall were also seized.⁵⁴⁷ The most important programme on the night of the 23rd was the construction of a Shaheed Minar (martyrs memorial) within the Medical College hostel premises next to Shed No. 12 where the first victims of the shooting fell on 21 February. Sayeed Hyder, a student of the Medical College, designed the Minar and the construction and other related work were done mostly by the students of the Medical College.⁵⁴⁸ The Shaheed Minar was inaugurated by the father of shaheed Shafiur Rahman on 24 February. Then it was inaugurated for the second time by Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, the editor of the *Azad*, who had resigned his membership from the East Bengal Assembly as a mark of protest against the police firing and the death of students and others.⁵⁴⁹

The developments of 21 and 22 February created a crisis within the ruling Muslim League. There was very strong opposition against the policy and decisions of the government and particularly against Prime Minister Nurul Amin and chief secretary Aziz Ahmad. The fact was that Aziz Ahmad, as a representative of the central government in East Bengal, took certain decisions outside the knowledge of the Prime Minister.

Yusuf Ali Chowdhury was the general secretary of the Provincial Muslim League at the time and was quite powerful. On the 21st, he was in his home district of Faridpur, but he arrived in Dhaka the next day. In the meeting of the Parliamentary Party of the Muslim League, some members demanded the resignation of Nurul Amin, but their attempts were opposed by Yusuf Ali Chowdhury and others and finally Nurul Amin succeeded in retaining his position. The main charges against him was that he had no control over the situation and that he acted on the advice of Aziz Ahmad. During this meeting the Muslim League members were visibly shaken and some of them apprehended that they would be attacked wherever they went.⁵⁵⁰

There was considerable militancy among the people of Narayanganj who participated in the movement in a big way since the evening of 21 February. In Mymensingh, Jessore, Sylhet, Comilla, Tangail, Chittagong and all other places in East Bengal, protest meetings, demonstrations etc. continued on 22 and 23 February. In fact, the whole of East Bengal was in a state of turmoil. It shook the entire people in such a manner that

⁵⁴⁶ Abdul Matin, collection on 21 February, edited by Hasan Hafizur Rahman, p. 230.

⁵⁴⁷ Tajuddin's diary, 25 February 1952; Anisuzzaman (letter to the author).

⁵⁴⁸ Rafiqul Islam, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

⁵⁴⁹ Badruddin Umar.

⁵⁵⁰ Yusuf Ali Chowdhury, Syed Nuruddin, Zahur Hossain Chowdhury, Tafazzal Ali, Shah Azizur Rahman, Nurul Amin.

the Muslim League as the ruling party was absolutely alienated from the people as never before.

Following the police firing and other repressive measures of the government, the latter was not only isolated from the people but also lost all support of the printed news media. On 24 February the *Azad* and the pro-Awami Muslim League weekly *Ittefaq* bitterly criticized the government. The *Sangbad* and the *Millat*, in spite of being pro-government papers, demanded an impartial enquiry into the incidents leading to and following the police firing.

The Provincial Muslim League Parliamentary Party was placed in this difficult situation, and in a meeting held on 24 February, while expressing full confidence in the leadership of Nurul Amin, expressed their sorrow and demanded an impartial enquiry and punishment of those responsible for the firing. They also demanded the withdrawal of section 144 from the city of Dhaka.⁵⁵¹ But in spite of these resolutions Nurul Amin, in a radio broadcast the same evening, put the entire blame on those who violated law and order.' This broadcast was denounced by the All Party Committee of Action through a press statement issued by its convener, Kazi Golam Mahbub, on the following day.

H.S. Suhrawardy at this juncture issued a statement to the press from Hyderabad, West Pakistan, in support of Urdu as the state language of Pakistan. He also said that Urdu must be taught in East Pakistan as a compulsory second language so that it would be eventually established in its full 'glory.' It was published in the Karachi daily *Dawn* on 25 February and later in other papers in East Bengal. This statement drew sharp reaction from all quarters and the newspapers protested as did the political elements belonging to the Awami Muslim League.⁵⁵²

The government then began to arrest persons connected with the Language Movement. In the early hours of 24 February, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish MLA was arrested under the Security Act. Abul Hashim was arrested from his house in the early hours of the next day. The same morning police arrested Khairat Hossain, Monoranjan Dhar and Gobindalal Banerjee who were members of the Provincial Assembly. The next day, in the early hours, three teachers of the Dhaka University, Dr P.C. Chakravarty, Head of the International Relations Department, Dr Muzaffar Ahmed Chowdhury, Proctor of the University and Munir Chowdhury, Lecturer in the Department of English were arrested. Ajit Guha, Professor of Bengali, Jagannath College, Dhaka, and Jatin Sen MLA were also taken into custody.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ *Azad*, 24 February 1952.

⁵⁵² *Azad*, 26 February 1952; *Naobelal*, 28 February 1952; Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ataur Rahman Khan.

⁵⁵³ *Azad*, 26 February 1952; *The Statesman*, Calcutta, 26 February 1952.

On the morning of the 25th a big crowd gathered within the premises of the Salimullah Muslim Hall to listen to the speeches of students who were addressing them through a microphone. At around 11 a.m., police and the EPR personnel surrounded the Salimullah Hall to remove the microphone and disperse the crowd. However, the Provost of the Hall persuaded the students to hand over the microphone to him and he handed them over to the police.⁵⁵⁴ Following this incident, thousands of people took out demonstrations raising slogans against the government and the repression by the police. There was complete strike in Dhaka and the industrial areas of Narayanganj. Spontaneous demonstrations were taken out in all areas in which women participated in large numbers.

A government handout released on the night of 25 February said that no demonstrations took place anywhere in Dhaka and that a number of conspirators were arrested. A meeting of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party, in a long resolution, dubbed the organizers of the language movement as conspirators who were out to destroy Pakistan. The tone of this resolution was quite aggressive and much stronger and uncompromising than that of the earlier resolutions of the Parliamentary Party and the Working Committee of the Provincial League.⁵⁵⁵ The government realized that in spite of the demonstrations and strikes, the movement had passed its peak and it was time for them to regain control of the situation.

On 25 February at 2 p.m. a joint meeting of the All Party Committee of Action and Civil Liberty League was held at the Dhaka Medical College Hostel. It continued up to 5.30 p.m. and was attended by Shamsul Huq, Kamruddin Ahmed, Mushtaq Ahmed, Tajuddin Ahmed, Shamsuddin Ahmed MLA and others. The meeting was presided over by Ataur Rahman Khan and it was decided to withdraw strikes from 26 February, to forward an ultimatum to Nurul Amin, to observe Shaheed Day and general strike on 5 March and to continue the student strikes.⁵⁵⁶

The next day the police raided the Salimullah Muslim Hall after breaking the main gate and arrested twenty-eight persons including Dr Mafizuddin Ahmed, a House Tutor of the Hall. The vice-chancellor, the registrar and provost of Salimullah Muslim Hall were present near the main gate of the Hall during the raid.⁵⁵⁷

The incidents of 21 February and subsequent developments created serious reactions within the camp of the Muslim League and a number of leading persons of that organization expressed their anger and dissenting opinions through press statements and discussions in Party meetings. A number of Muslim League members of the Provincial Assembly, Provincial Muslim League Working Committee and district level

⁵⁵⁴ *Azad, ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ Tajuddin's diary, 25 February 1952.

⁵⁵⁷ *The Statesman*, 27 February 1952; *Ittefaq*, 5 March 1952.

leaders left the Muslim League. Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, Khairat Hossain, Ahmad Hossain, Osman Ali and Khondkar Moniruddin resigned from the Muslim League Parliamentary Party. The government also arrested a large number of teachers, students, political persons and men who resigned from the Muslim League Parliamentary Party and central and district committees.⁵⁵⁸

On 29 February and 1 March, there were demonstrations and disturbances in Narayanganj,⁵⁵⁹ On 3 March Nurul Amin in a radio broadcast read out a written speech prepared in consultation with Aziz Ahmad, Azfar, and education secretary Fazle Karim Fazli, all of whom were non-Bengali representatives of the central government and were known as sworn enemies of the Language Movement.⁵⁶⁰ In this long radio broadcast Nurul Amin said that the whole movement was a conspiratorial act of the communists and disgruntled political elements opposed to the Muslim League who were out to destroy Pakistan. The government therefore had no alternative but to take drastic action against those who were acting against the interests of the state in the name of promoting the cause of Bengali as a state language.⁵⁶¹

On 28 February warrants of arrest were issued against Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad, Mohammad Toaha, Khaleque Nawaz, Abdul Matin, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Aziz Ahmad, Abdul Awal and all members of the All Party Committee of Action.⁵⁶² Shamsul Huq and Khaleque Nawaz Khan were arrested in Dhaka on 7 March, and members of the All Party Committee and a few others were arrested on the same day while they were in the midst of a meeting in a house at Santinagar. With these arrests the All Party Committee was virtually liquidated.⁵⁶³ However it was soon re-constituted with Aatur Rahman Khan as convener and Kamruddin Ahmed and Syed Abdur Rahim as joint conveners.⁵⁶⁴ Arrest warrant was issued against Bhashani on 13 March and he surrendered to the district magistrate of Dhaka on 10 April.⁵⁶⁵ Nevertheless, in spite of these arrests and setbacks, the movement continued all over East Bengal and it spread to remote rural areas. The general strike on 5 March failed in Dhaka, but was quite successful in areas outside Dhaka.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁵⁸ *Azad*, 25-27 February 1952; *Naobelal*, 28 February 1952.

⁵⁵⁹ *Naobelal*, 6 March 1952; *Morning News*, 1-2 March 1952; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 178; Shamsuzzoha, Mohammad Awal Bhuiyan, Aziz Ahmad (Chief Secretary), Nurul Amin.

⁵⁶⁰ Kazi Mohammad Idris; *Azad*, 5 March 1952.

⁵⁶¹ *Azad*, 5 March 1952.

⁵⁶² *Dacca Gazette*, 28 February 1952.

⁵⁶³ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-82; Toaha, K.G. Mustafa, Mujibul Huq, Shahidullah Kaiser, Kazi Golam Mahbub, Mahbub Jamal Zahedi, Sadek Khan, Anisuzzaman (letter).

⁵⁶⁴ *Ittefaq*, 17 March 1952; *Naobelal*, 21 March 1952.

⁵⁶⁵ *Naobelal*, 24 April 1952.

⁵⁶⁶ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

On 12 April, the newly constituted All Party State Language Committee held a meeting and decided to hold a convention at Dhaka on 27 April.⁵⁶⁷ The same day a telegram from the All Chinese Students Federation addressed to the East Pakistan Students' Federation (pro-communist) reached Dhaka. The telegram said,

The Chinese Students community is expressing its sincere sympathy for those who have been martyred, wounded and arrested for defending the honor of their language. The world student community, particularly the student community of Asia, fully supports your democratic and national struggle.⁵⁶⁸

On 10 and 11 March 1952, the Indian Communist Party daily *Swadhinata* had published two articles in which it was said that the communists of East Bengal played the most important role as initiators and organizers of the movement. This, under the circumstances was a thoughtless act and the government of East Bengal tried to take advantage of it. Nurul Amin in his long Assembly speech on 24 March quoted certain extracts from *Swadhinata* and tried to establish that the entire language movement was a conspiratorial and subversive act of the communists and foreign agents who were out to destroy Pakistan.

On 27 April, about 500 delegates assembled at the Dhaka District Bar Library Hall for the convention. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had been released from Faridpur jail on 27 February and he was present. Aatur Rahman Khan, the convener of the Committee, read out a written speech and the convention was addressed by representatives of various participating organizations. Apart from re-stating their demand for making Bengali one of the state languages of Pakistan, the convention in one of their fifteen resolutions demanded the annulment of all security laws, an end to all repressive measures taken by the government and the release of all political prisoners who were detained in various jails of East Bengal.⁵⁶⁹

The government announced a one-member enquiry commission on 13 March. Justice T.H. Ellis of the Dhaka High Court was nominated by the governor of East Bengal on 17 March and he was directed to conduct the enquiry. A gazette notification of the government published the terms of reference of the enquiry as follows: (1) Whether firing by the police was necessary and (2) whether use of force by police was justified or was it more than necessary for restoring order.

The Ellis Commission started its work on 20 February and all concerned people were asked by the Commission, through radio and newspapers announcement to send their statements before 31 March, i.e. within eleven days. On 28 March, a meeting of the All Party Committee rejected the Ellis Commission on the ground that its terms of reference

⁵⁶⁷ Naobelal, 24 April 1952.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 27 March 1952.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ittefaq*, 7 April 1952, *The Statesman*, 30 April 1952; *Naobelal*, 5 May 1952 and 8 May 1952, Badruddin Umar.

were too narrow. Moreover, it was to be conducted 'in camera'. They demanded that the terms of reference be broadened, the persons arrested in connection with the movement be released and warrants of arrests against others be withdrawn. They also demanded that the Commission try to find out whether there was any need to promulgate section 144 in Dhaka on 20 February and look into the details of firing on the police and killing of a policeman in Narayanganj. No notice was taken of these demands and the Ellis Commission was boycotted by the All Party Committee and other important organizations like the Youth League.⁵⁷⁰ The decision of the All Party Committee was communicated to the Commission by Ataur Rahman Khan. The acting general secretary of the Youth League, Emadullah, informed the Commission about their decision to boycott it.⁵⁷¹

Justice Ellis appointed Syed Abdul Gani of the Dhaka High Court to assist him in the work of the Commission. Barrister Hamoodur Rahman applied to the Commission for permission to plead for the government servants. He was granted permission. No other lawyer of the Dhaka High Court applied for such permission.⁵⁷²

During the enquiry, Justice Ellis discovered that the constables who were deployed in front of the Medical College Hostel on 21 February were wearing cotton caps instead of steel helmets and thus easily wounded by the stones thrown by the students. On the basis of this 'discovery' he arrived at the conclusion that if the constables were provided with steel helmets instead of cotton caps the occasion for the entire enquiry would not have arisen. It is not matter of surprise that as a stooge of the government, this English judge with his 'keen historical sense,' and as a member of the one-man commission, declared his verdict in the following manner: (1) It was necessary for the police to open fire on 21 February and (2) in that specific situation application of force by the police was justified.⁵⁷³

The Language Movement was a great landmark in the history of East Bengal not only for of its political significance, but more importantly because it helped, in a big way, to clear the fog surrounding the identity of the Bengali Muslims. In fact, for the first time, it turned the Bengali Muslims into Muslim Bengalis. Since then, though some confusion continued in the minds of some people, the vast majority of the Muslim middle class in Bengal never really looked back. This change in the sense of identity profoundly influenced the subsequent social, cultural and political developments of the people of East Bengal and finally culminated in the emergence of the sovereign state of Bangladesh. It is interesting, how within a span of less than five years since the establishment of Pakistan, this change took place in the life of the people of this region.

⁵⁷⁰ *Naobelal*, 27 March 1952; ECR, para 5.

⁵⁷¹ ECR, para 5.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, para 9.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, para 51.

In 1948, when the first Language Movement took place, the working people, with the exception of some Dhaka-based railway workers, had nothing to do with it. It was almost entirely a movement of the middle-class intelligentsia, particularly students, teachers and cultural workers. At that time the local people of Dhaka, who lived in the old parts of the town, were quite hostile towards the workers of the language movement, and did not hesitate to beat up the student activists who were engaged in propaganda work. Moreover, it was a completely urban movement.

The situation was quite different in 1952. This time it ran through the whole of East Bengal, in urban and rural areas, and the people of Dhaka united in support of the movement, in demanding Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan. So a sea-change took place within a span of four years. Between the years 1948 and 1950, there were peasant movements in Sylhet, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Khulna, Jessore and other areas of East Bengal and the government responded by massive acts of repression, including arson, plunder, rape and murder. The communist prisoners in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Mymensingh and other jails were inhumanly tortured and killed. All the middle-class demands were ignored by the government and the rural people and the urban poor faced serious food crisis and famine since the first days of Pakistan. Smuggling, black marketeering, and profiteering and abuse of power by the bureaucracy became normal aspects of the economy and administration. An attitude of unconcern for the people prevailed among the political leadership of East Bengal Muslim League, because they had no will except to remain in power as agents of the central government.

The food crisis and the famine situation actually played the most important role in destroying the social base of the Muslim League. The reactions which food crisis or famine creates in the minds of the people and the manner in which it contributes to economic and political setbacks has not been studied seriously in this country. But it is a matter of great importance. The famine and food crisis preceding the Language Movement transformed the attitude of the entire peasant population towards the Muslim League.

The Muslim League government closed all doors for constitutional protests and blocked all means for expressing the grievances of the people. So the people registered their protest through public meetings and other kinds of mobilizations in Dhaka and other parts of the country. Various government policies, decisions and pronouncements often created sharp reactions among the people, particularly the middle-class, and they began to form themselves into organizations in order to consolidate their movements. This was how the Gana Azadi League, the Democratic Youth League, the Awami Muslim League, the East Pakistan Youth League and other such organizations gradually emerged and began to shape public opinion against the Muslim League Government.

The Language Movement took place at a point when the people of East Bengal had already discarded the Muslim League as their representative organization and were poised for a countrywide revolt against the government. The police firing of 21 February set the fire of revolt among the masses. Police firings and tortures of all descriptions were a regular feature of government repression; jail killings also took place in Dhaka and other districts, particularly in Rajshahi central jail, where seven communists were killed by firing in 1950. One of them was a student. In spite of such police and government atrocities, there was little reaction among the people. It was because the ground was not yet prepared for the revolt and the minds of the people was not heated enough to catch fire.

In 1952, it was different. The police firing on 21 February transformed, almost overnight, the Language Movement into a movement of the broad masses of the people for the overthrow of the existing government. The people realized much more clearly the regional character of the Pakistan Government and the need to struggle for establishing not only certain basic regional rights but for consolidating themselves as a linguistic nation.

This change of attitude and direction of popular political movement was directly opposed to the so-called ideological basis of the state of Pakistan. Since 1947, all democratic movements were denounced by the Pakistan government and their lackeys in East Pakistan as anti-Pakistan and anti-Islamic. That went a long way to alienate the people, who were struggling for democratic rights from the state of Pakistan. The inevitable consequence of this contradiction was the continuous de-communalization of politics and the emergence of non-communal forces as organized political and cultural bodies. This process matured rather quickly because the Hindu middle class professional people, landowners and moneylenders, had left East Pakistan in large numbers, and the region's economic life, in the rural and urban areas, began to be dominated by Muslims. Thus, the Hindus were no longer visible as exploiters and oppressors of Muslim peasants and other classes of the toiling people. In the absence of Hindus as a dominant community, there appeared West Pakistan-based Urdu-speaking Muslims, who increasingly began to dominate the economic life, as well as politics and the entire governmental administration of East Bengal. Thus, a new contradiction arose between the Bengali-speaking people of East Bengal and the Urdu-speaking businessmen, industrialists, bureaucrats and politicians based in West Pakistan and their local representatives in the Muslim League organization.

By the time of the Language Movement, the influence of feudal culture, along with that of communalism, declined perceptibly and this was accompanied by a new rise of linguistic nationalism. The total character of the language movement was shaped not only by the aspirations and the struggles of the Bengali middle class but also by the struggles of the peasants, workers and other sections of the working people. This gave

the Language Movement a certain democratic character which remained unsurpassed during the subsequent political developments in East Bengal.

The Awami Muslim League participated in the Language Movement, but it was not at all a dominant factor at any stage. Among the organized forces, the communist-dominated Youth League played the most effective role. It was for the first and last time that the communists were able to dominate a mass movement in East Bengal. The Awami Muslim League, as an organization of the Bengali petty bourgeoisie, had no love for the interests of the peasants and workers. By continuously harping on the question of regional disparity between the two parts of Pakistan it created a situation whereby the middle class, peasants and workers politically rallied round it. The communists failed because they did not realize that regional or national exploitation and repression was a specific form of class repression, and as such it was not isolated from class struggle. This led them to practically renounce the struggle against national exploitation and repression and talk in an abstract and confused manner about class struggle and the struggle for socialism. The consequence of this was that in spite of their work among the peasants and workers, they could not involve them in their political struggle. The working people remained politically inclined towards the bourgeoisie, particularly the Krishak Sramik Party, the Awami Muslim League, and to some extent the National Awami Party (NAP). Finally it was the Awami League which politically elbowed out all others and pushed itself forward as the foremost organization of the Bengali petty bourgeoisie and was also able to take the peasants and workers along.

However, it would be wrong to think that the Awami League actually carried forward all the democratic aspirations of the people which shaped the character of the Language Movement. On the other hand, it very effectively stripped off almost all the basic democratic contents of that movement and showed in bold relief the contradictions between the big bourgeoisie of West Pakistan and the small bourgeoisie of East Pakistan. It continued its struggle for seizing as much power and opportunities as possible. In this struggle they obtained a favorable ground in the changing thoughts of the middle-class Muslims who were increasingly identifying themselves with linguistic nationalism instead of Islamized politics or socialism. While demanding Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan, the leaders and workers of that movement conceded at the same time the democratic right of all Pakistan languages like Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushtu, Balochi and others to be state languages, if the people who spoke those languages demanded it. Thus, the Language Movement of 1947-52 stood for Bengali as a state language, but there was no chauvinist hostility against any other languages. This is why at that time a considerable number of Urdu-speaking workers, literary persons, men belonging to the middle class, and even organizations like the Mohajir Society joined the Language Movement in support of Bengali.

This attitude was reflected in all the propaganda materials, leaflets, placards, banners etc. published and prepared spontaneously. The Communist Party, through their

leaflets and propaganda work among the people through the Youth League and the students, tried to strengthen this approach and attitude. Considered in this light it can well be said that the language movement was actually the greatest democratic movement in East Bengal during the Pakistan period. The democratic heritage of this movement was, however, substantially destroyed by the new Bangladeshi ruling class at the official and government levels by launching a chauvinist hate campaign against other languages, particularly Urdu, and this hatred trickled down and affected broad sections of the new Bangladeshi middle class.

A significant limitation of the Language Movement was the absence of anti-imperialism during its entire course from 1947 to 1952. In this respect it was very much different from the 4 May 1919 movement of the Chinese students, which as a clearly anti-imperialist movement not only helped the growth and development of bourgeois democratic values and movements, but also went a long way in creating circumstances which led to the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. It is no exaggeration to say that it was from this negative aspect of the language movement that the Awami League derived its real strength and as a collaborating bourgeoisie forged ahead politically. The communists tried to introduce an element of anti-imperialism through their leaflets and pamphlets published at the time, but failed to bring it forward as a noticeable factor. For this they cannot really be blamed. The circumstances at that time were such that regional factors overshadowed all other factors in such a manner that it was not possible for even the initiated to notice the presence of imperialism in Pakistan and the game they were playing until the United States and their allies entered into military pacts with Pakistan and Callahan, a US agent, openly interfered in Pakistani politics and became instrumental in removing Fazlul Huq from the position of the Prime Minister of East Pakistan and in breaking up the United Front after the election of 1954.

Chapter Twenty-Two

CHANGE IN COMMUNIST PARTY STRATEGY AND GROWTH OF NEW POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Communist Party of India, and the Communist Party of The East Pakistan, discarded the semi-terrorist line propounded by the Ranadive thesis, and it became necessary, to re-formulate a new, appropriate line. To do this the East Pakistan Communist Party had to convene a party congress which could deliberate on the relevant issues and subjects and take decisions. But it was very difficult, almost impossible, to hold such a congress anywhere in the country because government repression against the communists was very serious and extensive.

The party decided to hold a plenum or an extended meeting of the Provincial Committee sometime in the middle of 1951.⁵⁷⁴ Thirty delegates, including members of the Provincial Committee and members nominated by the Provincial Committee attended. The agenda of the meeting included a review of party work during the last three years, discussion and decision on the party's strategy and programme, formulation of the party's immediate tactical line and the election of a new Provincial Committee.⁵⁷⁵

The report on the party activities conducted on the line of the Ranadive thesis seriously criticized by way of self-criticism the sectarian and reckless left deviations.⁵⁷⁶ In fact, the Ranadive thesis was criticized by many in the party but the Provincial Committee, in line with the Indian party, tried to implement it without paying any heed to the actual conditions prevailing in Pakistan. As a consequence of that unrealistic line, the party was compelled to limit its activities in certain rural areas and mostly among the tribal peoples. They were isolated and alienated from the broad masses failed to play any effective role in the politics of East Pakistan. However, for a radical change the party had to wait till it was seriously criticized by the Communist Information (Cominform) in its paper 'For a Lasting Peace, For a Peoples Democracy.'

The discussions in the plenum on the new party strategy, tactics and programme took place in the light of Cominform criticism and their analysis of the situation in Pakistan. However, it was decided to draft a document on the new strategy, tactics and

⁵⁷⁴ Khoka Ray, *Sangramer Tin Dashak* (Three Decades of Struggle), *Jatiya Shahitya Prakashani*, p. 106.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

programme on the basis of the actual situation in the country and distribute it internally for the consideration of the members.⁵⁷⁷

The main problem in formulating the immediate tactical line was finding a way to establish contact with the majority of the people of Pakistan and to work out an appropriate programme. After long discussions two major decisions were taken.⁵⁷⁸ First, to continue regular political work on the basis of an immediate programme among the peasants, workers, students etc., for the release of all political prisoners and for meeting certain urgent demands of the working peoples in the rural and industrial areas. Secondly, in the context of an all-out government repression on the communists and isolation of the Party from the people, it was decided that as a short-term tactic some party members would join the Awami Muslim League, work among the people on the party line and try to establish party contacts among them. Though the Awami Muslim League was a communal organization and as such Hindus and men of other religious communities could not become members of that organization, it was considered as the foremost democratic organization at that time and in spite of its nomenclature, it had no communal programme, and there was no communalism in its political propaganda. It was active against all repressive acts of the government and represented certain national sentiments of the people. This was how leftists summed up the political character and position of the Awami Muslim League when they decided to work among the people through that organization.⁵⁷⁹ This again was another big mistake and the Communist Party had to pay very dearly for such a decision soon thereafter. However, in 1951 the Awami Muslim League itself had little organization and was a rather insignificant political factor.

A new Provincial Committee was constituted with nine members, including Moni Singh, Nepal Nag, Barin Datta, Roushan Ali, Shukhendu Dastidar, Mantu Majumdar, Shahidullah Kaiser, Mirza Abdus Samad and Sachin Bose. Later Sudhin Ray (Khoka Ray) was also included in the Provincial Committee.⁵⁸⁰

About three months after the party plenum, a programme was prepared by the party, cyclostyled copies of which were circulated within the party organization. The programme identified imperialism, feudalism and compradore big bourgeoisie as the main enemies of the people of Pakistan, and in order to fight these enemies they proposed to work for a united front of peasants, workers, middle-class people, the intelligentsia and the national bourgeoisie. The main objectives of the programme were establishment of full democracy, release of political prisoners, to have Bengali as one of

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ Khoka Ray, *ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

the state languages, total land reform and land to the tillers, higher wages for the workers, autonomy for East Bengal and independent and neutral foreign policy.⁵⁸¹

Basically the programme was realistic but little work could be done to implement it. In spite of the decision of the party plenum to work within the Awami Muslim League, some members of the Dhaka district and city party committees including Mohammad Toaha, Oli Ahad and Sardar Abdul Halim refused because they thought that it was a communal organization and nothing really democratic could be done through that organization. Moni Singh, Khoka Ray and others tried to persuade them to follow the party line but they could not be persuaded. So the programme of work through the Awami League could not be implemented and consequently there was little Communist Party organizational work. The Provincial Committee could not formulate any alternative line of work among the working people by building up new appropriate mass organizations through which they could carry forward their programme.⁵⁸² The only exception in this regard was the East Pakistan Youth League. It was, however, formed before the party plenum. The initiative and work of Communist Party members in forming the Youth League indicated that the party was generally inclined towards open mass work among the people. Thus, the formation of the Youth League was a step in the right direction. But their later decision to work through the Awami Muslim League was certainly wrong.

The Language Movement created opportunities for new organizational work. The students participated in the movement in large numbers and it became quite clear that students were going to play a very important and effective role in future political movements.

The initiative for organizing a new students organization was taken by the Communist Party, and Shahidullah Kaiser, a member of the Provincial Committee, was given the responsibility to contact the students, particularly those left-leaning workers who took an active part in the Language Movement. A students' conference was convened at the end of April 1952 and about fifty students from various parts of East Bengal and Dhaka city attended. The student delegates discussed the current political situation and agreed to form a non-communal democratic students' organization. Accordingly, on 26 April 1952, soon after the end of the Language Movement, the East Pakistan Students Union was formed and Mohammad Sultan, one of the leading figures of the language movement and a party person, was elected president and Mohammad Ilias was elected as the general secretary. In the 1953-54 period, this new students organization came to be organized as a representative and powerful student body and subsequently played a very important role in the political developments in East Bengal.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵⁸³ Moni Singh, *Jiban Sangram* (Struggle for Life), *Jatiya Shahitya Prakashan*, Vol. 2, pp. 15-16.

Since the policy of the Communist Party to work through the Awami League was frustrated by the total non-cooperation of certain influential members of the party, they looked for creating new opportunities for making contacts with the people through appropriate political instruments. A political organization called the Ganatantri Dal came into being. It was a petty bourgeois organization in which some members of the Communist Party and other non-communal and anti-Muslim League elements gathered. At the conference of political workers in January 1953 in which the Ganatantri Dal was formed, Haji Danesh of Dinajpur, a veteran communist and peasant leader of Tebagha fame, became its president with Mahmud Ali of Sylhet as the general secretary. The formation of Ganatantri Dal reflected the need for providing a political platform for non-communal political forces, but its activities were limited and it was short-lived. However, it was able to attract a number of influential political workers of the time. Later its members joined other political organizations including the Awami Muslim League. In spite of its ineffectiveness it was the first non-communal political party in East Pakistan and its emergence signified a new line of political development.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

Chapter Twenty-Three

NEW INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE WORKERS' MOVEMENT

East Bengal was the hinterland of the jute industry and trade in Bengal during the British period. After independence and the partition of Bengal, jute traders and growers faced a serious crisis as there were no jute industries in East Bengal. The Chittagong port was not yet capable of handling the big volume of exportable jute that had earlier been exported out of Calcutta port. In fact the entire marketing network suffered serious dislocation and the production of jute, an important cash crop, fell sharply. But this crisis was soon overcome with the beginning of the Korean war in the fifties. The price of jute and the demand for it increased, and the Pakistani jute exporters took full advantage of this. The profit from jute trade went to the Ispahanis and West Pakistani traders like the Adamjees. A large number of jute brokers, some of whom were Bengali, also benefited from the new opportunity which had opened up.⁵⁸⁵

At the time of partition, East Bengal was almost entirely an agricultural country and industrial products were few and insufficient to meet even low level consumption requirements. Thus, the need for imports was quite urgent and the prices of imported commodities increased. This provided an opportunity for the traders to invest money in imports and with the very large profits from both import and export trade large amounts of capital began to accumulate in their hands.⁵⁸⁶

These capitalists, of whom Adamjee, Ispahani and other non-Bengalis like them were the leading ones, made new investments in the jute-press industry and from there also collected huge profits. Since there were no jute mills in East Bengal and the opportunities for entering that industry had now opened, leading traders like Adamjee, Bawani, Ispahani and others were set to invest in the jute sector.⁵⁸⁷

The Pakistan Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) was set up in 1950 to promote industrial development by encouraging private investors to collaborate with the government in setting up industries. Subsequently these were to be handed over to the private sector by withdrawing government capital for re-investment in other industries. The new investors did not show any interest in any industry other than

⁵⁸⁵ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 97, Dhaka 1995.

⁵⁸⁶ Lenin Azad, *Unshottorer Gano Abhuththan* (The Mass Uprising of 1969), University Press Limited, Dhaka, pp. 102-3.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

jute.⁵⁸⁸ However, with the setting up of the PIDC, various types of industries began to develop in small numbers in the public sector. Up to 1951 there were only 152 industries in East Bengal including small and medium ones. They were all located mostly in and around Dhaka, Narayanganj and Chittagong. Apart from these there were 327 very small factories, mostly processing industries for agricultural produce. From an agricultural survey of 1951, it was found that only 22 percent of such industries, fifty-nine in all, were consumers of electricity. The only big setups were a few railway workshops, the three newly established jute mills including the Adamjee Jute Mills and the cotton textile mills.⁵⁸⁹ There were 130 tea gardens located in the district of Sylhet, five cotton textile mills, one in Kushtia and four in Narayanganj. The textile mills in Narayanganj had their own independent power installations.

Adamjee and Ispahani were nominated as directors of the PIDC in 1950. They had made enormous profits from the jute trade and jute press industry and were interested in setting up jute mills. A very large jute mill was set up by Adamjee in Narayanganj and remains the world's biggest. It went into initial production in 1951.⁵⁹⁰

PIDC did not really succeed in creating interest among private investors to collaborate in establishing joint venture industries. So investments in public and private sectors ran parallel to each other. The main areas of government investment were paper, ship repairing, jute, sugar, etc.⁵⁹¹ Later the government of Pakistan handed over some of these industries to the private sector, including those which were making profits. This amounted to a policy of enriching emerging private capitalists through government investments.

Jute industry was not as capital intensive as the others, and the rate of profit was quite high. It was mainly because of this that private investment in jute was larger than in any other sector. The jute industrial project at Narayanganj was very big, but in the initial stage of production it employed about 300 regular workers at the end of 1951. However, 4000 to 5000 workers were employed in the construction work of the mill.

In spite of big capital outlay for the jute mill project, the housing and sanitary conditions for the workers were utterly deplorable. There was no arrangement for drinking water and no tube wells. The workers had to bring water from the river which was at some distance from their mud-built thatched quarters. No latrines were constructed and this was a health hazard. Their weekly wage was 5 rupees and 8 annas and with dearness allowance added, it was 8 rupees and 8 annas. Each worker had to pay 7 rupees per week as mess charges to contractors who ran the eateries.

⁵⁸⁸ Hexner, J. Tomas (1969), *EPIDC; A Conglomerate in Pakistan-The Spin-off Process*, Cambridge, Development Advisory Service, Mimeo, p. 9.7, quoted by Lenin Azad, *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁹ Lenin Azad, *ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹¹ Lenin Azad, *ibid.*, p. 107.

The first initiative in organizing the workers into trade unions was taken by a communist worker called Hossain, who worked in a railway workshop as a mechanic. He had been jailed for two years in 1949 for his involvement in political work. After his release at the end of 1951 he came to Adamjee Jute Mills and was employed as a jute mill mechanic.

Apart from the restrictions on the communists, any trade union work was strictly prohibited in the jute mill area. If the authorities had any information about a worker's involvement or even link with any organizational activity he would be immediately sacked. Hossain thus had to work in secret. Within a short time he was joined by others including two workers who were retrenched from the cotton textile mills of Narayanganj. After establishing contacts with a number of workers, they decided to publish and distribute a leaflet in the name of 'Adamjee Jute Mill Workers'. It created great enthusiasm among the workers, but it alerted the mill authorities. At that time a jute growers conference (Pat Chashi Sammelan) was being held at the Dhaka district Bar Library Hall. Hossain and another worker, Amjad distributed the leaflets. A police intelligence agent marked and identified Hossain and an Intelligence Bureau officer was immediately sent to inform the mill authorities. It was clear to Hossain that it would no longer be possible for him to continue as a mill worker at the Adamjee Jute Mills, so he decided to openly form the Adamjee Jute Workers Union. He then contacted party members in Dhaka and arranged a public workers meeting at Siddhirganj in an open field as no meeting could be organized within or very near the mill premises.

It was a rainy day, and a great majority of workers were afraid to attend a public meeting, so it was not a largely attended meeting. The Adamjee Jute Workers Union was formed with Mahmud Ali as president, Yusuf Hasan, M.S. Huq and Noor Mohammad as vice-presidents, Dewan Mahbub Ali as secretary. Hossain was elected joint secretary with the main responsibility of organizing the Union. An application was forwarded for registration of the Union, but nothing happened. After sometime it transpired that the management of the mill had 'organized' another union with exactly the same name and got it registered. So Hossain and the others changed the name of their union to Adamjee Jute Mill Mazdur Union and applied again for registration which was given.

Almost immediately after the registration of the Adamjee Jute Mills Mazdur Union, the mill authorities raised the weekly wage of the workers by two rupees without any action by the workers. They did it to show the workers that they were interested in their welfare and the workers need not go in for any action including strikes. But it had a different kind of effect on the workers. When they saw that with the registration of the Union the authorities enhanced their wage, they decided to join the union openly and work for it. After this initial increase in wages, the workers began a campaign for change in the rate of overtime work. The mill authorities were paying for overtime at

the same rate as the daily wage. The workers demanded double the rate and went on indefinite strike against overtime work, till their demand was met. After two months of striking, the authorities decided to accept their demand.

The first regular general strike at the Adamjee Jute Mills, took place on 25 December 1952, the birthday of Mohammad Ali Jinnah also called the Quaid-i-Azam. The Adamjee Jute Mill Mazdur Union decided to hold a meeting of the workers on the day. Earlier whenever the Union decided to hold any meeting on Sunday, the mill authorities announced that the mill would remain open on that day. This time the workers thought that since it was the birthday of the Quaid-i-Azam it would not be possible for them to keep the mill open. But when the management came to know about the planned meeting, they announced that the mill would remain open on 25 December and the workers would have to work as on any other regular workday.

This announcement caused great excitement and the workers decided to ignore the work notice and go on strike and hold their meeting as announced. The workers of the Adamjee Jute Mill were united in their response to the strike call. The workers of Chittaranjan, Lakhsminarayan and Dhakeshwari Cotton Textile Mills were also mobilized in organizing this strike. Ali Akbar, an active worker and a close associate of Hossain, played the most effective role.

On 25 December 1952, the whistle of the Adamjee mill blew incessantly calling the workers to join their work, but nobody responded. The strike of the Adamjee Jute Mill workers was a complete success. In the afternoon, a few thousand workers from the Adamjee Jute Mills, the Dhakeshwari, Lakhsminarayan and Chittaranjan Cotton Mills and peasants from the neighboring villages assembled in a field at Siddhirganj and held the announced meeting. The whole meeting-place resounded with slogans raised by the participants and reflected a determination on the part of the workers to continue their struggle in spite of the opposition and resistance from the mill owners and the government.

Chapter Twenty-Four

CHANGES IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Mohammad Ali Jinnah's health began to deteriorate from the middle of 1940s, and he died on 11 September 1948. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and the clique around him needed a weak head of state and an East Pakistani in that position. Khwaja Nazimuddin, the then prime minister of East Pakistan, was an obvious and safe choice for them and he was installed as governor general.

Liaquat Ali, as Prime Minister of Pakistan, had to face many difficulties at home as well as in matters relating to foreign affairs. He was an 'outsider' and as such he did not belong to the inner core of the Punjabi landlords and other propertied classes of people who had formed a clique from the very beginning. In addition, there were people in the Punjabi civil service and the armed forces who wanted to assert their power not only in the administration, but also in the sphere of politics.

The poor leadership quality of the Muslim League organization and the central cabinet encouraged both civil and military bureaucracy to think in terms of political power, and since they were not elected public representatives, the only way to political power for them was through conspiracy. The position of top civilian and military officers was much more powerful in Pakistan than in the newly established Indian Union. First, because the political leadership of the Congress at the centre and in the provinces was incomparably superior and efficient in India, and the civilian and military officers could not gain an upper hand as their counterparts did in Pakistan. Secondly, in Pakistan both the civil service and the armed forces had to be organized from top to bottom unlike in India where a structure already existed. This naturally concentrated great power in the hands of the armed forces, and the bureaucracy, and they put it to political use through conspiracy and with consummate cleverness. Jinnah's early death removed the greatest obstacle in the way of the above-mentioned forces, but Liaquat Ali remained, and with him around, they could not proceed with their plans easily or as fast as they wished. So a conspiracy was planned, along with certain foreign forces to remove him.

The manner in which India was partitioned by Mountbatten and the British government, and subsequently the way they conducted their relations with India and Pakistan, created hostility in the minds of the Muslim League and Pakistani government leaders, particularly Jinnah and Liaquat Ali, against Mountbatten and also against the British government. Mountbatten was soon declared *persona non grata* in Pakistan, and this affected Anglo-Pakistani relations adversely.

This was also a time when a certain rivalry existed between Britain and the United States in working out their diplomatic and other relations in the region. Liaquat Ali Khan paid a visit to the United States in 1950 and apparently he was inclined towards them. On the other hand, the old civilians and army officers had good and well-established connections with men in the British government establishments.

Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated on 16 October 1951, while addressing a public meeting at Rawalpindi. His assassin was killed immediately afterwards. This immediate killing of the assassin left no doubt about the fact that Liaquat Ali's assassination was not the act of any stray individual or in any way unpremeditated. On the other hand, it was a well-conceived, well-planned and well-executed conspiracy in which men of very high echelons of the government were involved.

After the death of Liaquat Ali, Nazimuddin was once again the obvious choice of the conspirators as the death-vacancy filler. He was chosen because he was one of the most pliable 'veteran' leaders of the Muslim League and an East Pakistani. But while doing so, the existing constitution of Pakistan had to be violated, because there was no other way in which a governor general could be inducted to the post of the prime minister directly, particularly when with the death of the prime minister the cabinet stood dissolved and the central Muslim League Parliamentary Party was not convened to elect a new leader.⁵⁹²

A very queer and ridiculous procedure was followed to install Nazimuddin as the Prime Minister. It was also utterly illegal and undemocratic. Thus, though the cabinet constitutionally did not exist, Nazimuddin appointed himself as Prime Minister by making the following announcement: The cabinet today has given me the onerous responsibility of being Pakistan's Prime Minister'.⁵⁹³ There was no opposition from the Muslim League leaders. Men like Fazlur Rahman, a member of Liaquat Ali's cabinet and also of Nazimuddin's, and a long time member of the Nazimuddin faction in the Bengal Muslim League, thought that they could 'use' Nazimuddin to their advantage.⁵⁹⁴ The others were too afraid to lose the position which they enjoyed, if they put up any resistance or even made any slight protest. So, everything was in order. Ghulam Mohammad, the principal leader of the Punjabi clique, was made the governor general, and he was replaced as finance minister by Chowdhury Mohammad Ali, an old Punjabi civil servant and secretary general. What was amazing was that for the six following months, Chowdhury Mohammad Ali continued as secretary general along with his ministership in the finance department!⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 110.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

The first big political disturbance occurred after Nazimuddin's assumption of office, when he paid an official visit to East Pakistan and in a public meeting at Dhaka most unnecessarily, and in a quite irrelevant way, said that Urdu would be the only state language of Pakistan. His statement initiated and created such a massive popular movement against the Muslim League organization and government that the political base of the ruling party was practically wiped out in East Pakistan.

The second political disturbance took place in Lahore in West Pakistan when the Jamaat-i-Islami, led by Abul Ala Maududi, instigated a widespread communal riot against the Qadiyanis and killed thousands of them. Finally, the armed forces had to be called in to control the situation. This was in early 1953.⁵⁹⁶

The food situation in West Pakistan had deteriorated and almost famine conditions were created in certain areas. The general economic situation also became critical with the end of the Korean War, when the price of jute sharply came down and suddenly the production of jute and jute goods, and the jute trade in general, suffered a serious setback.⁵⁹⁷

The relationship between East and West Pakistan worsened, and the clash of interest between the provinces of West Pakistan also grew. All these developments added up to create deep frustration and at the same time restlessness among the broad masses of the people in both regions of Pakistan.

Ghulam Mohammad, Governor General of Pakistan, dismissed Nazimuddin as Prime Minister on 17 April 1953, through a proclamation which said:

I have been driven to the conclusion that the Cabinet of Khwaja Nazimuddin has proved entirely inadequate to grapple with the difficulties facing the country. In the emergency which has arisen, I have felt it incumbent upon my asking the Cabinet to relinquish office so that a new cabinet, better fitted to discharge its obligation towards Pakistan, may be formed.⁵⁹⁸

Between the period of Nazimuddin's assumption of the office of Prime Minister and his dismissal, Pakistan's relation with the United States 'improved' to such an extent that the country 'needed' a Prime Minister who would be a complete puppet of the United States. This need arose out of the changed allegiance of the ruling clique from the British to the Americans. This change was reflected very soon in the sphere of foreign affairs when the Pakistan government entered into a bilateral military alliance with the United States and later joined the SEATO and Baghdad Pact to counter Soviet military power in South East Asia and the Middle East.

⁵⁹⁶ Report of Chief Justice Munir on the Qadiyani Riots, 1953.

⁵⁹⁷ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 112.

Mohammad Ali Bogra, ambassador of Pakistan in the United States and a former minister in the Suhrawardy cabinet in Bengal, was immediately summoned by Ghulam Mohammad under the pretext of finalizing an agreement for the import of foodgrains from the US, and appointed as the Prime Minister of Pakistan, completely ignoring the usual formalities for electing a majority leader in the parliamentary party.⁵⁹⁹ Nazimuddin had to leave through the same back door through which he came to occupy the chair of the Prime Minister!

Almost the entire cabinet of Nazimuddin joined the cabinet of Mohammad Ali after the latter was formally elected as the Prime Minister in the parliamentary party. No one shed tears for Nazimuddin.⁶⁰⁰ The involvement of the army, particularly of its chief, General Ayub Khan, in these changes was quite clear and open. As a close accomplice of Ghulam Mohammad in these conspiracies, Ayub was made the Minister for Defence. The bond between the civil and the military clique within the ruling circles of Pakistan was thus cemented firmly.

Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy and Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, leaders of the Awami Muslim League, were on the rostrum in a public meeting in Dhaka in the afternoon of the 17 April, when the news of the dismissal of Nazimuddin reached them. Suhrawardy publicly welcomed the change and endorsed the completely undemocratic and constitutionally illegal act of the Governor General. But Bhashani strongly denounced the act as undemocratic and warned the people of the consequences of such an act.⁶⁰¹ On Suhrawardy's part it was not a thoughtless utterance. In future, he himself became a tool in the hands of Ghulam Mohammad and Iskandar Mirza and played an important role in the conspiratorial politics of Pakistan.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰¹ Oli Ahad, *Jatiya Rajnity 1945-75*, pp. 190-1.

Chapter Twenty-Five

THE CONSTITUTIONAL FORMULA AND EAST BENGAL'S OPPOSITION

Mohammad Ali Bogra was installed as Prime Minister in April 1953, by Ghulam Mohammad after the unceremonious dismissal of the Nazimuddin government. He was also made president of the Pakistan Muslim League by the hardcore West Pakistani military-bureaucratic clique in order to show that the Bengalis were in power at the centre, though he was nothing but a mere puppet in the hands of Ghulam Mohammad.⁶⁰² In all matters relating to the government and the state, he acted on the bidding of the latter.

The Constituent Assembly of Pakistan appointed the Basic Principles Committee on 12 March 1949, and an interim report of the Committee was presented before the Assembly by Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan on 28 September 1950. The provisions of the interim report were so undemocratic and adverse to the interests of East Bengal that there was widespread opposition to them. Faced with such opposition the central government temporarily shelved the report and nothing was done during the rest of Liaquat Ali's term.⁶⁰³

On 22 December 1952, Khwaja Nazimuddin, who succeeded Liaquat Ali as Prime Minister of Pakistan, presented a revised report of the Basic Principles Committee. While presenting his Constitutional Formula on 7 October 1953, Mohammad Ali, referring to this report, said:

The final report which the House is now being invited to consider, was presented to the House in December last year. The proposals contained in the Committee's Report which deal with the composition of the Federal Legislature and the division of powers between the Upper and the Lower House failed, however, to satisfy all Units. Progress with further Constitution-making had therefore to be abandoned. There arose as regards the structure of the Federal Legislature a deadlock which defied solution. Strenuous efforts were made to resolve this deadlock. They all proved abortive. As this deadlock continued, provincial misunderstanding began to grow and threatened to undermine the solidarity of the nation. A sense akin to frustration began to spread among the people.

⁶⁰² Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 112.

⁶⁰³ See Chapter 18 of this book on Basic Principles Committee.

Happily, out of this frustration there eventually grew recognition on all hands of the fact that the constitutional deadlock can and must be broken.⁶⁰⁴

...The House will be pleased to learn that the formula has been unanimously accepted by my colleagues, by the Chief Minister of East Bengal, the Punjab, Sind, the NWFP and Bahawalpur and by all members of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party. This unanimity of opinion is in itself a remarkable feature. It serves to underline the basic unity and cohesion of the country—a unity which transcends all provincial boundaries.⁶⁰⁵

After having said this, Mohammad Ali proceeded to detail the principal feature of his proposals as follows:

The Central Legislature will be bicameral. For the purpose of representation in these Houses the state has been divided into five Units. There will be a Lower House in which the Units will be represented on a population basis and a smaller Upper House in which each of the Units will enjoy equal representation. This is the essence of any Federation. The Lower House, which will be directly elected, will represent the people; the Upper House, whose Members will be elected by the respective Legislatures of the Units, will represent the Units. A federation is a free association of Units in the governance of the country. The equality of representation in the Upper House, is, therefore, designed to give each Unit, big or small, an equal voice in the Upper House. Thus far these proposals follow the generally accepted federal pattern adopted by most progressive countries.⁶⁰⁶

The West Pakistani landlord and big bourgeois interests were always haunted by the fear that East Bengal would try to use its numerical majority to its advantage and to the detriment of West Pakistani interests. So, in spite of their strong position in every area of economy, administration and of the armed forces, they were very careful to make certain special constitutional provisions to 'protect' the interests of the 'minority'. Thus, Prime Minister Mohammad Ali of East Bengal, while giving details of his formula, said:

We then proceeded to make special provision to ensure that neither of the two parts of Pakistan may apprehend domination by the other. For this purpose the following mechanism has been devised. First, both Houses have been given equal powers. Every measure introduced and passed in the Lower House which is constituted on a population basis, must also be passed by the Upper House where each unit is equally represented. Similarly, every measure introduced and passed in the Upper House has also to be passed by the Lower House. Should

⁶⁰⁴ *Bangladesh Freedom War Documents* Vol. I, Government of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Information, p. 358.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 360-1.

there be any difference of opinion between the two Houses in respect of the measure or any clauses thereof, it shall be placed before a Joint Session of the two Houses. The measure may then be passed by a majority vote, but this majority vote must include at least 30 percent of the members present and voting from each zone. For this purpose, East Bengal constitutes one zone and the four Units of what is commonly known as West Pakistan constitute another zone. Further it has been provided that a vote of confidence or of no-confidence may be moved only in a joint session of the two Houses, may be passed by a majority vote provided only that the majority includes at least 30 percent of the total members belonging to each zone. A similar majority is required also for the election of the Head of the State in a joint session.⁶⁰⁷

By proposing a bicameral Legislature in which powers were to be distributed equally between the two, the majority of East Bengal was totally neutralized in the name of parity and federalism. But there was no question of equal distribution of executive, judicial and revenue administrative powers, equal distribution of defence forces, parity in matters of foreign exchange and investment. With the latter heavily loaded in favor of West Pakistan, the mere allocation of equal powers between the two Houses, instead of establishing parity and a federal system, was sure to create and maintain a situation of great imbalance between the two zones in the total power structure of the state.

Mohammad Ali, while elaborating his formula further, said,

The representation of the various Units in the two Houses is so arranged as to give an overall equality of representation to the two zones. You will recall that this principle of what came to be known as parity between East Bengal on the one hand and the Provinces composing West Pakistan on the other is contained in the Basic Principles Committee's Report. Fears were expressed, however, that it might in practice result in the domination of West Pakistan by East Bengal or vice versa. In order to prevent such a contingency the safeguard has been provided that any measure to be discussed in a joint session which gives East Bengal parity of representation *vis-a-vis* the units composing the Western Zone can be passed only if a substantial percentage of the members for each zone support that measure. What we have thus ensured is not merely parity between the two zones, but, what is far more important, inter-dependence of these two parts of Pakistan.⁶⁰⁸

These constitutional proposals were, in fact, not meant to ensure inter-dependence of the two zones, but a permanent dependence of East Bengal on West Pakistan, its big bourgeoisie, its civil and financial administrations and the armed forces. But in spite of

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 361-2.

these Mohammad Ali Bogra, the Prime Minister, ended his Constituent Assembly speech, by saying,

It is important to remember that this additional safeguard is merely another expression of the same principle of parity. It is also proposed that the Head of the State must be elected from a zone other than that to which the Prime Minister belongs.

The constitutional debate on the Mohammad Ali formula continued from 7 to 23 October 1953, and a number of members, both from East Bengal and West Pakistan, took part. Referring to the recommendations annexed to the Report on which the future Constitution of Pakistan was to be based, Dharendra Nath Datta from East Bengal said, on 8 October,

If you read List No. II, you will find that the Provincial Government - the Government of the Unit-will not be able to run the administration at all. As I was submitting yesterday, the provinces will be nothing better than the glorified Union Boards.⁶⁰⁹

List No. II was the Provincial List or the Unit List. So, in the name of parity etc. the new Mohammad Ali Constitutional Formula was nothing but an arrangement to deprive East Bengal of all real powers, including tax raising powers, and keeping it permanently crippled in every possible way.

On 14 October, Nurul Amin, rose to speak in support of the constitutional recommendations put forward by the Prime Minister. Referring to the difficulties of constitution-making in Pakistan and a 'solution' of the tangle which had so long been a cause for great disappointment and frustration, he said,

It has been done and it had been hailed all over the country, except those who do not see eye to eye with the Muslim League and I know the reason. They are those people who opposed Pakistan; they are, again, those people who do not want that there should be a strong Pakistan and that constitution should take another step to make it stronger. I have read in the press that a meeting was held in Dacca, which was attended by several parties. I will just name those persons, rather parties, who are said to have rejected this formula. The meeting was addressed by representatives of Jinnah Awami League, the Communist Party, the Krishak Sramik Party, the Ganatantri Dal, the Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party and ex-Finance Minister, Mr. Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, and it was presided over by the former Bengal Premier Mr. A.K. Fazlul Huq. All these disgruntled gentlemen

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

and organizations, which are ideologically opposed to Pakistan, have joined hands and are trying to gather strength against the Muslim League.⁶¹⁰

It clearly appears from the above statement of Nurul Amin that the so-called Mohammad Ali Formula was rejected by the people and the political representatives of East Bengal and so there was no question of its being hailed all over the country as was claimed by him in the earlier part of his speech in the Constituent Assembly.

On 24 October, A.K. Fazlul Huq rose to speak against the government constitutional formula presented by Mohammad Ali. Referring to the meeting mentioned by Nurul Amin he said that on 9 October in 'the biggest meeting that was ever held in Dhaka,' a resolution was adopted by all the parties unanimously opposing the constitutional proposals of the government.⁶¹¹ He said that the resolution thus adopted was printed, and before actually beginning to read out the printed matter, he said, 'Sir, this is the opinion of East Bengal recorded at that mammoth gathering'.⁶¹² The resolution read out by him⁶¹³ was as follows:

Whereas the so-called agreed solution of Constitutional deadlock announced by the Prime Minister of Pakistan gives no indication of East Bengal's universal demand for complete zonal autonomy on the basis of the historic Lahore Resolution of 1940 and recognition of Bengali as one of the state languages;

And whereas the proposed Constitutional Solution deals only with composition and power of the Federal Legislature and the election of the Head of the State and Prime Minister, to the exclusion of all other aspects of a constitution;

And whereas the creation of an undemocratic and retrograde Upper House and by providing mandatory 30 percent zonal support for acceptance of any measures gives constitutional sanction to undesirable zonal distrust and suspicion instead of encouraging mutual confidence and goodwill and sanctions separate communal electorates ostensibly to safeguard communal interests but really designed to perpetuate reactionary leadership thriving upon communal hatred and jealousy;

And whereas the creation of an undemocratic and retrograde Upper House is deliberately designed to put a constitutional clog on popular and progressive schemes in the guise of checks and balances;

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 369-70.

And whereas the House of Units is given powers co-extensive with the powers of the House of Peoples;

And whereas in the composition of the House of Units East Bengal has not been given the status of zone, but East Bengal with a population of four and a half crore has been put on equal footing with Baluchistan and Karachi and other very small Units, the population of which will not exceed even forty lakhs;

And whereas the creation of an undemocratic and retrograde Upper House is silent about other reactionary recommendations of the Basic Principles Committee Report such as suspension of the constitution by the Head of the State according to his sweet will and behest and giving autocratic powers to the Head of the State to appoint or dismiss the Unit Cabinets without referring to the wishes of Legislature and the impediments placed by the Basic Principles Committee on the independence of judiciary and the inviolability of the fundamental rights of the citizens;

And whereas the Basic Principles Committee Report fails to equalize the advantages of administration and justice and arranging alternative sitting of the government and federal court in Karachi and Dhaka;

And whereas East Bengal during the last six years of consideration of constitutional problems has declared unequivocally in favor of a unicameral Federal Legislature directly elected by the people having two specified reserve subjects, namely Defence and Foreign Affairs, which means powers to raise Army, Navy and Air Force and maintain them in time of war and peace and deal with political relations with foreign countries and formulate the foreign policy;

And whereas a country's constitution cannot be considered and accepted piecemeal, but has to be placed before the people as a composite whole for their consideration;

It is hereby resolved that this meeting of the citizens of Dhaka convened under the joint auspices of all political and cultural parties except the Muslim League do hereby reject the constitutional formula announced by the Prime Minister and warns the central Authority not to hazard imposition of any constitution unacceptable to the people.

It is further resolved that the people of the country have no confidence in the authors and supporters of the constitutional schemes and solutions announced by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party and demands immediate dissolution of the Consenbly for fresh election of a

Constitutional Assembly directly by the people on the basis of universal adult franchise and on joint electorate system.

This meeting calls upon the people of the country to express their views on this issue through the press and platforms from all districts, sub-divisional and rural centers.

The endorsement of the Mohammad Ali Formula by the representatives of the Muslim League in the Constituent Assembly and opposition to it by all the political parties and demonstration of public disapproval by the people through public meetings all over East Bengal, clearly indicated the isolation of the Muslim League.

In fact, from the beginning, the interests of the two zones of Pakistan were so diverse and different and the ruling classes based in West Pakistan were so organized and powerful, that they were not prepared to concede any democratic right to the people of East Bengal. This was very clearly manifested in the recommendations of the BPC, in the Mohammad Ali Formula and in the debates of the Constituent Assembly. In all these the basic line of future political developments was contained. The diverse interests demanded a truly federal constitution with maximum autonomy for the two zones, and the refusal to concede was certain to create a crisis which could not be overcome except by a total separation of the two zones.

Chapter Twenty-Six

POLITICAL PARTIES ON THE EVE OF THE 1954 GENERAL ELECTION

Fazlul Huq was appointed Advocate General of the East Pakistan High Court by Nurul Amin and he held this position till September 1953.⁶¹⁴ The overdue general election was officially announced in November 1953. After resigning his position Fazlul Huq began to address public meetings and exchange views with political persons and parties. First he rejoined the Muslim League and contested Nurul Amin for the post of president the East Pakistan Muslim League and was defeated. He left the Muslim League immediately with his followers and for some time toyed with the idea of joining the Awami Muslim League. Many Awami Leaguers hoped that he would do so. But finally, he decided to float a party of his own. Previously, his party was called the Krishak Praja Party, but after the abolition of the zamindari system the term 'praja' (tenant) became meaningless, and he called his party the Krishak Sramik Party or Peasants and Workers Party. The formation of this party was announced in October 1953.⁶¹⁵

Fazlul Huq was never a good party organizer and he never tried to be one. It suited him to have a large amorphous following without any real organizational discipline. With the Krishak Sramik Party he followed the same 'principle'. His old political associates apart, a considerable number of deserters from the Muslim League joined his party, and almost immediately after his re-emergence as a political leader, he began to draw large crowds to his meetings. He thus became a political factor to reckon with before the general election.

H.S. Suhrawardy migrated to Pakistan in March 1949, at about the same time when the Awami Muslim League was formed in Dhaka.⁶¹⁶ But he had very little to do with the formation of this new party. He decided to establish his political base in West Pakistan and took up residence in Karachi. He thought this would provide him a better opportunity to become an important factor in central politics. He tried to organize a new political party with the Pir of Manki Sharif, Nawabzada Nasrullah, the Khan of Mamdot and others who were all big landlords and had very little political base in West Pakistan. The party was called the Jinnah Awami Muslim League.

Suhrawardy, however, soon realized that East Bengal was his real political base and he could not play any effective political role as a central leader without having powerful

⁶¹⁴ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-3.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

support from the eastern zone of Pakistan. Thus, he began to visit East Bengal frequently and established relations with the Awami Muslim League led by Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. At that stage Suhrawardy changed the name of his party from Jinnah Awami Muslim League to Pakistan Awami Muslim League and became its president. This so-called all-Pakistan party had practically no base in West Pakistan, but Suhrawardy had some political relations with a few influential West Pakistani leaders. He never held any council meeting or any formal meeting but was 'elected' president of the All Pakistan Awami Muslim League by some persons who gathered around him. As a 'central' leader he had very little political effectiveness and his main political base was in East Bengal, which helped him later to become a central political figure. He had no difficulty in this, because Bhashani had no parliamentary ambition and never wanted to be an all-Pakistan leader. Thus, before the general election of 1954, Suhrawardy became a very important factor in the Awami Muslim League, and he and Bhashani together became the most important organized political factor on the eve of the general election.⁶¹⁷

Active participation of the Communist Party and workers associated with it in the Language Movement created a favorable situation for their open political and organizational work. Their contacts with the students and members of the intelligentsia expanded, not only in Dhaka but also in other places throughout East Bengal. After the Language Movement there was a general decrease of direct repression on the people. This was primarily because of the considerably weakened position of the ruling Muslim League. Some leaders and workers of the Communist Party were released from jail and a comparatively liberal atmosphere prevailed in the political life of East Bengal.⁶¹⁸ The party therefore decided to resume as much open activity as possible, and formed a team with Provincial Committee member Mirza Abdus Samad and a few others. They began their work in 1953 under the guidance of this Committee (it was called Provincial Committee though there was no Central Party Committee of the Communist Party in Pakistan at that time). They rented a house at Bangsal Road and opened an office there and later the office was shifted to Narinda.⁶¹⁹

The main work of the team was the exchange of views with other political parties and persons, making press statements and explaining their position through the media. Thus, after a gap of four years, the party was able to make its views known publicly. Their underground work continued as the principal form of their activities, but the limited open work was quite helpful in that period preceding the election.⁶²⁰

The Ganatantri Dal, a petty bourgeois democratic party, was formed through the initiative of the Communist Party in January 1953. It was a small party, but a number of

⁶¹⁷ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchash Bachar* (Fifty Years of Politics as Seen by Me), p. 254.

⁶¹⁸ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 120-21.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

communist and non-communist democratic workers gathered and were led by Haji Mohammad Danesh and Mahmud Ali.⁶²¹ The East Pakistan Youth League was another organization of progressive youths and it became an effective political body by 1953. The Students Union, which was formed immediately after the Language Movement, was quite organized and influential among the students, and most of its leaders were associated or had links with the Communist Party. Thus, on the eve of the general election, the Communist Party was a factor to politically reckon with.

Apart from these there were two religious parties - the Nizam-e-Islam and the Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party. In British India there were two important Muslim religious parties-the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind and the Jamaat-e-Islami. In the 1950s there were no such parties in East Bengal. The Nizam-e-Islam was the first religious party organized by mullahs in East Bengal and was led by Maulana Athar Ali. The other religious party was the Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party organized by Abul Hashim and Professor Abul Kasem of the Tamaddun Majlis. The latter was a cultural organization which took a leading part in the Language Movement in 1948, and in spite of its religious orientation had a somewhat democratic record of political work. The Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party stood for what they called Islamic socialism, etc. which meant a social order based on Islamic principles. Unlike the Nizam-e-Islam, the Rabbani Party used modern jargon with a view to blend Islamic ideas with modernism. It was in practice a futile political exercise and soon was proved to be so.⁶²²

Outside the parliamentary party the Congress had no organization in East Bengal after the partition of the country. There was no Muslim member in the Congress parliamentary party as no Muslim could get elected in 1946 on the Congress ticket. So the Congress parliamentary party was a Hindu party and there was no Hindu-Muslim meeting ground in the bourgeois political life of East Bengal. But even after large-scale migration of the middle class and poorer sections of Hindus from East Bengal since the middle of 1947, a large number of Hindus, mostly peasants and lower middle class people, remained and as voters they provided constituencies in Hindu majority areas for the Hindu candidates who were mostly old Congress leaders. So the Congress had its presence as an electoral factor.

The other non-Muslim political party was the Scheduled Caste Federation or Topsily Federation in which the leaders and members were all from the scheduled castes. They had some organized political activities.

The Muslim League had practically lost its social base in East Bengal by grossly misusing its political power and by completely ignoring the interests of the working people and by resorting to repression against all sorts of political opposition. But their

⁶²¹ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶²² Badruddin Umar.

greatest self-inflicted blow was their opposition, particularly armed opposition, against the Language Movement, which not only antagonized the great masses of people against them but also created dissension and rift within the leadership and rank and file in their own organization.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

FORMATION OF THE UNITED FRONT

With the reappearance of Fazlul Huq in politics and the Krishak Sramik Party he became a formidable political force immediately after the announcement of the election. On the other hand, the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was the biggest organized party in East Bengal. Its leaders, Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, had by this time emerged as political leaders of considerable stature. Their influence on the politics of East Bengal was also considerable.

Both these parties were constitutional parties with an electoral programme, and in the ensuing election they had to fight the common enemy, the ruling Muslim League. They realized that in order to defeat the Muslim League it was necessary to mobilize the entire opposition into a single force. The fear of a triangular electoral fight, therefore, loomed large over the political forces in East Bengal, particularly the left forces. It was particularly so because in spite of Muslim League's growing unpopularity the opposition did not realize that its social base had, in fact, been liquidated and its vote bank had become almost empty.

After the announcement of the general election, the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party met to consider the situation.⁶²³ The meeting came to the conclusion that it could be possible to defeat the Muslim League if all the democratic parties united on a common platform. So the party issued such an appeal to all the democratic and opposition parties to unite against the Muslim League.⁶²⁴

Of the opposition parties the Nizam-e-Islam was a reactionary anti-people party and there were other opportunist parties, but in spite of this the Communist Party thought that since the foremost political task at that point was to defeat the Muslim League, it was tactically correct to have a united front even with certain rightist parties.⁶²⁵ However, there were other opinions within the party. Some thought that in the name of defeating the Muslim League, a united front with reactionary political parties would be sheer opportunism on the part of the party. They were of the opinion that the party should try to unite the left section of the Awami League led by Bhashani, the Ganatantri Dal, the Communist Party and other small progressive groups and individuals in order to form a 'truly democratic front'. But the Provincial Committee was opposed to it because it thought that any move to form such a front would create disunity even

⁶²³ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

within the Awami Muslim League and divide the anti-Muslim League camp. Since a considerable number of party persons held the other view, the members of the Provincial Committee sat down with them in a number of meetings and finally were able to convince them of the tactical incorrectness of their stand. So finally, unanimity of opinion was established within the party regarding the nature of the pre-electoral united front.⁶²⁶

Strong opinion in favor of the united front began to register in the meetings of the Youth League, the students organizations, in meetings of political parties and in the newspapers. The Awami Muslim League held an emergency meeting of its Council in Mymensingh in late November 1953, where the proposal of a united front was discussed and finally adopted.⁶²⁷ Thus, an electoral united front was formed on 4 December 1953, and the announcement was made by Bhashani and Fazlul Huq in a joint statement to the press.⁶²⁸

In order to defeat the Muslim League in the coming election and to form a representative government of the people, the two principal political parties, the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League and the Pakistan Krishak Sramik Party, have united on the basis of a minimum programme.

In fact, there was no programme at that time except defeating the Muslim League. The electoral programme of the United Front was drafted and adopted later, towards the end of December. The same day as this announcement was made, Fazlul Huq said, in a press interview, that he and Bhashani had sent a joint telegram to Maulana Athar Ali to join the United Front and he expressed the hope that the latter would agree to do that.⁶²⁹

The inclusion of Athar Ali created complications and it was a well-calculated move by Fazlul Huq. He wanted to have an electoral ally who would be helpful in countering the support which the Awami Muslim League, particularly Bhashani, would get from the leftists. Athar Ali made it quite clear that he would not have anything to do with either the Communist Party or its ally the Ganatantri Dal as a component of the United Front, and he would walk out of the Front if they were included.⁶³⁰ Athar Ali himself or his party would not have been a great problem if Fazlul Huq had not tied himself up with the Nizam-e-Islam. His clear stand was that without Athar Ali the United Front would break up.⁶³¹

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

⁶²⁷ *Azad*, 5 December 1953; *Bangladesh Freedom War (BFW) Documents* Vol. I, p. 372.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁰ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-5.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

Mirza Samad of the Communist Party met Abul Hashim so that he could persuade Fazlul Huq to change his stand. Abul Hashim personally was not opposed to the inclusion of the Communist Party, but he knew perfectly well what Fazlul Huq's strategy was and that the latter would not agree to part with Athar Ali. So he advised Mirza Samad to accept that position and fight the Muslim League, remaining as an outside ally of the United Front. Samad and the Communist Party were very bitter but the Communist Party decided to do just that.⁶³² They did not press very hard for their inclusion in the United Front and decided to work for it except in constituencies where they had their own candidates.⁶³³

Athar Ali also demanded that Ganatantri Dal be excluded from the United Front, and the same complication developed there. Paradoxically Suhrawardy, who was opposed to the leftists, finally succeeded in nominating some members of the Ganatantri Dal and keep a seat open where there was a known communist candidate. This he had to do in order to counter the moves of Fazlul Huq.⁶³⁴

Fazlul Huq did not bother at all about a proper election manifesto and wanted to include all those issues which would fetch votes. Basically Suhrawardy's position was the same. But Bhashani wanted a real programme which would meet the aspirations of the broad masses of the people-the peasants and workers.

The character of the United Front and its component units can be understood to some extent if one follows the way the election manifesto was considered and finalized. Abul Mansur Ahmed had already drafted a 42-point election manifesto of the Awami Muslim League. That was the draft which the leaders of the Front considered to finalize their manifesto. A dinner meeting was arranged at the Bangsal residence of Kafiluddin Chowdhury in which Fazlul Huq, Bhashani, Suhrawardy, Athar Ali, Ataur Rahman Khan, Kamruddin Ahmad and Abul Mansur Ahmad were present.⁶³⁵ Suhrawardy said that the manifesto should be shorter, not exceeding ten points, so that each candidate could remember and explain them.⁶³⁶ He did not seem really concerned about the contents of the manifesto in any serious manner. He had never been so throughout his career except when he considered it too progressive for him. This was the reason why he opposed the draft manifesto prepared by Abul Hashim in consultation with theoreticians of the Communist Party in spite of the fact that they were in the same faction in the Bengal Muslim League and Abul Hashim was in charge of the 1946 election as general secretary of the Provincial League.

⁶³² Badruddin Umar.

⁶³³ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁶³⁴ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁶³⁵ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Autobiography of a Middle-class man of Bengal*, p. 8.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Bhashani said that the manifesto would have to be prepared in a way so that it would help in fulfilling the aspirations of the people.⁶³⁷ He was a petty bourgeois democrat and he had the interests of the people in mind. So he meant what he said. In addition to that he also said that it must be stipulated in the manifesto that the constitution of Pakistan would be prepared on the basis of the Lahore Resolution and that the foreign policy of Pakistan would be neutral.

While the discussions continued, Fazlul Huq remained practically unconcerned.⁶³⁸ Suhrawardy opposed two points in the draft,⁶³⁹ both of which were meant to be election stunts. The first was to make Burdwan House, the residence of the East Bengal Prime Minister, the seat of the Bengali Academy. Secondly, to fix the salary of ministers at Rs 1000. Abul Mansur continued to defend both in his own way.⁶⁴⁰ Finally, Bhashani turned towards Fazlul Huq and said, 'Since we have decided to make you the leader, your opinion should get precedence'.⁶⁴¹ To this Fazlul Huq replied, 'The election manifesto will be prepared to win the election, so whatever will fetch votes should be included'.⁶⁴² So indirectly he supported Abul Mansur Ahmad and both the items were finally retained. But Suhrawardy said that the provision of Rs 1000 salary for ministers would be applicable only for the Provincial Ministers and not for the centre. Abul Mansur again wanted to defend his proposal, but Suhrawardy said that one should consider the consequences before entering a debate. How can it be that in the case of a coalition ministry at the centre, the Punjabi ministers would get Rs 4000 and the Bengali ministers would get Rs 1000.⁶⁴³ Fazlul Huq said that he had no objection to anything but the number of items in the manifesto must be reduced.⁶⁴⁴

While reducing the number of items Abul Mansur Ahmad, according to his own statement, decided to use a stunt by selecting the number at 21, keeping in mind the historical 21 February.⁶⁴⁵ So at last a 21-point election manifesto was adopted as the election manifesto of the United Front.

Apart from stunts, the 21-point manifesto contained a number of important democratic programmes. These included establishing Bengali as one of the state languages of Pakistan, abolition of zamindari and all rent-receiving interests in land without compensation and distribution of surplus land to landless peasants and nationalization of jute trade to bring it under the management of the East Bengal government. It also wanted to introduce cooperative agricultural system in order to develop agriculture, to

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁵ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

save the country from flood and famine by digging canals and arranging irrigation, to industrialize East Bengal scientifically and modernize agriculture for making the country self-reliant in industry and food and to establish the economic, social and all other rights of workers according to the basic principles of the International Labour Organization. This last provision was suggested by Kamruddin Ahmad who was associated with the labor movement in East Bengal since before 1947.⁶⁴⁶

There were other points:

- to introduce primary and free compulsory education throughout the country
- to introduce basic reforms in education and make education scientifically effective
- to introduce teaching through the mother tongue and to abolish differences between government and non-government schools
- to abolish the Public Safety Act and ordinance and to release all political prisoners detained without trial
- to try publicly all persons against whom there were allegations of anti-state activities
- to make the right to publish newspapers and hold meetings unrestricted and absolute
- to separate the judiciary from the executive
- to construct a Shaheed Minar or martyrs memorial in the memory of those who were killed at the time of the language movement to declare 21 February as Shaheed Day and - to make it a public holiday.

There were also three constitutional items, which were:

- East Bengal will be made completely autonomous and sovereign on the basis of the Lahore Resolution and all subjects except defense, foreign and currency will have to be brought under the provincial government;
- army headquarters of the defense department will be established in West Pakistan and the headquarters of the navy will be established in East Pakistan;
- East Pakistan will have to be made self-sufficient in defense by building ordnance factories in East Pakistan.

Moreover,

- the United Front ministry, under no excuse will prolong the life of the Legislative Assembly;

⁶⁴⁶ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

- six months before the expiry date of the Assembly the ministry will resign and arrange for an independent and impartial election, through the Election Commission;
- and any vacancy during the tenure of the United Front ministry will have to be filled up through a bye-election within three months and the ministry will resign if its candidates are defeated in three successive elections.

There were also some other minor items in the manifesto.

What is very significant is that the 21-point programme did not have anything on the annulment of separate electorate systems and the introduction of joint electorate. This is truly surprising because the issue of abolition of separate electorates and introduction of joint electorate was already in the air before the general election of 1954.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁷ For details of 21-points see *BFW Documents* Vol. I, pp. 373-4.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

GENERAL ELECTION LIQUIDATES THE MUSLIM LEAGUE IN EAST PAKISTAN

The United Front, was not a genuine united body of democratic political forces and elements. It was, in fact, a marriage of convenience. It was a fragile political platform which somehow preserved itself through a series of crisis out of fear of a Muslim League victory. Opportunism and irresponsible moves by central and district level leaders, and those seeking nominations, created much disorder within the structure of the United Front. It would have broken down had there been no fear of a Muslim League comeback and the persistent effort of political workers for preserving the front. The greatest crisis was in connection with distribution of seats between the component units and nominations for candidates belonging to different organizations. The Awami Muslim League was the biggest political party at the time of the election, but no constituent party of the United Front including the Awami League had any proper organization throughout the country.

The Muslim League was an old organization, and even at this critical juncture, it had organizational units throughout the country. So a large number of people in each constituency applied for Muslim League nomination.⁶⁴⁸ On the other hand, the internal squabbling within the United Front became public knowledge and created a certain loss of confidence in it.⁶⁴⁹ The opposition parties had no proper organizational base in all parts of East Bengal and it became difficult to find suitable candidates in many constituencies. As late as the first week of February, the United Front (UF) had received only 620 applications. From more than half constituencies of Mymensingh there were no applications. Abul Mansur Ahmad had to be dispatched there to look for candidates.⁶⁵⁰

People were reluctant to apply for UF nominations because of uncertainties prevailing within it. In order to create confidence in it, the UF election office informed the newspapers that they had received 1156 applications from about forty constituencies.⁶⁵¹ H.S. Suhrawardy was the only one who continued to insist that candidates would have to be set up in all constituencies.⁶⁵² Abul Mansur Ahmad contacted some fellow members of the pre-independence Krishak Praja Party and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

⁶⁴⁸ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵² *Ibid.*

collected some friends of the Islamia College Student's League and other senior Student's League leaders.⁶⁵³ Others also tried their best and used all their resources, and somehow, candidates were found for all 237 constituencies. But there was much bitterness before the nominations were finalized. The worst misgiving took place between Yusuf Ali Chowdhury (Mohan Mian) and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who even exchanged blows.⁶⁵⁴ This was out of disagreements regarding nominations in two constituencies-one in Chittagong where Nabi Chowdhury was given the first nomination, but overriding this decision Bhashani nominated Abdul Aziz of the Awami Muslim League. The other one was in Comilla where finally they did not nominate any candidate but permitted Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmad of the Awami Muslim League and Ramizuddin of the Krishak Sramik Party to fight it out between themselves. Mushtaq Ahmad won the election in Comilla.⁶⁵⁵

The chaos, confusion and opportunism which characterized the entire process of seeking and giving nominations could be seen in the way activities were conducted in the UF. Such examples were not rare when a single candidate applied first as candidate for one party and then for another! Farid Ahmad of Cox's Bazaar was one of them. First he applied as an Awami League candidate, but the next day he appeared again at the UF office with *achkan-pyjama*, headgear and a stick in hand and filed his application for nomination as a Nizam-e-Islam Party man! He said that since there was an Awami League candidate in his constituency backed by Sheikh Mujib, he had no chance of getting nomination from the Awami League. So after having consultations with Athar Ali, he decided to apply again as a Nizam-e-Islam candidate, because he came to know that the final decision would be taken by Fazlul Huq.⁶⁵⁶

Fazlul Huq and Bhashani both changed the agreed nominations in many constituencies unilaterally, but the former did so in a larger number of cases. In Jessore there was another kind of situation. There the Communist Party had set up Abdul Huq as their candidate. Awami Muslim League first decided to set up Abdul Hai as the UF candidate. But Abdul Huq was the elder brother of Abdul Hai and the latter wanted his elder brother to contest the seat and the UF to keep the election centre open. Fazlul Huq opposed the decision, but finally Suhrawardy persuaded him to keep it open and not to nominate any UF candidate. Abdul Huq's chief election rival was Shamsur Rahman of the Muslim League. Abdul Huq was defeated. No communist candidate could be elected from any Muslim constituency. There were two others.⁶⁵⁷

The Communist Party actually set up eight candidates, three in Muslim constituencies and five in Hindu constituencies. Of the Muslim candidates Abdul Huq had a

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁶ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

considerable support in his constituency, but he could not be elected because a large number of communist workers who were supporting him were arrested. Abdul Huq himself was in jail at that time and he was defeated by a margin of a few hundred votes. The Party, however, won in four Hindu seats out of five. Those who won in the four seats were Purnendu Dastidar and Shudhangshu Bimal Datta (both from Chittagong), Barun Roy (Sylhet) and Abhoy Barman (Rangpur).⁶⁵⁸

The situation was so fluid in the United Front that there was a lot of confusion regarding the real status of Ganatantri Dal and the Rabbani Party in the UF. The Dal was given nominations in thirteen constituencies and there were other nominated candidates who had strong links with them.⁶⁵⁹ So it was presumed that they were part of the UF, though formally they had nothing or very little to do with the decision-making process of the UF.⁶⁶⁰

The Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party was given only one nomination for Patia in Chittagong which went to Abul Kasem, who was also the founder of the Tamaddun Majlis, which initiated and took a leading part in the language movement in 1948. Shahed Ali, editor of weekly *Sainik*, published by the Tamaddun Majlis, contested from Sunamganj in Sylhet district. He had a rival UF candidate, whom he defeated.⁶⁶¹ There were two other Khilafat-e-Rabbani candidates of whom Abul Hashim was one. Both of them were defeated.

Abul Hashim applied for UF nomination from the Dhaka East constituency, but he was not given the nomination in spite of Fazlul Huq's efforts. Suhrawardy strongly opposed it and remained adamant. He took this opportunity to settle his past account with Abul Hashim.

Suhrawardy owed a great deal to Abul Hashim for being elected leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party and Prime Minister of Bengal in 1946. But when Abul Hashim and Fazlul Huq (who returned to the Muslim League fold when Jinnah lifted the ban on him) contested for the presidentship of the Bengal Muslim League in January 1947, Suhrawardy, instead of supporting Abul Hashim, indirectly gave his support to Fazlul Huq. A critical situation developed and there was a stalemate. Finally, Akram Khan withdrew his resignation and the election was postponed. Later in June 1947 Suhrawardy suddenly changed sides and moved the official Muslim League resolution, on being asked by Jinnah, for acceptance of the Mountbatten dispensation and the partition of Bengal in the Muslim League convention at New Delhi. Both Sarat Bose and Abul Hashim considered that as a betrayal of the agreement to which Suhrawardy was a party. When the Muslim League parliamentary party for East Bengal met to elect a

⁶⁵⁸ Moni Sinah, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁶⁵⁹ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁶⁶⁰ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁶⁶¹ Shahed Ali (interview).

new leader for the position of Prime Minister, there was a contest between Suhrawardy and Nazimuddin. This time Abul Hashim remained neutral and Suhrawardy was badly defeated. Suhrawardy wrote a letter to Abul Hashim in which he said that it could not be possible to give him the UF nomination because in Dhaka East constituency they had to give it to an important political worker, Golam Quader Chowdhury, of Ganatantri Dal. Abul Hashim had already registered as a candidate and he did not withdraw his candidature. Neither he nor the Khilafat-e-Rabbani Party had any financial and organizational resource to fight the election and Abul Hashim was badly defeated.⁶⁶²

Suhrawardy was the only central leader who knew that the Muslim League was in a really bad condition, which is why he had insisted on setting up candidates in all constituencies. In a pre-election review, it was at first thought that the UF would be defeated in about forty-five constituencies, but in a Jessore election meeting Suhrawardy said that the League would not win in more than ten constituencies. While explaining the reasons for his estimate, he said that the weak pockets were all surrounded by strong UF areas. East Bengal was a very densely populated country and when the people of any weak constituency see that in the surrounding constituencies the situation was greatly in favor of the UF, they will turn against the Muslim League. He said that it could happen even only a week before the election. What he said turned out to be prophetic.⁶⁶³

The general election created great enthusiasm among the people all over East Bengal. Endless examples of this enthusiasm could be cited, but it will be enough to mention two of them. In the Raipur constituency of Narayanganj, Syed Abdus Selim was the Muslim League candidate. Miss Fatima Jinnah and Kazi Isa of Balochistan were scheduled to address an election meeting in favor of the League candidate. This scared the UF candidate, so they asked the UF office at Dhaka to send one of the three leaders to their constituency for a meeting on the same day. None of them were available and Kamruddin Ahmad had to go there to address the meeting. On reaching Kaliganj, the venue of the meeting, he found that suddenly Fazlul Huq had changed the UF nomination for Faizur Rahman and nominated Reza-e-Karim. It created added panic and confusion. But Kamruddin Ahmad addressed the election meeting of Faizur Rahman which was attended by more than 25,000 people. On the other hand, the meeting addressed by Fatima Jinnah and Kazi Isa failed to attract more than 2000 people.⁶⁶⁴

Abul Mansur Ahmad related how, with the advancement of the election date, enthusiasm for the UF began to increase rapidly, and culminated in the votes on election day:

⁶⁶² Badruddin Umar.

⁶⁶³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

The enthusiasm of the people also spread among the village women. I saw in my area women coming to vote in-groups, maintaining *purdah*. The arrangement for *purdah* was like this: four young men were holding the four sides of a mosquito net and between 15 to 20 women were walking under its cover. They were all moving with the moving mosquito net.⁶⁶⁵

The general election was held on the 8 March 1954.⁶⁶⁶ The United Front and its allies won 228 seats and the ruling Muslim League got only nine.⁶⁶⁷ Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, who was elected as an independent candidate, joined the Muslim League. None of the ministers were elected. Nurul Amin was defeated by Khaleque Nawaz Khan, a student candidate of the United Front. The Muslim League was virtually liquidated as a political party in East Pakistan.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁵ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

⁶⁶⁶ Rangalal Sen, *Political Elites in Bangladesh*, University Press Limited, p. 123.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

FAZLUL HUQ'S POST-ELECTION SOMERSAULT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The fear of a Muslim League election victory, which kept the ragtag United Front (UF) together till the end of the election, disappeared immediately after the election. The date for electing parliamentary leader of the UF was fixed for 2 April 1954. The previous day the newly elected members of the Awami Muslim League met informally at the UF office at Simson Road. The younger members had little confidence in Fazlul Huq, and they insisted that before the election of the United Front parliamentary leader, Fazlul Huq would have to prepare a full list of cabinet members and their portfolios and sign the list to be forwarded to the governor. They further insisted that until the list was signed, Fazlul Huq would not be elected. They also said that they were a majority in the UF, so Aatur Rahman Khan should be elected deputy leader of the parliamentary party.⁶⁶⁹ Suhrawardy said that since people had already elected Fazlul Huq as the leader, so it would not be proper to impose any terms on him. He also assured that Fazlul Huq would not repeat his past mistakes and there was nothing to be worried about. Bhashani also said that Fazlul Huq was their leader and, therefore, there was no reason to distrust him.⁶⁷⁰

A meeting of the United Front parliamentary party was held, as scheduled, at the Dhaka District Bar Library Hall presided over by Bhashani and Fazlul Huq was unanimously elected as its leader. Suhrawardy congratulated him and Bhashani offered his blessings. No elections were held for electing a deputy leader, whip etc. The meeting dissolved after adopting a resolution on the Constituent Assembly.⁶⁷¹ Bhashani, Suhrawardy and Fazlul Huq met at the latter's residence to work out the details of formation of the ministry. Serious disagreements took place between Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy. It centered around inclusion of two young members, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and the other a nominee of Fazlul Huq.⁶⁷² Suhrawardy was himself very opposed to the inclusion of Mujib in the ministry and had rebuked him earlier.⁶⁷³ But when Fazlul Huq proposed his candidate Suhrawardy opposed him, and in order to counter his proposal effectively, proposed Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's name.⁶⁷⁴ Fazlul Huq did not want to accept Mujib because he considered him totally unfit for the job.

⁶⁶⁹ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-3.

⁶⁷² Abul Mansur Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 263.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Suhrawardy proposed Mujib's name in order to put pressure on Fazlul Huq to withdraw his candidate, but the latter was adamant and the meeting ended without any agreement or decision on the composition of the cabinet. The stalemate could have been avoided if Bhashani had intervened on either side, but he remained silent. Thus, a totally ridiculous situation developed out of a trivial matter and the United Front, and with that the aspirations of the people who voted them to victory, were thrown overboard by the leaders of the Awami League and the Krishak Praja Party.⁶⁷⁵

On 3 April 1954, the governor invited Fazlul Huq to form his ministry and he announced a four-member cabinet with himself and Abu Hossain Sarkar and Syed Azizul Huq, both from Krishak Praja Party (KPP) and Ashrafuddin Chowdhury (one-time Congress leader and a close associate of Subhas Bose) of the Nizam-e-Islam. The Awami League were astounded. Suhrawardy and others tried to persuade Fazlul Huq to take Awami League members in the cabinet, but he refused. Bhashani was not a party to all this and he left Dhaka for Kagmari.⁶⁷⁶

Around this time King Ibne Saud of Saudi Arabia came to Karachi on an official visit to Pakistan and wanted to meet the leaders of the United Front. He sent a chartered plane to Dhaka to bring them to Karachi. Fazlul Huq left Dhaka with forty-five persons, all belonging to the Krishak Praja Party and the Nizam-e-Islam. He did not consider it necessary to take any Awami League member, not even Suhrawardy, with him. Following this, the Saudi King sent a telegram to Suhrawardy inviting him to meet him in Karachi. Suhrawardy went there on his own expense and met Ibne Saud separately.⁶⁷⁷ The United Front was virtually on the point of breaking up.

In order to prevent such a breakdown a meeting of the Awami Muslim League Working Committee was held and it decided to support the Fazlul Huq ministry under all circumstances. Maulana Bhashani was authorized to take any decision regarding the inclusion of Awami Muslim League ministers in the expanded Fazlul Huq ministry, when the occasion would arise.⁶⁷⁸ In the end of April Fazlul Huq, as Prime Minister of East Bengal, paid a visit to Calcutta without any regard for normal diplomatic formalities. On 30 April, he addressed a gathering there, in which he said,

Bengalis are an indivisible nation. They speak in the same language and live in one compact land. Their ideology and way of life are also identical.... Today I will have to participate in the construction of future history. By India, I understand both Pakistan and India, because I consider that division as artificial.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

⁶⁷⁹ Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

This statement was really very surprising from a man who did practically nothing to prevent the partition of Bengal, did not take part in the movement for united sovereign Bengal in any manner, and in June 1947 refrained from voting against the partition of Bengal in the special session of members of East Bengal in the Bengal Assembly held in Calcutta.⁶⁸⁰

In Karachi there was sharp reaction against Fazlul Huq's statement, and he was immediately branded a traitor. The ruling Muslim League also took full advantage of the situation. Fazlul Huq was scared of the reaction of Karachi, and in order to strengthen his position in East Bengal made overtures to the Awami Muslim League to include them in his ministry.⁶⁸¹ Word was sent to Bhashani at Tangail.⁶⁸² But Bhashani, instead of being personally involved in any negotiation in forming the ministry, authorized Abul Mansur Ahmad, Aaur Rahman Khan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to do whatever they deemed fit. Fazlul Huq met them and expressed his desire to include them in his ministry.⁶⁸³ Thus, they took oath as members of his cabinet at the Government House in Dhaka in the morning of 15 May 1954.⁶⁸⁴ Abdus Salam Khan, and Hashemuddin Ahmad were also included in the cabinet. Before this oath-taking ceremony Fazlul Huq had suddenly appeared on the dais of an Awami League public meeting at Paltan Maidan on 10 May, uninvited, and declared that henceforward he would run the government on the instructions of Maulana Bhashani! There was general rejoicing among the Awami Muslim Leaguers at this gesture.⁶⁸⁵ All these undoubtedly indicated the shape of things to come. While they were taking oath, a massive and dangerous riot broke out in the Adamjee Jute Mills between Bengali and non-Bengali workers. The news reached the Government House while the members of the cabinet were still there. Fazlul Huq and other ministers went straight to the Adamjee Jute Mills from here.⁶⁸⁶

The election victory of the United Front struck terror in the hearts of the ruling clique in Karachi as well as the non-Bengali West Pakistan based industrialists and big traders who had investments in East Bengal. The latter actually considered the United Front election victory as a victory of representatives of the working class and tried to subvert the United Front government in league with the central government agencies. Their first act was to organize a Bengali-non-Bengali riot at the Chandraghona paper mills at Chittagong on 23 March, soon after the general election results were out. The Adamjee riot was their second act, but in this case it was much more extensive and devastating.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-36.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁸² Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

⁶⁸³ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 265; Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

⁶⁸⁴ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁶⁸⁶ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

⁶⁸⁷ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 24; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

By the time the Fazlul Huq and his cabinet reached Adamjee, hundreds of workers had been killed on both sides. The ministers as well as other political workers, including the Communist Party workers who had influence among the Adamjee Jute workers, tried - to stop the riot. The situation calmed down to some extent by the evening, but it continued the next day. The rioters set fire to large number of houses of the workers. The number of men, women and children killed were estimated between 500 and 1000. It was alleged that some of the non-Bengali workers used fire arms.⁶⁸⁸

Immediately after the Adamjee riots, the Communist Party issued a press statement saying that this had been a conspiracy of the central government to dislodge the United Front ministry. They also asked the people and all democratic forces and political parties to resist that conspiracy.⁶⁸⁹ It was quite clear from the way the riot broke out, as well from its magnitude, that it could not have been organized without the help of the central government.

They took advantage of every opportunity which came their way. One such opportunity was again provided by Fazlul Huq in an interview to *The New York Times* published on 23 May 1954, in which he again said that East Bengal 'wished to become an independent state'.⁶⁹⁰ On 25 May 1954, *Pakistan Observer* reproduced part of a two-hour-long interview which he was supposed to have given to Callahan, the representative of *The New York Times* in Karachi. It is quite possible that Callahan took the opportunity to add some salt to what Fazlul Huq said in order to create confusion in the political situation in Pakistan in line with the open activities of the US ambassador. But Fazlul Huq himself was not a very responsible politician either. Moreover, he was in the habit of making public utterances without paying any heed to the consequences. He could be undiplomatic to an extent impermissible for a politician of his stature and position.

According to the report Fazlul Huq had said, 'Independence will be one of the first things to be taken up by my ministry Separation of West and East Pakistan by more than one thousand miles of India was one reason for 42 million Bengalis wanting their freedom.' He is said to have reviewed several cultural and economic points of disagreement between the two zones. These included the language difference, lack of corridor across India other than by air, and lack of revenue balance. He also referred to favoritism in the central government offices, particularly preferences given to people of the Punjab province to the exclusion of Bengalis.

What Fazlul Huq said about the disparities between the two zones could not land him and the United Front government into any big trouble, but *The New York Times* report

⁶⁸⁸ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, 136.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

about independence, etc. provided the Pakistan Government with a big excuse to attack the newly formed United Front Government as conspirators. Fazlul Huq issued a press statement denouncing the report of *The New York Times* correspondent, and described it as deliberate falsehood and perversion of facts. The press statement published in the *Pakistan Observer* on the 26 May 1954 read as follows:

Today at about 4 p.m. I have had the advantage of having read some of the notes taken by the Karachi correspondent of *The New York Times*, of my conversation with him on Monday. I regret to have to say that the statement as taken down by him, containing nothing but deliberate falsehood and perversion of facts which it is impossible to believe, has been made deliberately. Every word of the statement is baseless falsehood and every sentence is a perversion of truth. It is impossible to contradict such a statement piecemeal, so I am making the following statement as a whole to give the public an idea of what I said and how much my statement has been mutilated.

What I actually stated at the interview to the correspondent is as follows: East Pakistan should be an autonomous unit of Pakistan. This is our ideal; and we will fight for it. I never said for a moment that our ideal is 'independence'. I extremely regret that I am so much misunderstood and misreported. Perhaps people come to me with preconceived notions. I am not a coward. If I said something I will own up to it.

There were two correspondents, of the *Reuters* and *The New York Times*, at the interview. They asked me about the defense of East Pakistan. I told them that in the case of aggression, we would expect help from West Pakistan but if no help was forthcoming from West Pakistan, we would help ourselves. I did say that East Pakistan has a fine manpower for a first class Navy.

Fazlul Huq further said, "There was a discussion about this interview at the Prime Minister's House where the correspondents were called in. The correspondent of *The New York Times* admitted that I did not talk of independence. He said he had gathered it from my talks.'

A very dishonorable and surprising part of the whole episode was this meeting between the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the Prime Minister of East Bengal and the correspondents of the *Reuters* and *The New York Times*, arranged by the former. The following report was published by the *Pakistan Observer* on the same day.

It is understood that on reading the text of Mr. Fazlul Huq's interview with Mr. John D. Callahan of *The New York Times*, the Prime Minister got together both Mr. Huq and Callahan and put before them the published report of the interview, reports APP. Mr. Fazlul Huq denied having made some of the statements

ascribed to him. Mr. Callahan of *The New York Times*, however, stuck to his version of the interview and did not retract any part of it.

It actually leaves little scope for doubt that taking advantage of Fazlul Huq's earlier statement made in Calcutta, the Pakistani Prime Minister, as the servitor of US imperialism and the power clique at the center, tried to build up a case against the United Front government as a justification for toppling it and promulgating section 92-A in East Bengal.

The Governor General of Pakistan, Ghulam Mohammad, promulgated section 92-A in East Bengal through a proclamation on 29 May 1954, which was published in a Gazette Extraordinary the next day. The proclamation was worded thus:

Whereas the Governor General is satisfied that a grave emergency exists and thereby the security of East Bengal is threatened and a situation has arisen in which the Government of East Bengal can't be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935. Now, therefore, in exercise of the power conferred by section 92-A of the Act, the Governor General is pleased to direct the Governor of East Bengal to assume on his behalf all powers vested in or exercisable by the Provincial Legislature.⁶⁹¹

Actually Chowdhury Khaliqzaman, the Governor of East Bengal, dismissed the government of the United Front but he could not 'assume all powers', because he was also dismissed almost immediately and Iskandar Mirza was sent to East Bengal and was sworn in as the next Governor of East Bengal.⁶⁹²

Mohammad Ali Bogra, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, reiterated in a broadcast over the radio the reasons for the dismissal of the United Front government. *The Pakistan Observer* reported the speech⁶⁹³ in the following manner:

Mr. Mohammad Ali said that, in the light of information in possession of the government, two factors stood out clearly. Firstly, disruptive forces and enemy agents were actively at work in East Bengal to undermine the integrity of Pakistan by setting Muslims against Muslims, class against class and the province against the centre. The second factor was that Mr. Fazlul Huq and his colleagues were 'not prepared to take the action necessary to cope with this situation.' The Prime Minister detailed the tragic events resulting from the nefarious activities of subversive elements in East Bengal and referred to the troubles in the industrial centers of Chittagong, Narayanganj and Khulna immediately after the results of the United Front victory which came to be

⁶⁹¹ *Pakistan Observer*, 31 May 1954; *Bangladesh Freedom War (BFW) Documents* Vol. I, p. 406.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*

⁶⁹³ *BFW Documents* Vol. I, pp. 407-09.

gradually announced. He proceeded to mention the 'serious riot' at the Chandraghona Paper Mills where thirteen persons were killed, the disturbance between the jail staff and the public at Dacca and finally the 'proudly tragic' riot at Adamjee Jute Mill in which over four hundred persons, including innocent women and children, were killed.

The part of the Prime Minister's speech on Fazlul Huq's Calcutta visit was reported thus:

Mr. Mohammad Ali declared that Mr. Huq's recent statements, viewed against the background of his Calcutta utterances, had convinced him and his colleagues that they had to deal with a political leader who was fundamentally opposed to Pakistan. It was clear that neither he nor his Cabinet was fit to administer the province or could be trusted to restore peace and confidence and work for the prosperity of forty-two million people. The centre had, therefore, no other alternative but the dismissal of the Huq Ministry.

The part of Mohammad Ali's speech regarding Fazlul Huq's *The New York Times* interview was reported as follows:

Mr. Mohammad Ali also made a reference to Mr. Fazlul Huq's interviews with *Reuters* and *The New York Times* in which he was reported to have stated that his objective was to secure independence for East Bengal, and later issued a denial of this statement. Three days later, however, said Mr. Mohammad Ali, Mr. Fazlul Huq had again changed his mind and in the course of certain discussions plainly told us that his objective was an independent East Bengal.

This last part of Mohammad Ali's speech was a lie, meant to vilify Fazlul Huq in particular and the United Front government in general. But one thing is quite noticeable that though both the correspondents were present at the time of the interview, nothing of what was published in *The New York Times* was published by the correspondent of *Reuters*.

Mohammad Ali without any representative character whatsoever, said that Fazlul Huq and his colleagues in the cabinet were not fit to administer the province. It is difficult to believe that a government installed through a general election by an overwhelming majority of the people would try to create a situation to destabilize its own administration by creating a law and order situation'. On the contrary, it was most likely that the forces which were overthrown by the people by the power of their free votes would try to do so. In this case, the conspiracy of the US government, which increasingly began to interfere in the administration and political developments in Pakistan, and that of the power clique at the centre led by Ghulam Mohammad, was quite transparent. In this game, the statements of the US ambassador to Pakistan against

the UF government clearly revealed how fast US imperialism began to establish its power and control over the government, administration and politics of Pakistan.

Repression followed the imposition of Governor's Rule in East Bengal. Fazlul Huq was interned in his house.⁶⁹⁴ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was arrested along with hundreds of opposition political workers of all shades.⁶⁹⁵ H.S. Suhrawardy had earlier gone to Switzerland, being seriously ill, and was in a Zurich hospital.⁶⁹⁶ Iskandar Mirza, even before reaching Dhaka to take his new charge, declared that he would shoot Bhashani with his own hand because of his treacherous acts.⁶⁹⁷ But, unfortunately for him, Bhashani was also out of the country. He had gone to Sweden to attend the International Peace Conference at Stockholm. After the dismissal of the United Front government, he stayed back in London. No resistance could be organized by the opposition against the dismissal of the elected government and the imposition of 92-A in East Bengal.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁴ Oli Ahad, p. 218; Abul Mansur Ahmad, pp. 268-69; Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁶⁹⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 214, 219.

⁶⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁶⁹⁷ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 268; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

⁶⁹⁸ Oli Ahad, *ibid.*, pp. 217, 219.

Chapter Thirty

AFTERMATH OF THE FALL OF THE EAST BENGAL GOVERNMENT

After the dissolution of the East Bengal Government, thousands of workers belonging to the Awami Muslim League, Communist Party, Ganatantri Dal, Youth League, Muslim Students League and Students Union were arrested. The East Bengal Legislative Assembly was suspended. For the first time the Communist Party was banned. Since 1947 the government had made regular attacks on the Communist Party and the communists in all possible ways, but it was never formally banned either by Nazimuddin or Nurul Amin. But the Pakistan government did so after overthrowing the government in East Bengal on 4 July 1954.⁶⁹⁹ On the same day the party was also declared illegal in West Pakistan. The secretary of the Communist Party of West Pakistan, Firozuddin Mansur, along with a number of other communist and democratic opposition leaders and workers were arrested.⁷⁰⁰

Fazlur Rahman, the dismissed minister in Nazimuddin's cabinet somehow managed to convince Mohammad Ali that by manipulating the Muslim League majority in the Constituent Assembly, they could repeal Article 10-A of the 1935 Act of the Government of India and thus could take away the powers of the governor general to dismiss the prime minister and make the prime minister's office dependent not on the will of the governor-general, but on the Constituent Assembly, in which the Muslim League had the majority.⁷⁰¹ In the last week of September when Ghulam Mohammad was in Abbottabad they actually did so and successfully repealed the Act. However, at the time of the parliamentary action, constitutional politics had lost all relevance the real politics of Pakistan. So, Ghulam Mohammad quietly discussed the situation with the bureaucrats and with the leaders of the armed forces. When he returned to the capital the Prime Minister was out of the country. On his return, Mohammad Ali was taken to the governor general's residence as a virtual prisoner and was ordered to sign a proclamation dissolving the Constituent Assembly.⁷⁰²

While describing this very important development in the history of constitutional crisis and breakdowns in Pakistan, Kamruddin Ahmad, an important spokesman for the United Front and the opposition in East Bengal at the time wrote,

⁶⁹⁹ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 24; Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁷⁰⁰ Khoka Ray, *ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

⁷⁰¹ Kamruddin Ahmad *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*; Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, pp. 115-17; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 221; Kamruddin Ahmad, *The Social History of East Pakistan*, 2nd Edition, 1967, p. 133.

Ghulam Mohammad wanted Mohammad Ali to be brought straight to the Government House from the airport before he could contact anyone. Mohammad Ali was frightened out of his wits and he was forced to broadcast a prepared speech to the nation as the 'Prime Minister'. Ghulam Mohammad needed Mohammad Ali for this purpose because, as he later on admitted, he firstly wanted a Bengali to justify his action, and secondly he thought the international reaction would be less adverse if the Prime Minister himself spoke to the nation. Mohammad Ali was 'released' in the early hours of the morning with the assurance from Ghulam Mohammad that he would remain designated as Prime Minister in the Governor General's new cabinet provided he behaved. Ghulam Mohammad got the backing of the army, bureaucracy, industrialists, commercial magnates and the landlords of the Punjab and Sindh. His only need was support from Bengal and the North-West Frontier Province.⁷⁰³

Iskandar Mirza managed to obtain the needed support from the North-West Frontier Province. He was a personal friend of Dr Khan Sahib, brother of the famous Ghaffar Khan. Dr Khan Sahib joined the new cabinet of Ghulam Mohammad, with little persuasion. Ghulam Mohammad then approached Mahmudul Huq Osmani, the general secretary of the Pakistan Awami Muslim League and he was quite useful in 'influencing' the Awami League in East Bengal. He came to Dhaka and held 'substantial' talks with Aatur Rahman Khan, leader of the Awami League Parliamentary Party, and was able to convince him on the need to politically cooperate with the Governor General in re-organizing the government at the centre and in East Bengal. Aatur Rahman agreed to discuss the matter with H.S. Suhrawardy who was in Zurich at that time. Suhrawardy heard what Aatur Rahman had to say but did not commit to cooperate with Ghulam Mohammad. However, he did not negate the possibility either, and said that he would decide on the matter after his return to Pakistan. It is possible that Ghulam Mohammad had other contacts with Suhrawardy through some of his own trusted men.⁷⁰⁴

When Ayub Khan, Iskandar Mirza, Ispahani, Mohammad Ali and such others came to know that Ghulam Mohammad was trying to get Suhrawardy as the Prime Minister in his cabinet, they opposed it and advised him against it. Under this pressure Ghulam Mohammad had to change his plan, but it was kept secret from his contacts within the Awami League.⁷⁰⁵

In order to handle the situation in the new context, Ghulam Mohammad in his characteristic way began a new conspiracy by trying to keep Fazlul Huq and Suhrawardy apart. He sent Mohammad Ali to Fazlul Huq for talks on reorganizing the

⁷⁰³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 118, also Kamruddin Ahmad, *The Social History of East Pakistan*, pp. 133-34.

⁷⁰⁴ Kamruddin Ahmad, *Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 118.

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

central and the provincial cabinets. Mohammad Ali had no difficulty in obeying the orders of the Governor General. Neither had Fazlul Huq any real difficulty in carrying discussions about his return to power with a man who had denounced him as a traitor and disgraced and humiliated him in many ways.⁷⁰⁶ These machinations were classic examples of class collaboration at the expense of the people who voted them to power.

On his return, Suhrawardy was given a warm welcome at the Karachi airport. He met Ghulam Mohammad, who to his surprise, told him that it would not be possible to immediately have him as the Prime Minister because of certain difficulties, and he needed some time for other people to get used to him as a cabinet colleague. However, he would be the virtual or *de facto* Prime Minister while Mohammad Ali would continue as the formal and *de jure* Prime Minister. Suhrawardy was offered a comparatively minor situation in the cabinet as the Law Minister.⁷⁰⁷

Suhrawardy decided to accept the offer and began to persuade his fellow Awami League leaders who were opposed to the compromise and who for some time continued to insist that he should not accept anything less than the post of Prime Minister. But Suhrawardy explained to them that Ghulam Mohammad, while assigning the Law Ministry to him, had promised to entrust him with the responsibility of drafting a constitution for Pakistan. Under the circumstance a constitution was much more important than his prime ministership and that it would come to him automatically after the constitutional job was done. Suhrawardy, however, failed to convince all his lieutenants in the Awami League, most of whom returned to East Bengal after the talks.⁷⁰⁸

Suhrawardy was drafted in the cabinet which included General Iskandar Mirza, General Ayub Khan, Ispahani and ironically Mohammad Ali who had served under him as junior minister in the Muslim League Government in United Bengal. This was another example, a very glaring one at that, of the interests of the working and democratic people of East Bengal being thrown to the winds.

It is an interesting study to follow the reasons why the East Bengal political parties and their leaders, after the resounding victory against the Muslim League in the general election of 1954, instead of standing up against the conspiracies, machinations and divide-and-rule policies of the central government, began to crawl on all fours before the civil-military bureaucratic clique which was at the centre of power in Pakistan.

The reason for this was basically the weakness of the new petty bourgeoisie which began to emerge and take shape since 1947 in the eastern zone. It was terribly underdeveloped even in British India and the nature and extent of political opportunism and

⁷⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁷⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰⁸ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-7.

the unabashed greed for power which characterized almost the entire range of leadership was repugnant not only to the communists and workers of organizations allied to them, but to most of the rank and file of the Awami Muslim League.

The Awami Muslim League circles reacted favorably to the 23 October 1954 dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. The general secretary, Mahmudul Huq Osmani from Karachi, and the leader of the East Bengal Awami Muslim League Parliamentary Party, Aatur Rahman Khan from Dhaka, in their press statements congratulated the Governor General. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, general secretary of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League and a dismissed minister of the short-lived United Front government, sent a congratulatory telegram to the Governor General from the Dhaka central jail.⁷⁰⁹ It was this reaction to his totally undemocratic act that encouraged Ghulam Mohammad to proceed with his plans to manipulate political developments in the way he did. After having achieved considerable success in widening the division between the two main parties of the United Front, the Awami Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party, and acquiring the position of an arbiter in the conflict of interest between the two, Ghulam Mohammad announced, that he would visit Dhaka on 14 November 1954.

With the possibility of the withdrawal of 92-A and revival of the provincial government, the Awami Muslim League leaders became particularly restless because they thought that since Fazlul Huq had already announced his decision to retire from politics after being humiliated and branded a traitor by Mohammad Ali Bogra it was the Awami Muslim League which would be called to form the government. However, before his visit to Dhaka, Ghulam Mohammad issued a statement to the press that he did not consider Fazlul Huq a traitor, but considered him a friend of Pakistan. Fazlul Huq felt greatly 'inspired' by this statement and decided to return to active politics again. This decision created some frustration among the Awami Muslim League leaders, but still they expected to get a better deal from the central government.⁷¹⁰

Both Fazlul Huq and Aatur Rahman Khan actively organized a reception for the Governor General on his arrival. The competition between them assumed such ugly proportions that they were even prepared to push each other physically in order to be the first to garland Ghulam Mohammad at the airport. The crafty Ghulam Mohammad took the garlands from both without giving precedence to either.⁷¹¹

The atmosphere which prevailed in East Bengal in the middle of November was similar to the atmosphere which had prevailed in Karachi at the time when Suhrawardy was sworn in as the central minister for law. After being inducted as a central minister

⁷⁰⁹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-22; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁷¹⁰ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 273; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-3 Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 120.

⁷¹¹ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 273; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 222-3 Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 120.

Suhrawardy thought that he had become a favorite of Ghulam Mohammad and that the Krishak Praja Party, would be kept out of power. Even if they were taken in he would be consulted before any such decision was taken. But to the utter surprise of Suhrawardy and the Awami Muslim League leadership, Ghulam Mohammad appointed Abu Hossain Sarkar of the Krishak Sramik Party as a minister in his cabinet.⁷¹²

The rift within the already badly divided United Front became wider, giving enormous advantage to the Governor General. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who proposed a no-confidence motion against Fazlul Huq declared that it was a no-confidence proposal not by members of the Awami Muslim League but by members of the United Front in general. This move not only made the Krishak Sramik Party members more hostile, but also divided opinion within the Awami Muslim League leadership.⁷¹³ Faced with this development, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as general secretary, issued a mandate to Awami Muslim League members after holding a meeting of the Working Committee. Abul Mansur Ahmad and Tofazzal Hossain, editor of the *Ittefaq*, strongly opposed the move but they were told by Mujibur Rahman that it had the approval of both Suhrawardy and Bhashani in Karachi and London. The former was not available, but Bhashani told them that he had never approved such a proposal and advised them to stop the no-confidence move. But at that stage nothing could actually be done.⁷¹⁴

The United Front Parliamentary Party met on 17 February in the refreshment room of the East Bengal Assembly. Pandemonium prevailed during the meeting and the no-confidence proposal was finally placed for voting by Mujibur Rahman, Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish and Aatur Rahman Khan, who had been expecting to replace Fazlul Huq as the next Prime Minister of East Bengal. Fazlul Huq received 119 votes as against 105 received by the opposition. He was supported by Abdus Salam Khan, who had earlier formed a separate group within the Awami Muslim League and had been supporting Fazlul Huq. Nineteen other Awami Muslim League members of the Assembly also joined the Krishak Sramik Party. Thus, the no-confidence move not only broke up the United Front, but also broke up the Awami Muslim League Parliamentary Party.⁷¹⁵ Suhrawardy played an effective role in this attempt. He wanted to become the Prime Minister of Pakistan by courting favor with Ghulam Mohammad and did not hesitate to characterize the United Front as 'a conglomerate of parties' and as such of little consequence. Many people were shocked and surprised at this, because he was one of its chief architects and had worked very hard to lead it to a resounding electoral victory.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹² Kamruddin Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 119; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 278; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-4.

⁷¹³ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-6; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-81.

⁷¹⁴ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-1; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-7.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁶ Oli Ahad *op. cit.*, pp. 226-7.

Fazlul Huq, on the other hand, was doing the same thing in Karachi by trying to be close to Ghulam Mohammad in the expectation of being a greater favorite. Neither Suhrawardy nor Fazlul Huq had the political integrity and understanding to realize that the strength of both of them lay actually in their unity and mutual co-operation. Since they did not have a broad vision even of their own self-interest, they did not hesitate to stoop low and engage in ugly conspiracies rather than stand on the support of the people of East Bengal extended to them in the most generous and powerful manner.

The president of the dissolved Constituent Assembly, Tamizuddin Khan, filed a case in the Sindh Chief Court against the dissolution and the verdict was given in his favor. The central government appealed in the Supreme Court of Pakistan which cancelled the Sindh Chief Court verdict, and upheld the Governor General's order dissolving the Constituent Assembly, but at the same time ordered the re-constitution of the Constituent Assembly. On 16 April 1955, the Governor General, issued the Constitution Convention order.⁷¹⁷

Bhashani reached Bombay from London on 5 January 1955 and from there came to Calcutta, where he stayed till the end of April, until the ban on his entry into Pakistan was withdrawn.⁷¹⁸ Before that a very surprising move took place in an influential circle of the Awami League. The *Ittefaq*, started writing against Bhashani's return to East Bengal on the plea that his return would create new difficulties in the already delicate situation. Bhashani was thus advised to stay back in Calcutta indefinitely. However, Bhashani returned to Dhaka on 25 April 1955.⁷¹⁹ Before that a public meeting was organized by the Awami Muslim League in Dhaka on 15 April at Paltan Maidan demanding the withdrawal of section 92-A and the release of political prisoners, particularly the withdrawal of the order prohibiting Bhashani to enter Pakistan.⁷²⁰ Suhrawardy and Iskandar Mirza came to Dhaka to persuade both the Awami Muslim League and the Krishak Sramik Party to join the Constitution Convention.⁷²¹

On Suhrawardy's direction, a joint meeting of the members of the Awami Muslim League Working Committee and the members of the Parliamentary Party was held at the Government House at Dhaka and the decision to join the Convention was made. There was, however, some opposition on the question of parity of representation between East and West Pakistan and the formation of a single province comprising the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, Balochistan, Sindh and Khairpur. This opposition, however, was overruled because the vast majority was in favor of a

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 228-9.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷²¹ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

compromise with the centre and wanted to return to power as quickly as possible.⁷²² The leader of the Krishak Sramik Party, Fazlul Huq, rejected the Constitutional Convention Order.⁷²³ This was undoubtedly part of Ghulam Mohammad's game as he did not want smooth sailing in the proceedings of the Convention.

As soon as Bhashani returned to Dhaka, a meeting of the Awami Muslim League Working Committee was held on 26 April 1955. At first Bhashani was unwilling to endorse the decision of the earlier meeting for joining the Convention and expressed his apprehensions about the implementation of the twenty-one points, etc. However, he agreed to join when Suhrawardy gave him the following promise in writing:

I hereby declare that I shall try my utmost to get the 21-point programme and joint electorate (accepted) by the Constitution Convention so far as the proposal affects the Constitution. On failure to do so I shall resign from the Ministry.⁷²⁴

This written undertaking indicated quite clearly the lack of confidence and trust that Bhashani had in Suhrawardy.

Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, while in Calcutta, had already made a press statement opposing the Governor General's right to call the Constitution Convention and had appealed for boycotting it.⁷²⁵ But Suhrawardy arranged to lift the ban on his return to Pakistan, went to Calcutta personally, and accompanied Bhashani on his return journey to Dhaka on 25 April 1955.⁷²⁶ It is interesting to note that Suhrawardy did little for Bhashani's return even after he became central minister and let him languish in a cheap Calcutta hotel since his arrival there in the first week of January 1955. But as soon as the Awami Muslim League Working Committee and the Parliamentary Party were in a crisis which could not be resolved without Bhashani's presence and consent, Suhrawardy not only acted immediately, but personally went to Calcutta to bring him back to Dhaka.

Suhrawardy was finally able to persuade Bhashani to give up his opposition to the Constitution Convention, but Fazlul Haq and the Krishak Sramik Party, advised by Iskandar Mirza, began to oppose it and held meetings against the Governor General's authority to convene such a Convention. Iskandar Mirza at that time was already engaged in his game to replace Ghulam Mohammad as the Governor General. When Suhrawardy was holding a joint meeting of Awami Muslim League Parliamentary Party members and the members of the working committee at the Government House, Dhaka, Iskandar Mirza was personally present in a similar meeting of the Krishak

⁷²² Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁷²³ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁷²⁴ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-30.

⁷²⁵ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

Sramik Party, being held at the same time in another room of the Government House, presided over by Fazlul Haq. Actually the decision to boycott the Constitution Convention was taken here, and announced afterwards by Fazlul Haq.⁷²⁷

The Krishak Sramik Party, Muslim League and all opposition parties except the Awami League, decided to boycott the Convention and launched an agitation to get a democratically constituted Constituent Assembly. The central government postponed the date of filing nomination papers twice. Finally, nomination papers were filed by Awami League candidates, Suhrawardy, Bhashani, Ataur Rahman Khan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Tofazzal Hossain (Manik Mian), Yar Mohammad Khan and Oli Ahad. Awami Muslim League was at that time virtually isolated from almost the entire opposition political parties and opinion in East Bengal.⁷²⁸

Much to the frustration of the Awami Muslim League, the Governor General cancelled the Constitution Convention Order on 10 May 1955 when the Federal Court gave its verdict against the said order and ordered the constituting of a Constituent Assembly. Accordingly, the Governor General issued an order on 28 May 1955, constituting the Constituent Assembly consisting of eighty members-forty from the West and forty from the East and including both Muslim and non-Muslim.⁷²⁹ Almost immediately after issuing his order for re-constituting the Constituent Assembly Ghulam Mohammad had to leave Pakistan for treatment in a Zurich hospital. Suhrawardy followed him to Zurich for consultation on constitutional matters.⁷³⁰

On 3 June 1955, the central government lifted section 92-A from East Bengal. Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra came to Dhaka and a new provincial government was sworn in on 6 June 1955, with Abu Hossain Sarkar as the Prime Minister, evidently with the consent and collaboration of Fazlul Huq. The Governor of East Bengal, Shahabuddin, was opposed to this procedure, and since all conventions were ignored in the formation of this new ministry, he resigned his governorship. Chief Justice of Dhaka High Court, Aminuddin Ahmad, replaced him as the Governor of East Bengal.⁷³¹

Thirty-eight Awami Muslim League members of the East Bengal Assembly supported the United Front government; of them eighteen actually joined the Krishak Sramik Party. Abdus Salam Khan of Faridpur and Hashimuddin Ahmad of Mymensingh, who were leaders of an Awami Muslim League faction of twenty members, became ministers. Nizam-e-Islam and the Scheduled Caste Federation also joined the ministry

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 282-3.

⁷²⁸ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 283; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.* p. 230.

⁷²⁹ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁷³⁰ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

⁷³¹ Oli Ahad, p. 232; Abul Mansur Ahmad *op. cit.*, p. 284.

as did the Ganatantri Dal. Thus, in spite of the fact that the Awami Muslim League remained out of the ministry, it was considered as a government of the United Front.⁷³²

The new Constituent Assembly was formed on 21 June 1955. Of the forty members from East Bengal, thirty-one were Muslims and nine were non-Muslims. Among the Muslim members United Front had sixteen, Awami Muslim League twelve, Muslim League one, and independent two. Of the non-Muslim members Congress had four, United Progressive Party two and Scheduled Caste Federation three.⁷³³

In the afternoon of 17 June, a large public meeting had been organized by the Awami Muslim League at Paltan Maidan, Dhaka. Presided over by Bhashani, the meeting demanded a constitution providing regional autonomy on the basis of the 21-point. A meeting of the Awami Muslim League Working Committee held on 23 June and presided over by Aatur Rahman Khan, resolved that failing to incorporate regional autonomy in the Constitution, the Awami Muslim League members of the Constituent Assembly would resign. However, though regional autonomy was not provided in the 1956 Constitution, of which Suhrawardy was one of the chief architects, the Awami Muslim League members, instead of resigning from the Constituent Assembly joined the government both at the centre and in East Bengal.⁷³⁴

On 14 June 1957, the Awami League Prime Minister Suhrawardy declared, in a big Paltan Maidan meeting, at Dhaka that the 1956 Constitution had provided 98 percent autonomy to East Pakistan.⁷³⁵ Aatur Rahman Khan, chief minister of East Pakistan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, general secretary of the Awami League, instead of opposing Suhrawardy's claim, supported it with contrived silence. However, these same leaders, immediately after the fall of the Suhrawardy ministry at the centre, again became great champions of the autonomy for East Pakistan, and while doing so did not hesitate to declare that there was no provision for East Pakistan's autonomy in the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan.

The first session of the newly formed Constituent Assembly was convened at Murree in West Pakistan on 7 July 1955. Twelve Awami Muslim League members were elected by the members of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, and there were sixteen United Front members. They left Dhaka by air on 5 July. A meeting of the Central Working Committee of the Awami Muslim League was called at Lahore on the same day. Aatur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman reached Lahore for the meeting, in which leaders and members other than those of the Constituent Assembly were present. The main agenda for discussion was the constitution and continuation of Suhrawardy in the Mohammad Ali ministry and a number of

⁷³² Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

⁷³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-4.

⁷³⁴ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

resolutions were adopted. Suhrawardy left Lahore for Murree with Pir of Manki Sharif and some of his lieutenants including Abul Mansur Ahmad. On the second day the Working Committee meeting was presided over by Nawabzada Nasrullah.⁷³⁶

The Murree session of the Constituent Assembly began on 7 July 1955, and continued till 14 July. During the session, Suhrawardy and other leaders of the Awami Muslim League had special sessions with Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani, the governor of West Pakistan and first chairman of the Constituent Assembly nominated by the Governor General, and some other leaders of West Pakistan. They talked about the importance of parity of representation as well as One Unit in West Pakistan. These two objectives were already declared through a formal ordinance of the Governor General on the basis of which voting took place in the provincial assemblies for equal representation (40:40) for both wings in the Constituent Assembly.⁷³⁷

The parity of representation between East and West Pakistan had been opposed both by Bhashani and Fazlul Huq. Earlier, in a number of meetings of the members of the Awami Muslim League Working Committee and members of the legislature debated the issue, but finally Suhrawardy said that unless it was accepted, the Governor General and the West Pakistani leaders would not agree to constitute a new Constituent Assembly. On the basis of this argument the Awami Muslim League agreed to parity. But it was given to understand that this was a temporary arrangement and not a permanent structural arrangement for the new constitution. What is really astonishing is the fact that Suhrawardy, while presenting this argument tried to give the impression that formation of the new Constituent Assembly depended on the sweet will of the Governor General, when in reality it had to be constituted in accordance with an order of the federal court of Pakistan. The Governor General had no option in the matter. This demonstrated Suhrawardy's eagerness to pave the way to his becoming Prime Minister.

The East Pakistani delegates, however, agreed to the two provisions on condition that (i) in matters of representation, and in the distribution of jobs, trade and industry, finance, army etc. parity would have to be observed; (ii) full regional autonomy would have to be granted; (iii) joint electorate system would have to be introduced; and (iv) both Bengali and Urdu would have to be the state languages of Pakistan.⁷³⁸ That there was not the slightest possibility of realizing terms (1) and (2) under the prevailing conditions was apparent to all.

⁷³⁶ Abul Mansur Ahmad, pp. 286-8.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 292-3.

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 294-5.

Chapter Thirty-One

CHOWDHURY MOHAMMAD ALI - THE NEW PRIME MINISTER

The developments which followed the Murree session of the Constituent Assembly clearly showed that both the Awami Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party leaders, representing East Bengal, were obsessed with posts of prime minister, ministers etc. Neither of them cared a fig for the interests of the people of East Bengal. The Awami Muslim Leaguers seemed to be willing to do anything to install Suhrawardy as Prime Minister of Pakistan. Thus, they made compromises with West Pakistani leaders like Iskandar Mirza, Gurmani and others.

The date for electing the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Provincial Assembly in Dhaka was fixed for 5 August 1955 and Awami Muslim League candidates were defeated by 170-177 votes. Abdul Hakim and Shahed Ali of the Krishak Sramik Party were elected Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively with the support of the Congress and the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF). A meeting of the Awami Muslim League Working Committee was called in Karachi on 10 August for an assessment of the situation.⁷³⁹

A meeting of the Constituent Assembly was held in Karachi on 8 August, as announced earlier, under the presidentship of Gurmani. But since the ministry could not be formed by that time, the session was postponed and 12 August was fixed for electing the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Constituent Assembly.

The leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party was to be elected on 7 August. Strangely enough the Krishak Sramik Party leaders, under Fazlul Huq, began to canvass for Mohammad Ali Bogra for the post. On the other hand, the Awami Muslim League leaders, 'inspired' by Suhrawardy, began to do the same for Chowdhury Mohammad Ali. The reckonings of the Awami Muslim Leaguers were based on the assumption that since there was a 'convention' of not having the Prime Minister and the Governor General from the same zone at the same time, so with Iskandar Mirza of West Pakistan as the Governor General, the Prime Minister would have to be from East Bengal, and Suhrawardy was the obvious choice. So the 'great democrats' of the Awami Muslim League had no hesitation in canvassing for Chowdhury Mohammad Ali, a Pakistani ex-civil service man, for the leadership of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party in the Constituent Assembly. Similar was the case with the Krishak Sramik Party

⁷³⁹ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

who also, for similar reasons, had no hesitation to canvass for Mohammad Ali Bogra who had earlier disgraced and humiliated Fazlul Huq and even called him a traitor.⁷⁴⁰

On 7 August, Chowdhury Mohammad Ali, supported by the West Pakistanis, was elected leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party.⁷⁴¹ Soon afterwards the Awami Muslim Leaguers were told that there were definite difficulties in having Suhrawardy as the Prime Minister because of certain objections from the scheduled caste members of East Bengal who were against having joint electorates immediately and wanted to have reservations for another ten years. Moreover, they were told that the demands for full regional autonomy was also unacceptable. With these objections, they clearly violated the constitutional agreement they had signed in Murree.⁷⁴² However, the Awami Muslim Leaguers did not have the guts to publicly denounce this clear betrayal of a solemnly signed agreement. Instead they continued compromising in the expectation that ultimately Suhrawardy would be asked to form the government at the centre and the provincial government would be restored in East Bengal under the leadership of the Awami Muslim League.

Since Chowdhury Mohammad Ali had been elected leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party, the Awami Muslim League leaders including Suhrawardy were expecting that the Governor General would call the latter to form the ministry. But nothing happened. The leaders of the Krishak Sramik Party and the Scheduled Caste Federation held talks with Chowdhury Mohammad Ali and other West Pakistani leaders. Chowdhury Mohammad Ali then met Suhrawardy at the latter's residence and held confidential talks with him.⁷⁴³ Later it became known that he was offered the post of deputy prime minister with Chowdhury Mohammad Ali as Prime Minister. Suhrawardy was told that he would be the virtual Prime Minister in the same manner as he had been told by Ghulam Mohammad at the time of his acceptance of a ministry under Mohammad Ali Bogra. Suhrawardy and other Awami Muslim Leaguers declined the offer.⁷⁴⁴ They had to, because to become a deputy prime minister under a prime minister of the Muslim League which they had completely decimated in East Bengal would have been suicidal. It would have isolated the Awami Muslim League, including Suhrawardy, from all political forces of East Bengal, which constituted their support base and would have practically ruined Suhrawardy's prospects of becoming prime minister. It would also have created an immediate rift within the Awami Muslim League because it was certain that Bhashani would oppose such a move. Bhashani had practically no involvement in these activities of his party men at Karachi.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 301-303.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 305-11.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 304-5.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

On 7 August, the day Chowdhury Mohammad Ali was elected Muslim League Parliamentary Party leader, Suhrawardy had several confidential telephone conversations with Iskandar Mirza, and in the evening Suhrawardy took Abul Mansur Ahmad, Aaur Rahman Khan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the residence of Mirza and left them there for talks with him. It was clear that they were left there to be persuaded by the Governor General on matters which were delicate for Suhrawardy. During the discussion Mirza told them that 'full' regional autonomy, 'parity in all respects' and joint electorate without reservation was unacceptable to them.⁷⁴⁵ The three opposed the change in the Murree Agreement (the original signed copy was in the custody of Gurmani who had presided over that Constituent Assembly session) which had been signed by representatives of both East and West Pakistan. But Mirza remained unmoved.⁷⁴⁶ It became clear that Mirza had already reached an agreement on this with Suhrawardy and the latter, instead of informing them personally, left it to the resources of Iskandar Mirza. Perhaps Mirza told him that if the Awami Muslim League accepted such terms Suhrawardy could be commissioned to form the ministry. But it turned out differently much to the surprise of the Awami Muslim Leaguers.

On 8 August, Suhrawardy again sent the three of them to Gurmani's house in his car for discussions. Daulatana, Chundrigarh, Dosti, Khuhro, Rashdi, Talpur, Haroon and others were also present. Chowdhury Mohammad Ali was conspicuously absent. There they were told that in spite of being the majority in East Bengal, the United Front led by Fazlul Huq, was not demanding the post of prime minister. In fact, they were agreeable to having Chowdhury Mohammad Ali as prime minister. They were also told that Fazlul Huq had the support of the Hindu members of the Constituent Assembly. Under such circumstances it was not possible for them to persuade the Muslim Leaguers to agree to have Suhrawardy as the prime minister and since they would have nothing less than this top post, Chowdhury Mohammad Ali had to be commissioned to form the government.⁷⁴⁷

It was quite clear from Suhrawardy's political moves even within his own party that he was actually agreeable to all that Gurmani had said. The real reason for this, however, remained apparently unknown since the only driving force in politics was to somehow be installed in power, if not right then, then at least in the near future.

Chowdhury Mohammad Ali of the Muslim League formed the government at the centre as prime minister on 10 August 1955. In the name of United Front the Krishak Sramik Party, the Congress and the Scheduled Caste Federation also supported him and joined the ministry. Fazlul Huq became the interior minister in the new cabinet.⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 305-7.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 309-11.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

Mohammad Ali Bogra was again appointed as Pakistan's ambassador to the US and left Karachi for Washington.

Chapter Thirty-Two

CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATE ON THE ONE UNIT PLAN

The One Unit plan was introduced in the Constituent Assembly session in August 1955. It was a major constitutional change and should have been introduced as a part of the Constitutional proposal itself. But instead it was introduced separately in a very abrupt and conspiratorial way so that it would find a relatively smooth passage during the debate on the proper constitutional bill. During the debate on the One Unit plan the Krishak Sramik Party members, as partners in government, kept their peace but it was very strongly opposed by the Awami Muslim League. It is, necessary to quote from the Constituent Assembly speeches of four Awami Muslim League leaders during the debate. On 25 August 1955, participating in the Constituent Assembly debate on the One Unit plan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman⁷⁴⁹ said,

Why do you want it to take up just now? What about the State Language, Bengali? What about joint electorate? What about autonomy? The people of East Bengal will be prepared to consider One Unit with all these things. So I appeal to my friends on that side to allow the people to give their verdict in any way, in the form of referendum or in the form of plebiscite. Let the people of Frontier say that they want One Unit. At the moment they say that they are against it. But Dr. Khan Sahib said the other day that people were in favor of One Unit, but his brother Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Pir Sahib of Manki Sharif said that they were against it. Now, who will judge? Who should be the judge? If the people of the Frontier say that they are in favor of One Unit, we have no objection to that. Similarly in Sind, Mr. Khuhro says that they are in favor of it, while Mr. G.M. Syed and others say that people are against One Unit. All right, if they are in favor let a referendum be held and let the people decide themselves and we will accept it.

On the question of Karachi he said,

As far as Karachi is concerned, there should be no referendum in Karachi because it is the Federal Capital made by Quaid-i-Azam and we will not allow people to insult Quaid-e-Azam and the late Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan. We have no right to take Karachi from the people of Karachi and from the people of East Pakistan. It belongs to us also as it belongs to other parts of Pakistan. We have spent so much money on its development. Why do you want to make another

⁷⁴⁹ *Bangladesh Freedom War Documents* vol. I, Bangladesh Government Information Ministry, Dhaka, p. 431.

capital and spend hundreds and thousands of rupees and for which you will require at least fifty years.

At the end of his short speech he said,

So, I will appeal to you although you have force at your disposal, that for the sake of Pakistan, for the sake of democracy, for the sake of humanity, for the sake of Quaid-e-Azam, go to the people, let the people give their verdict and we will accept it.

Abul Mansur Ahmad,⁷⁵⁰ while taking part in the debate on 31 August, said,

There is a suspicion also in the minds of the people of East Pakistan. You remember, Sir, that the people of East Pakistan accepted the principle of parity in all respects. This was a great sacrifice on the part of the people of East Pakistan because they are actually in a majority and they shall continue to remain in a majority for another two or three decades.

With regard to the violation of the so-called convention he said,

I have already referred, Sir, why the people of East Bengal have become suspicious of late about the bona fides of the ruling junta of Karachi. Sir, we have seen very recently how the interest and wishes of the people of Bengal have been ignored on the question of division of powers and parity; how the salutary convention that had grown in Pakistan for the last eight years with regard to the appointment of Governor General and the Prime Minister from two wings has been broken at the very first opportunity.

He very strongly opposed the constitutional arrangement by which the capital would be shifted to Rawalpindi (Islamabad) and Karachi would be handed over to West Pakistan. On the question of One Unit he said,

Sir, we are unanimous in voicing our demand that regional autonomy should be given to both West Pakistan and East Pakistan. Sir, again I bring you back to the provisions made in Clause 4 which, as I have already submitted, is a replica of Section 9 of Indian Independence Act, 1947, that all powers should be given to Governor General for an indefinite period. No mention of autonomy has been made. There is no possibility of having it if this bill is accepted in this House. Sir, this has given rise to a suspicion, a bona fide and genuine suspicion, in the minds of the people of East Pakistan because we believed the demand of integration of West Pakistan was a demand of the people for they said that this would enable

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 433-7.

West Pakistan to put themselves on the same footing with ourselves or East Pakistan. We are one region, the entire East Pakistan is one compact geographical and political unit, let West Pakistan also get itself into one compact political area so that we should be two brothers - How beautiful! But, Sir, we find that arrangements have been made, attempts are being made, to give no democratic rights, no autonomy to West Pakistan people. Instead of democracy they are giving to West Pakistani people an 'officiocracy'. West Pakistan people must think that if they are not granted regional autonomy, naturally East Pakistan people will not get autonomy. We cannot claim autonomy alone. as soon as this is done there will be utterances made towards East Pakistan people by our learned leaders, the Prime Minister and the Governor General over Radio Pakistan: 'oh! ye people of East Pakistan! Wait for sometime; we are busy managing West Pakistan. As soon as we shall have finished this, we shall surely grant whatever you want.' That is the scheme of things that they want to rush through. Therefore, we have grown suspicious and we cannot in the interest of democracy and autonomy of both wings of Pakistan and in the interest of the people allow this bill to be rushed through in this manner without reference to public opinion.

Ataur Rahman Khan⁷⁵¹ took part in the debate on One Unit on 6 September. Referring to the violation of the Murree Agreement he said,

It was said that the claim of the Bengali language will be recognized before we actually frame the constitution along with the fullest regional autonomy to East Bengal, the question of One Unit, Joint electorates. It was said all these things will be done together as the basis for the Constitution. The agreement has not been signed by the people in power. They refuse. It does not behoove them to say that you agreed to a thing and now you are going back. Mr. Aziz Din's strongest argument was that Mr. Suhrawardy had supported it. Is that a crime? He says that such and such gave this statement or that statement. Yes, Sir, we have a right to refuse under the changed circumstances I when the basis of the agreement has broken down.

With regard to parity he said,

As I was telling you about parity I must mention, Sir, that for the last eight years we fought against parity; we did not want parity; it is no basis of democracy; it is an arrangement we have been fighting against. Ultimately when we found we must have an agreed Constitution and that Constitution was to be based on federal scheme, we came to the conclusion that we must have parity; we agreed to it. We thought that parity is the basis of federation and so we agreed to parity.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*

But parity in what respect? Having 40:40 in this house and not in other matters at all. I now sincerely believe that they just put us into a trap. They just got us agreed to that parity of 40 in this House from East Bengal and 40 from West Pakistan and then they forgot about all those assurances that parity was to be in all respects. Parity indicates just and fair play; parity means parity in all respects, in all walks of life, in the total wealth of the country; in all things; in matters of appointments; in matters of posts, in matters of industry and commerce; in all matters possible there must be parity and equality. Have we done it, Sir? Not at all. You from West Pakistan, have usurped to yourself the two highest posts of Pakistan at the first opportunity that you got the Governor Generalship and the Premiership.

At the end of his speech Aatur Rahman Khan said,

We don't believe in the promises any more. We must now get everything here. As I told you, five demands of East Pakistan must be conceded to, must be ensured, not by mere mouth or word, but it must be ensured in the Bill that you have brought here, namely, the West Pakistan Merger Bill.

Shaheed Suhrawardy,⁷⁵² while participating in the debate on 12 September said,

It may be said that since I was in favor of the One Unit Scheme, why today there is so much opposition to it. In short, it is due to the fact that the people have lost confidence in the good faith of the Government. Sir, I was dilating upon the attitude of various parties regarding political issues; what transpired thereafter is also well known, and is not a cabinet secret. What transpired in Murree is well known and it was talked about all over the place. What had been told to me in private by the Honorable Prime Minister and his colleagues I shall not refer to. Private conversations should be kept out of this House. The logical trend of events of what they were leading to was well known, and I pointed this out to you, not because as I said yesterday, I was not elected or selected as the Prime Minister Now, Sir, as I said, we have unhappily to go into the motive to some extent although I would much rather have not done so. Before I do that, however, I would like to place before the Honorable Prime Minister the four principles which hang together and for which we can support the One-Unit Scheme. If any of these principles are destroyed, you destroy the support to your scheme. These principles are: firstly, the integration of West Pakistan - that integration can be in various forms, it does not necessarily mean unification. You can have unification, you can have zonal sub-federations, or you can even bring some provinces together and instead of having ten or eleven provinces, you may have three or four provinces just as suits your administrative convenience

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 444-5.

keeping in view the views of the people whom I would request you to consult. Secondly, then, Sir, parity between East and West Pakistan. This is the important part of the principle. Thirdly, division of the offices of the Governor General and the Prime Minister between East and West Pakistan which forms a principle of that parity, because the principle of that parity is again a question of division of powers....the fourth principle also thereafter was: regional or zonal autonomy. All these principles hang together. You have destroyed one principle and with that you have destroyed the principle of parity. The main basis of the unification of Pakistan, viz., that we as equal partners will work together, has been destroyed by you.

Whatever was said in the Constituent Assembly by the leaders of the Awami Muslim League as spokesmen for East Pakistan was totally ignored by the leaders of West Pakistan, and the West Pakistan merger bill was passed by the might of government majority on 30 September 1955.⁷⁵³

In the constitutional debate on the West Pakistan Merger Bill, the Awami Muslim League leaders took a very unified stand. From Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy they all spoke like one man. It must also be mentioned here that they also took a unified stand at Murree when they reached an agreement on five points with the leaders of West Pakistan. The question of the One Unit concerned the West Pakistani Muslim League leaders and their supporters directly, therefore in the August-September 1955 session of the Constituent Assembly they owned only one point, One Unit for West Pakistan, and introduced the West Pakistan Merger Bill. There was a lot of democratic content in what the Awami Muslim League leaders said against the One Unit plan, but at the same time it betrayed a certain opportunism both in case of their support as well as their opposition to it.

During their speeches on the One Unit debate, they themselves confessed that in spite of their earlier acceptance of the One Unit plan, they decided to oppose it because the convention of not having the two highest positions of the state from one wing was violated when Chowdhury Mohammad Ali of West Pakistan became the Prime Minister instead of Suhrawardy of East Pakistan. This they regarded also as a violation of the principle of parity, because by concentrating the powers of the Governor General and the Prime Minister in the hands of West Pakistanis alone, the basis of sharing equal powers was destroyed.

It is interesting to observe here that in spite of the Awami Muslim League leaders' emphasis on, and demand for parity, in all respects-economic, state power etc.-they agreed to the 40:40 representation from each wing before constitutionally being ensured about 'parity in all respects.' Ataur Rahman Khan spoke about being trapped by them.

⁷⁵³ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

The naiveté of the Awami Muslim League leaders appears quite amazing. They did not even care to keep a signed copy of the Murree Agreement. The single copy of the Agreement signed by the leaders of the three parties was kept in the custody of Mushtaq Ahmed Gurmani, as President of the Constituent Assembly. If the Awami Muslim League leaders had kept a signed copy of the Agreement they could have confronted the Muslim League leaders with it. They could even have published it in the newspapers and strengthened their demand for implementation of the agreed five points. Instead Suhrawardy talked about verbal and private conversations between him and the Prime Minister which was not possible for him to reveal before the members of the Constituent Assembly.

The question of representation was particularly important at the time of constitution-making. The leaders of the Krishak Sramik Party remained completely undisturbed by all the conspiratorial moves of the West Pakistan Muslim League leaders as they were callously satisfied with government jobs. The Awami Muslim League leaders completely failed to realize that they were dealing with enemies who had real power and force of all kinds at their disposal and it was necessary to confront them with at least one power, the power of majority in the Constituent Assembly.

The attitude of the Awami Muslim League leaders towards the question of One Unit in West Pakistan is exemplified in Suhrawardy's Constituent Assembly speech on the question. In it the whole emphasis was on 'administrative convenience,' as if reorganization of provinces or regions, or even areas, is basically an administrative matter. This was so from the point of view of the West Pakistani ruling classes and their leaders, but it had nothing to do with democracy which the Awami Muslim League leaders were vociferously trying to uphold during the Constituent Assembly debates. So, while indicating the nature of the question of One Unit, Suhrawardy actually subscribed to the 'administrative' views of his West Pakistani counterparts and colleagues in the Assembly. In fact, West Pakistan was not a homogeneous region ethnically, linguistically and culturally in the true sense of the term. The Punjabis, the Sindhis, the Pathans, the Balochis and others did not belong to one nation on the basis of race, language, culture etc. It was, therefore, necessary to properly reorganize the areas on linguistic and racial basis and give them as much freedom as possible under the given circumstances. So their basic interests were not at variance with the basic regional interests of East Bengal. Considered in this light the whole plan for the unification of West Pakistan in the name of administrative and political convenience of the ruling classes of that wing was an utterly reactionary and anti-people conspiracy from the very beginning, even before the violation of the so called convention to which the Awami Muslim League leaders made frequent references.

The whole policy of unifying the provinces in West Pakistan into One Unit by abolishing the provinces was an attempt to further deprive the already deprived people of Sindh, North-West Frontier, Balochistan and other areas from whatever little they

were getting through their provincial administrations. It would centralize to a much greater degree the powers of the capitalist-landlord-bureaucratic clique in West Pakistan. Thus, the whole scheme was against the interests of the people of East Bengal, but much more so against the peoples of West Pakistan themselves. Opposition to it developed quite rapidly all over West Pakistan and soon the One Unit administrative arrangement had to be scrapped.

It is quite clear from the way the Awami Muslim League supported the One Unit plan at Murree that they had very little regard for the ethnic, linguistic, cultural, in one word national interests of the peoples of Sindh, Frontier Province, Balochistan and also the Punjab and other areas-interests which were basically the same as their own. Thus, on the one hand, they were trying, with all their limitations, to have regional autonomy etc. for East Bengal, but on the other hand they were united with the West Pakistani power clique in their attempts to undermine the interests of the various nations and nationalities and they ignored the autonomy question for the provinces of West Pakistan. So, in the matter of promoting their own interest at the expense of other peoples, they were not basically different from their West Pakistani counterparts!

It is true that during the constitutional debates on the one unit plan, the Awami Muslim League leaders talked about a referendum on the question and also about the rights of the peoples of Sindh, Frontier, Balochistan etc., but these ideas had surprisingly not occurred to them when they signed the agreement with West Pakistani leaders at Murree.

Considering the class position of the Awami Muslim League, there was nothing to be surprised at when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as the top leader of the Awami League government in Bangladesh, refused to grant any rights to the Urdu-speaking people and the peoples of Chittagong Hill Tracts after 1971 and ordered them to become Bengalis. There is nothing to be surprised when later Ziaur Rahman, Ershad, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, representing the same class interests, did everything possible to repress and suppress the non-Bengalis, and particularly the peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in spite of the fraud the Awami League government perpetrated on them in the name of a Peace Agreement. There is nothing to be surprised at the fact that after signing the so-called Peace Agreement, the leader of Janasanghati Samity, Shantu Larma, is now crying in the wilderness on being trapped by the Awami League government and their peace-loving leader. Its origin can be traced to the class character of the Awami League, the various manifestations of which were quite evident at an early stage, and more so during and before the constitutional debate on the One Unit Plan.

Chapter Thirty-Three

THE UNITED FRONT MINISTRY IN EAST BENGAL

On 5 June 1955, section 92-A was lifted in East Bengal by a proclamation of Governor General.⁷⁵⁴ As required by the ministry of A.K. Fazlul Huq was automatically revived and he had to formally resign, which he did.⁷⁵⁵ Abu Hossain Sarkar, who was commissioned to form the government in East Bengal, had also resigned as a central minister.⁷⁵⁶ On 6 June, he was sworn in as the prime minister of East Bengal. The portfolios were distributed in the following manner: Abu Hossain Sarkar (Home and Chief Ministerial Department); Ashrafuddin Chowdhury (Finance and education); Syed Azizul Huq (Commerce, Labour, Industries and Revenue); Abdus Salam Khan (Communication, Building and Irrigation, Local Self-Government and Public Health); and Hashemuddin Ahmad (Food and Agriculture and Judicial). Sarkar told the pressmen after the swearing-in ceremony that the skeleton cabinet would be expanded soon.⁷⁵⁷ He also announced that the release of political prisoners would be given first priority by his government and he would try to implement the 21-point election mandate of the United Front as far as possible. About the inclusion of the Awami Muslim League in the government, he said that since they had left the United Front there was no question of their inclusion in the cabinet until they decide to return to its fold.⁷⁵⁸

The day after his assumption of office Sarkar passed orders for the release of political prisoners. At the initial stage all members of the Legislative Assembly, including two communists, seven members of Ganatantri Dal, one of minority United Front and one independent and four other prisoners were released. The released prisoners were Akkhai Burman and Purnendu Dastidar (Communist Party); Mahmud Ali, Haji Mohammad Danesh, Khalifa Ahmed, Aatur Rahman, Dewan Mahbub Ali, Azizul Huq and B.C. Chatterjee (Ganatantri Dal); Phani Majumdar (Minority United Front) and Prasun Kumar Ray (Independent).⁷⁵⁹

The Pakistan Observer of 11 June 1955, reported that about 500 prisoners, who were arrested before and after the imposition of section 92-A in East Bengal, were to be released within the month. The government would consider the cases of those prisoners against whom there were no specific charges, and with regard to the others the centre

⁷⁵⁴ *Pakistan Observer*, 6 June 1955.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7 June 1955.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 June 1955.

would be consulted. In addition to this, Sarkar sent a message to the Communist Party leaders that since he was now the Prime Minister they had no need to remain underground. He also said that all warrants against those who were in hiding would be withdrawn soon. The provincial committee of the party considered the message but opinions were divided. Some said that since the warrants had been withdrawn they should come out in the open, otherwise it would strengthen the government propaganda that the party was engaged in subversive activities against the state. Moreover, all opportunities for open work should be used so that misconceptions regarding the party could then be removed from the minds of the people in general. The other opinion was that since an extremely reactionary government was in power at the centre, Abu Hossain Sarkar, in spite of being a good man personally, would have little choice regarding government policy towards the Communist Party. So, if they came out in the open and then suddenly the government decided to arrest them, the party would face a breakdown situation.⁷⁶⁰ The latter argument had more substance in it because the Communist Party was still illegal in East Bengal and there was no talk about lifting the ban on them.

Finally, the provincial committee of the Communist Party decided that they would accept the offer of the East Bengal Prime Minister and their members who were underground would come out in the open. Moni Singh was in favor of this decision, but it was opposed by Khoka Ray.⁷⁶¹

The Ganatantri Dal arranged a public reception at Paltan Maidan in Dhaka for the Communist Party members who were released from jail as well for those who came out into the open from their underground shelters.⁷⁶² The party also held a press conference, which was the first in its post-independence history.⁷⁶³ But there was a constant surveillance of the movements of these leaders and on their main shelter at Siddiquebazar in Dhaka.⁷⁶⁴

The underground communist leaders like Moni Singh, Khoka Ray, Barin Datta, Altaf Ali, Gyan Chakravarty, Shukhendu Dastidar, Nalini Das, Abdul Kader Chowdhury, Moni Krishna Sen, Mukul Sen, Jyotish Basu, Ajoy Ray, Sachin Basu, Saradindu Dastidar and others who were in jail from 1948-49, came into the open in July 1955.⁷⁶⁵ But one month later a massive attack on the Communist Party was launched by the provincial government on the pretext that the party had engineered and organized the strike of the police forces in East Bengal in August. However, there was no question of communist involvement in that strike. In fact no party was actually involved and it was organized

⁷⁶⁰ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-9; Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶² Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*; Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁷⁶⁴ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁷⁶⁵ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

by members of the police forces themselves. But the government took the opportunity to unleash an attack and ordered the arrest of all members of the Communist Party.⁷⁶⁶ This attack was undoubtedly a result of the provincial government's consultation with the central government which was a sworn enemy of the communists and a stooge of US imperialism.

A large number of party members were arrested in spite of their decision to remain alert and Abu Hossain Sarkar's assurance. However, some important leaders of the Party like Moni Singh, Sudhin Ray (Khoka Ray), Nepal Nag, Shukendu Dastidar, Anil Mukherjee, Barin Datta and Amjad Hossain avoided arrest by immediately going underground. Thus, in barely thirty days their open political life came to an end. The attack on the Communist Party created an adverse effect on public opinion in East Bengal and the government lost much of its popularity. It was denounced in all opposition political circles including the Awami Muslim League.⁷⁶⁷

The Sarkar government, in fulfillment of their commitment to the 21-point election programme, established the Bengali Academy in December 1955 in Burdwan House, the building which was the residence of the prime minister since 1947.⁷⁶⁸ The elaborate inaugural function was attended almost entirely by government officials and members of the government party. However, persons connected with literary and cultural activities were virtually excluded from the list of invitees. This gave rise to much criticism against the Sarkar government in spite of fulfillment of their election pledge to establish the Bengali Academy.

The government had no majority in the Provincial Assembly and in order to preserve the ministry Sarkar had distributed ministerial and other important jobs like parliamentary secretaries to about forty members of the provincial legislature. Also, Sarkar did not convene the provincial legislature even once during his thirteen months in office. He and his cabinet were haunted by the prospect of being thrown out of power if they convened a session of the Assembly and did not do so even to pass the annual budget.⁷⁶⁹ The central government sent Fazlul Huq as the governor of East Bengal and everything was done according to his advice and with his active help and collaboration.

East Bengal was struck by a bad famine in 1956. The government became panicky, but instead of taking the proper steps they took some very wrong and unpopular decisions. The decision to distribute rice through members of the United Front was one. Abu Hossain Sarkar was personally reputed to be honest, but he decided to issue permits to his party men who bought rice from government godowns at the rate of 10 rupees per

⁷⁶⁶ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-2; Khoka Ray *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁸ *Bangladesh Freedom War Document* vol. I, pp. 448-50.

⁷⁶⁹ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 123.

maund and sold them in the open market, at a time of famine, at three or four times that price. The government party members made a lot of money by this black marketeering and it created the natural reaction among the people and political circles.⁷⁷⁰

Resistance against the famine began in the early months of 1956 and on 7 May 1956, Bhashani began a hunger strike demanding 500 million rupees from the central government for meeting the famine situation. On the same day, rather promptly, Central Minister Basanta Kumar Das, in a letter to Bhashani, expressed his concern for his health and requested him to end his hunger strike.⁷⁷¹

With the mounting food crisis and the onset of the famine, food demonstrations became a regular matter. On 19 and 20 May, the council meeting of the Awami Muslim League was held at the Mukul Cinema Hall in Dhaka. There Oli Ahad moved a resolution for forming a united famine resistance committee, comprising other political parties, but it was opposed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who was in favor of going it alone.⁷⁷² It was a very clever strategy, at the expense of the movement, based on the expectation that all the credit for famine resistance would accrue to the Awami Muslim League if they alone spearheaded the movement, leaving the others to their own resources.

By a new constitutional provision the beginning of the fiscal year was fixed for July-June instead of April-March. Sarkar did not convene the session of the Provincial Assembly even once and met the expenses of the government by getting the budget certified by the governor. In spite of the central government's backing, this created special complications. Iskandar Mirza, the Governor General, and Prime Minister Chowdhury Mohammad Ali asked Governor Fazlul Huq to convene the Provincial Legislature within 30 August 1956.⁷⁷³

The food agitation had by now reached its peak. From 1 September, the Awami Muslim League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, began to carry out daily demonstrations. On 4 September a very large number of people from across the Buriganga river, from Jinjira and other places, reached Chawkbazar and proceeded towards the city. The demonstration was obstructed by the police almost immediately and it became violent. Police tear-gassed and lathi-charged the demonstrators, but the violence increased, so they resorted to firing upon them. Three persons were killed and a number of them were injured. The situation in Dhaka became very tense and the government faced a critical situation which they had no way of handling.⁷⁷⁴ Abu Hossain Sarkar resigned the same afternoon and the Governor commissioned Ataur Rahman Khan the next day, i.e. on 5 September, to form the government. On 6 September 1956, Ataur Rahman Khan

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁷⁷¹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-9.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-1; Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 123.

formed a coalition government of Awami Muslim League, Ganatantri Dal and Krishak Sramik Party (Kafiluddin faction). Governor General Iskandar Mirza and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy were both present at the oath-taking ceremony at the Government House. Later, the Pakistan National Congress and United Progressive Party (Dhiren Datta faction) also joined the Awami Muslim League Coalition Government.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 251; Kamruddin Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-4.

Chapter Thirty-Four

AWAMI MUSLIM LEAGUE BECOMES A NON-COMMUNAL PARTY

In East Bengal Hindu-Muslim relations had begun to change in a very important and significant way immediately after the establishment of Pakistan. To recapitulate briefly, state and government power passed into the hands of the Muslim middle class, represented by the Muslim League. In the economic life of the country Muslims began to replace Hindus as property-owners both in the urban centers and in the countryside. Large-scale migration of Hindu middle class people accelerated the process. The Muslims began to acquire land and real estate which previously belonged to Hindus, took over money lending from the Hindu mahajans, and replaced the Hindus from the various professions, trade and commerce.

Thus, the nature of the contradictions which existed earlier between the property-owning Hindu landlord and trades people and the Muslim peasants and the lower middle class people were eliminated. Hindus ceased to be the dominant section of the exploiting classes. They were replaced by Muslims, in the rural areas by Bengalis, and in the urban areas, by mostly non-Bengalis.

During the British period the Muslims demanded, and got, a separate electorate system in order to protect their minority rights. However, the basis of the separate system disappeared with the disappearance of Hindus as the dominant economic and political power. It became necessary to replace it by a system of joint electorates. This demand for joint electorates began to gain ground among the Muslim middle class, students, teachers and politicians who saw no threat from the Hindu voters. Moreover, the need for a united struggle of the Bengalis against the West Pakistani landlord-big bourgeois ruling classes and the non-Bengali administrative officers and the Armed Forces, strengthened the internal demand for a joint Hindu-Muslim political action. The first great manifestation of this was the Language Movement of 1952. But in spite of these developments, the Awami Muslim League and some other parties, refrained from including joint electorate in their 21-point programme out of fear that such a step would go against their electoral interests. As it turned out, this fear had no basis, and was the result of a lack of proper understanding of the nature of developments which were taking place at the economic base and the structure of society in East Bengal.

However, the Awami Muslim League formally launched a campaign for joint electorate in August 1956, through a propaganda leaflet. By way of appealing for demanding joint electorate, the leaflet referred to a statement by Jinnah made in the inaugural session of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on 14 August 1949, The Hindus will no longer

remain Hindus, and Muslims will no longer be Muslims, not in the religious sense, but in the political sense, as citizens of the state.' The leaflet said that the Quaid-i-Azam wanted to build the Pakistan state not on communal basis, but on the basis of equal rights for all citizens, and for this a joint electorate was a necessary pre-requisite. The same leaflet also said that great harm had been done to the country by communalism, and it was politically imperative to get rid of this poison. Changing the communal denomination of the Awami Muslim League was a condition for its demand for joint electorate. But it could not be effected before the general election of 1954. However, soon after the general election and the subsequent developments, the issue made its appearance on the political and organizational agenda of the Awami Muslim League.

The three-day council meeting of the Awami Muslim League beginning on 21 October 1955, was held at the Rupmahal Cinema Hall near Sadarghat in Dhaka. The most important decision of that council meeting was the change in the denomination of the organization thereby turning it into a non-communal party. The principal spokesman for this change was Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. At first it was very seriously opposed by Suhrawardy. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was somewhat in favor of this, but he was a blind supporter of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy so he could not take any clear-cut position. But all conscious workers in that organization were in favor of dropping the term 'Muslim' from the name of their party, and it was very difficult for him to take a negative stand on the question.⁷⁷⁶ The problem, however, was resolved in a meeting of the Working Committee on 22 October. Suhrawardy finally agreed to the change.⁷⁷⁷

The amendment to the organization's constitution was moved by Suhrawardy.

Give them (the minorities) the opportunity to realize that you as well as your government are fully with them in their desire to get their due share in every walk of life. Only then can you, in fairness, claim loyalty from them.⁷⁷⁸

According to a report in the *Pakistan Observer*,

Suhrawardy referred to the doubts, with regard to the propriety of the move, which had assailed some minds because of the fact that though it was the Awami League which had fought for the cause of the minorities during the last eight years, they had joined hands with the party in power. This, Mr. Suhrawardy explained, might be due to apprehension that if they fell in the step of the party in opposition, they would get the same treatment as they got under the Muslim League Government.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁶ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 235-6, also *Bangladesh Freedom War (BFW) Documents* Vol. I, p. 451.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁸ *BFW*, Vol. I, p. 452.

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

With regard to the relation between the Awami Leagues of the East and West Pakistan Suhrawardy was reported to have said,

We had the Jinnah Awami Muslim League in West Pakistan whereas you had the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League in this wing. Realizing the position in trade unionism, recognition was given by us to the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League though there were differences in name and perhaps other details. Now, we in West Pakistan have the Pakistan Awami League and for the sake of unanimity in name, it would, in my opinion, be fair and fine to get your organization into that line, but it rests entirely with you, the House, to pass a verdict on this point.⁷⁸⁰

This last part of Suhrawardy's speech was very astonishing, because his Jinnah Awami Muslim League, based in West Pakistan, was practically a paper organization and its so-called subsequent edition, Pakistan Awami League, was no different. It was, in fact, a loose group of some political elites of West Pakistan like the Khan of Mamdot, Nawabzada Nasrullah, Mahmudul Huq Osmani etc. But the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was an organized political body with considerable mass support at that time and it was established in 1949 as an independent political body. So, there was no question or need of its affiliation to the Pakistan Awami League. The only relation between them was Suhrawardy with his close personal relation but without any formal relation with the East Pakistan organization.

The Council meeting was presided over by Bhashani who in his speech, as reported by the *Pakistan Observer* said that,

The proposal that the 'Awami League' should be an organization of the people of all communities had been mooted sometime back; but it was feared so long that if that step was taken before the party had gathered sufficient strength to withstand the onslaughts which might be launched on it, the party might go under. In this connection the Maulana referred to the lengths to which the Muslim League Politicians went during the Language Movement to accuse that it was engineered by the Hindus. The Awami League had now grown into a powerful organization and it could not die. It was, therefore, felt that the step which they had hesitated in taking so long, could now be taken safely.⁷⁸¹

The Pakistan Observer further reported that both Suhrawardy and Bhashani made impassioned appeals to the councillors to realize that it was only fair to allow the members of the minority communities to exercise their just rights to partake in the political life of the country. It was only when such opportunities were available to them,

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid*

would they be able to give the loyalty to Pakistan which every citizen of the country was expected to do.⁷⁸² According to the report, Bhashani's address to the councillors was so convincing and moving that the element of opposition to the proposal practically disappeared and in a house of about 600 councillors there were only five votes against the proposal.⁷⁸³

From then on the party would be known as the East Pakistan Awami League and any citizen of Pakistan, fulfilling the general requirements of the organization, would be eligible for its membership.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 451.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*

Chapter Thirty-Five

STRUGGLE FOR A CONSTITUTION

As Minister for Law, Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy openly declared that he would promulgate the Constitution for Pakistan by an ordinance and immediately begin drafting a constitution.⁷⁸⁴ Under the pretext of giving Pakistan a constitution within the shortest possible time, it was undoubtedly a very undemocratic step. Moreover, such a step was evidently envisaged and endorsed by leaders of West Pakistan to promote their regional interests at the expense of East Bengal. So from the beginning it was opposed by almost all political quarters in East Bengal, including large sections of the Awami Muslim League. Meetings were held at the Dhaka Paltan Maidan and elsewhere, denouncing the plan for a 'Constitutional Ordinance' to be prepared by a special Convention.⁷⁸⁵

However, this step did not actually materialize and Suhrawardy could do very little for giving Pakistan a new constitution, though he had earlier tried to convince his party colleagues that his acceptance of ministership under Mohammad Ali Bogra was a democratic necessity in order to have a Constitution for Pakistan, and Ghulam Mohammad, the Governor General, had given him assurance of his full cooperation in the matter.⁷⁸⁶

But Suhrawardy's efforts did not produce any tangible result, and, on the other hand, his personal image and credibility, and with that the popularity of the Awami Muslim League, suffered a setback in East Bengal. Since there was very little progress during Suhrawardy's ministership in the Bogra cabinet, in Constitutional matters the responsibility fell on Chowdhury Mohammad Ali after he replaced Bogra as the Prime Minister.

Ismail Ibrahim Chundrigar, Minister for Law in the Chowdhury Mohammad Ali cabinet, presented the fourth draft constitution on 9 January 1956, before the Constituent Assembly. While doing so he said,

The Constitution Bill, which is placed before you, is the outcome of prolonged discussions in the Coalition Party. The Honorable Prime Minister had invited the leader of the Awami Muslim League Party to join in these discussions. Unfortunately, this party did not accept the offer of the Honorable Prime Minister. Other political parties remained in opposition in the day-to-day

⁷⁸⁴ Kamruddin Ahmad, *The Social History of East Pakistan*, 1967, p. 136; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-75.

⁷⁸⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

⁷⁸⁶ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-75.

running of the Government. The constitution-making is a matter above party politics and it should be the endeavor of every member of the Constituent Assembly to appraise the constitution-making on national and not on a party basis.⁷⁸⁷

The draft constitution, which the law minister presented before the Constituent Assembly, clearly proved that all his bombastic talk about rising above party interest and serving the nation as a whole was nothing but an attempt to equate West Pakistan with the nation and he had no difficulty in making an 'appeal' to the leaders of East Pakistan to uphold the interests of that 'nation' while discussing the provisions of the draft constitution! The leaders of East Bengal, who were in the coalition ministry, extended co-operation to the government in the same manner as the Awami Muslim League had done on the advice and assurance of Ghulam Mohammad. But at the time of presentation of the draft the Awami Muslim League refused to accede and its leaders as it turned out became the only representatives of East Bengali interests in the Constituent Assembly. Claiming that the draft constitution presented by him was a federal type, Chundrigar said,

I was only submitting that a constitution may be of a unitary or federal type. This constitution is of a federal type and this is in consonance with the resolution which was passed at the sessions of the All-India Muslim League and which was adopted and which provided autonomous provinces and here also provinces have been given autonomy as appears from the Fifth Schedule to the draft constitution.⁷⁸⁸

Nothing could be more incorrect and false than to claim that the draft constitution which was presented before the Constituent Assembly by Chundrigar was a federal constitution. It was actually a proposal for a totally unitary constitution in which the interests of East Bengal were ignored in all important matters, and its only purpose was to serve the landlord-bureaucratic ruling clique of West Pakistan.

Reacting to the constitutional proposals of the central government, the Awami Muslim League organized a protest meeting in Dhaka at the Paltan Maidan on 15 January 1956. Representatives of the Awami Muslim League, Ganatantri Dal, Students Union, Students League, Youth League, University Committee of Action, etc. spoke strongly, criticizing the draft constitution. They all expressed great concern at the way the interests of East Bengal was ignored in the draft and expressed their determination to resist it with all their organized might. Bhashani, as president of the meeting, wanted to know from the audience whether they were willing to fight against the constitution

⁷⁸⁷ *Bangladesh Freedom War (BFW) Documents* Vol. I, p. 453.

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

presented by the central government, and they all raised their hands expressing their determination to do so.⁷⁸⁹

Bhashani, in his presidential address, said,

The proposed draft constitution is a great conspiracy to keep seven crore oppressed people of Pakistan in permanent bondage. But the bearers of a tradition of struggle, the awakened people of East Bengal, will not tolerate any low conspiracy against democracy by the ruling cliques. We are determined to raise a wall of resistance against this anti-people constitution prepared by vested interests even at the expense of our lives.⁷⁹⁰

In his speech Bhashani appealed for an All-Party Convention at Dhaka to prepare a democratic constitution based on twenty-one points and acceptable to all. All parties of East Bengal, i.e. Muslim League, Nizam-e-Islam, United Front and leaders of the minority communities were asked to participate. Bhashani expressed the apprehension that if exploitation and repression was to continue against the people of East Bengal, then the future generations of the people of this province will be forced to think about their separate entity.⁷⁹¹

This meeting was held when the proposed constitution was being debated in the Constituent Assembly at Karachi. Representatives of the Awami Muslim League consistently and cogently argued against the undemocratic and anti-East Bengal provisions of the draft and established their credentials as spokesmen for the interests of the people of East Bengal. This helped the Awami Muslim League organization to recover much of their credibility lost during the period when Suhrawardy was minister and when they had collaborated with Ghulam Mohammad.

Abul Mansur Ahmad was the first to open the attack on the draft constitution in the Constituent Assembly. In the course of his speech he referred to the geographical situation of Pakistan—two parts separated by a distance of a thousand miles—and the differences that such a situation gave rise to. He mentioned this factor as the greatest impediment in the way of framing a constitution for Pakistan and said that necessary attention must be given to this question.⁷⁹² Referring to the transfer of resources from the East to the West, Abul Mansur Ahmad said,

The drain is a one-way traffic as it only comes and never goes back. As I have enunciated government expenditure is the income of the people, in this case the expenditure of the Central Government of Pakistan is not the income of the

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 458.

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 458.

people of East Pakistan. It is one-way traffic. It comes from East Pakistan but does not go back to East Pakistan and is absorbed in West Pakistan. Therefore, gradually East Pakistan is going to be impoverished very rapidly.⁷⁹³

In order to substantiate his statement he quoted from a statistical pamphlet published by the central government,

I am quoting from it. In 1947-48 East Pakistan's contribution to the Central Revenue was 28 percent, in 1948-49 it came down to 26 percent; in 1955-56 to 12.47 percent. You will find that for coming down from 28 percent to 12 percent, we have taken only nine years. In the course of nine years our contribution from East Pakistan to Central Revenue has been reduced from 28 to 12 percent. By this process how long do you think East Pakistan will take to come down to zero—only another eight years, Sir. If this process goes on in the year of our Lord 1956, East Pakistan shall come to zero. East Pakistan will then contribute a zero to the Central Revenues. This is arithmetic; this is the result of geography. How does it happen, Sir? Because, as I have said it must happen due to the geography. Our geography cannot be altered. This geography is the hardest fact to be taken into consideration in framing our Constitution; geography is the basis on which a country is located, a language is described, a state is demarcated and a people is defined, Sir, it is an extraordinary situation that we are confronted with.⁷⁹⁴

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman spoke on the draft constitution on 17 January 1956. While taking part in the debate, he repeated much of what Abul Mansur Ahmad had said the previous day. However, at the end of his short speech he said,

Sir, the people of East Bengal will never accept the draft Constitution. You can arrest us. You have already arrested our friends and you will arrest more. I would appeal to my friend, Honorable Mr. Chundrigar, who fought in the Federal Court about the dissolved Constituent Assembly and who has fortunately become the Law Minister now, to frame the Constitution on the basis of 21-point Programme. If you want to push through the Constitution you could do so, but if you press this Constitution you are playing with fire. I have just now come from East Bengal, and I know the sentiments of the people there, of the agriculturists, of the poor businessmen and other people of East Bengal. If you push through this Constitution, God alone knows what will happen. We want that Pakistan should be saved from the ruling junta for the poor masses, who have achieved Pakistan after great sacrifices. These people who are now ruling were not 2-anna members in the struggle for Pakistan. They want to destroy Pakistan in the name of Islam. If you frame the Constitution on the basis of 21-

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 459-60.

point Programme, we will cooperate with you, we will join you, but if you go against the wishes of the people, we will mobilize opinion not only in East Pakistan but also in West Pakistan against this dictatorial and undemocratic Constitution. If you agree to pass a democratic Constitution we will help you to pass it within seven days, even within three days but that Constitution should be on democratic basis, on the basis of 21-point Programme, otherwise we will oppose it tooth and nail.⁷⁹⁵

On 27 January 1956, Ataur Rahman Khan spoke on the proposed constitution,

If the people of East Bengal feel that they are a different people, it is these people here who have forced them to do so and nobody else. It is they who have created this situation. For the last eight years they have crippled the people in such a way that they cannot but think like this. For instance, the statement of Maulana Bhashani has created a fuss here, it has created a row here. So has the statement of Abul Mansur Ahmad. He has been recommended for being tried for high treason.⁷⁹⁶

There were some interruptions by the Deputy Speaker and also by Yusuf Abdullah Haroon. Ataur Rahman resumed his speech and repeated what Abul Mansur Ahmad said earlier,

...we are two geographical and economic units; we are two people; we have got two cultures; we have got two ideas; we have got two languages. All this has astounded these people. It has shocked them. I wonder if the injustice of the last eight years has shocked their conscience or not. Sir, they do not possess any conscience. Their exhibition of love for the country is nothing; they just raise a slogan to cover up the wrongs that they have committed. It is only to cloud the real issue. Sir, has any paper of West Pakistan till now discussed or written a word about the injustices that have been done to East Bengal; has any paper written exposing the ruling coterie; has any paper here expressed regret, expressed sorrow and said that they are ashamed to find this disparity? Sir, Mr. Abul Mansur Ahmad has already presented a list showing this disparity.⁷⁹⁷

...Sir, now that we are welded into one nation-and we must live as one nation till eternity-there are methods of doing that. Sir, it is the fault of geography. Even one people may be separate on account of geography. The history of America, the history of Australia, the history of New Zealand is there. The same blood has been running in the veins of these people, but they are separated on account of geography. Sir, we are two countries. There is no denying the fact. It is sacrilege

⁷⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 463-64.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

to you, to us it is not. We have been two countries; as a matter of fact we have been welded into one nation and there are necessary things to be done. The union must be a happy one. The union must be a cordial one. There are certain methods of doing it; let us try for it. A single Act, Government of India Act, or the Independence Act, cannot unite two hearts.⁷⁹⁸

Regarding the question of amending the constitution, Aatur Rahman said,

The injustices, the disparity, the misdeeds that have been committed on East Bengal are going to be legally and constitutionally perpetuated by this Constitution. Sir, nowhere there is any provision in this Constitution for correcting those wrongs or making amends for those things and so it will continue under the authority of the Constitution after the Constitution is passed.⁷⁹⁹

On the question of autonomy, Aatur Rahman said,

As I told you earlier the geographical position of the country is so peculiar and on that account the economic division of the country is so complete that East Bengal must have its own economy apart from the economy of West Pakistan or it cannot live. The last eight years of our existence have shown that unless and until we have separate and distinct economy in East Bengal within the next eight years we will be completely impoverished and it will bring our annihilation.⁸⁰⁰

With reference to a statement of Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, foreign minister in the cabinet of Chowdhury Mohammad Ali, regarding autonomy Aatur Rahman said,

My learned friend Mr. Hamidul Huq Chowdhury yesterday told that a greater amount of autonomy has been given to East Bengal and that East Bengal should be satisfied with that. I strongly repudiate this view and hold that this is absolutely incorrect and that what has prima facie been shown as strength of the provinces is not really the strength of the provinces. You have actually cut down from the autonomy by adding a few more subjects which are not power creating or money producing. You have actually swelled the provincial list and thereby you want to show that regional autonomy has been given to the country. I do not really understand the attitude of Mr. Chowdhury so far as regional autonomy for East Bengal is concerned.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

It is true that while talking about regional autonomy for East Bengal, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury was rendering a self-service by echoing what the West Pakistani ruling clique was saying and what they wanted to hear from a stooge from East Bengal. But in this game Hamidul Huq Chowdhury was not an exception at all. When Suhrawardy became Prime Minister of Pakistan he did not lose much time to proclaim that East Bengal had already got 98 percent autonomy and that as Prime Minister of Pakistan he would make it a 100 percent! At that time the gentlemen of the Awami Muslim League who were quite vociferous-and rightly so-about East Bengal's autonomy, during this debate had practically little or nothing to say publicly in protest of what Prime Minister Suhrawardy said about the autonomy of East Bengal!⁸⁰²

Mentioning the financial aspect of the constitution Aaur Rahman said,

Now, I come to the financial aspect of the Constitution. 172 crores were raised as revenue in East Bengal and out of this 45 crores were spent in East Bengal during the last eight years-I am referring to the clause relating to Finance Commission. It is section 144 of this Draft Constitution Bill. Mr. Hamidul Huq Chowdhury on behalf of the Government has told us that all the remedies have been provided for and all the amendments have been made up in such novel innovations that they have been able to set up a National Finance Commission and that is a remedy for all our difficulties and no more injustice will be done to East Bengal after that. In reply to that I shall show how the remedy cannot be ensured by this National Finance Commission. I will presently show how this is another hoax-let me tell you about the financial position of East Bengal. I have already told you that out of Rupees 172 crores, only Rupees 45 crores have been spent in East Bengal and Rupees 124 crores have been taken away from East Bengal and the money went to the central coffer. If this amount of 124 crores would have been spent in East Bengal, that would have brought further income to the country but instead of doing it, they made that province drier and this part prosperous. So the disparity will increase more and more, because the money spent from there never came back to its source.⁸⁰³

....Sir, I may tell you about the State Bank. Now State Bank in the country controls the foreign exchange. Finance is collected by commerce and industry and in the matter of commerce you will find that there is no balance between the ratios of goods that were exported from East Bengal and imports that were brought in. Sir, the greater the export of the country, the greater chance there is of goods going away unless it is balanced by import. It has not been so, so far as East Bengal is concerned.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰² Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

⁸⁰³ *BFW Documents* Vol. I, p. 468.

⁸⁰⁴ *BFW Documents* Vol. I, p. 468.

...The total trade balance for the last eight years is Rupees 664 exports and Rupees 292 imports, leaving a balance of Rupees 372 crores. In West Pakistan Rupees 586 crores exports and Rupees 826 imports - leaving an unfavorable balance of 239 crores of rupees. These Rupees 372 crores which could have been brought to East Pakistan was not done and the goods of the country have gone away by way of export leaving the country poorer so far as the material goods are concerned. But in proportion to that, that amount of goods did not come by way of imports giving no incentive to the producer, the labor and all other classes of people who are interested in this and the country has become poorer.⁸⁰⁵

Referring to foreign exchange and the functions of the State Bank he said,

This is the position and a solution to this should have been found by the division of foreign exchange What is actually the position here? The entire amount of foreign exchange is controlled by the State Bank of Pakistan.

The State Bank could have been divided also as it is done in other countries. As my friend Mr. Mansur has said that there are countries which merely on account of sheer distance have divided the State Bank in two parts. Even in the neighboring country India, in the month of January, 1955, I read a statement of Mr. Nehru that they are going to create five or six zones of the Reserve Bank with a federating Reserve Bank over all of them at the Centre.... Yes, Sir, there should be two State Banks for the two wings for State Bank controls foreign exchange. There should be one Federating unit situated at Karachi and two branches one at Lahore and the other at Dhaka.⁸⁰⁶

Another important item touched on by Ataur Rahman in his speech on the draft constitution was with respect to elections. After the disastrous defeat of the Muslim League in the 1954 general election in East Bengal the central government, in their attempt to establish control over the elections, made provincial or regional elections a concern of the central government. Thus, Part VIII, Article 137, of the constitution provided that the Election Commission consisting of a chief election commissioner and the regional election commissioners would be appointed by the President and all elections would be conducted by it. With reference to this Ataur Rahman said,

Sir, you will find that one very important thing which actually determines the character of autonomy for province is the election. The election of the Provincial Assemblies, which was in the Provincial Lists, has now been taken away in the new scheme of things. That has actually crippled any amount of autonomy that East Bengal enjoyed before this. It is not saying that we have given you so many

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 468-69.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

subjects, twenty or thirty subjects. All the subjects are there, but that does not make the country autonomous; in fact, the principle of democracy has been taken away—a very important thing, namely, the election—because judging from the things that are going on in the country, it is a party government which is running the country's administration. East Bengal may have a Government of one party opposed to a party which is in power in the Central Government. Therefore, it is necessary that the election of the Provincial Legislature must be under the control of the Provincial Government and not under the control of the Central Government here, but it has been taken away, so that autonomy, even if it is given, or even if it were there, has been completely, in a way, taken away by that provision.⁸⁰⁷

Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, leader of the opposition in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, spoke on the constitutional proposals on 31 January 1956. He began on a conciliatory note compared to the very bitter and at times angry attacks made earlier by his party colleagues.

I had recently been to East Bengal for the purpose of assessing for myself whether the opposition that we heard in the papers and voiced on the floor of this House was a mere paper opposition or was it really grounded in the will of the people. I have, Sir, no hesitation in stating that people of Bengal are greatly perturbed ... in approaching constitutional proposals, I do so with only one objective. It must ensure and promote the stability and integrity of Pakistan. To me and my party, all of us residing within Pakistan as its citizens and subjects are one nation, namely the Pakistani Nation, irrespective of the provinces or the regions from which we come, irrespective of the origin, of our race and tribe, irrespective of the religion, caste or creed. We are one state and we are one people ... To my mind, Sir, as a Pakistani, I say that I cannot visualize any period of time when there will be secession between the two wings of Pakistan. I cannot conceive even the idea of secession. We have got to live together... What keeps us together is this: the realization that neither part of Pakistan can live without the other. We are dependent upon each other in a hundred thousand ways and therefore it will be fortuitous on the part of any one to say 'Let us seek our own destiny elsewhere without the help and cooperation of the other.' ... we must get together as soon as possible, instead of fighting each other, even on the floor of this House.⁸⁰⁸

On the question of relative underdevelopment of East Bengal Suhrawardy said,

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 471-72.

There is no denying the fact that there has hardly been any development in East Bengal worth the name, compared to the development on this side of the country. We wish this country well. We are happy that it has been developed... But surely the people of East Bengal too have the right to come forward and claim some consideration from you. Surely they have got the right to come and say that during all these years East Bengal has been impoverished in several ways. I do not want to juggle with figures. These are facts which are before us. There has hardly been any development in that part of the country.⁸⁰⁹

After referring to the specific points of under-development in industry, agriculture and defense Suhrawardy said,

After all, East Bengal is not such a backward area as to have justified all this under-development that you say, that the people are not coming forward and there is nothing there as if the people are primitive or something to that effect. There is absolutely no justification for this view.⁸¹⁰

On the specific provisions of the constitution, Suhrawardy said,

Now, let us come to the provisions of this Constitution. Is it really honestly an improvement on the 1935 Act? I can hardly see that it is so in any respect. The Lists are there as they were before, powers are there, just as they were before. You have merely called it Federal Constitution, where as it was not federal previously. But the same lists existed; there had been some modification but the same List I, List II and List III are there. In the days when India was a unitary government you still had the same Lists I, II and III and so what is the difference that you can show from the Government of India Act. You can say that the residuary powers have been given to the Provinces under this Constitution. But what are residuary powers? Do they ever come in for exercise? Where, Sir, You have differed from the 1935 Act, it has always been done to the detriment of democracy and against the interests of this country. May I just point out a few instances and then ask you whether you should make some efforts to bring it into line with progressive thought?⁸¹¹

In spite of what Suhrawardy said about the injustices done to East Bengal, his approach was similar to what Maulana Mohammad Ali described as 'begging and praying politics' with reference to Congress demands to the British government.

Continuing his speech with reference to the powers of the President,

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 472.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

Take the case of the powers of the President... I think, Sir, with regard to the dissolution, viz., the power of the President to dissolve an Assembly when he is of the opinion that the Ministry has lost the confidence of the country, I think Sir, that this thing is so obviously ridiculous that I am sure that the government will either withdraw it, or place something else a bit more reasonable. To leave it to the President to judge about the possibilities that you have lost the confidence of the country is fantastic in a democratic Constitution. Yes, if he thinks that a present Ministry has lost the confidence of the legislature over which that Ministry presides, then, some powers might be invoked, but to go and dissolve the legislature on that ground because they have lost the confidence of the people is a vastly different matter. Then, Sir, a very very important power has been given to the President which will override the entire Constitution, viz., power to declare emergency. All the power to declare an emergency is vested in the President.⁸¹²

Regarding fundamental rights Suhrawardy said,

Sir, let us take another provision in this Constitution, viz., that of fundamental rights. Why these fundamental rights have been absolutely put down in the Constitution if provisos were a necessary attachment of them. If these fundamental rights have got to be hedged round with all kinds of provisos, circumscribed by this under these circumstances and that under those circumstances, and so on, what is the use of these fundamental rights? Therefore, Sir, please do not delude us by putting this word that you have been able to put in the fundamental rights. The fundamental rights are of no value at all.⁸¹³

Sir, there are also certain hiatuses in these Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles which I hope will be filled up. I do not find anything either in the Rights of Directive Principles to look after the interests of the agriculturists and labor, and to prevent them from exploitation. There is a general clause; an attempt, I believe, will be made to promote the social and economic well-being and so on, of the people, and to adjust relationship between landlords and tenants and between employers and labor. Sir, there is not enough either as a Directive Principle or a Fundamental Right because we do maintain that the cultivator, the man who produces the food grains, should be the owner of the land which he is tilling. This should be provided for in the Constitution. At least this should be the aim of this Government.⁸¹⁴

Thus it was Suhrawardy, more than anybody else in his own party, the Awami League, or any other member of the Constituent Assembly, who spoke on the rights of the

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 473-4.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 474.

peasants and workers to be protected from exploitation, and that the land which the peasant tills should rightfully belong to him. It is true that the Awami League, when in power, also did not do anything for the peasants and workers, but Suhrawardy's reference to the question at least registered it as a problem during the debate on the constitution.

Referring to the question of defense and the provisions of the constitution in that regard he said,

There was nothing in the Constitution regarding them, not even in the Directive Principles ... regarding the principle of giving military training and establishing military bases for purposes of giving to the people of East Bengal encouragement to come forward and to take part in the defense of their country. There is nothing. There is nothing regarding foreign exchange. There is no provision to say that there shall be development side by side and in equal measure. There is nothing regarding Service, and so on. What is the use of this Constitution? This Constitution has shelved all the problems and all that it has got is a certain number of clauses taken from the Government of India Act, 1935 and wherever they have departed from it, woe to this country!⁸¹⁵

Finally, Suhrawardy came to the core of the constitutional problem, the question of provincial autonomy:

Now, Sir, we come to the question of provincial autonomy. It is a matter on which you cannot come to a finality here. At the same time you have to consider that if the two wings-East and West-do not come to an agreement, what should be done. I feel, as I have pointed out, that the ruling party of West Pakistan want to eat and have the cake. They have taken their parity in the Constitution over and over again. They have pointed it out that this shall stand even if the number of members increases in the National Parliament. I am sorry to state all that goes with parity has been ignored by them. I maintain that the people of Bengal would not have accepted parity had it not been coupled with regional autonomy. This was the thing which was placed before them; one group in one part should not dominate over another group in another part: everything should be done by agreement and by a process of give and take and not by force. For that reason there should be equality. Obviously West as a nation, as a group was pitched against the East as a nation or as a group. I am using the word 'nation' in the loose sense and not in the sense of Pakistani nation. Therefore, in as much as they were separated on account of distance they must have regional autonomy. That

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 474-75.

was the basis of parity and the further basis of parity was that if Bengal was to speak it should speak together and for that we must have joint electorate.⁸¹⁶

All that was said by Suhrawardy, and his colleagues earlier, have a striking similarity to the political debate between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, with this difference that in British India the Muslims were a religious minority, but here the Bengalis constituted a majority.

In the final draft of the constitution parity went by default and joint electorate was not provided for. The constitutional provisions were very heavily weighed against East Bengal. The Awami League members of the Constituent Assembly walked out on the final day and refused to put their signatures on the constitution.⁸¹⁷ But what was quite surprising in this was that the leader of the Awami League, Suhrawardy, as leader of the opposition signed the constitution which was finally adopted on 23 March 1956.⁸¹⁸ Members of the United Front led by Fazlul Huq supported the constitutional proposals as they were presented by the government and put their signatures on the constitution.

In order to become the fundamental law of the land, the constitution had to be finally signed by the head of the state. But Iskandar Mirza refused to put his signature unless he was made the President of Pakistan. He insisted that he would put his signature on the document only as the President of Pakistan, and not as Governor General. Chowdhury Mohammad Ali, had no option but to agree and the final seal on the Constitution was put by Iskandar Mirza as the President of Pakistan.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 475.

⁸¹⁷ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-20; Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 122; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

⁸¹⁸ Kamruddin Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 122; Oli Ahad, *ibid.*

⁸¹⁹ Kamruddin Ahmad, *ibid.*, p. 123 (footnote).

Chapter Thirty-Six

AWAMI LEAGUE IN POWER

Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy was in East Bengal in the first week of September 1956. He toured several places outside Dhaka. The food situation was critical and the political situation deteriorated because Abu Hossain Sarkar had failed to prepare the budget and was unable to convene the provincial assembly as he had no majority in the house.

Both Prime Minister Chowdhury Mohammad Ali and President Iskandar Mirza contacted Suhrawardy and requested him to go to Karachi, but he expressed his inability to leave East Bengal at that moment. The central government was on the verge of collapse owing to large scale desertions from the Muslim League to the Mirza-backed Republican Party led by Dr Khan Sahib. Suhrawardy demanded the dismissal of the Sarkar government and its replacement by a government of the Awami League.

Following the very serious food demonstration in Dhaka on 4 September police firing and the death of one person, Fazlul Huq, the governor of East Bengal, was forced to dismiss the United Front government and invite Aatur Rahman Khan of the Awami League to form a new government.⁸²⁰ A new coalition government was formed on 6 September 1956, with Aatur Rahman Khan as the Chief Minister. Initially the coalition consisted of Awami League, the Ganatantri Dal, and the breakaway Kafiluddin Chowdhury faction of the Krishak Sramik Party. Soon they were joined by the Pakistan National Congress, the Tapshili (scheduled caste) Federation and the United Progressive Party led by Dhiren Datta.⁸²¹

On 5 September, President Iskandar Mirza had suddenly arrived in Dhaka. The new government took oath in the presence of President Mirza and H.S. Suhrawardy, the leader of the Pakistan Awami League.⁸²² It seemed that the dismissal of the United Front government and the installation of an Awami League-led government was decided earlier in Karachi, and the presence of Mirza and Suhrawardy was not a matter of chance. After the oath-taking ceremony of the new Awami League coalition government, both of them left Dhaka for Karachi in the same plane.⁸²³

The powers vested in the Governor General in the amended 1935 India Act, the Indian Independence Act 1947, and later the powers vested in the 1956 Constitution of

⁸²⁰ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 123.

⁸²¹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 251; Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁸²² Kamruddin Ahmad, *Banglar Ak Madhyabitter Atmakahini* (autobiography of a Bengali middle class man), p. 51.

⁸²³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 124.

Pakistan, were such that the head of the state was in a position to exercise immense power. Since there was practically no constitutional provision or real political power to restrain him from manipulating parliamentary politics, and even from illegal and unconstitutional acts, for all practical purposes, he became the arbiter of factional power politics, in order to exercise control over the Prime Minister. He even had practical powers to topple governments whenever he considered it necessary. In fact the vast undemocratic power vested in the President was the greatest single factor in destabilizing parliamentary politics in Pakistan.

Since the assassination of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in October 1951 there was growing instability within the ruling Muslim League as a consequence of absence of capable leadership. The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the dismissal of the elected provincial government in East Bengal and total disruption of parliamentary practices by Ghulam Mohammad were the worst examples of political intervention by the head of the state.

This practice was continued under the 1956 Constitution by the President. Following the example of his predecessor Ghulam Mohammad, Iskandar Mirza began to destabilize the government of Chowdhury Mohammad Ali soon after it was formed. Chowdhury was elected leader of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party, and was then elected as the leader of a coalition government of the Muslim League and the United Front led by Fazlul Huq. He had a clear majority in the Parliament, and it was not easy for Mirza to dictate to him as he did, under special circumstances, at the time of the final enactment of the 1956 Constitution by demanding that he be made the President before he would put his signature on it as head of the state.

Iskandar Mirza decided to break up the Muslim League Parliamentary Party so that the government of Chowdhury became a minority, and for this he involved his old friend Dr Khan Sahib, who persuaded by Mirza, floated a new party called the Republican Party. Members of the Muslim League Parliamentary Party, sensing the direction the wind was blowing, began to desert the Muslim League to join the new party, which was also backed by Mushtaq Ahmad Gurmani, the governor of West Pakistan. Consequently, the fall of the Chowdhury government became imminent by the end of August 1956.⁸²⁴

Fazlul Huq, as partner of the coalition, had to act in accordance with the wishes of President Mirza in the hope of preserving the government of Abu Hossain Sarkar in East Bengal. But this time Fazlul Huq, the then governor of East Bengal, gained practically nothing, and his long political career virtually came to an end after the fall of the provincial government of the United Front.

⁸²⁴ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

President Mirza made a new deal with Suhrawardy, and Chowdhury Mohammad Ali resigned as the Prime Minister. On 11 September, the President commissioned H.S. Suhrawardy to form a new government at the centre which was inducted the next day, 12 September 1956. It was a coalition of the Awami League and the Republican Party. The former had twelve and the latter twenty-seven members in a Parliament of eighty. So other elements were also hooked in to have the necessary majority.⁸²⁵ The composition of the new government was, in fact, a marriage of convenience of two parties with utterly divergent and even opposite interests. It was an example of the extent to which political opportunism could be stretched in Pakistan.

The Awami League was basically a party of the new and rising petty bourgeoisie or middle class of East Bengal with no social and political base in West Pakistan, whereas the Republican Party was composed entirely of feudal and upper bourgeois classes, well-entrenched in the social and economic system of West Pakistan. The Awami League stood for provincial autonomy and a federal system of government, whereas the Republican Party was committed to a highly centralized unitary government, and as such was opposed to the autonomy demand of East Bengal. These were the same people who enacted the 1956 Constitution by completely overruling each and every demand of the Awami League in the process of constitution making.

The character of this alliance did not go unnoticed in East Bengal where doubts were expressed in many circles, including a section of the Awami League, about its workability, and was in fact considered a very unwise political step. But in spite of Bhashani's reservations, the Provincial Awami League and its government supported Suhrawardy and welcomed the formation of the new central government in the hope that the provincial government would be able to function properly with the support of a central government which would be sympathetic to them.⁸²⁶

The coalition government made a good beginning. Like its predecessor the new government, as their first act, released political prisoners detained in jail without trial. There were fifty-nine such prisoners in the Dhaka central jail. They were not only released unconditionally on 8 September, but were received and welcomed by Chief Minister Aatur Rahman Khan and other cabinet ministers at the jail gate.⁸²⁷ It was undoubtedly a very democratic act, an unprecedented gesture and also a fulfillment of their pledge embodied in the 21-point electoral programme.

Aatur Rahman Khan took another very important step in this direction by making a declaration on behalf of his government that the Security Act, the black law for detention of political prisoners without trial, would be abolished. But since it was a law passed by the Legislative Assembly it could not be abolished by a mere declaration. A

⁸²⁵ Ibid.; Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 124.

⁸²⁶ Kamruddin Ahmad, *The Social History of East Pakistan*, p. 144.

⁸²⁷ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-4; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

decision of the Provincial Assembly was necessary and later the Security Act was repealed by an Act of the Legislature.⁸²⁸ But the political benefit of this was very largely negated when the Awami League members voted for the continuance of the Safety Act in the Parliament.⁸²⁹

The Awami League government came to power in the midst of a serious food crisis and conditions of famine. It was their immediate responsibility to handle that crisis. With the help of the central government they were able to ease the crisis within a fairly short period of time. Rice and wheat were imported from Burma, Thailand and other countries, and transported by tramp ships when normal shipping space was not available. Prime Minister Suhrawardy saw to it that foreign exchange was made available for the import of grain. In certain areas food had to be air-dropped because there was no other means of reaching the populace there. Millions of rupees were spent for test relief programmes to create buying power for the landless and jobless people.⁸³⁰

A number of bye-elections were pending during the Sarkar Ministry. Like the Muslim League government he also avoided holding them. But the Awami League coalition government decided otherwise and as a fulfillment of their 21-point election pledge they organized the bye-elections. The first one was held on 10 December 1956. The Awami League candidate won by a large majority. Their handling of the food crisis contributed greatly to this election victory. Six other bye-elections were also held in which the Awami League candidates won in five constituencies. The elections were quite fair, without any rigging or governmental intervention by the party in power.⁸³¹

The Awami League-Republican Party coalition government at the centre led by Suhrawardy was a fragile arrangement. First, because the Awami League had only twelve members out of eighty in the Parliament, and second, because its continuance depended on the convenience of President Iskandar Mirza, who from the beginning knew that Suhrawardy could not be permitted to remain Prime Minister for long in spite of the compromises he had made with vested interests of West Pakistan. Suhrawardy was aware of this and, therefore, he tried to do a few things as fast as it was practicable. The introduction of the Joint Electorate Bill was one of them. Within a month of assuming power as Prime Minister, Suhrawardy himself moved the Bill on 10 October 1956 to provide for the principle of joint electorate in elections to the National and Provincial Assemblies. While moving the Bill he made a long speech in which, among other things, he said,

It may appear strange to those who have not been able to adapt themselves to the change in political outlook resultant on the creation of Pakistan, that I who was

⁸²⁸ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁸²⁹ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁸³⁰ Ataur Rahman Khan, *Ojaratir Dui Bachar* (Two Years of Ministership), pp. 30-2.

⁸³¹ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 133.

an advocate of the two-nation theory in undivided India, and whose contribution to the creation of Pakistan was perhaps not insignificant, and who believed in separate electorates in undivided India, should advocate joint electorate in Pakistan as a salutary constitutional principle. Undoubtedly separate electorates formed the cardinal creed of the Muslims of undivided India, and was strongly advocated with irrefutable logic by Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy in his minute of dissent to the Simon Report as early as 1928-29, but it was not based on the two-nation theory as such a theory was advocated as late as 1940 in the political document known as the Lahore Resolution. Separate electorate was a device to secure proper representation in the Legislatures for the Muslim minority; it took something away from the majority population; it was certainly never meant to be a device to safeguard the interests of a majority population. Although the Lahore Resolution appeared to endorse the two-nation theory, it actually never did so; it threw it overboard when it visualized in the same resolution that minorities would be left behind in the two countries of Pakistan and India. The two-nation theory carried to its logical conclusion would have connoted total exchange of population—the creation of a completely Hindu nation in India and the creation of a completely Muslim nation in Pakistan.⁸³²

While trying to strengthen his argument Suhrawardy further said,

The two-nation theory was advanced by the Muslims as a justification for the partition of India and the creation of a State made up of geographically contiguous units where the Muslims were numerically in a majority. Once the State was created, the two-nation theory lost its force even for the Muslims. If it is still persisted in, it will logically lead to the partition of Pakistan and the creation of a State made up of contiguous areas where non-Muslims are in a majority; a contingency from which every Pakistani must recoil with horror. The Muslims, who were a nationality in undivided India, are now citizens in their own country, Pakistan, in which every citizen, whatever may be his religion, is a member of the Pakistani nation. All of the Muslims and non-Muslims are Pakistanis first and last and we take pride and glory in our having achieved nationhood. There is thus a radical difference between the conception of the Millat-i-Islam which transcends geographical boundaries, and the conception of a Pakistani nation or *qaum* which has boundaries and has a peculiar entity which differentiates it from other nations. Circumstances have thus changed, and so must our political outlook change with the establishment of Pakistan. Today we do not want to develop fissiparous tendencies within the country but must create one nation. I, therefore, advocate joint electorate because this will help in wielding all the people together into one great Pakistani nation, in creating mutual confidence and cooperation in the service of the country, and destroying

⁸³² BFW Documents vol. I, p. 585.

the seeds of suspicion, distrust and hatred between the citizens professing different religions. I want to help in the creation of a Pakistan nation. I want the citizens to have only one ideal, namely, service to Pakistan each according to his own religious convictions but all united to advance the stability, integrity and the glory of Pakistan and all dedicated to their motherland. Surely, this is an ideal worth struggling for and worth achieving.⁸³³

I beg this House, therefore, and the people outside the country to view this problem only from one angle, namely, the interest of Pakistan. It is so easy to mislead our people who are prepared to sacrifice everything in the way of Islam, to mislead them in the name of Islam. It is so easy to excite passion, so easy to kindle fires, so easy to destroy, so difficult to build, that I would beg of those who are utilizing this controversy, for the sake of opposition, not to fan the flames of fanaticism and bigotry and hatred, but to pause and build Pakistan on the solid foundation of trust and unity between all the peoples inhabiting this beloved country of ours.⁸³⁴

I.I. Chundrigar, leader of the Muslim League opposition in the Parliament, spoke for a system of separate electorates. While marshalling the case for a separate electorate he said that this system of voting was in the best interest of both Hindus and Muslims. Pir Ali Mohammad Rashidi of the Muslim League, among others, spoke very strongly in favor of separate electorates. Others who spoke on the motion included Mian Iftikharuddin and Dr Khan Sahib, the chief minister of West Pakistan. Iftikharuddin told the House that they were worried about the electoral system because it did not represent the people. He also said that whether he believed in joint or separate electorate did not matter. The point was that representatives of West Pakistan had supported separate electorate and his party and himself had no right to go back on it without referring the matter to the people.⁸³⁵

Finally on 11 October 1956, the National Assembly or Parliament passed the Bill providing for joint electorate in East Pakistan and separate electorate in the country's western wing. The Electorate Bill was passed by forty-eight votes to nineteen.⁸³⁶

The two systems of electorates for the two zones of Pakistan - the East and the West - clearly indicated the very great differences which existed between them in matters of political thought, which in its turn was a reflection of the incompatibility of the interests of the two wings. It was also an indication of the shape of things to come.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 585-6.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 588.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 589-90.

⁸³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 589.

To any observer of Pakistani politics this legislation on the electorate would appear very extraordinary for two reasons. First, because in the same state two types of electorates were provided for. Second, because joint electorate was provided for East Pakistan where there was a substantial Hindu population; and separate electorate was provided for West Pakistan where the non-Muslim population was very small and electorally a minor and insignificant factor. From this the depth of the disparity problem between the two wings could be easily seen. It was not only a question of uneven economic development and disparity in the allocation of resources, but a far more significant difference existed politically at the time of independence and grew rapidly during the post-Pakistan period.

In spite of the economic backwardness East Bengal was an advanced region in respect of social, cultural and political developments. Owing to the cultural and political backwardness and the predominantly feudal composition of the leadership in West Pakistan they cling to old political prejudices. The power of this prejudice was such that it was not possible for them to realize that after accepting joint electorate for East Pakistan, separate electorate only for West Pakistan became a constitutional and political farce.

What is interesting in this matter is that after the fall of the Suhrawardy ministry in October 1957, Chundrigar as the new Muslim League-Republican Party coalition Prime Minister, revived the electorate issue. This was possible because President Mirza, as the principal player in Pakistani politics, asked the Republican Party to change its stand on the electorate issue so that the Muslim League could form a coalition government with them. But the Republican Party, in spite of being pressurized to change their stand formed a Fact Finding Committee which came to East Pakistan on 2 December 1957, to ascertain public opinion on the question. The same day the Awami League organized a demonstration in Dhaka in support of joint electorate, and a huge public meeting at Paltan Maidan on 5 December.⁸³⁷

That same evening, a joint meeting of the National Awami Party, Krishak Sramik Party (Abu Hossain Sarkar group), Pakistan National Congress, Pakistan Socialist Party and others was held in the central office of the National Awami Party and presided over by former minister Shamsuddin Ahmad. An All Party Joint Electorate Committee of Action was formed with Bhashani, Abu Hossain Sarkar, Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Shamsuddin Ahmad, Mahmud Ali, Oli Ahad, Abdus Salam, Zahur Hossain Chowdhury, Kazi Mohammad Idris and others.⁸³⁸

The Chundrigar government was set to place the Separate Electorate Bill in the National Assembly on 11 December 1957. The same day the All Party Joint Electorate Committee

⁸³⁷ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

⁸³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 287-8.

of Action observed a joint electorate day' in Dhaka and other areas of East Pakistan.⁸³⁹ Faced with this opposition, the Republican Party decided to refrain from supporting the Bill, and the Chundrigar government fell on 16 December 1957, after about two months in office. Malik Firoz Khan Noon of the Republican Party was then commissioned to form the government at the centre, and he remained in power till it was overthrown by the military *coup d'état* of General Ayub Khan on 7 October 1958.⁸⁴⁰

Immediately after assuming power as chief minister of East Pakistan, Aaur Rahman Khan made a policy statement over the radio on 7 September in the evening. In it he described in some detail how he was going to tackle the serious food crisis. He also said that his government had already released all political prisoners and was working out legal details for the annulment of Security Act which was in force. He announced his government's determination to eradicate all sorts of corruption and to institute an enquiry committee for investigating high corruption practices by people in power. He promised necessary educational reforms and promised to protect life, livelihood and property of the religious minorities. Referring to the existing condition of Mohajirs or those who had migrated from India after partition of the country, he promised to look into their interests fairly and do everything possible for their rehabilitation.⁸⁴¹

On the policy pursued by the Awami League government in East Pakistan, Gankovsky, a Soviet historian of the Pakistanology Department, in 1964 wrote in his book, *A History of Pakistan*,

With the establishment of Suhrawardy Government at the centre the coalition of forces within the ruling camp was, to a certain extent, altered in favor of the commercial bourgeoisie and liberal landlords of East Pakistan. This was reflected in a number of government measures. Already during the first months after the Awami League had come into power, the local authorities of East Pakistan were given greater power to decide questions concerning the economic life of the province. In the interest of the landlords and rich peasants who were jute growers, a state corporation for the jute trade was set up towards the end of 1956 and the beginning of 1957. Large state funds were allocated for development of power stations, industry and transport in the eastern wing of the country. The import of the means of production for East Pakistan increased, and the granting of import licenses was readjusted in favor of businessmen from East Pakistan. The government tried to create conditions in the Province which were likely to induce landlords, merchants, and well-to-do peasants to invest their capital in the industrial sphere.⁸⁴²

⁸³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴¹ *BFW Documents* Vol. I, pp. 581-4.

⁸⁴² Y.V. Gankovsky, *A History of Pakistan*, 1963, pp. 274-7, quoted by Rangalal Sen, *Political Elites in Bangladesh*, 1986, pp. 150-1.

So the class character of the Awami League and its government was clearly revealed in the policies which they began to pursue. There was nothing wrong in what they did to promote business and industry in East Pakistan, but the fact was that such a policy was almost entirely oriented to protect landlord or *jotedar* interests and the interests of the newly-formed, and rising, business and commercial interests. They did not intend to bring about any kind of land reform for protecting the peasants from the exploitation of the landowners and the moneylenders.

In spite of their grandiose declaration for eradication of corruption, the leaders of the Awami League and the men in government soon resorted to corrupt practices with a zeal not seen in East Pakistan since 1947, either during the Muslim League regime or during the ministry of Abu Hossain Sarkar. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as minister for anti-corruption indulged in corruption himself in a very ugly manner and made a considerable fortune within the shortest possible time. He soon built a big house in the Dhanmondi residential area and this was, in fact, a monument of corruption. Within a short period this area became an Awami League colony where almost all Awami League leaders built houses and moved in.⁸⁴³

With Sheikh Mujibur Rahman there were other problems. It was provided in the constitution of the Awami League, as amended in their conference held in October 1955, that any person holding any government office would have to resign his position in the party. According to that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had to resign his position as general secretary of the Awami League. But he refused, and consequently was guilty of violating the constitution of his own party. The party constitution also provided that if a person holding government office failed to comply to the party rule the post would fall automatically vacant after one month. But nothing like that happened in the case of Mujibur Rahman.⁸⁴⁴ However, due to criticisms within the party, especially in the context of corruption, it was decided to shift him to another position. He was appointed chairman of the Tea Board with a very large salary and other huge benefits and he thus continued as the general secretary. This, however, did not prevent him from indulging further in corrupt practices because he remained a powerful factor in the ruling party. Bhashani's influence in the Awami League organization began to decline after it came to power at the centre and in East Pakistan. This was because he had no parliamentary ambition and thus was in no position to exercise any real control over government policies pursued by the Awami League governments. Allocation of large state funds for development and the new adjustments of import and export licenses in favor of East Pakistanis created an opportunity for Awami Leaguers to receive and sell licenses and permits and make easy money. Apart from these there were other forms of corruption.

⁸⁴³ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 256 and 300.

⁸⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Nothing was visualized and planned at policy level for the peasants and the rural poor. All these were enough to alienate Bhashani from the government of his own party.

The foreign policy pursued by the Awami League coalition government at the centre became another area of conflict. Initially Suhrawardy took a new stance in foreign policy in spite of the existing military alliances of Pakistan with the Anglo-US bloc. In line with the resolutions adopted by the Awami League prior to his assumption of office, he declared in his first broadcast over the radio that he would follow a neutral foreign policy and he decided to visit China before any other foreign country.

Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the US in 1949 at the invitation of the US government, but they remained indifferent to Liaquat Ali Khan. In order to put pressure on the US government he got himself invited by the Soviet government. It worked and soon Liaquat Ali was invited by the US government and in spite of the Soviet invitation he did not go to the Soviet Union, and instead went on a visit to the United States. This was the beginning of the bad relation between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. Thus Suhrawardy's decision to go to China came as a big surprise in Pakistan's political circles. He went to China within three months after the formation of his government. This was soon followed by a return visit of the Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En Lai. A large reception was organized for Chou En Lai and he addressed a huge public meeting in Dhaka at the Paltan Maidan.⁸⁴⁵

But in spite of these visits the foreign policy of Pakistan remained tied to the Anglo-US bloc and Suhrawardy, as Prime Minister eventually, became an open spokesman of that policy. He refused to act for the annulment of the military pacts, and on the contrary, in contradiction to earlier Awami League official decisions and resolutions, began to defend them on the ground of national security, for gaining support for Pakistan on the Kashmir question and for economic benefits. It was certainly an about-turn in matters of foreign policy and it naturally aroused the left elements in the Awami League, particularly those who belonged to the Youth League and the Ganatantri Dal. They were joined by Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani.⁸⁴⁶

This opposition did not develop in East Pakistan alone. In West Pakistan Mahmudul Huq Osmani, general secretary of Pakistan Awami League, protested against Suhrawardy's support for the Baghdad Pact, and in retaliation he was asked to resign. A meeting of Pakistan Awami League called upon the Pakistan government to withdraw from the Baghdad Pact.

Suhrawardy's support for the Baghdad Pact and SEATO, as also his stand on the Suez issue in favor of the Anglo-French axis antagonized the progressive and left forces in

⁸⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 259, 300.

East Pakistan. When the Anglo-French attacked Egypt the left forces among the students and other young people burnt down the British Information Service bungalow in Dhaka. So it was natural that any policy of hostility against Egypt and President Nasser would antagonize the progressive sections of the people in East Pakistan.⁸⁴⁷ But in spite of this there were little hostile reaction within the Awami League. Rightist leaders like Aaur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mushtaq Ahmad and their followers supported the official foreign policy of Pakistan upheld by Suhrawardy in the interest of keeping themselves in power. There were other factors, but it was really the foreign policy which created a rift between the left and the right forces in the Awami League and finally split the organization in early 1957.

Suhrawardy had to steer his policy against the conspiracies of President Iskandar Mirza and his partners in power of the Republican Party on the one hand, and against the opposition of left and even moderate elements within the Awami League and their partners in the provincial coalition ministry, on the other. It became increasingly difficult for him, especially because the Awami League had only twelve members in the Constituent Assembly, which made it impossible for him to push any policy forward from a position of strength. In this critical situation, in order to save his position as Prime Minister, Suhrawardy continued to tilt increasingly towards the rightists of his own coalition ministry, West Pakistani vested interests and Anglo-US imperialism. It made his personal position quite vulnerable, because in spite of his blatant compromises he was never really trusted by them.

Suhrawardy's policies created a lot of confusion in the Provincial Awami League, and on more than one occasion conflicting positions were taken by them on autonomy and foreign policy. A resolution of the East Pakistan Assembly may be mentioned as an example of this kind of conflict. Professor Muzaffar Ahmad, a communist member who had been working in the Awami League under instruction from his party, moved the following resolution on 3 April 1957:

This Assembly is of the opinion that Government of East Pakistan should represent to the Government of Pakistan for taking suitable steps for providing full regional autonomy for East Pakistan, leaving the following subjects only to the concern of the Centre: Currency, Foreign Affairs and Defense.⁸⁴⁸

This non-official motion was supported by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Abu Hossain Sarkar. It meant that it was a resolution supported by both the left and right wings of the Awami League as well as the Krishak Sramik Party.⁸⁴⁹ But in spite of this united move Suhrawardy denounced the resolution as a 'political stunt'.⁸⁵⁰ In reply to

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 258-9.

⁸⁴⁸ *Pakistan Observer*, 4 April 1957, quoted by R. Sen *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵⁰ *Morning News*, 7 April 1957, quoted by R. Sen *op. cit.*, p. 155.

Suhrawardy's comment, the Awami League chief minister of East Pakistan, Aatur Rahman Khan, according to a report published in the *Morning News* of 7 April 1957 said, 'We meant it seriously and not for fun.' It was a mild rejoinder, but nevertheless it indicated that the question of regional autonomy constituted an area of tension between the central and the provincial governments. With reference to this resolution, the Central Home Minister M.G.A. Talpur, in an angry statement to the press, said that 'the Central Government under no circumstances will allow this move to succeed; it will smash it with an iron hand'.⁸⁵¹ Suhrawardy did not, because he could not, contradict this harsh statement of his cabinet colleague of the Republican Party. What was amazing was the fact that this same Suhrawardy spoke at length in his speeches in the Constituent Assembly supporting regional autonomy for East Pakistan when he was in the opposition.

Prior to this resolution a major conflict had taken place between Bhashani and Suhrawardy on 7 February 1957, at Kagmari during the council session of the Awami League. Bhashani, in his speech, said that the rights of East Pakistan were not recognized in the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan, and so the Awami League would have to be active in changing and amending the Constitution to provide regional autonomy to East Pakistan. He emphasized the need for political action and demanded complete regional autonomy for East Pakistan. He also said that if regional autonomy was not granted to East Pakistan, then a time may come when East Bengal may feel like saying goodbye to West Pakistan.⁸⁵²

Suhrawardy, in his speech, spoke not as a leader of East Pakistan but as a representative of the vested interests of West Pakistan. He said that '98 percent autonomy had been provided for East Pakistan in the Constitution. Therefore this demand has no basis.' He also denied that East Pakistan was being exploited by West Pakistani vested interests and said, 'Since Awami League is in power, West Pakistan can also allege that they are being exploited.' It was certainly a very queer political exercise. What was amazing was the fact that none of his political lieutenants in East Pakistan like Aatur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman contradicted Suhrawardy and remained seated in their exalted chairs. They certainly loved autonomy for East Pakistan, but their love for power and ministerial posts was immodestly greater. In contrast to this, the general members attending the council stood up in support of Bhashani when he spoke in favor of autonomy and exhorted them to organize a struggle for that. However, it must also be mentioned that when Suhrawardy spoke in great detail in support of his policy, the great majority of councillors refrained from opposing him, and in a way they were convinced by the Prime Minister. No resolution was placed on the question of autonomy in spite of all the dust that was raised. Kagmari conference was a sad

⁸⁵¹ *The Pakistan Times*, 5 April 1957.

⁸⁵² Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-8.

commentary on the Awami League as well as a clear reflection on the character of the East Pakistani Bengali bourgeoisie who were developing as a nascent 'national' entity.⁸⁵³

On his return journey from Kagmari, Suhrawardy came to Dhaka and addressed the students of Dhaka University at Salimullah Muslim Hall and said again that East Pakistan had achieved 98 percent autonomy because it had been provided for in the 1956 Constitution and there was no need for any struggle for regional autonomy. Reportedly, his argument was so strong that the students of the Dhaka University were also convinced.

In Kagmari much greater heat was generated around the issue of foreign policy. The central committee of the Communist Party decided that if any resolution was raised by Bhashani denouncing the military pacts and pro-imperialist policies of the Pakistan Government, they would support it. They issued instructions to their party members to vote for an anti-imperialist resolution and also to persuade other members of the council to vote in favor of Bhashani's resolution.⁸⁵⁴

It was expected that a decision would be taken for placing a resolution on foreign policy in the working committee meeting of the Awami League on 6 February, the day preceding the council meeting. But Bhashani made an opportunistic compromise with Suhrawardy and decided not to attend the meeting. In spite of Bhashani's compromise there was a debate on whether to move a resolution on the annulment of military pacts like SEATO, Baghdad Pact and Pak-US bilateral military pact. It was finally decided by 35 to 1 vote that no resolution for the annulment of such pacts would be placed before the council. The only dissenting vote was cast by Oli Ahad, organizing secretary of the Awami League, who was also a member of the Communist Party.⁸⁵⁵

In the council meeting the next day, no resolution was moved for the annulment of the military pacts, but a lot of confusion was created. Bhashani, in spite of his agreement with Suhrawardy not to press for any resolution on foreign policy, made a fiery speech against the pacts. It was ugly opportunism. Since it was already made known to the delegates that no resolution was going to be moved on foreign policy, Bhashani's fiery speech had little impact.⁸⁵⁶

Prime Minister Suhrawardy, in his long speech, also spoke on Pakistan's foreign policy, and making an about-turn on Awami League's resolutions opposing military pacts and anti-imperialist foreign policy in their council meetings in Mymensingh in 1953, in Dhaka in 1955 and 1956, supported the existing pacts and denounced all attempts for

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-5.

⁸⁵⁴ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-3; Kamruddin Ahmad, *Social History of East Pakistan*, p. 150.

⁸⁵⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-6.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 270.

the annulment of such pacts. He was able to convince the vast majority of the councillors.

In his speech before the Dhaka University students on his way back, he also spoke on the government's foreign policy and spoke in identical terms in which his predecessors of the Muslim League and the Republican Party spoke. The students of the Dhaka University generally opposed the foreign policy and the military pacts of the previous governments, but the same policy and pacts were supported by them as they were 'convinced' by Suhrawardy's speech!⁸⁵⁷ There were no demonstrations, black flags etc. against him. It greatly relieved Suhrawardy's cronies in the Awami League and the provincial government, but prepared the ground for a split in the organization.

⁸⁵⁷ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 43; Kamruddin Ahmad, *Social History of East Pakistan*, p. 150.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

FORMATION OF NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY

The Awami League coalition ministry turned their back to the regional autonomy demand of East Pakistan and grew increasingly hostile towards it. With regard to foreign policy, the Awami League made a political somersault and stood firmly in favor of the military pacts which they had denounced earlier. This alienated the Central Awami League Coalition Government not only from a large section of the middle class in East Pakistan, but also from a very powerful section and workers and leaders of the East Pakistan Awami League.

Since the Kagmari conference, the internal conflict within the Provincial Awami League organization and between the Awami League government and a considerable section of workers of the Awami League organization, including its president, Bhashani, were moving fast towards a headlong collision. This clash finally split up the Awami League organization and brought about a new all-Pakistan political party, the National Awami Party. Maulana Bhashani resigned as president soon after the Kagmari conference and his resignation letter, though addressed to the general secretary, was sent straight to the editor of *Pakistan Observer* through Oli Ahad, the organizing secretary.⁸⁵⁸ On 30 March 1957, in a meeting of the East Pakistan Awami League Working Committee, Abul Mansur Ahmad placed a resolution for the temporary suspension of Oli Ahad from the Awami League, which was accepted. Bhashani was absent in this meeting, but it was done in the presence of Oli Ahad who simply said that he had acted on the instruction of the former president.⁸⁵⁹ Bhashani did not withdraw his resignation letter and made it clear publicly that he had no intention to continue in the Awami League and that he was engaged in the foundation work for a new democratic all-Pakistan party.⁸⁶⁰

In April 1957, Bhashani went to West Pakistan to meet the leaders of various opposition political parties in that region and explore the possibility of forming a new democratic political party on an all-Pakistan basis. Earlier he had discussions with the workers who belonged to the left faction of the Awami League many of whom were either members of the Communist Party or closely linked to it.

In spite of Bhashani's open activities with a view to forming a new party, his resignation was not formally accepted and he continued as the president of that organization till June 1957 when a council meeting of the Awami League was called. In that meeting,

⁸⁵⁸ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-4.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-7.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 280, 282.

held on 13 June, both Suhrawardy and Bhashani were present, and in spite of strong opposition from Bhashani and the left-wing members of the council, a resolution moved by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was passed by a majority vote endorsing the reactionary pro-imperialist foreign policy of the Awami League.⁸⁶¹ Next day at a Paltan Maidan meeting Awami League Prime Minister, Suhrawardy, declared that East Pakistan had been granted 98 percent autonomy!⁸⁶² After the Kagmari council meeting, the official resolution on a pro-imperialist foreign policy made it impossible for Communist Party members and their associates to continue as members and workers of the Awami League. So the party central committee decided to withdraw its men from the Awami League and asked them to support Bhashani formally in his efforts to form a new democratic, anti-imperialist party.⁸⁶³

After consultations with the leaders of West Pakistan, on 17 June, Bhashani announced a conference of all democratic forces in Pakistan to be held in Dhaka on 25 and 26 July 1957. Following his announcement, the Dhaka district Awami League, under the leadership of Yar Mohammad Khan, decided to sever its relation with the Awami League. In all other districts of East Pakistan, the Awami League organization split up and a large section of workers and leaders decided to participate in the Dhaka Conference. The Awami League reacted with large-scale expulsions from the party.⁸⁶⁴

A meeting of the Supreme Council of the Ganatantri Dal was held at Barisal from 21 to 23 July 1957, presided over by Mahmud Ali, who was president of the organization and a provincial minister in the Awami League coalition ministry. They decided to join the All Pakistan Democratic Worker's Conference and the working committee was authorized to take any decision at the conference which they considered necessary.⁸⁶⁵ Therefore, they finally decided to liquidate the Ganatantri Dal as a separate organization and merge it with the new party.⁸⁶⁶

A meeting of political workers was held on 1 July 1957, at the Dhaka District Board Hall under Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan. A reception committee was formed for the conference with Yar Mohammad Khan as chairman, and Mohiuddin Ahmed as general secretary. It was entrusted with the responsibility of organizing the conference on 25 and 26 July,⁸⁶⁷ Maulana Bhashani formally announced, on 24 July, his decision to sever all his connections with the Awami League which he had founded in 1949 and whose president he had remained till then.

⁸⁶¹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 281; Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

⁸⁶² Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

⁸⁶³ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

⁸⁶⁴ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

⁸⁶⁵ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

⁸⁶⁶ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

⁸⁶⁷ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

The conference of democratic workers of both wings of Pakistan began in Dhaka at the Rupmahal Cinema Hall near Sadarghat on 25 July. It was attended by Abdul Ghaffar Khan known as the 'Frontier Gandhi', and was a protagonist of Pakhtoonistan-an autonomous region in the North-West Frontier Province. Among those from West Pakistan were Mian Iftikharuddin, leader of Azad Pakistan Party; Sindhi nationalist leader G.M. Syed, Baloch nationalist leader Abdul Karim Khan, Pakhtoon leader Abdus Samad Achakzai, Mahmudul Huq Osmani who resigned his position as general secretary of Pakistan Awami League, C.R. Aslam (Punjab), Abdul Majid Sindhi, Ghous Baksh Bizenjo, Ataul Huq Khan Mengal, Khair Baksh Marri, Ghulam Mustafa Khar, Savo Guan Chandani and Wali Khan, leader of North-West Frontier Province and son of Abdul Ghaffar Khan.⁸⁶⁸

A large number of leftists, pro-communist and communist workers and leaders from East Pakistan attended the conference which was called the Founding Convention of the new party. This convention, attended by about 500 delegates, may be described as the greatest assembly of opposition and democratic forces that ever took place in the entire history of Pakistan.⁸⁶⁹

Following the Kagmari meeting of the Awami League Council, the split in the Awami League organization, and the announcement by Bhashani to hold a democratic convention of opposition and democratic forces of both wings of Pakistan, the hostility of the Awami League government at the centre and in East Pakistan against Bhashani, pro-Bhashani Awami Leaguers and the communists reached a high point at the time of the Convention.⁸⁷⁰

The vicious propaganda by the pro-Suhrawardy and pro-government Bengali *Ittefaq* and other propaganda machineries of the government turned into physical assaults against the people attending the convention.⁸⁷¹ The editor of *Ittefaq*, Tofazzal Hossain (Manik Mian), made all sorts of vulgar attacks on Bhashani, denounced the convention and the formation of National Awami Party as an Indian conspiracy, thus branding Bhashani, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and other leaders as agents of India. He even abused the National Awami Party by distorting the abbreviation as the 'Nehru Aided Party'.⁸⁷² Thus, in spite of political opposition to the Muslim League government and its line of communal and anti-Indian propaganda, the Awami League, wearing the mantle of the Muslim League, did not hesitate to make use of the anti-Indian sentiments of a section of the people and thus try to gain advantages through such utterly reactionary political exercises.

⁸⁶⁸ Oli Ahad, *ibid.*; Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-5; Rangalal Sen, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁸⁶⁹ Rangalal Sen, *ibid.*; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁸⁷⁰ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 45; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁸⁷¹ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 285; Moni Singh, *ibid.*; Saradindu Dastidar, *Jiban Smriti* (Memoirs), Sahitya Prakash, Dhaka, 1999, p. 151.

⁸⁷² Oli Ahad, *ibid.*; Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Manik Mian took charge of this kind of propaganda against the convention and its leaders, and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took charge of organizing physical attacks on even very prominent leaders attending the convention. Their musclemen surrounded the Rupmahal Cinema Hall and pelted stones indiscriminately at the delegates. They also snatched leaflets and other papers from the workers at the convention. Mian Iftikharuddin, Mirza Gholam Hafeez and others were injured.⁸⁷³

The delegates and the workers, however, remained indomitable. As Abdul Majid Sindhi said in his speech in reference to those incidents, 'The attacks of the oppositionists on our leaders has actually contributed to the success of our conference.' Others also strongly criticized and denounced the attacks by the Awami League government.

On 25 July, the convention began with Bhashani presiding. He spoke at length explaining the purpose of the convention and described the economic, social and political situation in both wings of Pakistan. He spoke of the miserable condition of the peasants and workers and people belonging to the lower stratum of the middle class and appealed to the delegates to organize a united struggle against the powers that were, for building up Pakistan as a federal welfare state, free from all exploitations and from all military pacts with external imperialist powers. Bhashani gave this inaugural speech in Bengali but it was translated into Urdu for the delegates from West Pakistan.⁸⁷⁴

The leaders from West Pakistan, and East Pakistan spoke on both 25 and 26 July. Yar Mohammad Khan proposed the formation of a new all-Pakistan party to be called the National Awami Party. Mohammed Toaha seconded the resolution that after discussing the political, economic and social situation in the country with leaders and representatives of both wings of Pakistan it is proposed to form a new political party called the National Awami Party which would consolidate the Pakistani people as a nation free from communalism, provincialism, imperialism and exploitation, improve the economic condition of the people and would establish constitutional democracy and autonomy in both regions of Pakistan. The Ganatantri Dal and Pakistan National Party joined the new party along with a large number of other leaders and workers from both East and West Pakistan.

At its final stage the programme of the new party stood as follows: (1) Full regional autonomy for all provinces and break-up of One Unit in West Pakistan; (2) independent and neutral foreign policy, and abrogation of military pacts with the imperialists; (3) holding of general election in the country; (4) industrialization of the country and improvement of the living conditions of working people; (5) abolition of feudalism and

⁸⁷³ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 45; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

⁸⁷⁴ *Sangbad*, 26 July 1957, quoted in *Bangladesh Freedom War (BFW) Documents* Vol. I, pp. 611-12.

radical agrarian reforms; (6) unity of all progressive forces in Pakistan, and solidarity with the Afro-Asian countries and support for their struggles against imperialism; and (7) turning Pakistan into a democratic state, free from imperialist fetters,⁸⁷⁵

Bhashani was elected president of both the All-Pakistan and East Pakistan Provincial Committees. In the All-Pakistan Committee Mahmudul Huq Osmani became general secretary; Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Abdul Majid Sindhi, Mian Mahmud Ali Kasuri, Haji Mohammed Danesh, Dabiruddin Ahmad and Mohammad Toaha became vice-presidents; and Professor Muzaffar Ahmed became the assistant general secretary.⁸⁷⁶ Mahmud Ali became the general secretary of the East Pakistan Party; Haji Mohammad Danesh, Abdul Jabbar, Dabiruddin Ahmed, Maulana Altaf Hossain and Abdul Kader Chowdhury became vice-presidents; Oli Ahad was joint-secretary. Ahmedul Kabir, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Khondkar Mohammed Ilias, Aatur Rahman (Rajshahi), Abdur Razzaq (Jessore), Maulana Azami (Chittagong), Bijoybhushan Chatterjee, Mosharraf Hossain Mondal, Azizul Huq (Rangpur) and Gaziul Huq (Bogra) became members.⁸⁷⁷

On the 26th a public meeting was organized at the Paltan Maidan. After the end of the convention Maulana Bhashani, Abdul Ghaffar Khan, G.M. Syed, Mian Iftikharuddin, Mahmudul Huq Osmani, Mahmud Ali Kasuri and other leaders of the West and East Pakistan Committees along with a large number of workers proceeded in a procession towards the Paltan Maidan. On their way they were attacked at various points, but when they reached the venue of the meeting at Paltan Maidan they found that the hooligans and musclemen of the Awami League were fully prepared to make an organized attack on the meeting. They used sticks to attack the workers and leaders and began to throw brickbats and stones. Some brickbats and stones were hurled on the dais. Afzal Bangash of North-West Frontier Province was hit on the head and suffered serious head injury. Some others were also injured. At one stage Abdul Ghaffar Khan stood up on the dais and began to collect the stones and deposited them in one corner of the dais.⁸⁷⁸ It was a very largely attended public meeting. But at one stage the disturbance created by Awami League hooligans let loose by Sheikh Mujib became so dangerous that finally the SDO Dhaka had to promulgate section 144 in the area to bring the situation under control.⁸⁷⁹

Unlike any other party formed in Pakistan after 1947 the National Awami Party (NAP) came into being as an all-Pakistan party. The leaders from both wings of Pakistan who assembled at Dhaka represented the most advanced and progressive political forces and opinions in the country. They all wanted to have a democratic political system, they were generally in favor of a sort of regional autonomy and were also opposed to

⁸⁷⁵ *BFW*, pp. 611-2.

⁸⁷⁶ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

military pacts and alliances with the US and other imperialist countries. But in spite of this there were great differences in class compositions between the leaders of West and East Pakistan. The former were all big landlords or owners of other forms of property and were opposed to any significant land reform in West Pakistan, with the exception of G.M. Syed of Sindh.

The leaders of East Pakistan all belonged to various professions or were minor landholders, who did not have any big stake in land. Thus, the programme for land reform remained a strong dividing line between the predominantly feudal leadership of West Pakistan and the middle class leaders of the East. Apart from the question of land there were other issues as well. With the decline of the initial enthusiasm the all-Pakistan character of the National Awami Party began to lose its significance. It soon broke down and assumed a regional character. This was a natural development in Pakistan where differences between the two regions were so considerable that no bourgeois or petty bourgeois party could reconcile such disparate and conflicting interests within the framework of an all-Pakistan organization.

At the time of the formation of the National Awami Party, the communist and pro-communist forces emerged as the leading factors in the new organization. But the Communist Party repeated their mistake by being a leading factor in the formation of another petty-bourgeois organization like the National Awami Party in the hope that this time, by virtue of being a leading factor, they would convert the National Awami Party into a socialist party. The nature of developments being different from what they expected, the National Awami Party finally powerfully retained its petty-bourgeois character and it was the Communist Party which began to melt in the hot pot of bourgeois politics during the military administration of Ayub Khan.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

ECONOMIC SITUATION IN EAST PAKISTAN DURING AWAMI LEAGUE ADMINISTRATION

The population of East Bengal was about 42 million at the time of partition, but its revenue income in 1948-49 was 169 million rupees. Compared to that the population of West Pakistan at the same time was 33.7 million and its revenue receipt was 279.5 million rupees.⁸⁸⁰ The economic conditions were generally bad for both the regions of Pakistan but conditions were much worse in East Pakistan with the resultant imbalance in the economic situation of East and West Pakistan.

In August 1947, East Pakistan was burdened with a debt of 141.6 million rupees on account of (i) Debt to the Reserve Bank; (ii) Provident Fund; (iii) Non-military Deposits; (iv) Unrealized Treasury Bills; (v) Deficit on account of Food Purchase and (vi) Agreed Debt against payments to government servants. The central government granted a loan of 44.7 million rupees to the provincial government for payment to the Reserve Bank and unrealized Treasury Bills in Bengal before partition. The rest of the debt had to be cleared by the provincial government from its own resources.⁸⁸¹ In addition, the provincial government of East Pakistan had to spend millions of rupees on many items like construction of office and residential buildings for government employees as Dhaka had no readymade accommodation, which could be used for this purpose.

In order to cover up the imbalance between the two regions of Pakistan, East Pakistan needed to be dealt with special consideration. However, since the centre of power was in West Pakistan and the resources were controlled by people who had little interest in the development of this region the opposite happened. In fact, they tried to take away as much of the resources from the East to the West as was politically feasible. Even sales tax, which was a provincial item, was transferred to the centre in 1948-9.

Up until 1957-8, West Pakistan had been granted up to 942.9 million rupees loan for development, whereas East Pakistan received 452.7 million rupees for the same purpose during the same period. Up to 1956-7 defence expenditure in East Pakistan was around 180 million rupees, whereas in West Pakistan it was 4800 million rupees. The East Pakistan government had to bear the expenses of the East Pakistan Rifles and the

⁸⁸⁰ Chief Minister of East Pakistan Ataur Rahman Khan's speech at the Press Conference held in Karachi on 4 June 1958. Government of East Pakistan, *Bangladesh Freedom War Documents*, vol. I, p. 615.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Frontier Police and though the central government agreed to take on 60 percent of this expenditure it did not pay anything at all on that count.⁸⁸²

In 1950-1 and 1951-2 the income of East Pakistan from the tax on jute was 67.2 million rupees and 60 million rupees respectively. The Raisman Committee was constituted by the central government to look into the matter of re-distribution of export duties between the two wings. The report of that committee weighed heavily in favor of West Pakistan and consequently, East Pakistan's share fell to 43.2 million rupees and 40 million rupees for 1952-3 and 1953-4 respectively.⁸⁸³

East Pakistan was affected by severe floods for three consecutive years, 1954, 1955 and 1956. This was followed by a severe drought in 1957. Crops were damaged but the central government did little to help East Pakistan. It was only when Suhrawardy became Prime Minister, and the Awami League government was installed in power in East Pakistan in 1956, that some funds were released to enable the provincial government to deal with the famine. The provincial government had the added burden of epidemics following the floods.⁸⁸⁴

The Awami League government in East Pakistan came to power at a time when economic conditions were very grave. This government had some advantage over the earlier government of Abu Hossain Sarkar because soon after the induction of the Awami League government in East Pakistan, Suhrawardy formed his minority government at the centre. So, although for about one year the East Pakistan government did not receive any major assistance from the centre, yet it did not face any great hostility from it either. This situation continued for a little more than a year until towards the end of 1957, Suhrawardy was forced by President Iskandar Mirza to resign.

The government of Aatur Rahman, though corrupt and inefficient in many ways, tried to do relatively more for the development of the economy and infrastructure in East Pakistan than the previous governments. But the provincial prime minister was in a particularly difficult situation, specially because of his rivalry and contradictions with the powerful general secretary of their party, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was a semi-educated person and understood very little of economics and administration. He was a political agitator and an organizer of considerable ability. As such he was extremely ambitious, but his abilities in other matters, were no match for his soaring ambitions. Indeed his quick downfall in independent Bangladesh from a position of great political height, achieved due to the historical circumstances, was the result of this gap between what he wanted to be and what he actually became. His lack of intellectual, educational and cultural abilities necessary to sustain his position was all too apparent. The contradictions between him and the provincial chief minister continued to plague the

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 616-7.

⁸⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 617.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 618.

proper functioning of the provincial government. Moreover, the Awami League members of the provincial assembly and their supporters began to treat the entire administration as a 'money-making machine' and corruption reached an unprecedented height. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that competition in corrupt practices began to create serious dissension within the ruling party.

Maulana Bhashani became increasingly irrelevant to this kind of Awami League politics because he had little taste for parliamentary politics and little control over the members of the Assembly who were loyal to the powers that were. Finally, when Bhashani left the Awami League and formed his new party, the National Awami Party, the struggle for power within the Awami League assumed very ugly proportions.

Nevertheless the Awami League government of Aatur Rahman Khan tried to work out a development plan and pushed forward some development programmes within the brief period of two years. It was for the first time that a Provincial Planning Board was constituted in East Pakistan with the Chief Minister as its chairman. Men like Abdur Razzaq of Dhaka University and other eminent economists were included as members of the Board. Apart from the members, other competent economists were also brought in to assist the Planning Board. After a preliminary review of the general economic situation of the province it was found that in the previous two years nothing had really been done for development and a 'Three Years' Phase of the Five Year Plan' with an allocation of 3250 million rupees was initiated. This meant that a three-year plan had to be prepared to make it possible to spend 1000 million rupees per annum. It may be mentioned here that in the two previous years allocation for development in East Pakistan was only 190 million rupees out of which only 120 million were spent!⁸⁸⁵

In case of the Awami League government's development expenditure, the central government tried to create as much difficulties as possible. So they cut the annual allocation of 1000 million rupees to 450 million rupees. Thus, the Provincial Planning Board had no other way than to revise their priorities and limit their expenditure accordingly. The provincial government was in such a difficult position that they could hardly fill the gap created between the originally planned expenditure and the amount available from the central government.⁸⁸⁶

Development of agriculture was very important for a region like East Pakistan but surprisingly the size of uncultivated fallow land had never been properly surveyed. A partial and incomplete survey in 1945 revealed that there were about 2.6 million acres of fallow land in the area which comprised East Bengal.⁸⁸⁷ Most of this land was *Haors* and *Beels* (natural water reservoirs). It could be reclaimed and made available for cultivation if water could be drained out from there. It was a questionable matter whether it was

⁸⁸⁵ Aatur Rahman Khan, *Ojaratir Dui Bachar* (Two Years of Ministry) First Edition, 1964 pp. 266-7.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

wise, from the economic and environmental viewpoint, to drain out the water from all such natural reservoirs for cultivation. The East Pakistan Planning Board decided that it was necessary to thus increase the area of cultivation for increasing crop production.⁸⁸⁸ For that purpose, the import of 1150 power pumps was sanctioned and about 1000 of them were actually imported during the tenure of the provincial Awami League government. Training arrangements for a few hundred technicians were also made to work the machines. Since there were few *khals* (narrow water lanes) and rivers in the northern areas, it was decided to set up deep tubewells for irrigation in those areas.⁸⁸⁹ The East Pakistan government claimed that within a period of a little more than one year they dug about 3000 *khals* and were going ahead with plans for digging more of them. They also claimed that owing to the digging of those new *khals* productivity of about 1.5 million acres of land was increased and consequently an additional 4.3 million maunds of rice was produced.⁸⁹⁰

Usually during the sowing season scarcity of rice seeds is very common, because during the lean period the peasants consume a large part of the seeds. So in the first year of this administration the government supplied about 40,000 maunds of Boro, Aman and Aush rice seeds to the peasants in addition to 11,000 maunds of *dal* (lentil) and mustard oil seeds. It cost them about 1.7 million rupees. In addition, 12,000 maunds of seeds were distributed among the peasants by releasing stocks from the government farms. Two thousand maunds of green vegetable seeds and 1.2 million maunds of potato seeds were also imported from abroad and distributed among the peasants.⁸⁹¹

While trying to improve agricultural production in general the government, as it was claimed by them, paid attention to the use of fertilizers. Only green manure was generally used by peasants as fertilizer and the use of chemical fertilizer was practically unknown. Most farmers actually had no idea about how to use chemical fertilizers. During the first eight years of independence only one million maunds of fertilizer was distributed among the farmers. In the first year of the Awami League administration 1.5 million maunds were collected and distributed and arrangements were made for doubling the amount. The fertilizer thus distributed was sold to the farmers at a largely subsidized rate—at about one-third of the market price. Crop production increased by about 25 to 30 percent as a result of using fertilizers.⁸⁹²

The use of pesticides was unknown in East Pakistan and consequently, about 10 percent of the crop was to be annually damaged by pests in addition to whatever damage was caused by regular floods. The East Pakistan Planning Board decided to take measures against such loss of crops and allocated 1.3 million rupees for the purchase of pesticides

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 267-8.

⁸⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*

during the three-year plan period. In the first year pesticides were distributed for about 30,000 acres of land.⁸⁹³

The Planning Board also paid attention to the development of horticulture. It is easy to grow fruits in East Bengal but there had been no planning for the improvement and development of horticulture. The government of East Pakistan worked out plans for this and allocated five million rupees, of which, eight hundred thousand was allocated for the first year. They also formed a Fruit Development Board for the development of fruit production and improvement of the quality of fruits.⁸⁹⁴

For agricultural education and training there was only one college and one school. The new government established two new agricultural schools—one in Rangpur and the other in Sherpur. In the first year, five million rupees were also allocated for five rice research centers.⁸⁹⁵ In Mymensingh a veterinary college for the treatment of animals, particularly farm animals, was established. They were also planning to establish an agricultural university in Mymensingh.⁸⁹⁶

It was a very wise decision of Ataur Rahman Khan's Awami League government to constitute the Planning Board. It seemed that he was well aware of the limitations of his party and the men who led it, and came to the conclusion that in order to make some positive contribution for the development of East Pakistan's economy, specialized knowledge and a body of men possessing such knowledge was necessary. This body could be nothing other than a Planning Board. Being moved by such thoughts he proceeded, immediately after assuming power, to constitute the Planning Board. This decision was central to whatever was achieved by the Awami League government at that time in spite of all the limitation by which Ataur Rahman's administration was handicapped.

The entire educational system was in a terribly bad shape, but the situation at the lower level was the most deplorable. So initially the government paid attention to primary education on a priority basis. At the time when they formed that government, apart from the fact that the salaries of primary teachers were miserably low, there were huge arrears which remained unpaid to them. Though there was shortage of funds, the government somehow managed to pay all arrears to the primary teachers within about a month of their assuming power.⁸⁹⁷ Earlier the salaries of the primary school teachers was disbursed through the School Boards. The government abolished them and the primary schools were all taken over by the government. One of the reasons for this was to see that the salaries of the primary school teachers were regularized and they

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 269-70.

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

received them in due time. Six million rupees were also sanctioned for the increase of the salaries of the school teachers.⁸⁹⁸ An 'Educational Reform Commission' was constituted for the first time with the Chief Minister as its chairman for reviewing the entire system of education and making necessary recommendations for improving the system.⁸⁹⁹ According to the recommendations of this Commission, it was planned to have new 2000 junior high schools, 500 high schools, 6000 primary schools, and 40 colleges. In addition to that allocations were also made for the development of the Engineering College. In the educational sector 240 million rupees were sanctioned for thirty projects.⁹⁰⁰

In 1957, apart from regular aid, ten million rupees were sanctioned for repairing college, school and madrassah buildings of which five million was provided by the central government. All educational institutions received part of this grant. The original building of Eden Girl's College was taken over by the East Bengal government for use as the secretariat, but no new building for the college was constructed. The provincial government sanctioned 2.6 million rupees for the construction of a new building for housing the Eden Girl's College. Additional one million rupees was sanctioned for constructing a hostel and 300,000 rupees for setting up a Science Section. A two-storied student hostel for the students of Dhaka College was built within a very short time. About four million rupees was sanctioned for a new building of Alia Madrassah which was shifted from Calcutta after partition in 1947, but had no building of its own. The construction of that building started when the Awami League government was in power.⁹⁰¹

International and coastal shipping in Pakistan was entirely in the private sector. The private shipping companies fixed freight charges at such high levels that commodities imported from West Pakistan cost much more in East Pakistan than in the West. These commodities included many things from salt to other manufactured goods. In order to reduce shipping freight charges and thus bring down prices of commodities in East Pakistan the Awami League central industries and commerce minister, Abul Mansur Ahmad proposed the formation of a National Shipping Corporation.⁹⁰² This was violently opposed by the private shipping companies and even President Iskandar Mirza advised the commerce minister not to go for that. Realizing the difficulties of the situation Prime Minister Suhrawardy also remained generally indifferent to the proposal and advised a go slow policy. The central commerce ministry then proposed that the operation of the corporation be limited to coastal shipping and it would have nothing to do with international trade and shipping. The very powerful interest groups in the shipping business blocked the proposals in spite of protracted negotiations

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 271-2.

⁹⁰² Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-82.

between relevant departments, during the tenure of the Awami League government at the centre which was dismissed by Iskandar Mirza at the end of 1957.⁹⁰³

Building and construction work in East Pakistan was hampered badly owing to, among other things, shortage of cement. There was only one cement factory in the district of Sylhet. It was owned by Indians at that time with the head office in Calcutta. Limestone, which was the raw material for this factory, had to be brought from the Indian side of the border. The capacity of the factory was 100,000 tons per annum, but the actual production was only 47,000 tons. The engineering department of the East Pakistan government told the central commerce minister, Abul Mansur Ahmad, that the actual requirement of cement at that time was 150,000 tons per annum and it would go up to 250,000 tons by the next year. So the additional quantity of cement had to be imported, and it could be done from West Pakistan. But shipping space from West Pakistan was a big problem and the needed supply of cement was not possible to manage.⁹⁰⁴ Abul Mansur Ahmad, along with the director general of central supply and development, B.A. Qureshi, visited the Chatak Factory. After discussions with the factory management, it was decided to import certain required machines so that within six months the factory could increase its production to a hundred thousand tons. This time the supply and development department of the central government took up the matter seriously and granted license for import of machineries, though on many previous occasions such proposals on behalf of the Chatak Cement Factory remained in the central government's cold storage. Following this move of the central government the production at the Chatak Cement Factory went up to 100,000 tons, but by that time the Awami League government was no longer in power at the centre.⁹⁰⁵

In November 1956, central minister for industry and commerce held a high-level conference in Karachi in which certain important decisions were taken. A controller for import and export for East Pakistan was appointed; three separate license boards were formed for the two provinces and the centre; representation from the East Pakistan government in the 'Ceiling Committee' and 'Foreign Exchange Committee' was arranged. In addition, opportunities for businessmen from East Pakistan and other areas, who were so far deprived from access to import-export trade, was opened up to some extent and in order to facilitate it, possible importers were categorized and a revised list was prepared for the purpose. As a result of this decision many powers of the central government were transferred to the provincial government which facilitated to some extent development activity of the latter.⁹⁰⁶

During the period preceding the general election of 1954 only two major industrial projects were completed-the Adamjee Jute Mills at Narayanganj and the Karnaphuli

⁹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 382-4.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 351-2.

⁹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 393-400.

Paper Mills in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The provincial Awami League government granted business to about sixty new industries of small and medium size. These industries were planned in such a manner so that they could use local raw materials, and their products could meet local requirements. The greatest difficulty in this was the shortage of capital. Very little agricultural surplus was available for industrial investment, and what was more important under the circumstances was the non-availability of required bank loans. The head offices of the banks were situated in West Pakistan and it was very difficult for East Pakistani businessmen, industrialists and entrepreneurs to have access to the bank facilities needed to set up business houses and industries.

Jute was the main cash crop in East Pakistan and about 50 percent of foreign exchange of the country was earned by exporting raw jute and jute goods. But owing to uncertainties of market conditions most of the benefits from this trade went to unscrupulous traders and speculators. In spite of the importance of jute in East Pakistan's economy the jute growers were exploited badly as the jute market remained unstable. Smuggling in the border areas made the situation worse because it affected normal trade between East Pakistan and India.

In order to stabilize the market, and stop smuggling, the East Pakistan government established a Jute Marketing Corporation, which arranged for the purchase of jute at fixed prices in the border areas and ensured a minimum price of jute to the actual growers. This new corporation began its work but vested interests, large number of whom belonged to the ruling party, tried to sabotage it as much as was possible for them. The Jute Marketing Corporation was considerably organized in spite of these difficulties.⁹⁰⁷

Very little or practically nothing was done for improvement of road and river transport and the improvement of economic infrastructure in general. The East Pakistan Planning Board paid attention to this situation and took certain positive measures in this area. They established the Inland Water Transport Authority and decided to dig thousands of khals for extending the inland water transport system. But it was not easy because of shortage of funds and experts.⁹⁰⁸

Three programmes were already taken up before the Awami League government came to power—the Karnaphuli Hydro-Electric Project, the Ganges-Kobadak Project and the Teesta Barrage Project. But the work in all these projects was badly mismanaged. Dependence on foreign aid complicated matters. However, the East Pakistan government tried to expedite work in all these projects on a priority basis.⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁷ Ataur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 275-6.

Periodic floods and drought always created uncertainties in the agriculture sector and attention had to be paid to irrigation and flood control. At that time the head of the United Nations Technical Mission, Julius Krugg, came to East Pakistan with his team and made an on-the-spot survey of the whole situation. They recommended a short-term plan which would have cost about 160 million rupees. It was expected that 100 million rupees would be spent within 1957, but it was not possible.⁹¹⁰ Projects for digging of the Gomati River, embankment on the south side of the Jamuna in Rangpur, flood embankment at Habiganj, improvement and control of the big rivers in Faridpur district, Gaibandha, Kurigram protection embankment etc. were also included in the plan.⁹¹¹ On the recommendation of Krugg, emphasis was laid on hydroelectric power and a water and power development board, WAPDA, was formed with a sanction of 2.5 million rupees for initial expenditure. It was planned to spend 300 million rupees in the next five years.⁹¹²

The Planning Board of the East Pakistan government decided to organize supervision and improvement of forest areas. For that the East Pakistan government appointed two conservators of forests, one in the East and the other in the West zone. Apart from this it was decided to establish a Forest Industries Development Corporation and a law was enacted accordingly, but the provincial Awami League government was dismissed in July 1958. However, the government established a big garden in Dhaka called the Ramna Green at a cost of two million rupees.⁹¹³

Certain powers related to commerce and industry were transferred from the centre to the provinces and that provided some opportunities to the provincial Awami League government to establish a number of new industries in East Pakistan.

East Bengal was self-sufficient in salt, but difficulties were created for this industry and people of this area had to depend largely on salt imported from West Pakistan. Shipping space problems created big problems and prices of salt fluctuated. In 1951, salt crisis became so acute that its price went up to even rupees 16 per seer! The East Pakistan government created a new ministerial department for establishing and improving the salt industry. Actual requirement of salt in East Pakistan was ten million tons per annum, of which half was produced locally. The rest had to be imported from West Pakistan.⁹¹⁴

Search for mineral deposits became a concern of the Planning Board and they took some measures for exploration. Gas was available in Sylhet and it could be used for producing fertilizer. But it was the responsibility of the Pakistan Industrial

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 278-81.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 283-4.

Development Corporation (PIDC). Following some urgent exchanges of letters between Prime Minister Firoz Khan Noon and chief minister of East Pakistan, Aaur Rahman Khan, a team from the PIDC visited East Pakistan and after much difficult negotiations it was decided to install a fertilizer factory at Fenchuganj in Sylhet which could use the Sylhet national gas as its basic raw material.⁹¹⁵ Apart from this pit coal, many types of stones etc. were also located in north Bengal and in the hill areas, but there was no immediate possibility of using them as raw materials in any industry. One big difficulty in this matter, apart from shortage of funds, was the absence of road or river communication.⁹¹⁶ At that time there were no direct road links between Dhaka and Chittagong, Dhaka and Sylhet, Dhaka and Rajshahi, Khulna and Jessore etc. There was no road connecting Dhaka and Aricha. The provincial government took up this matter and construction of roads began on some routes.⁹¹⁷

The government had to pay some attention to labor problems because the conditions of workers in the factories was absolutely deplorable and there was no institutional arrangement to look into such problems. So the East Pakistan government established an Industrial Tribunal and appointed additional labor commissioner, deputy commissioner etc. The workers were provided more opportunities to form trade unions and the arrangement for registration of unions was made easier and recognition of such registered unions by the owners was made binding and compulsory.⁹¹⁸

A Minimum Wages Board was also established for determining minimum wages of workers through direct negotiations between the workers and the management. The monthly salaries of lower grade government employees was raised though that was also quite insufficient to meet the rising expenses. But the government had no adequate funds. However, this little increase meant an additional expenditure of about 20 million rupees.⁹¹⁹

In order to help the poor peasants involved in litigation license fee for jute was abolished and court fee was reduced. It caused a 3.3 million rupees loss of revenue which had to be compensated by imposing taxes on shops, hotels, movement of jute etc.⁹²⁰

Realizing government dues through the issuance of certificates was an old practice, but it caused great difficulties for the rural people, particularly the peasants. The provincial

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 286-9.

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

government abolished the certificate system and made provisions for sending all cases to the Munsif Courts.⁹²¹

From what has been detailed here on the work of the provincial Awami League government, it appears clearly that East Pakistan after even ten years of independence remained practically at the same level of development at which it was found in 1947 at the time of partition. A hostile central government and a docile and submissive provincial government never paid any attention to the problems faced by the people. The United Front government of East Bengal led by Abu Hossain Sarkar, being almost equally submissive to the central government, also could do precious little.

The provincial Awami League government in its first year faced comparatively less hostility from the centre because an Awami League coalition ministry led by Suhrawardy was in power at the centre. But that government was dismissed in September 1957. The provincial government, in addition to the hostility of the central government, had to face many difficulties created by men belonging to very influential factions of their own organization.

But in spite of all these limitations it is quite noticeable that they were able to identify some of the major problems confronting the people and the economy and they tried to do as much as possible under the given circumstances. In this matter the role of the Planning Board, which was wisely constituted by the provincial Awami League government of Aatur Rahman Khan, was vital.

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 291-2.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

THE LAST PHASE OF CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT

The newly emerging Muslim middle class leadership throughout East Bengal, instead of consolidating its political and organizational position, found itself in complete disarray almost immediately after the general election of 1954. The Hindu and Muslim middle class Bengalis began to develop as a class under the British Indian administration from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Though the Bengali Muslim middle class was numerically much smaller in size than the Hindus, the educational and cultural life and social norms of both developed in conformity to the economic changes. There were cultural differences between them due to certain historical reasons. At the same time there also developed a unity of outlook based on the common class structure to which they both belonged, and it was reflected in the pattern of their social, cultural and political behavior.

This behavioral pattern underwent a sudden change with the almost overnight change of political position of the Muslim middle class after 14 August 1947, and became faster after the general election of 1954 when successive governments of the new East Pakistan Muslim middle class established themselves as the regional ruling power.

The opportunities during the two-year rule of the United Front government led by Abu Hossain Sarkar were small, but better than during the previous Muslim League government. The Awami League coalition government of Aatur Rahman Khan because of the relatively less hostility from the central government was well placed. The flow of funds was also larger because the Awami League coalition government at the centre, led by Suhrawardy, in spite of its limitations, paid more attention to the problems and needs of East Pakistan than any previous central government.

This help, however limited, extended by the centre during the first year of Provincial Awami League Government, made it possible for them to undertake certain important economic measures related to business, industry and infrastructure. But at the same time, it created opportunities for men, particularly the leaders of the ruling Awami League at all levels, to extract as much economic gains and benefits as possible from the government and the agencies related to the government. This also happened at the centre, though in a lesser degree, so long as the Awami League remained in power with Suhrawardy as the prime minister and Abul Mansur Ahmad as the minister for commerce and industry.

It may be said that during the period following the general election of 1954, the men belonging to the parties of the new Bengali Muslim middle class tried to resort to all

sorts of corrupt practices, constantly goaded by a lust for economic gains. It was actually a low-level exercise of the same process which began with a thousand-fold greater intensity and scale in Bangladesh after it was established as an independent state in 1971.

The Awami League government at the centre fell on 18 October 1957, and Iskandar Mirza, the President, began to conspire against the provincial Awami League government and to that end he strengthened his alliance with Fazlul Huq, the governor of East Pakistan, and his Krishak Sramik Party. Being ousted from power, the leaders and men of that party, and their allies, were deprived of all opportunities of corruption for making money and acquiring prosperity and they were dying to get back to power. It was thus easy for Mirza to involve them in the conspiracy he had hatched.

Malik Firoz Khan Noon became the Prime Minister of Pakistan on 16 December 1957, after the fall of the short-lived government of I.I. Chundrigar. Noon had his conflicts with Mirza and was more inclined towards the Awami League than towards Fazlul Huq and his party. Awami League was also a partner in his Republican coalition ministry. Noon wanted to dismiss Fazlul Huq as governor of East Pakistan but no candidate for the position was available from the Awami League or pro-Awami League circles. Moreover, it was difficult for him to persuade Mirza to dismiss Fazlul Huq who was closely allied to the former.⁹²²

The Budget Session of the East Pakistan Assembly was to begin in March and the budget had to be passed by 31 March. But the fate of the Awami League ministry and the Budget Session became uncertain particularly because of the position of the National Awami Party. Foreign policy, especially a non-aligned foreign policy, was the political plank of the latter and they had hardened their position.

The provincial government decided initially to present an On-Account Budget for three months in place of a regular one-year budget, in order to run the administration.⁹²³ The budget session began in March in the midst of great excitement, and fiery speeches were delivered accusing the government on many counts. At that time, Syed Azizul Huq, as the leader of the opposition, delivered his written speech in the strongest possible language. But the very next day he was toppled from his position and Abu Hossain Sarkar was again elected in his place by the Krishak Sramik Party and their allies.⁹²⁴ This clearly indicated how unstable the situation was not only in the one-time United Front in general, but also within the parties which constituted that Front before the general election.

⁹²² Ataur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

⁹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

Hot and angry debates took place during the budget session of the Assembly and finally a division was demanded in the first week of March. The National Awami Party remained neutral, but the government somehow survived by a marginal majority vote. A few days later another division took place in which the NAP voted with the government.⁹²⁵ But this did not mean that with their strength of thirty-three members, National Awami Party had decided to lend support to the Awami League government in all the divisions. On the contrary, they decided to maintain a position of neutrality.

On 31 March 1958, Chief Minister Aatur Rahman Khan saw the governor and requested him to prorogue the Assembly. Fazlul Huq, realizing the difficulties of the government, wanted to use it to his own advantage and refused to act. The same evening, as governor of East Pakistan, he wrote a letter of dismissal to the chief minister in which he said that he had to do so in order to protect the dignity of the constitution. The dismissal was immediately followed by the appointment of Abu Hossain Sarkar as chief minister of East Pakistan. The swearing-in ceremony also took place in the same evening.⁹²⁶

The same night President Iskandar Mirza dismissed Fazlul Huq as the governor of East Pakistan and replaced him with the chief secretary. Within twenty-four hours of his recruitment as chief minister, Abu Hossain Sarkar was dismissed and Aatur Rahman Khan was back to power as the chief minister of East Pakistan.⁹²⁷ Abu Hossain Sarkar filed a case in the Dhaka High Court against this change, but it came to nothing. Immediately after being sworn in again as the chief minister, Aatur Rahman Khan requested the Speaker to convene the Provincial Assembly. As the session of the Assembly began, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman moved a motion of confidence in favor of the government. The Opposition boycotted the session and the motion was passed on the strength of 157 votes.⁹²⁸ The session of the Assembly ended soon afterwards. After about a month, Sultanuddin Ahmed was sworn in as the new Governor of East Pakistan.⁹²⁹

The Awami League was hostile to the NAP from the very beginning and their campaign to politically malign Bhashani and the Communist Party was carried out relentlessly. Such hostility was unlikely to endear the Awami League ministry to Bhashani and the communists. But at the level of policy and tactics, the NAP had no definite and well-defined strategy. The communist and the ex-Awami League elements led by Bhashani, constituted the main body of NAP in East Pakistan, and as such there was much confusion regarding policy and tactical questions within it. This was why at one time it extended support to the Awami League and on another it became instrumental in

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 317; Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 292.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 317-18; Oli Ahad, *ibid.*

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*

ousting the Awami League government. Being thrown into the vortex of middle class politics with a hostile Awami League and an unscrupulous Krishak Praja Party around, the National Awami Party had great difficulties in following a consistent line in the parliamentary politics of the time. Moreover, owing to a dual leadership of Bhashani and the Communist Party, the pattern of National Awami Party's parliamentary behavior often showed inconsistencies which was interpreted by some quarters as political opportunism.

Anticipating his imminent dismissal by President Iskandar Mirza, Prime Minister Suhrawardy resigned on 13 October 1957. One of the reasons why Mirza wanted to remove Suhrawardy was that the latter was taking steps to hold a general election in Pakistan under the new Constitution in early 1959. It would have created a very difficult situation for Mirza and would lead to his removal from the presidency.⁹³⁰ Such a general election would have also badly affected the West Pakistani ruling feudal interests and the top echelons of the armed forces. The removal of Suhrawardy, could at least temporarily prevent such possibilities.

In his attempts to overthrow the Awami League at the centre and in East Pakistan, Iskandar Mirza turned his attention to National Awami Party. Suhrawardy, by his consistent support for One Unit in West Pakistan antagonized the predominantly National Awami Party leaders of Sindh, North-West Frontier, Balochistan and Punjab who wanted to dissolve the One Unit. National Awami Party, whose votes were a decisive factor for preserving the Awami League ministry in East Pakistan, fell into the trap laid for them by Iskandar Mirza, who bluffed them into believing that he would dismantle the One Unit and restore the old provinces, and perhaps do away with the parity system.

In June 1958, former chief minister of East Pakistan, Abu Hossain Sarkar, served notice for a no-confidence motion in the Provincial Assembly against the Awami League ministry. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, G.M. Syed and other leaders of West Pakistan were in Dhaka at the time attending a meeting of the central committee of National Awami Party. Presided over by Bhashani, the meeting passed a resolution supporting the no-confidence motion and instructions were issued accordingly to the National Awami Party members of the East Pakistan Assembly.⁹³¹

The Krishak Sramik Party, Nizam-e-Islam and the Muslim League formed an alliance in the East Pakistan Assembly, but even with their combined strength it was not possible for them to oust the Awami League government. It could be done only if National Awami Party with its thirty-three members supported their no-confidence motion. The

⁹³⁰ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

⁹³¹ Khoka Ray, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

support was forthcoming and on 19 June, after defeating the Awami League government, Abu Hossain Sarkar formed a new government in East Pakistan.⁹³²

The instruction of the National Awami Party central committee for supporting the Krishak Sramik Party no-confidence motion was so sudden that it surprised the underground leadership of the Communist Party which controlled twenty-two members in the East Pakistan Assembly. Their votes were crucial in deciding the fate of the government. Of these, four were members of the Communist Party and the others their allies.⁹³³

Since they had joined the National Awami Party Parliamentary Party they voted for the no-confidence motion moved by Abu Hossain Sarkar. They, however, had not received any instruction from the Communist Party to do this. So, indirectly they also fell into the trap. However, the Communist Party leadership was quick to realize the consequences of the overthrow of the Awami League government. As a representative of the rising Bengali bourgeoisie they were better equipped to oppose the central government in their attempts to discriminate against the interests of East Pakistan. Moreover, after the overthrow of Suhrawardy's Awami League government at the centre, in matters of foreign policy they were, at that point, somewhat inclined to follow an anti-imperialist line. The Communist Party secretly opened a dialogue with the Awami League on these matters and the latter agreed to work together. So the Communist Party decided to reverse the voting result of 19 June by supporting a no-confidence motion moved against the newly formed Krishak Sramik Party government. On the basis of this understanding, the Awami League tabled a no-confidence resolution in the East Pakistan Assembly on 22 June 1958, and the Communist Party gave urgent instruction to its members to vote in favor of it. The government of Abu Hossain Sarkar fell only two days after being installed in power. It was immediately replaced by an Awami League government with Aaur Rahman Khan as the chief minister.⁹³⁴

However, the new Awami League government could not function, because three days after its installation on 25 June 1958, Iskandar Mirza promulgated section 193 for two months in East Pakistan on the ground that frequent changes of governments in East Pakistan had created great instability in the region. In order to restore stability, it was necessary for the central government to impose their direct rule over the province for a limited period of time.⁹³⁵

⁹³² *Ibid.*; Aaur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 339.

⁹³³ Moni Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50; Khoka Ray *op. cit.*, pp. 169-70; Aaur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*

Chapter Forty

MILITARY COUP D'ÉTAT IN PAKISTAN

The political developments in East Pakistan from 31 March to 24 June provided Iskandar Mirza, and General Ayub Khan the opportunity to overthrow the civil governments at the centre and the provinces as well as the 1956 Constitution of Pakistan. The unstable situation which prevailed in both parts of Pakistan actually discredited the elected governments as well as the political parties which were enmeshed in conspiratorial activities and corruption of a kind unknown in the history of Pakistan since 1947. It was, therefore, no surprise that the real powers would make maximum use of the situation and put the blame for the crisis entirely on the political parties and project themselves as those who could ensure stable administration and economic development in the country.

General Ayub Khan referring to the situation in East Pakistan from 31 March to 24 June 1958, writes in his political autobiography *Friends Not Masters*,

In East Pakistan a serious crisis occurred on 31 March 1958, when Fazlul Huq, the Governor, dismissed Aatur Rahman Khan's cabinet. Later that night Fazlul Huq was himself dismissed by Iskandar Mirza. Aatur Rahman was succeeded by Abu Hossain Sarkar who was in turn dismissed within twelve hours of assuming office and the Aatur Rahman Cabinet was back again in power. As in West Pakistan, the NAP played its disruptive role of supporting and then opposing one ministry after another in East Pakistan. Its withdrawal of support led to the fall of the Awami League ministry on 19 June and the United Front Ministry succeeded it. The same day the NAP switched support to the Awami League and brought down the United Front Ministry. The situation became so confused that the President declared Section 193 (President's Rule) in the province on 24 June 1958. After two months Aatur Rahman Khan was reinstated as Chief Minister. The Provincial Assembly declared the speaker of 'unsound mind' and a brawl in the House on 21 September resulted in the death of its Deputy Speaker, Shahed Ali. By the middle of 1958 the whole country was in the grip of a serious economic crisis. Reckless spending seemed to be the order of the day.⁹³⁶

Referring to the conspiratorial plans of President Mirza he said,

Throughout this confusion there was incessant talk of holding general elections under the 1956 Constitution. Then elections were promised for November 1957.

⁹³⁶ Mohammad Ayub Khan, *Friends not Masters*, OUP Karachi, 1967, p. 56.

They were then postponed to 1958. The President had thoroughly exploited the weaknesses in the Constitution and had got everyone connected with the political life in the country utterly exposed and discredited. I do not think that he ever seriously wanted to hold general elections; he was looking for a suitable opportunity to abrogate the Constitution. Indeed, he was setting the stage for it.⁹³⁷

In spite of Ayub Khan's pretension of innocence during the course of these developments, he himself was a party to all this. He clearly saw what would follow the abrogation of the constitution.

By the time section 193 was promulgated in East Pakistan, the United Front, led by Abu Hossain Sarkar, lost much of its relevance in the real politics of East Pakistan. The dismissal of Fazlul Huq on 31 March 1958, practically terminated his long political career. All these developments contributed to the emergence of Awami League as the most important political factor in East Pakistan.

But at that time Awami League was a divided house. The rivalry between Chief Minister Aatur Rahman Khan and general secretary of the organization, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, created a big crisis. In 1954, in spite of his initial opposition, Suhrawardy at one point argued in favor of Sheikh Mujib as a minister in the United Front cabinet when Fazlul Huq had insisted on his nephew Syed Azizul Huq (Nanna Mian) for the post. In 1958, he was under great pressure from Mujibur Rahman, who himself wanted to replace Aatur Rahman as the chief minister. Suhrawardy knew him well and did not have a high opinion about his abilities to function as the chief minister. But lot of propaganda was circulated within the Awami League against Aatur Rahman Khan at that time and Sheikh Mujib took very active part in organizing it.⁹³⁸ This created considerable pressure within the Awami League, because as the general secretary, Sheikh Mujib was a very powerful factor in the organization. Suhrawardy had to depend on him for mobilizing public support, particularly party support, for his policies at the centre. Moreover, his real political base being East Pakistan he could not dismiss outright what was being said against Aatur Rahman from within the organization. So he also considered the idea of replacing Aatur Rahman either by Sheikh Mujib or by Abul Mansur Ahmad. But finally he was convinced that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was not really capable of doing the job as the chief minister and the situation was not likely to improve by replacing the incumbent chief minister by Abul Mansur Ahmad. Thus, finally Suhrawardy was somehow able to contain the crisis of parliamentary leadership and it was decided that Aatur Rahman Khan would continue as the chief minister after the lifting of section 193 in East Pakistan.⁹³⁹

⁹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

⁹³⁸ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 459-60.

⁹³⁹ Aatur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 342-4; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 462-4.

At the end of August 1958, section 193 was lifted before completing its two-month term and the governor of East Pakistan summoned Ataur Rahman Khan to form the ministry. But this time his freedom to choose his cabinet and assign them departments was taken away and he was not even consulted on these matters. Everything was decided by Suhrawardy, who dictated the names of the cabinet members and their departments on the phone from Karachi.⁹⁴⁰

It was obvious that Suhrawardy acted on the advice of, or rather under pressure from, Sheikh Mujib, who on failing to become the chief minister demanded that many of his personal allies be placed in the new cabinet.⁹⁴¹ Ataur Rahman Khan was again sworn in as the chief minister of East Pakistan on 22 July 1958. A session of the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly was convened on 20 September. The session ended without transacting any business.⁹⁴²

The Awami League leaders had no confidence in the speaker of the Assembly, Abdul Hakim, who disallowed a no-confidence motion against him. The government party wanted to replace the Speaker by the deputy speaker, Shahed Ali. In this the National Awami Party members were on the side of the government. A National Awami Party member, Dewan Mahbub Ali, moved a motion of no-confidence against Speaker Abdul Hakim on 23 September and it was passed by a majority vote. On the same day and almost immediately afterwards, another government party member belonging to the Congress, Peter Paul Gomez, moved a resolution declaring the speaker of 'unsound mind' or a mad man. This resolution was also passed by a majority. The speaker was prevented from entering the House and the session began with Deputy Speaker Shahed Ali on the chair.⁹⁴³

These moves of the government party infuriated the entire opposition in the Assembly and a riotous situation developed. The deputy speaker was not only abused verbally, but actually came under physical attack by the opposition members. Some government party members were also engaged in fighting the opposition members.⁹⁴⁴ The attack on the deputy speaker by the opposition members, even by some distinguished members, reached a dangerous point when they began to hurl physical objects like microphones, chairs handles, paper weights and other objects at him.⁹⁴⁵

The government leaders had expected some trouble inside the Assembly Hall and had arranged for a larger number of security guards. But the magnitude and scale of the attack was so big that in spite of physically encircling the deputy speaker, a heavy

⁹⁴⁰ Ataur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 344; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 465-6.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴² Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

⁹⁴³ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, pp. 294-5.

⁹⁴⁴ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 469-70; Ataur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 350-1.

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

object landed on his nose wounding him very seriously. He began to bleed profusely and was removed to the hospital. He succumbed to his injuries three days later on 26 September.⁹⁴⁶ The session of the East Pakistan Assembly was adjourned on 24 September 1958.

When these developments were taking place in East Pakistan, President Mirza got Prime Minister Firoz Khan Noon involved in his game plan against the Awami League. Noon contacted Suhrawardy and insisted that Awami League should join his cabinet and shoulder some responsibilities of conducting the affairs of the central government. He told Suhrawardy that it was not proper to criticize the government from outside without taking any responsibility.

The initial reaction of Suhrawardy, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Aaur Rahman Khan, Manik Mian and even Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was to reject this offer, because they surmised that it was a trap laid by Mirza. Abul Mansur Ahmad and Aaur Rahman Khan were strongly against it because they thought that before the coming general elections any involvement of the Awami League in the central government would put them in a difficult position in East Pakistan, because they would have to bear the brunt of the many misdeeds and anti-East Pakistan policies of the central government. On the other hand, they would gain nothing by having some ministers in the central government.⁹⁴⁷

However, on the insistence of Noon it was decided tentatively that they would join the central ministry. Firoz Khan Noon allotted a number of important departments to Awami League ministers, as demanded by Suhrawardy. But he wrote to Aaur Rahman mentioning the names of these persons without any mention of portfolios to be allotted and urged him to send them to Karachi to be sworn in as ministers.⁹⁴⁸ Aaur Rahman Khan was opposed to the proposal, specially because there was no mention of the departments which would be allocated to the Awami League ministers and wanted to send a reply to Noon's letter after consultations with Suhrawardy. But Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with the would-be central ministers, left for Karachi without informing either Aaur Rahman or Abul Mansur Ahmad.⁹⁴⁹ Even Suhrawardy did not consider it necessary to either consult or even inform them of the decision to join the central ministry. Suhrawardy anticipating the strong objections of Aaur Rahman and Abul Mansur avoided any consultation with them on the matter.

On 2 October 1958, three ministers and four ministers of state were sworn in as central ministers in the coalition government of Firoz Khan Noon. But these ministers resigned at 1 p.m. on 7 October, because portfolios were not allocated to them according to the

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁷ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 471-2; Aaur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 352

⁹⁴⁸ Aaur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 352.

⁹⁴⁹ Aaur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 353; Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

previous understanding.⁹⁵⁰ Portfolios were re-allocated at 7 p.m. the someday in order to bring back the Awami League members into the cabinet. But by that time Iskandar Mirza, supported by General Ayub Khan finally decided to strike and Martial Law was proclaimed throughout Pakistan. The 1956 Constitution was abrogated, the national and provincial assemblies, along with the central and provincial governments were dismissed and General Ayub Khan was appointed Chief Martial Law Administrator.

In order to dissociate himself from the responsibility of abrogating the constitution etc. Ayub Khan tried, subsequently, to put the blame entirely on Mirza and the political leaders. But a careful study of his political autobiography reveals that he was the most clever of all the conspirators and was perhaps the only one who could foresee the consequences of the steps which Iskandar Mirza was taking one after another. This is how Ayub Khan describes the developments immediately preceding the promulgation of Martial Law on 7 October 1958:

I arrived in Karachi on 5 October, Yahya and Hamid, and one or two other officers had preceded me. I went to see General Iskandar Mirza. He was sitting on the lawn, brooding, bitter and desperate. I asked him, 'Have you made up your mind, Sir?' 'Yes', he replied. 'Do you think it is absolutely necessary?' 'It is absolutely necessary', he said firmly. My reaction was that it was very unfortunate that such a desperate stage had been reached, necessitating drastic action. And it was not pleasant to get involved in it, but there was no escape. It was the last bid to save the country.⁹⁵¹

Describing the contemplated action of Iskandar Mirza to abrogate the constitution and declare Martial Law as 'the last bid to save the country,' betrays General Ayub's real involvement in the whole conspiracy.

It is necessary to follow, according to his own account, how Ayub Khan conducted himself during the whole development. Referring to the promulgation of Martial Law he says in his autobiography:

From that time onwards emotion had no place in the proceedings. Now that this job had to be done it must be done properly. A simple plan was formulated and put into operation. I advised General Iskandar Mirza: 'You had better inform your Prime Minister about the situation.' He thought it was unnecessary, as he had no doubt about the legality of his action. I said: 'I want two things from you in writing: one, that I will administer Martial Law; and the other, a letter to the Prime Minister that you have taken this decision, that the government has been dissolved, that you have abrogated the Constitution and declared Martial Law,

⁹⁵⁰ Oli Ahad, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

⁹⁵¹ Mohammad Ayub Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

and that you have appointed me to administer the Martial Law.' He wrote the letter to Malik Firoz Khan Noon without any difficulty. But he did not seem particularly keen to give me the letter of authority to administer the Martial Law. I wanted him to write the letter to the Prime Minister so that he should assume the responsibility for his decision. He, as the constitutional head of government, had come to the conclusion that the country could not be run any more on a constitutional basis. I said, 'At least you have done something and I believe you have done the right thing. But I feel, that I must have it from you in writing. He hummed and hawed but finally agreed to give me the letter after two or three days.⁹⁵²

Iskandar Mirza was not only an arch conspirator but also a man with a diabolical sense of humor. After finalizing his operational plan for promulgation of Martial Law he invited Prime Minister Firoz Khan Noon and the central ministers, including the Awami League ministers, to a party in his house on 7 October. After the party ended, he declared Martial Law through a special radio broadcast.⁹⁵³ In it he put the entire blame for the prevailing disorderly situation and instability of governments on political leaders. Among other things he said,

My appraisal of the internal situation has led me to believe that a vast majority of the people no longer have any confidence in the present system of government and are getting more and more disillusioned and disappointed and are becoming dangerously resentful of the manner in which they are exploited. Their resentment and bitterness are justifiable. The leaders have not been able to render them the service they deserve and have failed to prove themselves worthy of the confidence the masses had reposed in them.⁹⁵⁴

Justifying his action of abrogating the constitution he said,

The Constitution which was brought into being on 23 March 1956, after so many tribulations, is unworkable. It is so full of dangerous compromises that Pakistan will soon disintegrate internally if the inherent malaise is not removed. To rectify them the country must first be taken to sanity by a peaceful revolution. Then it is my intention to collect a number of patriotic persons to examine our problems in the political field and devise a Constitution more suitable to the genius of the Muslim people. When it is ready and at the appropriate time, it will be submitted to the referendum of the people.⁹⁵⁵

Finally he said,

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁹⁵³ Kamruddin Ahmad, *A Socio-Political History of Bengal*, p. 150.

⁹⁵⁴ *Bangladesh Freedom War Documents*, Vol. I, p. 625.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

I have, therefore, decided that (a) The Constitution of March 23, 1956 will be abrogated. (b) The Central and Provincial Governments will be dismissed with immediate effect. (c) The National Parliament and Provincial Assemblies will be dissolved. (d) All political parties will be abolished. (e) Until alternative arrangements are made, Pakistan will come under Martial Law. I hereby appoint General Mohammad Ayub Khan, Commander-in-Chief, Pakistan Army, as the Chief Martial Law Administrator and place all the Armed Forces of Pakistan under his command.⁹⁵⁶

Following the declaration of Martial Law, President Mirza announced a New Legal Order on 10 October called 'The Laws (Continuance in Force) Order, 1958', in which details about the functions of administrative and judicial branches of the State under Martial Law were laid out and the powers of the governors were specified.⁹⁵⁷

In the third section of the order was stated.

No Court or person shall call or permit to be called in question (i) the Proclamation; (ii) any order made in pursuance of the Proclamation or any Martial Law Order or Martial Law regulation; (iii) any finding, judgment or order of a special Military Court or a summary Military Court.⁹⁵⁸

This New Legal Order vested sweeping powers in the hands of the Martial Law authorities, and particularly in the hands of the Chief Martial Law Administrator. Indeed they did not fail to make 'proper' use of this power according to their perception of 'the well-being of the people of Pakistan' and of 'Pakistan's national integrity.' The Presidential Proclamation of 7 October 1958 banned all political parties. In East Pakistan, the offices of political parties were sealed and all properties, including furniture etc., were seized, and in certain cases destroyed.⁹⁵⁹

The job of the Martial Law Administration was easy because the proclamation of Martial Law was widely welcomed by the people, particularly by a large section of the middle class and government officials. This attack on the political parties and political leaders faced no resistance at all in any part of East Pakistan. In a certain section of the people and political circles there was resentments but it remained dormant as they were afraid of military actions against them.⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 627.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 628.

⁹⁵⁹ Ataur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

⁹⁶⁰ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 478-9; Ataur Rahman Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 357-62.

In East Pakistan, large-scale arrests of political leaders began on the night of 10 October. Maulana Bhashani was arrested under Security Act, but Hamidul Huq Chowdhury, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Abdul Khaleque and some others were arrested on charges of corruption. Additional Chief Secretary Asghar Ali Shah, who was not a Bengali but very close to Suhrawardy and other Awami League leaders, was also arrested the same night.⁹⁶¹ The governor of East Pakistan, Sultanuddin was removed and former Inspector General of Police, Zakir Hossain, took charge as governor on 10 October. Earlier he had been called to Karachi where he was given a list of political leaders to be arrested. Police officers raided the houses of politicians on the list, and made large-scale arrests.⁹⁶²

A few days later Chief Martial Law Administrator General Ayub Khan came on a visit to East Pakistan and addressed a big public meeting at the Paltan Maidan in Dhaka. The absence of any resistance and the large attendance in the public meeting showed that the political change was initially not unwelcome to the people of East Pakistan.⁹⁶³ It was actually the misdeeds of politicians belonging to the various parliamentary groups which had begun to alienate the people from the political parties they had voted to power in the general election of 1954. When Martial Law was proclaimed, this alienation was at its height.

Martial Law was actually the culmination of a process which began almost immediately after the election of 1954 and the forming the United Front government. The government of the United States was an active party in the conspiracy which finally brought down the civil government and ushered in the Armed Forces to power by abrogating the constitution. At that time, a certain conflict between the British and US interests in Pakistan also surfaced because the latter began to consolidate its power at the expense of British interests. Khan Abdul Qayyum Khan of the North. West Frontier Province, who became the president of Pakistan Muslim League after the death of Sardar Abdul Rab Nishtar, openly came out in support of an independent foreign policy and started a mass campaign against the US government and their conspiracies in Pakistan. He also branded Mirza as an agent of the US government.⁹⁶⁴

The US government was very apprehensive of the outcome of the general election in East Pakistan scheduled to be held in early 1959. They knew that the communists and the National Awami Party led by Bhashani were strongly opposed to the US-Pakistan military pacts. They also knew that in spite of Suhrawardy being their trusted man, the Awami League in East Pakistan could unite with the National Awami Party and the communists on the question of foreign policy if they were not in power at the centre.⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁶¹ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, pp. 479-81.

⁹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 479.

⁹⁶³ Mohammad Ayub Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁹⁶⁴ Abul Mansur Ahmad, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

⁹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 476-7.

Faced with this opposition both in East and West Pakistan and seizing the opportunity of the prevailing political and governmental instability both at the centre and in the provinces, they thought their interests could be best served by a strong central pro-US government. This government could be provided only by the armed forces through a military *coup d'état*. There are plenty of evidences, from 1954 to the moment President Mirza declared Martial Law, that US officials were in close touch with both Ghulam Mohammad and Iskandar Mirza as well as General Ayub Khan, and were deeply involved in the conspiracy which led to the abrogation of the Constitution and the overthrow of the elected governments.

Iskandar Mirza had no idea of what would happen to his presidency after the abrogation of the constitution. The logical consequence of such a step was, however, clearly foreseen by Ayub Khan and he knew quite well that the post of the President would have neither any legal nor actual basis without the constitution. So as a quiet tactician, he pushed forward his own line of action, but at the same time tried to avoid, in his own characteristic way, all responsibilities for the overthrow of the constitution and finally, for abolishing the post of constitutional presidency. Thus, in his autobiography he says,

Meanwhile, the army's legal experts came up with the opinion that since the Constitution had been abrogated and Martial Law declared, and a Chief Martial Law Administrator appointed, the office of President was redundant. That, according to their light, was the legal position. I said, Now, don't you chaps start creating more problems for me. Why do you bother me? It will serve no useful purpose.

Chief Justice Munir was there, I think, when this point came up for discussion. He had been advising Iskandar Mirza about certain matters before the revolution. I called him and thought that I would see Iskandar Mirza too. I asked Colonel Qazi to state his point of view. His position was that the President no longer had any place in the new arrangement. Munir disagreed. I told Qazi, I agree with Munir. This is final. Accept this as a decision.⁹⁶⁶

Soon after the 7 October Proclamation, Ayub Khan, according to his own version, was told by other generals and officers that Mirza's wife was constantly goading him to take action against Ayub Khan and that Mirza had been contacting various top army generals and officers to try to involve them in some kind of deal against Ayub Khan.⁹⁶⁷ Referring to people's reactions, Ayub says, 'In the meantime the feeling was growing among the people that so long as Iskandar Mirza remained on the scene, intrigues

⁹⁶⁶ Mohammad Ayub Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-5.

would continue and nothing worthwhile or constructive would be done'.⁹⁶⁸ Referring to his associates, he said that they were pressing him and the clamor became louder from headquarters and from the army officers'.⁹⁶⁹ So, finally he decided to act.

According to his version three generals-Burki, Azam and Khalid Sheikh-went to Iskandar Mirza and conveyed to him Ayub's decision that he would have to quit. Mirza realized the gravity of the situation and agreed to surrender.⁹⁷⁰ Iskandar Mirza, after declaring Martial Law had asked the politicians to leave the country 'while the going was good.' Only twenty days after making the 'Revolution' as the change through declaration was described by him-Mirza had to step down on 27 October 1958. General Ayub Khan, in addition to his post of Chief Martial Law Administrator, declared himself as the President of Pakistan and almost immediately afterwards, Iskandar Mirza had to leave Pakistan for London with his wife 'while the going was not so good'.

⁹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*