GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
AWAMI LEAGUE

The East Pakistan Awami Muslim League\(^1\) was founded in Dacca on 23rd June, 1949. This organisation came into existence largely due to the efforts of the dissident Muslim Leaguers. Its origin and development could be traced to the factionalism that existed in the Bengal Muslim League during the Pre-partition period. The two distinct factions in the Bengal Muslim League led by Khwaja Nazimuddin and H.S. Suhrawardy respectively were functioning with certain fundamental differences among themselves. These two groups later came to be known as the rightist and progressive wings of the Muslim League. On the eve of partition, the Bengal Muslim League came largely under the leadership of the progressive faction headed by Suhrawardy. However, the right wing of the party continued to enjoy the patronage and support of Mohammad Ali Jinnah who was the then President of All India Muslim League. This was quite evident in the Muslim League Parliamentary Party election which was held on 5th August, 1947. Khwaja Nazimuddin, the right wing

\(^1\)In 1955, the nomenclature of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was changed to East Pakistan Awami League.
leader, was elected as the leader of the Parliamentary Party in that election. It should be noted that in the leadership contest the leader of the progressive faction, Suhrawardy, lost by a margin of 36 votes. The success of Khwaja Nazimuddin in the leadership contest was mainly due to certain factors. In the first place, the central leadership of the Muslim League continued to provide necessary support and assistance to his faction. Secondly, he could easily exploit the sentiments of the people against Suhrawardy who advocated the idea of a united sovereign Bengal. Further, Khwaja Nazimuddin faction could secure the support of a group of 20 Muslim Legislators belonging to the Sylhet district of Assam by assuring them of adequate representation on the new Government to be formed in East Bengal after partition. As a result of the Parliamentary Party election, Khwaja Nazimuddin could not only become the first Chief Minister of East Bengal but also established his effective control over the party organisation.

The defeat of Suhrawardy in his leadership contest produced certain inevitable consequences. A deep sense of

\[2\] In the Parliamentary Party elections held on 5th August, 1947, Khwaja Nazimuddin was declared elected with 75 votes as against 39 votes polled in favour of Suhrawardy. Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary.

\[3\] The twenty legislators extended their full support to Khwaja Nazimuddin upon an assurance that their group would be represented by two cabinet ministers in the East Bengal Government. Details See The Azad (Bengali daily), 6, 10, 23, 31 July 1947. Also Talukdar Maniruzzaman, "Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh". In Radical Politics in South Asia, edited by Paul R. Brass and Marcus Pranda, London, 1973, p.253.
frustration and also a feeling of demoralisation in the rank and file of the progressive section of the Muslim League became its natural corollary. Had Suhrawardy won the election, perhaps the politics of East Bengal would have taken a different turn and the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League might not have been formed.

When Mohammad Ali Jinnah became the first Governor-General of Pakistan he had to relinquish his presidency of the party organisation for the simple reason that the constitution of the party strictly prohibit the holding of the positions in the organisation and the Government by the same individual. Accordingly Mohammad Ali Jinnah resigned his presidency of the Pakistan Muslim League and got Choudhury Khaliquzzaman elected as the party's Chief Organiser. Being the chief organiser, he nominated Moulana Akram Khan as his representative in East Pakistan. The nomination of Moulana Akram Khan provoked a serious controversy within the party organisation in East Bengal. A section of the Muslim Leaguers largely belonging to the progressive faction registered their protest by passing a no-confidence motion against Moulana Akram Khan. The role of Jinnah as the leader of the Government and not as the guiding star of the organisation created a vacuum in itself. The new party leadership, however, failed to provide any positive direction to the organisation. In other

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words, the Muslim League had lost much of its substance and vigour without the leadership of Jinnah and the party's new chief organiser, Choudhury Khaliquzzaman, lacked popular support and ability to build up the party into a powerful political organisation.  

The style and functioning of the new leadership of the party were such that its first programme of action amounted to the complete dissolution of the elected representative organs. As a matter of fact, adhoc committees essentially consisting of the loyalists of the new leadership replaced the elected bodies at the various levels of the party. This step, according to the leadership, was essential for the revitalisation of the party. In the process, the new leadership of the East Pakistan Muslim League was also guided by the fact that the party organisation shall have to be kept away from the influence of the progressive group headed by Suhrawardy. As Mustaq Ahmad writes:

"In appointing the ex-Presidents and ex-Secretaries in the provinces as Zonal organisers, a new opportunity was given to the old leadership to re-establish its hold in the party, thereby giving the younger elements a direct cause for resentment and revolt."

In the course of reorganising the party the new leadership adopted an attitude of encouraging its own

5 D.N. Banerjee, East Pakistan, A Case of Muslim Politics Delhi, 1969, p.61.
7 Ibid.
followers to capture the important positions in the party hierarchy. At the same time its hostility to enlist the support of Suhrawardy's followers could not be overlooked. The result was that Muslim League workers belonging to Suhrawardy group were not allowed to become even primary members of the party during the new membership drive in 1948-49. Moulana Bhashani had protested against this arbitrary decision of the party leadership. In various meetings addressed by Moulana Bhashani particularly at Narayanganj at Tangail, resolutions of protest were not only passed but also made vociferous demands for allowing the party to open its membership to all sections of the Muslim population. But all these demands fell flat on deaf ears of the then party leadership. As a last effort to make the Muslim League a broad based democratic organisation, a deputation of the dissident group decided to place their point of view before Choudhury Khaliquzzaman, the chief organiser of the Muslim League. The deputation consisting of Ataur Rahman Khan and three others in its meeting with him pleaded for issuing an immediate directive to Moulana Akram Khan, so that tickets for primary membership of the party be made available to the dissident group. The delegation returned to Dacca after securing an assurance.

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8The Azad (Dacca), May 17, 1948. Also see Abul Wansur Ahmad, Fifty Years of Politics (a political biography written in Bengali), Dacca, 1968, p.245.

9Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary.
of a favourable course of action. But later events proved beyond doubt that the East Pakistan leadership was most reluctant to act upon. In fact, no positive steps were taken to enrol members from Suhrawardy's group on flimsy groups such as shortage of paper and lack of printing facilities. While rejecting the demand for increasing the membership of the party made by the dissidents, the party leadership contemplated that the newly organised Muslim League must be an organisation of those who would solidly support the Government, its policies and programmes. It also categorically said that the new party should not be a mass organisation and therefore the demand for the enrolment of a large number of persons was meaningless. The real reason behind this negative attitude towards the dissident group was the fear of the High Command that if 150 Mughal Tuli workers were allowed to be in the organisation, it might possibly endanger the existing leadership.

The dissident group was thus denied a voice in the organisation and in the Government. In the meantime, the death of Mohammad Ali Jinnah brought about a change in the political set up of Pakistan. Khwaja Nazimuddin who

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10 Interview with Zahiruddin, a prominent Awami Leaguer and a Central Minister in the Suhrawardy's Cabinet (1958-57); on 3 Feb. 1974.
11 Ibid.
12 Interview with Kamruddin Ahmad, a prominent Awami League leader on 15 Feb. 1974.
13 Badruddin Umar, East Bengal's Language Movement and Contemporary Politics, (Bengali), Op.cit., p.721. 150 Mughal Tuli was the office of the Bengal Muslim League led by its Progressive faction before 1947.
succeeded Mohamad Ali Jinnah as the Governor-General of Pakistan left the leadership of the East Bengal Government to his nominee, Nurul Amin. This arrangement again affected the dissidents who demanded the electing of the new leader of the Parliamentary Party. They expressed their deep resentment against this undemocratic practice. Thus the politics of dissent grew up within the Muslim League itself. Moulana Bhaskari, who was then a vocal member of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly, along with the members of the Suhrawardy group used the floor of the Assembly to direct a scathing attack on the Government. The critics of the Government like Mohammad Ali, Tofazzal Ali, Khairat Hussain and others were generally inclined to bring Suhrawardy back to an important position in the politics of East Bengal. Encouraged by the open criticism by his followers, Suhrawardy launched some positive steps to establish political contacts with them. This political initiative on his part subsequently led to a major political breakthrough. On 7 October, 1947, Suhrawardy sent his political emissary to East Bengal just to ascertain from the people whether the political climate was favourable to launch his political movement. Encouraged by a

14 Interview with Yar Mohammad Khan, who played an important role in the founding of the Awami League on 4 March 1974. It should be noted here that Suhrawardy found himself in political wilderness immediately after partition. He decided to stay in Calcutta in order to organise peace mission along with Mahatma Gandhi. He had worked for long among the Bengal Muslims keeping Calcutta as his political base. He was also known for his leadership of the Calcutta Muslims.

15 Tajuddin Ahmad’s Diary.
positive response, Suhrawardy left for East Bengal on 23 September, 1948. He had a series of meetings with some important Assembly members and discussed with them their future course of action. Toffazzal Ali, Abdul Khalique, Mrs. Anwara Khatun, Mohammad Ali and others actively participated in these meetings. Their first aim was to capture the Muslim League. Failing that the formation of a new Muslim League. The new Muslim League which they contemplated should be essentially a mass organization. According to Moulana Bhashani, the idea of forming the Awami League as an opposition party originated with the dissident Muslim League Assembly members - Mohammad Ali of Bogra, Toffazzal Ali and a few others.

When Mohammad Ali Jinnah came to know of these developments, he sharply reacted and decided to nip this evil in the bud. He sent for the dissident Muslim League members of the Assembly and rebuked them for their anti-party activities. At the same time, Mohammad Ali Jinnah was confident of making them politically inactive since he possessed the power of patronage which he began to shower on the dissident elements. Accordingly, a number of dissident elements such as Mohammad Ali of Bogra, Toffazzal Ali etc.

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16 Other participants in the meetings were: Kamruddin Ahmad, Shoukhat Ali, Ataur Rahman Khan, Almas Ali, Abdul Awal, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Kafiluddin Choudhury, Mohiuddin, etc. See Tajuddin Ahmad’s 'Diary.


were appointed to several important positions like ambassadors, ministers and so on and thus "their solicitude for East Pakistan vanished with these chimerical gifts." 19

The dissident group believed that the Muslim League had already lost its credibility and as such it was no longer an effective organisation to serve the interests of the Muslim masses. 20 Many of them seriously contemplated the formation of a new political party. They discussed the nature, character and programmes of the proposed party and its relationship with Suhrawardy. 21 A number of meetings were held during the years 1947-1949 in this connection. The meetings that were held at 150 Mughal Tuli House, in the house of Kamruddin Ahmad of Zinda Bahar and Khan Sahib Osman Ali of Chashhara, Narayanganj, were of special significance. 22 However, all these attempts for the creation of a new organisation did not have a smooth going altogether. Some members of the dissident group were rather reluctant to form a new party against Muslim League because of their prime consideration that it was Muslim League that created Pakistan. They were convinced of the fact that since they were the real members of the parent organisation, they preferred to adopt that very name for the new party. 23

19 Moulana Bhashani, Quoted by Pakistan Observer, October 23, 1955.
20 Interview with Ataur Rahman Khan, who was one of the first Vice-Presidents of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, on 21 March 1974.
22 Details see Ibid.
23 Interview with Yar Mohammad Khan, Op.cit.,
There were a number of equally important factors which accelerated political developments in East Bengal. In 1948, a language movement mainly initiated by the students and the youths created a favourable political climate. This movement was supported by the Bengali officials because of the Punjabi domination of the bureaucracy in East Bengal. The Bengali Muslim officials had resented the discriminating treatment meted out to them by the behaviour of the Bihari and Punjabi officials. A kind of dissention and disharmony had already crept into the East Bengal Civil Service.\textsuperscript{24}

A propaganda was launched by the communist forces during this period to the effect that Pakistanis could not attain the real economic freedom inspite of the fact that political freedom was at hand as a result of partition. This propaganda had its impact on the new political climate in East Bengal.

The result of a bye-election held in the Tangail Constituency in 1949 was of tremendous significance in this context.\textsuperscript{25}

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\textsuperscript{24} Interview with Kamruddin Ahmad, \textit{Op.cit.},

\textsuperscript{25} An election petition had been filed by Khurram Khan Panni, the Zamindar of Korotia, requesting the authorities to nullify the elections of Moulana Bhashani from the Tangail constituency (Mymensingh district) to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly. The petitioners contention was that the elected member had not submitted a statement of election expenditure as required under the rules. This petition was favourably considered by the then Governor and the election was nullified. Further, the Governor also rendered the petitioner along with Moulana Bhashani and two others ineligible to contest any election until 1950.

The bye-election was ordered as a result of the nullification of the election of Moulana Bhashani to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly. This bye-election was regarded by the dissidents as a challenge to prove their political bonafides in East Bengal. They took up the issue in all seriousness and fielded Shamsul Huq against Khurram Khan Panni who was sponsored by the Muslim League. Shamsul Huq, who hailed from the very constituency, was a popular student leader. It should be noted that Khurram Khan Panni had been disqualified by the Government from contesting any election till 1950. However, when he was sponsored by the Muslim League for the Tangail bye-election, the Governor using his special powers withdraw the earlier order of disqualification against him. This decision of the Governor permitting Khurram Khan Panni to contest while others continued to remain disqualified was grossly discriminatory.

Shamsul Huq, in his effective political campaign, presented before the electorate a comprehensive programme of action. They were mainly (a) Bengali should be recognised as a state language; (b) Pakistan should be freed from foreign influence; (c) land to the tillers; and (d) Federal Government reservation of jobs on the basis of population. The

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26 The candidature of Shamsul Huq for the bye-election was officially announced at the meeting held by the workers of the dissident group in the residence of Osman Ali at Chashara, Narayanganj. Related by Shoukhat Ali, a prominent Awami League leader.


election campaigns in favour of Shamsul Huq was marked with some interesting developments. Mrs. Khurram Khan Panni extended a helping hand to Shamsul Huq by issuing a pamphlet against the Muslim League candidate who happened to be her husband. Others who vigorously campaigned for Shamsul Huq were Mustaq Ahmed, Kamruddin Ahmad, Shamsuzzuha of Narayanganj, Muhammed Almas Ali, Mohammed Awal and Shoukhat Ali. A number of Muslim League members were expelled from the party for their anti-party activities and the list of the expelled included three Assembly members. - Mrs. Anwara Khatun, Khairat Hussain and Shamsuddin Ahmad Choudhury. In spite of enormous expenditure and the use of official machinery for its candidate, the Muslim League was not able to ensure a victory for its candidate. Though it was a bye-election, the clear verdict of the people in favour of the dissident candidate was interpreted as a total disapproval of the policies of the Muslim League Government, both at the centre as well as in the State. Another important aspect of the results of the bye-election was that it provided the necessary political incentive to the dissidents who logically concluded that a political party with a definite socio-economic programme could easily win over the masses.


It was in this background of swift political developments that a number of Muslim League dissident workers approached Moulana Bhashani and urged him to convene a political convention. Moulana Bhashani readily responded to this demand by holding a workers meeting at 150 Mughal Tuli. This meeting constituted a committee with Moulana Bhashani as its Chairman, Yar Mohammad Khan as the General Secretary and Mustaq Ahmad as the Office-Secretary. This committee was asked to make necessary preparations for a bigger workers conference. 

In the meantime, H.S. Suhrawardy who had been to Dacca in connection with a court case, met some workers of the dissident Muslim League. He too was eager to see that a new party was formed similar to the Awami League of North-West Frontier Province.

The Committee headed by Moulana Bhashani had already made necessary arrangements for a workers meeting. As a matter of fact, an important convention of the workers was held on June 23 and 24, 1949, at Rose Garden of Dacca. The convention presided over by Ataur Rahman Khan, a well known lawyer of Dacca city, was largely attended by more than 400 delegates from different districts of East Bengal.

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31 Interview with Shoukhat Ali on 13 March, 1974.
Besides, representatives of student organisations, railway workers organisations and other organisations attended the convention. It should be noted that two important persons - Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - were not presented at the convention. However, the convention finally resolved to establish a new party and thus the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was formed at Dacca on June 23, 1949. The convention elected the following as the office-bearers of the new party:

**President**
- Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani

**Vice-Presidents**
- 1. Abdul Mansur Ahmad
- 2. Ataur Rahman Khan
- 3. Abdus Salan Khan

**General Secretary**
- Shamsul Huq (MLA)

**Joint Secretaries**
- 1. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman
- 2. Rafique Ahsan
- 3. Khondakhar Mustaq Ahmed

**Treasurer**
- Yar Mohammad Khan

In addition to the above office-bearers, the party president nominated 31 persons as members of the Organising Committee. While nominating the members adequate representation was given to all the districts on the basis of size and

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33 See Budruddin Umar, *Op. Cit.*, p. 248. Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had not played any important role in founding the East Pakistan Awami League. In fact, the former was not even invited to attend the convention, while the latter was undergoing imprisonment. Interview with Yar Mohammad Khan, *Op. Cit.*

34 Among the members who attended the convention there arose differences of opinion regarding the precise nomenclature of the organisation. The majority argued that the term Muslim League could be of greater appeal to the masses and therefore it should be preferred to any other name. But a minority mostly of the younger elements favoured the adoption of a new name so as to make it a secular political organisation. Finally, the issue was settled by accepting the majority view with the proviso that, in order to reveal the distinct character of the new party, the term 'Awami' be prefixed with the Muslim League.
population. Regarding the membership of the party, the doors were open to all adults without the payment of any fee. 

The convention, instead of adopting a clear cut manifesto declared its aims and objects:

(a) The abolition of Zamindari system without compensation;
(b) The nationalisation of the Jute Industry;
(c) The withdrawal of all internal restrictions on the movement of food grains and vigilance on the border areas;
(d) The holding of immediate General Election in the province on the basis of universal adult franchise;
(e) The abolition of burdensome taxes like the sales tax;
(f) The release of political prisoners;
(g) The recognition of Bengali as a State language.

These resolutions simply echoed the long standing grievances of the East Pakistanis.

As regards manifesto, a draft prepared by Shamsul Huq was adopted with certain modifications.

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35 Interview with Kamruddin Ahmad. Also see The Statesman, June 26, 1949.
38 Shamsul Huq’s proposals were published in the form of a booklet entitled “Basic Demand”.

Moulana Bhashani was primarily responsible for the growth of the Party. He united the various opposition groups and pitted them against the ruling Muslim League. Though Suhrawardy's contribution to the formation of the Awami Muslim League was much less than that of Bhashani, his followers who were the best party workers of the undivided Bengal Muslim League, constituted the core of the party.

The political situation in Pakistan was not conducive for the effective functioning of an opposition. The ruling class continued to emphasis the historical role of the Muslim League which alone would promote the interests of the community as a whole. Any opposition to Muslim League was anti-national and would not be tolerated. The Muslim League therefore adopted a hostile attitude towards the Awami Muslim League. The latter's intentions were suspected.

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39 Both as President of Assam Muslim League (before independence) and as a popular peasant leader, Moulana Bhashani had already earned a name for himself. He had an important role in the Sylhet-referendum which eventually led to its inclusion into East Pakistan.


Liaquat Ali Khan said "Pakistan has been achieved by the Muslim League. As long as I am alive no other political Party will be allowed to work here."
The bonafides of its Leader were doubted.

"Suhrawardy is the mad dog let loose by India" said Liaquat Ali Khan. The Government was determined to deal with the growing menace of the Awami Muslim League firmly. The public meetings held by the Awami Muslim League were systematically disturbed by the hired goondas of the Muslim League.

In 1949, the Awami Muslim League had organised a procession and a public meeting during the visit of the Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan. It was lathi (baton) charged and nineteen of its leaders were put behind the bars. Since then the Government and the ruling party consistently followed their policy of repression for a long time. The leaders of the Awami Muslim League were arrested and detained. Criminal charges were framed against them. Shamsul Huq who was then an elected member of the East Bengal Legislative Assembly was arrested and was not allowed to attend the Assembly sessions. Moreover,

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his election to the Assembly was set aside. The Press also was hostile to the Awami Muslim League. The policies, programmes and activities of the Party found no place in 'Morning News' and 'Azad'. Of course these two important medias were controlled by the Government. This was not true of 'Pakistan Observer'. But the repressive policy of the Government towards the Awami League simply strengthened the mass base of the Awami League.

Immediately after the formation of the party the task of organising a network of party units all over the State was taken up. The party officers and workers toured throughout the whole country. Two of them Shamsul Huq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - the two young student leaders - did yeomen service to the cause of the Party. Their unbounded enthusiasm, organisational ability, selfless service and cheerfulness to suffer won them a secure place in the heart of the people. Later H.S. Suhrawardy, took up the leadership of the party. The Awami League aimed at two things, negative and positive. It exposed the bankrupt policies of the Muslim League Government and the inherent weaknesses and deficiencies in the existing political system. Positively it provided sound political education to the

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46 *Pakistan Observer*, January 9, 1951.
47 Interview with Zahiruddin.
48 *Pakistan Observer*, June 13, 1950. Also see *Pakistan Observer*, January 13, 1951.
49 Ibid., January 9, 1951.
masses at large and promised a secular democratic society based on equality and freedom and adult franchise.

The Organising Committee of the party, warned the people about the evil intention of the Muslim League to stiffle all democratic opposition in the State. In a public meeting in Chittagong, on January 9, 1951, Suhrawardy stated: "People must fight to assert their right to have a democratic rule in Pakistan and no Government on earth can ignore the united voice of the people."51

The Anti-Basic Principles Committee Report (anti. BPC) movement and the language movement were the two important issues that helped the Awami Muslim League to consolidate itself as a strong opposition party in East Bengal.

Anti-BPC Movement

The Report of the BPC of the Constituent Assembly with regard to the future constitution of Pakistan was published on September 29, 1950.52 The reaction of East Bengal to it was very adverse.53 Firstly, the Report

50 The Pakistan Observer, February 27, 1951.
51 Ibid., January 10, 1951.
52 Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary.
53 The Pakistan Observer sums up the reaction in East Bengal as follows: "The citizens of Dacca, mostly East Bengalis, were rudely shocked when local dailies carried to them the full text of the Basic Principles Committee report with regard to the future constitution of Pakistan. It came from all walks of life, high officials, professors, teachers, lawyers, students, medical men, police personnel etc. Their first reaction was that of bewilderment." Pakistan Observer, (Dacca) 1 October 1950.
recommended urdu as the only state language. Secondly, East Bengal though its population was greater than that of West Pakistan would be reduced to a minority in a joint session of both the Houses of the central Legislature. It was feared that equal representation to all the existing six provinces in the second chamber, would reduce East Bengal to a minority in a joint session. Therefore, felt that the BPC report was aimed at keeping East Bengal in perpetual servility to West Pakistan. They also feared that it was designed to foster provincialism and to inject in the other provinces of Pakistan suspicion and antagonism against East Bengal. The Awami Muslim League leaders also demanded the immediate dissolution of the present Constituent Assembly, the holding of general elections without delay and the formation of a new constituent Assembly elected on the basis of adult franchise to frame a constitution for the country.

A Committee of Action was set up in Dacca to launch a country-wide movement against the BPC report and to draft an alternative constitution. Ataur Rahman Khan, vice-President of the East Pakistan Awami League and Kamruddin

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56 See, General Secretary of East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, Shamsul Huq's speech at Chittagong on January 9, 1951, Pakistan Observer, January 10, 1951.
Ahmed, an Awami Leaguer, were the convenors of the Committee of Action. The Committee visited all the districts and sub-divisional towns and set up branches of the Committee of action which came to be known as central committee of Democratic Federation. In February, 1950, the Grand National convention presided over by Ataur Rahman Khan was held which adopted alternative constitution proposals. These proposals, which included, among other things, full regional autonomy for East Bengal and the recognition of Bengali as a state language along with Urdu, remained the sheet-anchor of the all popular movements for the first two decades after the independence. Thus, the BFC report, for the first time, provided the opposition with an important political issue that would mobilise the masses behind them. The Committee of Action, formed throughout East Bengal created mass opposition against the recommendation of the BPC. Moulana Bhashani, in his directive, asked party workers to mobilise public opinion against the un-islamic and undemocratic BPC report and demanded its rejection. The Awami League leaders created among the people an awareness that East Bengal must get its due share. This was the crux of the anti-BPC movement. There was

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., For a full text of the alternative constitution see Appendix C of the same book, pp. 191-195.
60 Details see Pakistan Observer, January 18, 1951.
widespread discontent throughout East Bengal against the report. Even the East Pakistan Muslim League working Committee which met on October 29, 1950, took serious note of it.61 There was also a strike by students on October 16, 1950 protesting against the BPC report.62 Liquat Ali Khan visited East Pakistan to see for himself the attitude of the people against the report. A delegation led by Kamruddin Ahmad met Liquat Ali Khan and told him not to push through any constitution which did not guarantee full autonomy to East Pakistan.63 Realising the strong resentment of Bengalis, Liaquat Ali Khan announced in the Constituent Assembly the postponement of the discussion on the report. Again, a second draft of the report was presented to the Constituent Assembly by the Prime Minister, Khwaja Nazimuddin, on December 22, 1950 which mooted for the first time the idea of parity between East and West Pakistan.64 The parity principle was subjected to severe criticism not only from East Bengal but

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62 See Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary.

63 Kamruddin Ahmad, A Social History of Bengal, Op.cit., p.102

64 West Pakistan representation in the Federal Legislature was divided among 9 units on the basis of population. They were: Punjab, Sind, NWFP, Tribal areas, Bahawalpur, Baluchistan, Baluchistan States Union, Khairpur state and Capital of the Federation. Details see G.W. Choudhury, Constitutional Development in Pakistan, Op.cit., pp.73-74.
also from West Pakistan, especially Punjab. 65 Pakistan Times, wrote on December 30, 1952,

"It fails to provide a constitutional framework that would satisfy the aspirations and safeguard the democratic rights of our people ... The basic structure of the State, as envisaged in the Report, is likely to foster inter-provincial differences and to create a permanent political conflict between the people of East and West Pakistan. It may even threaten to destroy the fabric of our national unity...." 66

The East Pakistan Awami League was equally critical of the important recommendation of the report. Ataur Rahman Khan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Vice-President and Secretary respectively of the East Pakistan Awami League in a joint statement described it as undemocratic and un-Islamic. They said,

"It is extremely unfortunate that no consideration has been given to the universal demand of the people of East Pakistan as was incorporated in the alternative sets of basic principles passed by the representatives of the people of all shades of opinion in the grand national convention. Nor has any heed been paid to the memorandum submitted by the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League on the basic principles and Fundamental rights. The creation of a bi-cameral legislature is clearly undemocratic and un-Islamic. The existence of an Upper House is unknown to Islamic Polity and was invented during the period of Feudalism. The composition of the Lower House on the basis of parity in highly undemocratic as it has ignored the basis of population in respect of representation by the different provinces." 67

65 It was feared in the Punjab that the parity formula would work to its disadvantage as East Bengal could win over few representatives from any smaller unit in West Pakistan and thereby gain dominance in the Federal Legislature. But here they seemed to overlook the fact that East Pakistan had a greater population than the total of the nine units of West Pakistan put together. For details see Ibid, pp. 74-75.

66 Pakistan Times, 30 Dec. 1952. Also see Pakistan Times, editorial of 27 December 1952.

67 Details of the statement see Pakistan Times, 29 Dec. 1952.
The Awami Muslim League disapproved the BPC report and reiterated its demand for the creation of two autonomous regions. Though the anti-BPC movement was originally started by the combined opposition in East Bengal, the fruits of it were largely accrued by the Awami League. For, it was able under the popular leadership of Maulana Bhashani and Suhrawardy, to project itself as the true champion of the interests of East Bengal.

Language Movement

The language movement was the first important event in the history of East Bengal's democratic movement. It was, in fact, crucial to the development of the Awami Muslim League as a popular organisation. It gave to the party its mass appeal. The students and youth of East Bengal provided the leadership to the language movements in 1948 and 1952. This was largely because of the fact that during this period there were no organised opposition parties which could formulate the grievances and represent the interests of the people of East Bengal. The East Pakistan Awami Muslim

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68 The opposition to the report especially from Punjab forced the constituent Assembly to postpone once more its discussions for an indefinite period.

69 Tamaddun Majlis, founded in 1947, was a cultural organisation of the students and teachers of Dacca University (East Bengal). It was not a left organisation. Through seminar, etc. this organisation inspired the students and youth to involve themselves in the language movement. Members of this body supported all democratic movements during 1947-48. Details see Kamruddin Ahmad, A Social History of Bengal, Op.cit., pp. 97-98.

Talukdar Maniruzzaman wrote: "Much of the dynamics of politics in Pakistan has been provided at key periods by the Political Activism of University students in Pakistan." (*Political activism of University Students in Pakistan* Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, vol. IX, no. 3, November, 1971, p. 234.)
League which was an organisation of the East Pakistan middle class was still very week. As such, the students and youth were the only organised community of this middle class. Being young, educated and enthusiastic, the students and youth were the most suitable for acting as the vanguard of middle class politics.  

The Language movement was an expression of the identity of the people of East Bengal distinct from the people of West Pakistan. It helped to foster linguistic nationalism in East Bengal. Politically, socially and to a very great extent economically the contradiction inherent in Pakistan began to surface. The Language movement was the first symptom and though apparently emotional and cultural in character there was solid economic grounds for that. The first flesh of enthusiasm and a sense of achievement began to thin down and hard economic realities came up immediately after the creation of Pakistan. With Urdu as the only state language of Pakistan, the East Bengal middle class would have no chance to compete for central services with West Pakistanis. This was also a motive force for the language movement. In short, language issue brought about unity and solidarity of the people and that helped

70 For an interesting analysis of the role of students in politics. See Badruddin Umar, Politics and Society in East Pakistan and Bangladesh, (Mowla Brothers, Dacca, 1974), pp. 14, 32-36.

to bridge the gap between the leadership and the people.  72

As early as February, 1948, Dhirendra Nath Dutta, a Hindu Bengali member of the Pakistan Constituent Assembly, tabled an amendment permitting the use of Bengali in the Assembly along with Urdu and English. In his reply, Liaquat Ali Khan, the Prime Minister, said: "Pakistan is a Muslim state and it must have as its lingua-franca the language of the Muslim nation..... It is necessary for a nation to have one language and that language can only be Urdu and no other language." 73 The Prime Minister's stand on the official language policy was not welcomed by the Bengali population. Though there was widespread resentment against the Government's language policy, it was the students and a section of the teachers of the Dacca University who took the lead in giving expression to mass protest. They formed a state language committee of action and decided to carry on their fight for the cause of Bengali until it was recognised as an official language. 74 The Committee observed

74 The state language Committee of action was formed at the Tamaddun Majlis Office. Important leaders present were: Prof. Abul Kashem, Prof. Nurul Huq Bhuiya, Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad, Shamsul Alam, Tajuddin Ahmad, Kamruddin Ahmad, etc. Related by Oli Ahad, a leader of the youth League and later an Awami Leaguer. For details, also see Kamruddin Ahmad, A Social History of Bengal, Op. cit., p.90.
11 March 1948, as the protest day and organised a number of public meetings violating prohibitory orders. Describing the movement as anti-Islamic and anti-national, the Government took immediate steps to suppress it. The 1948 language movement, though started with a widespread protest, could not become a mass movement. An important reason for its failure was that the Muslim League of Pakistan was still regarded by a wider section of the community with a sense of respect and allegiance. Another reason attributed to the setback of the movement was the reluctance on the part of a section of the people to accept Bengali as their language and also their persistent belief that Bengali was the language of the Hindus.75

It is true that the movement was not mass based, yet it generated sufficient momentum and seriousness to catch the attention of the Government. The Government later entered into a negotiated settlement with the Committee of action and agreed to the following terms,

(1) all those who were arrested and detained in connection with the agitation were to be released on 15th March 1948;

(2) all prohibitory orders including those imposed on the press were to be withdrawn.76

76 See Tajuddin Ahmad's Diary.
One tangible achievement of the language movement was that the Government itself got a resolution unanimously passed in the State Assembly recommending to the Central Government that Bengali be adopted as the official language and also to be used as a medium of instruction.  

Mohammad Ali Jinnah adopted an uncompromising attitude on the language issue. In a public meeting held on 21 March 1948, at Dacca he categorically stated that Urdu would be the sole state language of Pakistan. He asserted by way of justification that a common language was absolutely essential for the unity and stability of Pakistan. Though the rigid position held by Jinnah on the language question was not at all appreciated by many in East Bengal the Government was going ahead with the programme of implementing Urdu as the sole state language. This was subsequently revealed in the report of the BPC of 1950. Steps had also been taken by the Government permitting the use of Bengali in arabic script. This was indeed an unpopular measure.

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77 East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Vol.1, April, 1948, p.165.

78 Sholikh Mujibur Rahman once observed that Jinnah did not understand language issue in its proper perspective when he made the statement. When the voice of disagreement was raised by the people against Jinnah's observation, he did not refer the matter again in his life time, Morning News, January 5, 1970.


and was criticised by the divergent sections of the community.  

The real reason underlying this attitude of the rulers of Pakistan was their serious misgivings about the loyalty of the Bengalis towards Pakistan. This was due to the fact that Bengalis always felt proud of their cultural heritage and the rich character of their language and literature. It was, therefore, felt that the Muslims would fall an easy prey to the cultural domination of Bengali Hindus with whom they had cultural and linguistic affinity. This foreign influence, it was afraid, might lead to the disruption of Pakistan and the Bengali Muslims might think of reuniting with West Bengal.  

There was "wide spread belief in Karachi and Lahore that East Pakistanis regard themselves as Bengalis first and Pakistanis second."  

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81 Details See Sainik (Bentali weekly), 9, 16 December 1949.


Dr. Shalidullah, the President of the then Pakistan Literacy Conference, said: "whatever race or religion we might belong to, we are primarily Bengalees. It is a direct bestowal to us by nature's invisible forces that have made us inseparably different. Different garbs cannot alter our identity". Quoted by Mustafa Sarwar, "25 Years of Struggle for Awami League and Bangladesh", Morning News, (Supplement) January 18, 1974.
apprehension on the part of Pakistani rulers produced dramatically opposite results. The East Pakistanis suspected that West Pakistan was conspiring to dominate East Pakistan. It should be noted that the language movement was not inspired by West Bengal. It was generated by the fear that if Bengali was not accorded official status, it would affect the people of East Bengal culturally, economically and socially.

The peak of the language movement was reached on 27 January 1952, when Khwaja Nazimuddin, who had by then become the Prime Minister of Pakistan, declared in a Public meeting at Dacca that Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan. This declaration obviously provoked the people. They felt betrayed by Khwaja Nazimuddin who had earlier agreed to make Bengali the state language of Pakistan. There was a general hartal throughout the State on 29th January. On the next day, the Dacca University was

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84 *Ittefaq* (Bengali Daily), 21 February 1971.
85 Ferdous Quareshi observed "There is no longer any difference of opinion about the fact that the West Pakistan tried to establish a highly centralised administration not for the sake of Islam or to safeguard the interest of the Muslims but to maintain their vested interests. They understood that to establish domination of the centre the supremacy of one language was essential."
86 According to Gunnar Myrdal, "Bengalis saw this (introduction of Urdu as the only national language) as not only a moral blow to their culture but a threat to perpetuate their under representation and inferior status in the administrative services, especially in relation to Punjabis, by putting them at a disadvantage in all competitive examinations." Gunnar Myrdal, Op.cit., p.318.
87 Diary of Events, *Pakistan Observer*, February 21, 1956
closed and reiterated their demand for making Bengali as the State language.

The language agitation took a serious turn. On 30 January, 1952, an All-Party State Language Committee of Action with Moulana Bhshani and Kazi Gulum Mahbub as Chairman and Convener respectively was formed to intensify the struggle. It was a broadbased committee representing Awami League, youth League, students League and intelligentsia. This committee organised public meetings and hartal on 4th February 1952. It was also announced that 21 February would be observed as a protest day. The Government immediately prohibited all demonstrations. The Action Committee thus faced the problem to comply or not to comply with the prohibitory orders. There arose a difference of opinion among the members of the Committee. The Awami Muslim League were in no mood to challenge the orders of the Government. The Committee, therefore, decided not to violate the prohibitory orders. The students refused to accept the decision of the Committee and violated the prohibitory orders regardless of all consequences. The police resorted to lathi charge and firing. Three students and a high court

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89 Ibid., Also see "Diary of Events", Pakistan Observer, Feb. 1956. Other prominent members were: Abul Hashim, Ataur Rahman Khan, Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad, M.A. Martin and Kamruddin Ahmad.
clerk were killed. The East Bengal Legislative Assembly was in session when firing took place. The Chief Minister did not express a word of sorrow for them who were killed. Some members of the Awami League protested against the indifference of the Chief Minister and walked out. Realising the gravity of the situation, the Chief Minister, got a resolution passed by the Assembly on the next day of the incident recommending to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan that Bengali be one of the State language of Pakistan.

The Chief Minister contended that the language agitation of 1952 was engineered by the communists and Hindu elements. He failed to understand the language agitation as a people's movement for a legitimate demand. There was widespread protest against Nurul Amin's description of the agitation as the one engineered by vested interests.

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93 Mrs. Anwara Khatun, Awami League member, in a resolution moved in the House, demanded the unconditional release of persons arrested during the language movement, compensation to the victims, and punishment of the officers who were responsible for the murders and atrocities. Details see, East Bengal Legislative Assembly Proceedings, Vol. II, 22 February 1952, pp.98-99.
96 Nurul Amin's observation was largely based on the two articles appeared in "Swadhinata", a Calcutta based Communist Party daily. In these articles the Communist Party had taken the credit for turning the 1952 language movement in East Bengal into a united mass movement. See "Swadhinata: March 10, 11, 1952. Also see East Bengal Assembly Proceedings, Vol.III, 24 March 1952, p.11.
It is surprising that the East Bengal representatives in the National Assembly were supremely silent on this issue. They were compelled to be silent.

Though the language agitation had not attained its immediate objective, it, however, produced certain inevitable consequences. First, it generated a mass movement secular in character. Second, it enlisted the sympathy and support of a wider section of the masses. Thirdly, it cut across all political and religious barriers and penetrated into the heart of every citizen. It was not urban in character. Those who played an effective role in conducting the movement came from the rural plebsantry. Finally it induced East Bengal to think that the Bengali interests were not safe in the hands of the Muslim League Government dominated by the West Pakistanis. The East Bengal language agitation left an imprint on the minds of the people who decided to observe February 21 as a Martyrs Day.

The political impact of the movement was that it led to the consolidation of the East Bengal Middle class which eventually strengthened the Awami League. The Student League 96


97 The East Pakistan Student League was founded on 4 Jan. 1948. It should be noted that the factionalism that existed in the Bengal Muslim League before Partition had its impact also on its student wing, the All-Bengal Muslim student League. After partition, this organisation had split into two largely on the question of leadership. One Group led by Anwar Hussain and Shah Azizur Rahman supported the Nazimuddin group of the Muslim League and the other led by Nooruddin and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman supported Suhrawardy group. The former thus formed the All East Pakistan Muslim Student League and the latter formed the East Pakistan Muslim Student League which later became a non-communal organisation. Details see. Ittefaq (Bengali daily), Jan. 17, 1957. Also see Badruddin Umar, "Language Movement and Contemporary Politics(three articles in Bengali) Ittefaq, April 1, 14 and 21, 1974.
and youth League in East Bengal which were in the forefront of the language movement joined the Awami Muslim League and provided a stable mass base for party. The former, while continued to operate as the student wing of the Awami League, consistently followed a policy of confrontation with the Muslim League and its Government. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was an outstanding leader of this group. The youth League consisting of young leaders like Shamsul Huq, Oli Ahad, Tajuddin Ahmad, Mohammad Toaha and Kamruddin Ahmad, was the first progressive democratic political organisation in East Bengal. This group, excepting Shamsul Huq, remained outside the Awami Muslim League for the reason that the Party was still a communal organisation in their estimate. However, they welcomed that organisation subsequently when the Party became a non-communal political organisation.

The Youth League used to exert tremendous influence on the students and other progressive elements in the society.

98 The Youth League was founded on 6-7 September 1947 by the young Muslim League workers and students who were associated with the Mughul Tuli. Its main programmes were: Anti-imperialism and support to liberation wars; Quitting of Commonwealth; declaration of Pakistan as a sovereign democratic republic, Universal adult franchise, anti-Feudalism, nationalisation of foreign capital, repeal of all black laws, release of political prisoners, secularism. Employment opportunities for all.


99 Shamsul Huq became the first General Secretary of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League.


The contributions of the communists in building up the Awami Muslim League was, no less important. The East Pakistan Communist Party was operating underground since it found it difficult to function as a political opposition in the open. Though the Communist Party had its own reservations about the true character of the Awami League, it was not averse in giving support to the latter because of the fact that the Awami League had all along been fighting for the people's democratic rights. Further, the Communist Party was also conscious of the popular image of the then leadership of the Awami League particularly that of Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani. In 1951, in a political note published in the cominform journal "For a lasting peace, For a people's Democracy", it was stated that in East Bengal the progressive forces were fighting through the Awami Muslim League. Subsequently in July, 1952, the Communist Party decided to carry on its activities.

102 Interview with Anil Mukherjee, a prominent Communist Party member at that time on 2 April 1974.

103 Moulana Bhashani denied that he was a Communist or a fellow-traveller. But he was a firm believer in the cause of Islam-peace, equality, democracy, world Brother-hood, and good will among all peoples. There were, according to him many differences with the Communists and many other left organisation on the matter of Philosophy, policies and programmes. These differences however, did not make him blind to the realities - to work together for the improvement of the oppressed and exploited people of Pakistan. Details see Moulana Bhashani's interview to U.P.P. correspondent, Pakistan Observer, January 4, 1955.

both in underground as well as through the Awami League. This to a great extent strengthened the Awami Muslim League in its overall political and organisational work. It was in this background that the Awami League found itself in a more congenial atmosphere to grow and develop. As a matter of fact, the pace of its organisational growth was rather quickened when a large number of people particularly the professionals, writers and students, teachers decided to join the Awami League. It may be noted that the then inspiring leadership of the Party comprising mainly Moulana Bhashani, Suhrawardy, Shamsul Huq and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who oratory skill and ability to win over the masses, certainly contributed to its success.

The Awami League was always quick and responsive to champion the people's cause. It had not only identified itself with the aspiration of the Bengali population but had also chalked out a programme of political action in furtherance of that objective. For instance, the party, by that time, had already come out with the demand for provincial autonomy and supported the cry of Bengal for Bengalees. This political sagacity and wisdom of the party leadership was widely appreciated. Consequently, important and divergent sections of the population were ready to join hands with it.

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In 1953, the East Pakistan Awami League found itself at the height of its popularity. In the meantime many of its leaders who were in jail had also been released. The party took up the question of organisational election and the first meeting of the party council was held on July 5, 1953. The meeting which was largely attended by about seven hundred councillors finally elected a team of Office-bearers with Moulana Bhashani as President, Ataur Rahman Khan as Vice-President and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as General Secretary. Though the election of the new office-bearers was unanimous, it was not without any dissenting voice. The former General Secretary, Shamsul Huq, issued a statement on July 8, 1953 accusing the party leadership of establishing fascist dictatorship of Moulana Bhashani, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and some others. The party Council had also decided to restructure the organisation similar to that of the Muslim League with the proviso that the party Council in future shall be composed of eight hundred members and that zonal organisers shall replace the joint secretaries.

It should be noted that Shamsul Huq, the first General Secretary of the party, by then became mentally deranged. There was an attempt by Moulana Bhashani and some other senior members to make Abul Hashim, the erstwhile General Secretary of the Bengal Muslim League, the General Secretary of the Party. However, some prominent members of the party like Manik Mia opposed this move on the ground that Abul Hashim was opposed to H.S. Suhrawardy, the convenor of the All Pakistan Awami League. Another contender for the prestigious party post was Khairat Hussain who withdrew his candidature when it was found that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was going to rig the election by introducing illegal membership. Interview with Abul Mansur Ahmad on 15 April 1974.

Details See, Morning News, July 9, 1953.

It was in this important meeting that the constitution of the party as well as the manifesto were approved.

The council meeting was significant on another score. An important issue which was seriously considered was the question of declaring the Awami Muslim League, a non-communal political organisation. Though the idea was favoured by a larger number of members, it was pointed out that the time for a drastic change in the nomenclature of the party was most inopportune. The group headed by H.S. Suhrawardy apprehended that the Muslim League was likely to exploit any such change in the party's character in the ensuring election and the electorate was likely to be influenced by its propaganda. Appreciating the rationality of the arguments, the council deferred the question. However, the party president was authorised to consider the pros and cons of the proposed change in the nomenclature of the party.\textsuperscript{110} It was generally felt that nothing should be done at that stage which would alienate the sympathy and support of the electorate. In short, it was nothing but political expediency that counselled the party to retain the name till the election was over.

Moulana Bhashani played a unique role in making the party a purely secular political body. His convincing

\textsuperscript{110}See Moulana Bhashani's statement, \textit{Morning News}, April 22, 1954.
arguments together with a dispassionate approach to a problem of high magnitude, in fact was a turning-point in the history of Awami League. Not only he was able to silence the dissidents but carried conviction with the council at the end. Being a democrat by himself, Moulana was guided by the wisdom of having frequent deliberations on this issue with his own party colleagues. Several meetings were convened, series of discussions were held to convince the rank and file of the party. Moulana reasoned out his arguments in such a way that it was rather difficult for his opponents to disagree with the proposal. Time and again he emphasised the absolute necessity of total integration of the diverse elements - the Hindus, Muslims or otherwise - into a homogeneous whole. He was convinced that the bond of nationhood had to be strengthened by the loyalty and support of the entire population.\footnote{Details see, \textit{Dawn}, 4 May 1954.} It was in this spirit that he quoted Mohad Ali \textit{Mjnah} and convinced his audience of the pressing need for the immediate change in the nomenclature of the party. The intelligent manner in which the most serious issue concerning his party was properly handled by Moulana Bhashani and it was no problem for him to get his proposal duly approved by the
\footnote{Moulana Bhashani was referring to Jinnah's declaration at the opening ceremony of Pakistan Parliament that following the creation of Pakistan, Politically the Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims ceased to be Muslims. \textit{See Ibid.}}
different sections of the party organisation. In a joint meeting of the working Committee and presidents and secretaries of the district and sub-divisional Awami League respectively held on April 5, 1954, a resolution was moved proposing that "the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League be named as the East Pakistan Awami League." The subject committee formed at the party council meeting on October 20, 1955 to which organisational issues were referred for consideration, had also recommended that the organisation should be non-communal and membership should be thrown open to all communities. This recommendation of the subject Committee was accepted by the party in its council session held on October 22, 1955. The party would now be known as "East Pakistan Awami League" and any citizen of Pakistan above 18 years of age, who signed a pledge subscribed to the aims and objects of the organisation and paid the membership fee, was now eligible for its membership.

The secularisation of the party was celebrated by the councillors by raising the slogan "Hindu-Muslim Bhai - Bhai". In a resolution passed at the council session, the party declared its faith in secularism and democracy. In another resolution, the party urged the members of the constituent Assembly to adopt joint electorate instead of separate electorate. These decisions were intended to

113 Morning News, April 22, 1954.
114 Pakistan Observer, October 22, 1955.
115 Proceedings see. Ibid., October 23, 1955.
116 Ibid.,
117 Ibid., October 24, 1955.
enlist the support of the minority community. All these indicate a more realistic and democratic approach to political problems. The conversion of the Party to a secular organisation must be attributed to the efforts made by Moulana Bhashani. It must also be said that there were many who were sceptical about the programme of Moulana Bhashani and his followers. Twenty three Awami Muslim Leaguers led by Abdus Salam Khan protested against the resolution and walked out of the council meeting. They declared that they would continue to function as the Awami Muslim League and would strive to uphold the original creed of the party. They argued that the decision was not only inopportune but also a violation of the principles of Islamic solidarity for the preservation of which Awami Muslim League was founded but also a negation of the two-nation theory on which Pakistan was founded. They feared, that the decision would root out religious influence from the country and thereby facilitate the infiltration

118 The Pakistan Times, October 25, 1955. In its editorial on October 25, 1955, Pakistan Times wrote: "They speak of a realisation on the part of Awami Leaguers of a fundamental fact namely that a genuine political party is and should be run essentially on a socio-economic programme. Whatever their caste, class or creed, they should not only desire but be able to unite on one platform."


120 Details see Pakistan Observer, January 3, 1956.

121 Ibid., October 6, 1955.
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As regards the Socio-economic policies and programme of the Party, the manifesto of 1953 declared that the State shall be Islamic, democratic and socialist. That is, Pakistan shall be a sovereign Islamic state; this state shall be sovereign and outside the Commonwealth; the sovereignty of the state was derived from the sovereign power of Allah; that the real owner of land was Allah, the supreme sovereign; the people shall exercise political power and enjoy property only as trustees of Allah. Its democratic content could be discerned from its declaration that the people shall have fundamental rights such as individual

122 Details see Pakistan Observer, November 4, 1955.

123 The party, in its convention, held on January 6, 1951, formed a sub-committee comprising of Moulana Bhashani, Shamsul Huq, Taffazul Hussain, Khairat Hussain, Ataur Rahman Khan, Abdus Salam Khan and Abdul Hussain, to draft (1) Party manifesto, (2) immediate programme and policy, and (3) Basic principles, Pakistan Observer, January 7, 1951.

As a matter of fact, it was Shamsul Huq, the first General Secretary of the Party, who drafted the Manifesto in consultation with Abul Hashim who as the General Secretary of the Bengal Muslim League before partition, gave the party a more or less similar manifesto. This was disclosed by Abul Hashim to the Author in a personal interview on 2 May, 1974.

124 Manifesto says that "Pakistan shall be an Islamic state in which sovereign power lay with the Allah, the supreme Sovereign. The people shall exercise sovereign power. Rulers who shall possess good moral character shall be elected by the people. The resources of the state and all powers vested in the Government shall not be utilised for private or personal gain but for the well-being of the people. Rulers shall be responsible to the people who could remove them if they violated the trust reposed in them. The laws of Pakistan shall be in accordance with the injunction of the Holy Quran and also teachings of prophet Mohammed. The party disapproved of all distinctions based on geography, race and language."

Details see, Shamsul Huq, East Pakistan Awami Muslim League Draft Manifesto (in Bengali) Published by General Secretary, Shamsul Huq, Dacca, pp.1-14.
freedom, the right to work, health, religion, shelter, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and assembly, freedom from detention without trial and equality before law, irrespective of caste, community, language, religion and sex. It also envisaged separation of judiciary from the executive, that all persons above the age of 18 years shall have the right to vote and right to contest election to any representative body.

The socialist orientation of the party was evident from the declaration that the Zamindari system would be abolished (without compensation) and the surplus land would be distributed among the landless proletariat. The State would establish co-operative farming, Jute trade and key industries such as mines, ammunition, Banking, Insurance, communication and power ... shall be nationalised. The other socio-economic reforms were the encouragement and strengthening of the cooperative movement and co-operative societies for the betterment of economic condition of the people; food grain trade shall be the sole responsibility of the State; prices of food grains and agricultural raw materials such as jute would be regulated by the state to ensure a fair return to the growers; industrial consumer goods would be made available to all the people particularly in the rural areas at reasonable prices; insurance against natural calamities such as floods would be undertaken by the state; the state shall take the responsibility of providing agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, water to the farmers.
The state would encourage cottage industries to solve the problems of unemployment; workers participation in the management of industries would be ensured; social and economic rights of industrial labour as envisaged under the ILO convention would be guaranteed; nationalisation of foreign capital and interests would be undertaken. Among its social welfare measures, the party placed emphasis on (a) free and compulsory primary education and (b) responsibility for looking after the old, orphan, sick and disabled persons.

The manifesto also clearly defined the defence and foreign policy objectives of the party. The defence of Pakistan was declared to be the duty of every citizen. To ensure the proper discharge of this duty, it was further declared that military training should be obligatory for every citizen.

The manifesto also declared that there would be complete autonomy for the East and West constituent units of Pakistan. That is East Pakistan must have its own army, navy and air force. Clearly this was not autonomy in the accepted sense of the term. Thus the Manifesto contemplated semi-independence for East Pakistan.

126 Details see Ibid., pp.15-18.
127 Ibid., p.13.
128 Ibid., p.17.
In its foreign policy, the manifesto commits the party to the policy of non-alignment and support to national liberation movements everywhere.\textsuperscript{129}

It is clear that the party manifesto contemplated radical reform of the State. It may be remarked the founders of the East Pakistan Awami League were not mere "frustrated defectors from the Muslim League" but they had a definite political philosophy and espoused a cause which was valid in the socio-economic condition in the East.\textsuperscript{130}

The Manifesto contemplated the establishment of a Parliamentary Democracy in Pakistan. Moulana Bhashani, in his Presidential address to the special council session of the Awami League at Kagmari on 7 February 1957, said "Neither Hitler's facism nor communism will be tolerated by the people. Real democratic social system is our objective."\textsuperscript{131} To distinguish the Awami League from the Muslim League, Suhrawardy made the following observation:

"In the first place, we do not believe in identifying the state with the party, the ministry and administration; we believe in democracy as opposed to facism. Next, we believe that an opposition party is necessary for the proper functioning of democracy. This is the only influence that can keep the rulers in check and at work, and can create public opinion..."\textsuperscript{132}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{130}] D.N. Banerjee, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.64.
\item[\textsuperscript{131}] Moulana Bhashani's Presidential address, East Pakistan Awami League Special Council Session, Kagmari, Tangail, Mymensingh, 7-8 February 1957(published by Gazi Ghulam Mustafa, Awami League Office, Sadarghat, Pioneer Press,Dacca) p.12.
\end{itemize}
To mobilise support of the divergent groups or classes in East Pakistan for its programme and to popularise itself the party began a vigorous membership campaign among all section of the people. The leaders of the party visited different districts, addressed public meeting and explained party programmes and policies. The party greatly succeeded in its attempts. "The programme of the Awami League found the broadest response in East Pakistan. Radical Muslim intellectuals, members of the national bourgeoisie, peasants, workers and owners of small and middle-size landholdings.... joined the Awami League." 133

The General election of 1954 provided the party a province-wide platform to publicise its programme and also ascertain its strength. The party fought the election as a partner in a united Front whose election manifesto incorporated all the major programmes of the party. Thus Awami programme became the political scripture of East Pakistan and exercised tremendous influence on the course of political development. 134

In the election, the UF secured 223 seats in a house of 309 of which 143 seats alone of the Awami League and thus emerged as the largest party in the legislature. 135

The election results gave a tremendous boost to the party's prestige and popularity. 136

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135 For details see Chapter on Elections.
136 Moulana Bhashani, the President of the East Pakistan Awami League, was given the title of "Quaid-i-Mazloom" (the leader of the oppressed) by the people. See K.K. Aziz, Party Politics, in Pakistan, Op.cit., p.99.
After the election, the people of the country particularly of East Pakistan, had hoped that a new era would be ushered in and the country would be provided with a democratic constitution. However, the hopes of the people were frustrated by the Governor-General, Ghulam Mohammad and the bureaucracy who were now in complete control of the levers of power in the country. The Governor-General and the bureaucracy had scant regard for institutions of parliamentary democracy. They did not allow the United Front to remain in power for more than few weeks. The UF Ministry was dismissed by the Governor-General at a time when it enjoyed the overwhelming support in the East Pakistan Assembly and imposed the Governor's rule in East Pakistan. The Government unleashed a reign of terror in East Pakistan. Awami League had to bear the main brunt of it. About 1200 workers and leaders and 30 assembly members belonging to the Awami League were arrested and jailed. The General Secretary of the Party, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was arrested and lodged in the Dacca Central Jail. Arrest warrants were issued against hundred of workers when the Government failed to arrest those against whom warrants

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137 *Pakistan Observer*, (Dacca), December 25, 1969.

138 Political role of bureaucracy in Pakistan, see C.P. Bhambhri and M. Bhaskaran Nair, "Bureaucracy in Authoritarian political system, the case of Pakistan", In *Pakistan Political System in Crisis, Emergence of Bangladesh*, edited by S.P. Varma and Virendra Narain, South Asia studies, Centre Deptt. of Political Science, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur (India) pp.79-94.
were issued, their property was confiscated. Moulana Bhashani, the President of the Party, who was then in London on a peace mission was not allowed to enter East Pakistan. Under the circumstances, Awami League annual council conference of 1954 could not be held. A.K. Fazlul Huq, the UF Chief Minister was placed under house arrest. The Dacca press was subjected to pre-censorship. The UF Parliamentary Party was not allowed to hold meetings for any purpose whatsoever - to elect any party office-bearers or to discuss matters arising out of the framing of the country's constitution. All political meetings were banned. The Communist Party was declared illegal on July 5, 1954. All these measures, however, instead of bringing disintegration of the Party, only helped to strengthen it.

The dismissal of the UF Government and the imposition of Governor's rule did not bring about any violent reaction from the political parties. However, the Awami League was vehemently critical of the action taken. True to its

140 Pakistan Observer, May 19, 1954. The Govt. banned the Pro-Awami League, Bengali Daily Ittefaq without assigning any reason whatsoever.
141 Pakistan Observer, June 17, 1954.
142 Details See Ataur Rahman Khan's statement on 7 June, 1954, Pakistan Observer (Dacca), June 9, 1954. A Pakistan political commentator wrote: "The imposition of Section 92-A in East Bengal after such a clear-cut verdict of the people was a serious blow to democracy and represented an attempt to undo the popular victory in the election...." politicus, "Political background to constitution making-", Pakistan Times, July 16, 1955.
democratic professions the party launched a vigorous
constitutional protest against the imposition of the
Governor's rule. The Awami League tried to bring about
the restoration of democratic rule through constitutional
methods. At a mass rally held on May 8, 1955, the
party passed a resolution criticising the attitude of the
Government of Pakistan "in wrongfully and illegally depriv­ing
the people of East Pakistan of their legitimate and
democratic right of being governed by their elected repre­
sentatives," and that the dismissal of a popular Govern­
ment "had given rise to a widespread sense of frustration
and misgivings about the bonafide of the central govern­
ment to the people of this wing."

East Pakistan Awami League also demanded the dis­
solution of the Constituent Assembly whose members from
East Pakistan lost their representative character according
to the results of the 1954 election in East Pakistan. They
showed that the Muslim League had practically no footing in the province.

143 Details see, vice-President of the party Ataur Rahman
Khan's statement on 7 June, 1954, Pakistan Observer (Dacca)
June 9, 1954.
144 Pakistan Observer, May 9, 1955.
145 Decision of the East Pakistan Awami League working
Committee to this effect. See Dawn, 3 April, 1954. Also see,
statement of 15 UF MLAs including Abul Mansur Ahmad, Awami
League ex-Minister. Pakistan Observer, October 6, 1954.
General Secretary of the Party Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said
that "the members of the constituent Assembly acting on the
false notion of sovereignty, had done nothing during the
long period, save the creation of provincialism and ill-
feelings between the two-wings of Pakistan. It has ruled
Pakistan autocratically and unislamic way, though they pre­tended to work out an Islamic constitution." Pakistan Observer
(Karachi), 31 October, 1954.
Kararuddin Ahmad, a prominent Awami League leader attached the unrepresentative character of the Constituent Assembly. He charged the members with corrupt practices. He threatened to launch a civil disobedience movement if the Constituent Assembly was not dissolved.\textsuperscript{146} Awami League and the Anti-Muslim League workers observed "Protest Day" on April 4, 1954 and "Dissolve Conssembly Day" on June 11, 1954.\textsuperscript{147} The UF Parliamentary Party in its first meeting held on 2 April 1954, demanded the same. In short, Awami League carried on a strong campaign for the dissolution of the constituent Assembly and for the election of a new one consisting of directly elected members on the basis of adult suffrage.

In addition, East Pakistan Awami League campaigned for the immediate release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the General Secretary of the party, and other political prisoners detained without trial and the withdrawal of all arrest warrants.\textsuperscript{148}

During Governor's rule, the Central Government brought about the disintegration of the UF by little bribes. The Krishak Shramik Party led by Fazlul Huq was won over by it. Some of its leaders were included in the Central cabinet. When the Governor's rule was lifted, Abul Hossain Sarkar, a nominee of Huq, was made the Chief Minister

\textsuperscript{146}Pakistan Times, 30 March, and 18 April 1954.
\textsuperscript{147}Morning News (Dacca), April 5, 1954. Also Pakistan Observer, May 17, 1954.
\textsuperscript{148}Pakistan Observer, November 20, 1954.
completely ignoring the Awami League, the single largest party in the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly. Awami League which supported the restoration of Parliamentary Government in East Bengal promised to cooperate with the Government in so far as its policy did not clash with the 21-Point Programme of the UF Party. As an opposition party, Awami League would try to organise people's movement for the implementation of the programme. 149

The Abu Hossain Sarkar Ministry remained in office for about fifteen months. During this period, Awami League's role as an opposition party was most effective. Implementation of 21-Point Programme and the establishment of real democracy were the twin objective of the Awami League. 150 The Awami League launched a vigorous campaign against the Sarkar Ministry for its failure to implement the 21-Point Programme - the main demand of East Pakistan. The Sarkar Ministry had not done anything about the important demands such as the abolition of Zamindari system without compensation and distribution of surplus land among the landless proletariat, reorientation of education system, monuments for martyres of language movement, release of political prisoners, industrialisation etc.. The party

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demanded that if the Government was not able to implement the 21-Point Programme it should resign.\textsuperscript{151}

The failure of the Sarkar Ministry to summon the Assembly Session during its entire period of its rule was another important point of criticism by the Awami League. By not summoning the Assembly, the Provincial Government deprived the elected representatives the opportunity to redress the grievances of the people. Further the Ministry should have summoned the legislature immediately after it assumed office to test whether it enjoyed the confidence of the Legislature.\textsuperscript{152} In order to perpetuate itself in power, the Ministry acted against all norms of democracy. In March, 1956 the legislature was not summoned for the purpose of budget. Instead, the House met on May 22, for the presentation of the budget. But the Speaker refused permission to the Finance Minister, who was also the Chief Minister, to present the budget on the ground of

\textsuperscript{151}Party President, Moulana Bhashani, in a statement said that "the country had not forgotten the 21-Point Programme, though MLAs belonging to the UF had forgotten it in their lust for power." Pakistan Times, January 1, 1956. Awami League exposed the unholy alliance between UF led by Fazlul Huq and the Muslim League at the centre. Party made it clear to the people that the UF Ministry led by Sarkar would not able to implement the 21-Point Programme because of its alliance with the Muslim League. So far their own party interest the UF led by Huq would never do anything which would incur the displeasure of its partner, the Muslim League.

Details see, Address of Moulana Bhashani at East Pakistan Awami Muslim League Council Session, 1955, pp.5-7

\textsuperscript{152}Party President, Moulana Bhashani even threatened to organise countrywide agitation for the same. See his address at East Pakistan Awami League Council Session, 1955 Op.cit., p.9.
breach of privilege of the House and short notice. The Legislature was adjourned sine die and prorogued.
When the Assembly met again on August 13, 1956, the Governor, on the advice of the Chief Minister, prorogued it. It was clear that the Ministry did not command the confidence of the House. The Awami League therefore, demanded the dismissal of the Sarkar Ministry. The Working Committee in its meeting held on August 14, 1956, decided to observe a province-wide protest day on August 27, against the prorogation of the Assembly. It condemned the threat of the Chief Minister to advise dissolution of Assembly and warned him that such an illegal and unconstitutional act would not be tolerated by the people.

Moreover, Sarkar Ministry did not hold single bye-elections to fill up 9 vacancies because the Chief Minister was afraid that bye-election may increase the strength of the opposition in the Assembly. The Government thus disregarded one of the 21-Point programme which promised bye-election within three months from the date on which a vacancy arises.

At this time, there was shortage of rice, prices of essential commodities shot up. The purchasing power of

153 Pakistan Observer, May 23, 24, 1956. Regarding Speakers ruling Suhrawardy said that it was an important milestone in establishing democratic conventions and all ministers are warned that if for the sake of keeping themselves in power, they flout spirit of constitution and the demands of democracy, they can plunge the country into serious constitutional difficulties.

154 Ibid., August 14, 1956.

155 Ibid., August 16, 1956.
the people was extremely low. The Sarkar Ministry denied food shortages and ignored the repeated warnings of Awami League about the food crisis. The Government, to silence criticism adopted a devious method by distributing 33 lakh mounds of rice at a nominal price among the members of the treasury Branch. A majority of the dumb millions were in the grip of famine. The East Pakistan Governor, Fazlul Huq described the condition of the people as "unparalleled in the history of East Pakistan for many years." This was a highly sensitive issue which the Awami League exploited easily for agitational purposes. The Awami League strongly criticised the Government for its failure to solve the food problem. It organised mass campaign with a view to discredit the UF Government headed by Abu Hossain Sarkar and also to expand its organisational base. The Government refused to call an emergency Assembly session as suggested by the Awami League legislators to discuss inter alia the food situation in the province.

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156 Rice was selling at 60/70 taka a maund in August 1956. Details see General Secretary, Sheikh Mujib Rahman's report party Council conference at Karmari. Reported Sangbad (Dacca Bengali daily), February 10, 1957.

157 Pakistan Observer, October 1, 1955.

158 Hafez Habibur Rahman, Muslim League, United Front and Awami League regimes: Comparative Study (Bengali); published by Hafez Habibur Rahman, publicity Secretary, East Pakistan Awami League, Pioneer Press, Dacca, 1957, p. 4. Also see Moulana Bhashani's statement, Pakistan Observer, Oct. 1, 1955.

159 Hindustan Standard, July 5, 1956.

160 Pakistan Observer, Feb. 11, 1956. Shawkawardy remarked: "My only regret is that the opposition did not get an opportunity to censure the Government on the manner in which it had bungled the food situation for I am certain that on a vote Government would have been defeated as it has lost the confidence of the majority of the members." Dawn 24 May, 1956.
General Secretary of the Party, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, had directed all the units of the Awami League in the province to organise immediately peaceful squad "processions and public meetings to awake the sleeping Sarkar Ministry." The party organised hunger marchers which was attended by a large number of Students and agriculturists. They shouted slogans such as "Save Bengal from famine." Moulana Bhashani resorted to hunger strike for 17 days to bring home to the Sarkar Ministry the distressing condition of the people. He also demanded a grant of 50 crores taka from the Central Government to meet the food situation. Finally, he gave up his hunger strike when Iskander Mirza, the Governor-General of Pakistan, granted the same. East Pakistan Awami League council in a resolution urged the Government to declare East Pakistan as a famine zone, mobilise the entire machinery of the state to solve this problem on an emergency basis and immediately make all arrangements by air, land and sea to rush rice to the province. The Famine Resistance Committee, formed by the Awami League on a province-wide basis observed July 8 as "Food Demand Day." On 4 August, 1956, the Awami League

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161 Pakistan Observer, May 7, 1956.
162 Times of India, May 13, 1956.
163 Pakistan Times, May 12, 1956.
165 Introduction of full rationing on a province-wide basis and till this was done, to distribute free rice to the poor, test relief measures and opening of gruel kitchen for the destitutes were other demands. Pakistan Observer, May 21, 1956.
166 Pakistan Times, July 2, 1956.
organised a hunger march in Dacca which was attended by a large number of people including women and children. The hunger marchers defied the order under section 144 and the police opened fire which resulted in the death of three persons. Again, on 4 September, four persons were killed as a result of police firing on hunger marchers. Awami League demanded an immediate enquiry into police firing and trial of those who were responsible for it. 167

The next day was observed by the party as "Protest Day". All the students organisations in Dacca had also called a general strike on that day. A long procession of mourners headed by Moulana Bhashani and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman with black arm-bands was taken out by the party to demonstrate the sorrow of the people at the killing. 168

In short, the economic crisis, famine condition, shortage of food grains, Moulana Bhashani's hunger strike and the events following the hunger march organised by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dacca brought about the fall of the Sarkar Ministry. Awami League proved to be the most well organised and mass based party in East Bengal.

As has been indicated earlier, the Awami League, when it was founded, was more a platform to mobilise the

167 Pakistan Observer, Sept. 9, 1956.
discontented opinion against the ruling Muslim League than a political party in the strict sense of the term. Within its ranks the party had all shades of opinion and interests. But essentially, from its very inception, it had two traditions: "A petty bourgeois elitist tradition for those who hoped to rise to senior position in the bureaucracy or to become members of the newly created business community in Bengal on the strength of Governmental financial support and subsidy; and a rural populist tradition that articulated the frustration and aspirations of the long suffering sections of the extremely poor Bengal peasantry." These traditions found expression in two discernable groups within the party. Suhrawardy, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ataur Rahman Khan were the leaders of the elitist group whereas Moulana Bhashani was the leader of the populist group in the Awami League. In addition to the programmatic differences between the two groups, these differences were also widened due to the personalities of Suhrawardy and Bhashani. They were the very anti-thesis of each other in temperament and outlook and brought to bear widely differing view points on major issues. Suhrawardy was modern in his outlook and education, but conservative in Politics; Moulana Bhashani was orthodox and self educated

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but revolutionary in politics. Suhrawardy had as his main objective to capture power at the centre. He therefore saw Awami League as the most potent and useful instrument to achieve his aim. And therefore he wanted the party to have an all-Pakistan basis and image. Moulana Bhashani, on the other hand, being a revolutionary and sincerely desiring the betterment of the conditions of East Pakistan did not have any ambition of capturing power. He, therefore, saw the Awami League as an instrument of social and political change of the province of East Pakistan. Moulana Bhashani was a "Mass Orator" and charismatic leader but not a parliamentarian of Suhrawardy's calibre. His main objective was to spearhead a mass movement designed to transform the character and content of the socio-economic life of the people.

Further, the appeal of the Suhrawardy group was directed mainly at the Middle class. It was from this class that the group also derived its support. This middle class was a recent phenomenon in East Pakistan in that it consisted largely of the urbanised section of the rural peasantry. Now their interests were securing jobs and contracts mostly in towns and cities and they saw the elitist group of the Awami League as the vehicle through which they could achieve their interests. On the other hand, the

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171 Details see Ibid., p.78.
populist group derived its support from the rural masses.

Within the party, the elitist group was the dominant faction. However, the populist faction was able to exercise a greater influence in the formation of policies and programmes. As a result the party acquired an image of a progressive and radical outlook.

As long as the party was in the opposition, the group differences remained quiescent. As soon as the party was voted to power, there was a demand that the policies and programmes that the party had advocated should be implemented. The populist group in particular began to exert pressure on the party Government for their immediate implementation, failing which they demanded that the government should resign.\(^1\) It may be noted that the Awami League Government was dominated by the elitist group; not only, they did not implement party policies, but in many instances deviated from its declared policies. Their main objective was to retain and consolidate the power they had acquired. It may, therefore, be noted that the main issue on which there was conflict between the groups was, not on the question of sharing power between them, but on the question of the ends for which power was to be used.

In this conflict, Suhrawardy, by virtue of being

in power,\textsuperscript{173} had an edge over the populist group. In addition, he was also supported by most of the top leaders of the party. He used these levers not only to consolidate his position but also to revise the declared policies of the party. He used the governmental and party machinery to strengthen his position and isolate Moulana Bhashani and his group. He tried to eliminate the members of the Youth League, an independent organisation who were also members of the Party.\textsuperscript{174} It may be noted that the members of the Youth League who joined the Awami League were the followers of Moulana Bhashani. The question of dual membership in the Party organisation was raised by the elitist group to weaken the populist group led by Moulana Bhashani. Moreover, the elitist group admitted the members of the opposition in the Assembly as members of the Awami League Parliamentary Party without discussing in the Party. The populist group strongly protested against this.\textsuperscript{175} The elitist group succeeded in its attempts to isolate the Moulana Bhashani group. Moulana Bhashani's efforts to establish real democracy in the country to achieve regional autonomy for East Pakistan, to shape the foreign policy of the Government were not realized.

In the field of foreign policy, the party's declared

\textsuperscript{173}H.S. Suhrwardy had then become the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

\textsuperscript{174}Pakistan Observer, February 12, 1957.

\textsuperscript{175}The Statesman, January 11, 1957.
aim was to follow an independent and non-aligned foreign policy. But after his assumption of office of Prime Minister, Suhrawardy who, while in opposition, was a strong critic of Pakistan's foreign policy, defended Pakistan's military alliances and pursued a pro-western foreign policy. The Party President, Moulana Bhashani warned Suhrawardy that the Awami League would continue to fight for the abrogation of these pacts. Suhrawardy denied that any such decision had ever taken by the Party. He went to the extent of branding those who opposed Pakistan military pacts as paid enemy agents. However, the Working Committee of the Party on 6 February 1957 had reaffirmed its stand against Pakistan's participation in any foreign sponsored military alliances. The Kagmari session of the party council, which met on February 7-8, 1957, had fully endorsed this policy. The reiteration of party's

176 This was contrary to party's declared policy of fighting for the abrogation of all military pacts. See Moulana Bhashani's telegram to Suhrawardy, The Statesman November 17, 1956.

177 Ibid., In a joint statement in November 16, 1956, East Pakistan Awami League organising Secretary, Oli Ahad and the publicity Secretary, Abdul Hai, fully supported the Party President's stand. See Pakistan Observer, Nov. 17, 1956.


179 Suhrawardy claimed that he had documentary proofs with him to substantiate his charge. However, Moulana Bhashani and others challenged him to product it. See Jyoti Sen Gupta, History of Freedom Movement, Op.cit., pp.94-95.

180 See the statement of Ataur Rahman Khan, CM of East Pakistan and Vice-President of the Party. Pakistan Times, February 11, 1957.
foreign policy had clearly gone against the foreign policy being pursued by the Suhrawardy Government. It was clear from the resolution of the Party Council that so far as the rank and file of the party were concerned, they were not impressed by the so-called successes of Pakistan's foreign policy as claimed by Suhrawardy. The party Council had, however, reconciled itself in the larger interests of the country to the party's continuance in power. Suhrawardy, on the other hand, had indicated that so long as he led the National Government, any basic change in the country's foreign policy was out of the question. Moreover, he had taken the party Council's stand on foreign policy as a challenge and tried to convert the critics of his foreign policy to his own viewpoint.

Another major irritant between the Suhrawardy group and Moulana Bhashani group was the question of regional autonomy which had been a major demand of the party. The Party President, Moulana Bhashani pressed the central Government headed by Awami League leader, Suhrawardy, to strive for regional autonomy. Largely under pressure from Moulana Bhashani, the provincial party working committee on March 2, 1957 directed its members of the Assembly to

181 Pakistan Times, February 10, 1957.
182 Ibid.
table a motion recommending to the centre, full regional autonomy. On April 3, the East Pakistan Assembly passed a non-official resolution urging the provincial government to ask the Central Government to take suitable steps to provide full regional autonomy for East Pakistan, leaving the centre with only few subjects like currency, foreign affairs (political) and defence. Moulana Bhashani, while stressing the importance of this demand, declared,

"So united are the people of East Pakistan on this one issue that no political party, big or small, or new, can hope to maintain its existence on the soil of East Pakistan if it opposes the demand for autonomy." 185

On the other hand, Suhrawardy, with a view to create a greater sense of trust between East and West Pakistan and also to assuage the fears of West Pakistan, declared on April 4, that "98 per cent" of the provincial autonomy had been provided in the 1956 constitution and therefore dismissed the East Pakistan Assembly resolution as "a political slogan and stunt." 186

Dissatisfied with the attitude of Suhrawardy on foreign policy and regional autonomy and also with a view to put pressure on him through the provincial party, Moulana

183 Dawn (Karachi), March 3, 1957.
184 Both the treasury benches and the opposition supported the resolution, and it was passed without a division. See, M. Rafique Afsal, Op.cit., p.214.
185 Dawn, March 6, 1957.
186 Eastern Examiner, April 5, 1957. Also see Morning News, July 5, 1957. It may be noted that the West Pakistan viewed with great concern the autonomy resolution passed by East Pakistan Assembly. They feared that this would lead to the disintegration of the country. Details see Eastern Examiner, April 5, 1957.
Bhashani submitted his resignation from its presidency towards the end of March, 1957. He also directed the General Secretary of the party to convene a meeting of the Working Committee and an emergency meeting of the Council. Accordingly, the party Working Committee which was attended by almost all its members, was held on March 30, 1957.

Though they postponed the consideration of Party President's resignation letter for the next Committee meeting, it authorised the General Secretary to persuade him to withdraw his resignation "as it appeared to have been submitted under mistaken impressions." Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Ataur Rahman Khan explained to Moulana Bhashani their disapproval of Suhrawardy's stand on autonomy. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assured him that the remark that the autonomy resolution of the Assembly was a 'political stunt' was wrongly attributed to Suhrawardy. As a result, Moulana Bhashani promised to withdraw his resignation from the party presidency after obtaining clarification from Suhrawardy to this effect. But Suhrawardy never explained his view point.

The conflict between the groups at the party level was carried at many forums. Serious conflict of such nature

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187 Details see Dawn, March 21, 1957.
189 Moulana Bhashani could not attend the meeting as he arrived Dacca late. Related by Ataur Rahman Khan, the then Vice-President of the Party.
190 Pakistan Observer, April 1, 1957.
192 Details see, Pakistan Observer, April 6, 1957.
arose in the meeting of the Working Committee. Party General Secretary charged Oli Ahad, its organising Secretary, of "indiscipline and disrupting activities." The main charges against him were the publication of a leaflet, under his own name, against the foreign policy of Pakistan and allegations of corruption against certain party ministers including Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Oli Ahad was suspended. As a protest against this, nine members resigned from the Working Committee.

Meanwhile, Suhrawardy group was determined to win over the Moulana Bhashani group in the next party council meeting scheduled for 13 and 14 June at Dacca. Party's General Secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was a protege of Moulana Bhashani and a strong critic of Suhrawardy's foreign policy.

It may be added that Oli Ahad was a close associate of Moulana Bhashani and a strong critic of Suhrawardy's foreign policy.

At the Committee meeting, some members defended Oli Ahad on the ground that his leaflet on Pak's foreign policy was in line with the party resolutions on the same subject. Oli Ahad, in his defence, challenged General Secretary to disprove those allegations brought against him by Newspapers.

The Working Committee was sharply divided on this issue. Out of 30 members present, only 15 voted in favour of the resolution, nine voted against it and six abstained.


General Secretary changed the venue from Rangpur as it was the headquarters of North Bengal where the party workers were mostly followers of Moulana Bhashani. In Dacca, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was in a better position to mobilise support for his group. He had distributed plenty of money to pro-Suhrawardy councillors to enable them to come to Dacca. Some thousands of council members were enrolled in the party from Dacca. It was expected that Pro-Bhashani Councillors, being poorer, would find it difficult to come to Dacca. Details see Jyoti Sen Gupta, Eclipse of East Pakistan, Op.cit., pp.326-328.
of Suhrawardy and was trained by him in politics, played a crucial role in mobilising support to Suhrawardy. He emerged as the most powerful man in the Party because, in addition to being its General Secretary, he also enjoyed the solid support of Suhrawardy who was the leader of the All-Pakistan Awami League as well as the Prime Minister of Pakistan. Moreover, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was also a good organiser. The result was that he became almost a 'dictator' in the provincial organisation. He adopted "undemocratic methods" to weaken the Moulana Bhashani group and to mobilise support for Suhrawardy. It may be noted that the Pro-Suhrawardy group was obviously playing the game at a higher stake. A clear mandate for Suhrawardy's foreign policy from the provincial Party council was necessary for him to continue as Prime Minister of a coalition Government at the centre.

On June 3, 1957, the party Working Committee took a number of important decisions. They were:

(a) expulsion of Oli Ahad for three years;
(b) appointment of 10 new members in the Working Committee;\textsuperscript{199}
(c) amendment to the constitution of the Awami League curtailing the power of the President to nominate 25 members of the Working Committee; and
(d) acceptance of the resignation of nine members of the Working Committee.\textsuperscript{200}

\textsuperscript{199} All of them were followers of Suhrawardy.
\textsuperscript{200} Pakistan Observer, June 7, 1957. Also see Yar Mohammed Khan's statement in Pakistan Observer, July 13, 1957.
With these actions, the chances of a rapprochement between the two groups inside the organisation ended. Moulana Bhashani group was most critical about the methods adopted by the Suhrawardy group to win over a substantial number of Councillors. Moulana Bhashani resented the move to make him just a figurehead of the organisation, depriving him of the powers he enjoyed, in case he continued as the President of the organisation. The followers of Moulana Bhashani felt that they would be outvoted in the council. As a result, Moulana Bhashani decided not to attend the council session, but his young followers like Muzaffar Ahmad, Mohammad Toaha, Mohiuddin Ahmad dissuaded him from doing so on the ground that his presence might influence the mind of the Councillors. They also appealed for the councillor's support for rescinding the working committee's order expelling Oli Ahad and also taking back to its fold the nine other members who had resigned. Moulana Bhashani was requested by them to continue as the leader of the organisation by withdrawing his resignation. But their main weakness lay in the fact that they had neither worked out a common plan of their own nor developed even a sense of unity to face the council session. Moreover, none of them had the organising ability of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of the other group.

201 Morning News, July 1, 1957.
202 Pakistan Observer, June 7, 1957.
Evidently, the party council approved Suhrawardy's foreign policy. Suhrawardy thus scored a clear victory against Moulana Bhashani group. This had radically changed the character of the party as it had earlier demanded a neutral foreign policy and the scrapping of all military pacts. As regards the implementation of regional autonomy, party General Secretary said that it would not be possible without an amendment of the Pakistan Constitution. So there was no way out, he added, but to wait till the ensuing general election.

The General Secretary's report on Party organisation, which was approved by the council, made it clear that those who did not believe in the existence of Pakistan or in its geographical integrity and were wedded to a particular ideology would have no place in the organisation. The General Secretary, thus, justified the action taken against Oli Ahad. In another important decision, the party council asked the party members who were also members of the East Pakistan Youth League to resign from the latter. There were about 11 members of the East Pakistan Assembly who were actively associated with both the Awami League and the

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203 According to General Secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the resolution on foreign policy was moved by Suhrawardy. While over 700 councillors approved it, and 25 of them opposed it. See Pakistan Observer, June 14, 17, 1957.
204 Details see Pakistan Observer, June 14, 1957.
205 Details see Pakistan Observer, June 14, 1957.
206 Pakistan Times, June 15, 1957.
Youth League. Clearly, this was intended to further weaken the group led by Moulana Bhashani in the party. However, the party council unanimously requested Moulana Bhashani to withdraw his resignation. The Council elected three new Vice-Presidents of the organisation in the place of Ataur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmad and Khairat Hussain who, in accordance with the provisions of the party's constitution should not, being ministers, hold offices in the organisation. The council permitted General Secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, to continue in the provincial Cabinet, but authorised the Chief Minister, Ataur Rahman Khan, to decide the time of Mujibur Rahman's resignation from the cabinet in consultation with party working committee. The Parliamentary Board of the party was formed to nominate party candidates in the next general election. Significantly, all these decisions were taken by the party council without consulting the President of the party.

The followers of Moulana Bhashani expressed their strong resentment against the undemocratic and unconstitutional procedure adopted at the party council session. The President of the Dacca City Awami League, Yar Mohammad Khan,

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207 Assembly members like Mohammed Toha, Mohiuddin Ahmed and Muzaffar Ahmad, said that the pro-Suhrawardy group's decision to drive out the members of Youth League from the party was the result of their fear that the youths inside the party might not approve of their anti-people and undemocratic actions. Pakistan Observer, July 12, 1957.

208 They were: Moulana Abdur Rashid, Tarkabagish, Moula Altaf Hussain (Mymensingh) and Mohibur Sama (Sylhet).

209 Details see Pakistan Observer, June 14, 1957.

210 Related to the author by Moulana Bhashani.

resigned from the party on July 12. In a statement, he said that the Awami League had lost its original character and principles and had been made an instrument to be utilised for the personal gains of Suhrawardy and his followers.212 Many workers and office bearers of the provincial party units resigned from the organisation. In Dacca city itself, the followers of Moulana Bhashani had captured the city Awami League.213 Party had lost ground in seven out of 17 districts in the province since its last council session in Dacca.214 About 16 provincial Assembly and 2 parliament members had resigned from the party in support of Moulana Bhashani.215

Meanwhile, there was hectic activity in the pro-Bhashani group. Nearly 100 party workers who constituted the hard core of the pro-Bhashani group met at the residence of Yar Mohammad Khan to decide their future course of action. Moulana Bhashani was not present at the meeting.216 He made certain moves. He invited Mohamoodul Huq Usmani, Mian Iftikharuddin, G.M. Sayyid and others who were prominent leaders of the newly formed Pakistan's National Party

212 Pakistan Observer, July 13, 1957. Also see the statement of Mohammad Toana, Mohiuddin Ahmad and Muzaffar Ahmad (all MPAs). Pakistan Observer, July 12, 1957.


214 These districts were: Dinajpur, Bogra, Rangpur, Pabna, Mymensingh, Sylhet and Barisal. In Sylhet alone, 43 out of 45 party councillors had deserted the party. Details see Morning News, July 20, 1957.

215 Pakistan Observer, July 12, and 25, 1957.

216 Pakistan Observer, June 12, 1957.
The idea behind this move was to explore the possibility of forming a new all-Pakistan political party with the aim of preserving the sovereignty of Pakistan and of the establishment of real democracy. The deliberations between the Bhashani group and the leaders of the National Party of West Pakistan (in which the Ganatantri Dal also participated) resulted in the formation of an all-Pakistan Party, the National Awami Party. The Democratic Workers convention called by Moulana Bhashani on July 25, 1957 supported Bhashani. Earlier on July 24, Moulana Bhashani resigned from the primary membership of the Awami League Organisation. Thus ended Moulana Bhashani's association with the East Pakistan Awami League whose President he was for an uninterrupted period of 8 years. The New Party comprising mainly Awami League dissidents and Ganatantri Dal was formed under the Chairmanship of Moulana Bhashani. Regional autonomy, abrogation

The New Party was formed in West Pakistan in September, 1956 by merging six organisations with progressive political ideologies. They included inter alia the Frontier Gandhi's Khudi Khidmatgars, Main Iftikharuddin's Azad Pakistan Party, G.M. Sayyid's Awame-Mahaz and Mahmoodul Huq Usmani's dissident unit of the Awami League.

Influenced by Mian Iftikharuddin, the Ganatantri Dal which was then a component unit of the Awami League coalition Government had already decided its merger with the new party that was proposed to be set up by Bhashani and others. Details see, Jyoti Sen Gupta, History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh, Op.cit., pp.118-119, 121-122. Also see M. Rafique Afzal, Op.cit., pp. 215-216.

It may be noted that the word 'Awami' was added to the National Party at the instance of Moulana Bhashani.

Details see, Morning News, July 25, 1957.
of all defence and military pacts and introduction of an independent foreign policy were some of the basic demands of the new Party. The aims and objects of the party included, among other things, nationalisation of basic industries, liquidation of all foreign firms, creation of strong trade unions, confiscation of all estates, immediate abolition of landlordism, closer connection between the Govt. and the workers, etc. In spite of Moulana Bhashani's leadership and a radical socio-economic programme, the party failed to grow into a mass party. Again, the politically relevant section of the people in East Pakistan were increasingly losing interest in the politics of opposition practiced by Moulana Bhashani. And finally, the party lacked on organisation to take its programme to the masses. Nasim Ahmad wrote,

"The NAP provided a convenient platform for the leftist elements and the communists to work from and they joined the party in large numbers. But apart from mouthing a few platitudes that any liberal party believes in, the NAP failed to develop a distinctly leftist character so far as internal politics were concerned."

With Moulana Bhashani and his followers breaking away from the East Pakistan Awami League, the character of

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222 The Times (London), June 18, 1957.

the party had undergone a radical change. For, it had thus lost its populist and communist cadres who were mainly responsible for its popularity. The party had now come under the firm grip of the elitist group led by Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. It was difficult to assess how far the party had become organisationally weak as a result of this split in the party. The party Working Committee which was elected in 1955 council session had not been reconstituted even in 1958 though its constitution called for election once in two years. All organisational elections were put off in view of the ensuring General elections which though scheduled for March 1958, was not held because of the imposition of Martial Law in October of the same year. Moreover, the party council session scheduled for March 5, 1958 was postponed side die.

Nevertheless, the Awami League remained as the most popular and organised party in East Pakistan. As Hamza Alavi wrote, "by a mistimed and badly managed precipitation of the party crisis, it was the populist cadres who were isolated." Suhrawardy, during his tenure as Prime Minister

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224 *Pakistan Observer*, June 17, 1957.
225 *Pakistan Times*, June 15, 1957.
226 The reasons stated were: (1) absence of Suhrawardy from the country; (2) Continuation of the session of the parliament upto March 12, 1958 and (3) the budget session of the provincial Assembly.*Morning News*, Feb. 71, 1958.
campaigned vigorously for building up the party. In September 1957, he addressed 13 mass meetings in the major cities and administrative centres in East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{229} Even the Muslim League paper, \textit{Dawn}, reported these meetings as record gathering.\textsuperscript{230} Both Suhrawardy and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, being out of power, could devote more time for organisational work.\textsuperscript{231} With the ensuing elections in view, Suhrawardy and others devoted their time for almost a year (October 1957 to October 1958) for making the organisation strong and popular one. By his dynamic personality and sheer force of oratory, Suhrawardy's popularity had increased and he came to be known more and more in the rural areas of East Pakistan.\textsuperscript{232} This had helped the Awami League to retain its considerable political strength. More important was the role played by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in maintaining the organisation's popularity. Hamza Alavi wrote,

"In the retention of the party's hold over the masses, the role of Sheikh Mujib was crucial notwithstanding his firm commitments to the elitist group, his rhetoric and even his personal style of life were populist in character. He was a man with whom the people could identify. He bridged the gap between the elitist leadership of the Awami League and its populist mass base."\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., p.127.
\textsuperscript{231} In October 1957, Suhrawardy resigned as Prime Minister of Pakistan as he had lost his majority in the National Assembly, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had resigned for the provincial Govt. to devote more time for organisational work.
\textsuperscript{232} Suhrawardy, who was the supreme leader of the Party was called Quaid-i-Pakistan (Leader of Pakistan) in August, 1958. See K.K. Aziz, \textit{Party Politics in Pakistan}, \textit{Op.cit.}, p.232.
In short, partly because of its leadership and partly because it was in power both at the centre and in the province, the Awami League was able to retain its mass base and popularity in East Pakistan. It was, in fact, the most popular and well-organised party. This was clearly demonstrated in the election of its candidates in six out of seven by-elections in the province, in 1956.\textsuperscript{234} The majorities secured by the party's candidates were in most cases large enough to further substantiate its claim to possess the confidence of the people. Moreover, it had a sizeable membership in East Pakistan which was to 1.6 million in 1958.\textsuperscript{235} The provincial party council consisted of 868 members in the same year.\textsuperscript{236} More than 600 full-time workers were employed by the party and their effort was augmented by the work of a much large body of voluntary sympathisers.\textsuperscript{237} Although the party did not have its units at all levels it had well-organised branches in every district and subdivision of East Bengal.\textsuperscript{238}

\textsuperscript{234} The candidate lost in Bhola constituency to the Nizam-e-Islam's candidate. Details see Pakistan Times, December 18, 1956. Also The Times of India, Dec. 17, 1956.
\textsuperscript{235} Mustaq Ahmad, Government and Politics in Pakistan, Op. cit., p.163.
\textsuperscript{236} Morning News, February 21, 1958.
\textsuperscript{238} See General Secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's report to the Awami League Council Session at Kagmari. Sangbad, February 11, 1957.