ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE PARTY

Building up of an opposition Party against the (Ruling) Muslim League immediately after the establishment of Pakistan was not an easy task. This became all the more difficult when the new Party was composed of dissident elements from the Muslim League. Besides, as a new Party, the Awami League had to be build up almost from the scratch. It started its organisational activity with no funds and no office. Ataur Rahman Khan's chamber used to be Party's meeting place. Subsequently, a small house in Nawabpur Road (Dacca) was acquired to set up the Party office. ¹

The first Party Working Committee played a crucial role in building up the organisation. Party President, Moulana Bhashani, General Secretary, Shamsul Huq and other Working Committee members toured the whole of East Bengal for establishing Party branches. Initially, at the sub-divisional level, they could get only 5 to 6 persons and appointed them as convenors.

¹Interview with Zahiruddin, a prominent Awami Leaguer on February 1974.
Thus, the Party organisation spread itself up to thana level in 1951. The Language Movement of 1952 gave them the opportunity to penetrate to the union level also.²

The organisational structure of the Party was not fundamentally different from that of the Muslim League as, until 1955, both parties had restricted membership to Muslims. The Working Committee of the Party in its meeting held on 5th April 1954 which was also attended by all district presidents and General Secretaries formed a "Constitutional Sub-Committee" for amending the Party constitution.³ As per the direction of the Working Committee, the Sub-Committee prepared an amended constitution which was accepted with certain amendments as organisation's constitution and Regulation.⁴ As a result the membership of the Party was thrown open to any citizen of Pakistan above the age of 18 years, who subscribed to the aims and objects of the organisation and paid the membership fee.⁵

According to the Party constitution, the East Pakistan Awami League was the provincial branch of

²Interview with Moulana Bhashani on 5 May 1974.
³See Constitution and Regulation of East Pakistan Awami League (Dacca, 1955), Introduction.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid., p.3.
All Pakistan Awami League. The Awami League included the annual and special sessions of the League and

i) Council,
ii) The Working Committee,
iii) The Parliamentary Party,
iv) The Parliamentary Board,
v) District/City, Ward, Sub-division, Thana, Municipality, Union or Panchayat Units recognised by the East Pakistan Awami League.

The Office-bearers of the Awami League shall consist of:

i) President,
ii) Three Vice-Presidents (first, second and third),
iii) General Secretary,
iv) Publicity Secretary,
v) Organising Secretary,
vi) Office and Residential Secretary,
vii) Labour and Refugee Secretary,
viii) Lady Secretary,
ix) Social Welfare, Culture, Voluntary and Health Secretary,
x) Treasurer.

These office-bearers would be elected by the Councillors from amongst themselves in the bi-annual Council meeting of the Party.

Council

The Party Council shall consist of a specific number of Councillors elected from all the districts on the basis of population. Councillors shall be elected

6 While the Awami League claimed to be an All-Pakistan party it had been primarily based in the Eastern Wing and its success in the West was still limited. For all practical purposes the East Pakistan Awami League functioned as an independent organisation.


8 See Ibid., pp.3-4.
from each district at the rate of one for every 50,000 population. Similarly Councillors shall be elected from each city at the rate of one for each 15,000 population. If any district or city unit of the Party fails to elect the Councillors and office-bearers on or before the date fixed, the Working Committee may nominate the required number of Councillors from those units. The first session of the bi-annual session of the elected and or nominated Councillors shall co-opt 25 primary members from any branch of the Party as members of the Council. The nominated members shall have the same rights and privileges as the elected Councillors. But within three months, the Working Committee shall hold election to those district or city units for the election of Councillors and office-bearers. The Councillors thus elected shall automatically replace the nominated Councillors. During the interval between the nomination and election of Councillors, the Working Committee may ask the previous Committee or form Ad-hoc Committee to carry on Party work in the district or city.9

A Council meeting shall be called by the General Secretary in consultation with the Party President. Except the bi-annual election session, the Session of

9Details see, Ibid., pp.4-7.
the Council shall ordinarily be held annually or on a joint requisition by not less than 100 Councillors. A requisitioned meeting shall be held within 30 days of the receipt of the requisition. The President of the Awami League shall be the President of the Council session. In his absence, the Vice-President according to seniority or any member of the Working Committee duly elected shall preside over the Session.

A special, General or election Session of the Council shall be called by the Working Committee. To this session, on the invitation of the Working Committee, each district or city unit may send equal number of delegates along with elected Councillors. No delegate shall have the right to vote but he shall have the right to participate in the deliberations. Except the elected co-opted and nominated Councillors, others shall not have the right to participate in the meeting of the party's election Council.10

The Council shall have the power,

i) to elect office-bearers of the Party;

ii) to decide the principles and objectives of the organisation;

iii) to implement the decisions of its special, general or election session;

10 See Ibid., pp.8-10.
iv) to approve Party's accounts and an auditor may be appointed, if necessary;

v) to elect a specific number of Councillors from East Pakistan to the All-Pakistan Awami League Council;

vi) to take decision against the appeal made by a member who is punished by the Working Committee;

vii) to frame rules for the proper conduct of the Council meetings;

viii) to adopt any programme for fulfilling the aims and objectives of the Party;

ix) to constitute a Parliamentary Board for deciding candidates for various elections;

x) to delegate any power to the Working Committee;

xi) to frame rules for the proper conduct of the provincial or national Parliamentary Party.\(^{11}\)

The council, in its sessions discussed provincial, national and international affairs. The sessions were made use of by the Councillors from all over the Province to discuss such matters.\(^{12}\)

The council is the highest authority. While electing the office-bearers and the Working Committee members, the Council shall give adequate representation to all the districts. In 1955, strength of the Council was 675. It increased to 12,000 in 1958.\(^ {13}\)

\(^{11}\)Ibid., pp. 11-12.


Working Committee

The Working Committee shall consist of the President of the Awami League and 36 members, of whom eleven will be elected by the Council and the rest shall be appointed by the President. Office-bearers of the Party are members of the Working Committee. Nomination of 25 members shall be made within 21 days of the election of the President. This power of the President was, however, curtailed in June 1957 by an amendment of the Party Constitution. The most important amendments brought about were:

1) half of the members of the Working Committee would be elected by the Council; and

2) nominations by the President to the Working Committee was reduced to 8.

The main objective of these amendments was to make the members of the Working Committee responsible to the Council and not the Party President. But the real reason behind this was to weaken the populist group led by the Party President, Moulana Bhashani. Ordinarily, members of the Working Committee were selected from all districts on the basis of population and also on the basis of merit. The idea was to give representation to all the districts in the Working Committee which was the highest executive authority of the Awami League. In fact, membership of the Working Committee was not clearly defined and anybody

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15 Interview with Abul Mansur Ahmad, Op.cit.,
16 Ibid.
17 Interview with Yur Mohammad Khan, Op.cit.,
of political importance could be co-opted as a member of the Working Committee. 18

The General Secretary shall call regular meetings of the Working Committee. The Party President can also direct the General Secretary to call for a meeting of the Working Committee. The quorum of a meeting of the Working Committee shall be nine. 19 For the meeting of the Working Committee, at least 7 days notice shall be given. Emergency meeting of the Working Committee may be called at any time.

The Working Committee shall have the power,

1) to give grants to Party units;

2) to take constitutional action against any unit and to form ad-hoc Committees, if necessary;

3) to fill the vacancies arising in the Party Council, Working Committee, Parliamentary Board, office-bearers or any other Committee, by co-option or by selection;

4) to give directions to the Parliamentary wing of the Party or any of its members and to take disciplinary action against Parliamentary Party or its members in case of violation of Party manifesto;

5) to prepare accounts of the Party for placing it before the Council;

6) to approve any expenditure above taka 100.

7) to approve the appointment or removal of any member of the office-staff made by the General Secretary;

18 Interview with Nurur Rahman on 16 May 1974.

8) to strike out the names of the members of the Working Committee who absented themselves consecutively four meetings. This should be done only after giving sufficient notice to them for explaining why they should not be dropped.

9) to fix the time, venue and agenda of the bi-annual, yearly or special or election session of the Party Council;

10) to fix the date for the enrolment of Primary members of the Units, election of different units or branches and the number of Councillors to be elected for the Party Council from district and city units according to the Census.

11) to reallocate the functions of the Party Secretaries, if necessary.  

The party was always guided by the Working Committee. In between two sessions of the council, the Working Committee will act on behalf of the Council, exercise its authority and discharge all its responsibilities.

An important feature of the Working Committee was that it used to have its occasional meeting which was attended by representatives from all the districts. It also used to have "extended meetings" in which Secretaries and Presidents of the sub-divisions and districts were invited. A complete liaison was thus maintained between the Central organisation and the district and sub-divisional organisations.  

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21 Interview with Zahiruddin. Also by Nurur Rahman.
also used to have regular tours of different districts where they used to address public meetings and educate the people on the policies and programmes of the Party.  

Important decisions of the Working Committee were communicated to the lower units through correspondence - to district, from district to sub-division and from sub-division to thana and from thana to union level. Working Committee decisions shall be binding on all subordinate units.  

President  
The President of the Awami League shall be the head of the organisation. He shall preside over the meetings of the Council and the Working Committee. The President shall have the power,

1) to give ruling on any constitutional question. He can also take opinion of the Councillors and members of the Working Committee about the interpretation of any of the clauses of the Party constitution;  

2) to direct the general Secretary to convene the meeting of the Council and the Working Committee;  

3) to nominate 25 members (in 1957 it was reduced to 8) of the Working Committee;  

4) to nominate members of the Election Committee;  

5) to exercise any power of the Council and of the Working Committee;  

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22 Interview with Zahiruddin.  

23 Interview with Abul Mansur Ahmad.
6) to take appropriate measures for organising the Party for the betterment of the country. 24

Vice-President

A Vice-President (according to Seniority) shall preside over the meetings of the council and the Working Committee in the absence of the President. They will perform the duties of the President in his absence. In addition, they will perform the functions assigned to them by the Party President. 25

General Secretary

General Secretary shall be the Chief executive of the Party. He shall have the power,

1) to give advice and instruction to all the departmental Secretaries for their smooth functioning;

2) to call the meeting of the Secretaries at least once a month for discussing the day-to-day problems and taking decisions. Final decisions will be taken by the Working Committee;

3) to appoint and dismiss the office-staff, fix up their wages, salaries, grant leave etc. subject to the ratification by the working Committee;

4) to see that the decisions of the Council and the Working Committee are implemented properly;

5) to submit the report of the activities of the organisation in the Council;

25 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
6) to exercise the extra-powers vested upon him by the Council and the Working Committee;

7) to direct the Secretaries to do any work other than the Department work and they are bound to obey it;

8) to empower any of the Secretaries to discharge his function in his absence.\footnote{ibid*, p.17} 

**Departmental Secretaries**

They will execute the departmental work and the instructions or decisions given by the General Secretary, the Working Committee or the Council. They can request the General Secretary to convene the meeting of the Working Committee for discussing problems relating to their departments. They will submit the report of their activities before the Council Session through the General Secretary. Lady Secretary must be a lady member of the Party. She will organise the women of the country for the Party. She will implement the decisions of the organisation regarding the problems of women.\footnote{ibid*, p.18}

**Treasurer**

The Treasurer shall be responsible for the maintenance of proper accounts of all the funds of the organisation and keeping them in safe custody. He will release money only on the written request of the General Secretary. Money cannot be withdrawn from the Party fund without the joint signatures of the General Secretary and the Treasurer.\footnote{ibid., p.18.}
Parliamentary Board

The Parliamentary Board shall consist of the Party President, General Secretary, the leader of the Awami League Party in East Pakistan Legislative Assembly, the leader of the Awami League Party in Pakistan Central Legislative Assembly and seven others elected by the Council from amongst themselves. The East Pakistan Awami League President shall be the President of the Board. The General Secretary of the Board will be elected from amongst the members.

The Parliamentary Board shall have the power,

1) to make the final selection of the candidates for the Provincial and Central legislatures, and

2) to conduct election campaigns.

While selecting candidates, the Parliamentary Board should give due importance to the recommendations of the District Awami League Working Committee, but Board's decisions shall be final. 29

Parliamentary Party

The Parliamentary Party shall consist of the Awami League members in the East Pakistan Legislative Assembly. It will elect its own office-bearers. The Parliamentary Party shall be bound by the decisions of the Party. It cannot take decisions contrary to the Party Constitution. 30

30 Details see, Ibid., pp.20-21.
Volunteer Bahini

Volunteer Bahini shall be organised at all levels of the Party organisation. This will be under the control of the Working Committee through departmental Secretaries. Any member of the Party can be a member of the volunteer Bahini. The members of the volunteer Bahini will be known as the Awami League Volunteer. Selfless service for the people, protection of the integrity of the State, working for the general betterment of the community and carrying out the directions of the Party are some of the main functions of this body. The Party will bear all the expenditures and responsibilities of this Bahini.31

Primary Members

Organisational pattern of the Party at all levels shall be the same as that of the Provincial level. According to Party constitution, primary members are recruited in each union through the printed receipt book in which the members are to sign the bond that they would abide by the rules of the Party. These members are enrolled for two years. Each member is to pay a fee of 25 paisa. And the minimum number of enrolment in each union is 200. Those primary members are treated as Councillors of that Unit. Councillors of the union Awami League in a bi-annual

31 Details see Ibid., pp.21-23.
election session elect their office-bearers and members of the Working Committee. They also elect Councillors for Thana unit. The Thana Councillors elect thana office-bearers and members of the Working Committee and councillors for the district Awami League. The Councillors who are elected from different thana units of a particular district sit in a session of that District Awami League and elect District Party Working Committee and also elect Councillors for the Provincial Unit. And East Pakistan Awami League in its bi-annual election meeting elect the office-bearers of the Provincial Working Committee.

Party Units

There were 19 districts in East Pakistan which were divided into sub-divisions. The sub-divisions was further divided into Thanas (Police station). Each thana was divided into unions. Union was the Primary unit, both of the administration of the Government and of the Party. Each union consisted of 10 - 12 villages. The population of the village was roughly 2000 to 5000. The Awami League had good organisation in all districts, sub-divisions, thanas and in some unions. The Party could not form well-organised units in all the unions and villages in 1958.\(^2\) In 1958, for instance, the Awami

\(^2\) See Report of the General Secretary, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to the Awami League Council Session, Kagramari, Sangbad (Bengali), February 11, 1957. Also interview with Mohammadullah, office-Secretary of the Party during the period under study on 21 May 1974.
League was able to form its units only in 28 unions out of 68 unions in the sub-divisions.33

Party units were formed in cities like Dacca, Chittagong, Narayanganj and Syedpur. Under the city unit, every union was equal to thana unit. Under each union, there were several wards and they had the status of union Awami League. Under city Awami League, the ward Awami League was treated as they primary unit. The city Awami League followed the rules and regulations of the District Awami League.

Dacca city unit had a special status. But almost from the beginning, Dacca city Awami League was riven with factionalism. The leadership of the Party wanted to have complete control over the Dacca city Awami League. Therefore, they wanted their own men to be in control of the Party unit. Those partymen who did not toe the line of the leadership were weeded out. Shoukhat Ali was an influential and popular member of the Dacca city Awami League Council. Since he did not blindly follow the party leadership led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he was expelled from the Party Working Committee for a period of 5 years as a disciplinary measure.34

33 Pakistan Observer, January 8, 1955.
A sub-committee with 9 members was also formed by the Working Committee vesting all powers for organising the Awami League in the Dacca city. The expulsion of Shoukhat Ali from the Dacca city unit was deplored by some of the Awami Leaguers. They said,

“This action (expulsion of Shoukhat Ali) appears to the public eye as an indication of following the pattern of Muslim League policies during the post-partition period which transformed the erstwhile platform of the nation into a pocket organisation. Are we going to follow the communist method of purging anyone who does not agree with an influential one.”

As a result of this infighting, no effective party organisation was formed in the Dacca city. In fact, East Pakistan Awami League was formed excluding the members of the Dacca city.

Party organisation was weak in some parts of North Bengal like Rangpur, Dinajpur, Jaintiapur, Sylhet Barisal and Khulna. These were the districts with which communications were difficult and at great distance from Dacca. Effective political propaganda could not be carried on during the 1954 elections, in these areas. Therefore, the party lost a couple of seats in these areas. Again the Awami League could not create a strong organisation in the Barisal district which was the home district of

35 Interview with Shoukhat Ali.
36 Pakistan Observer, February 1, 1955.
37 Interview with Shoukhat Ali.
A.K. Fazlul Huq who was a very popular leader. However the party had a very strong organisation in Chittagong, Comilla and Rajshahi districts.  

Generally, elderly men were elected as Presidents of the District and sub-divisional branches but secretaries were mostly young men. In many districts, the elderly members of the legislature were elected as President but in few places the legislators were elected as Secretaries. This was done with a view to have active members who could move about in their respective areas for building up the party.

Membership

Awami League was not a homogenous organisation. It was nothing more than a platform and not a party which was built up on the basis of a clear-cut ideology. In the early stages of its growth, the Party admitted into its fold any and everybody. There was no correct list of its members. Membership fee was not collected from all. All the units at the lower level did not submit an authentic list of members. There that were sent were not free from doubts. Therefore the register of members was defective.

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38 Interview with Kamruddin Ahmad.
39 Interview with Zahiruddin.
40 Interview with Nurur Rahman. Also Interview with Muhamudullah, Office-Secretary of the Party till 1958.
41 Interview with Habibur Rahman.
42 Interview with Yar Mohammad Khan, Treasurer of the Party till 1957 and Ataur Rahman Khan, Vice-President.
Party maintained a Secretariat which did not function regularly. It had a regular body of workers spread over the province to organise meetings, processions and strikes under the direction of the Party. It also maintained an efficient publicity service controlled by a Secretariat financed by voluntary subscriptions.

The Party was supported by a Bengali daily the Ittefaq which came into prominence during the language movement. It was at first a weekly political review. It was the channel through which the Party programmes were transmitted to various places. In 1956, when the United Front split, this paper started supporting the Krishak Sramik Party led by A.K. Fazlul Huq. Later when Awami League formed the Government the paper supported the Party. It was the champion of the Awami League. It was patronised by Suhrawardy when he became Prime Minister of Pakistan.

**Decision Making Process**

The Awami League was not a democratic organisation as far as its decision making process was concerned. Decisions were always taken by a 'Top echelon' comprising

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45 Interview with Mohammadullah.
Moulana Bhashani, H.S. Suhrawardy, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ataur Rahman Khan, Abul Mansur Ahmed and others. Even after the Party split in 1957 and Moulana Bhashani and his followers left the decision making was done by the same group minus Moulana Bhashani. H.S. Suhrawardy, who was the supreme leader of the Party played a crucial role in decision-making. Suhrawardy said often that “the policy of the Awami League is my policy.” Since Suhrawardy was mostly pre-occupied with the problem of organising Awami League on an all-Pakistan basis, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, his close associate played a key role in the Party. It was often said that the Awami League was one man (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) show with the help of Suhrawardy. Nobody had the courage to oppose Suhrawardy and he loved Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as his own son. It may be noted that Suhrawardy had no sons but only one daughter. Mujibur filled up the vacuum in the psychology of Suhrawardy. Therefore nobody dared to oppose Sheikh Mujibur Rahman his proposals. If anyone objected, he was dropped like a dead chicken in a glass of wine. Therefore, the Awami League was controlled by a clique. Power corrupts man. Absolute power corrupts man absolutely. Therefore Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became a dictator. There was growing

47 Interview with Shoukhat Ali.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Interview with Kazi Rokumuddin Ahmed.
discontent in the rank and file because even Moulana Bhashani was not given full opportunity to express his views on major problems facing the country.\textsuperscript{52}

**Communication**

The decisions of the Central Committee of the Party were communicated to the lower units through correspondence, leaflets and pamphlets. The Central Committee organisers also frequently visited the units, held workers meetings, public meetings and special rallies to focus the attention of the people on important issues like autonomy, food and repression. But the Party popularised its programme through mass contact. Yet the media of information and communication were more favourable in the cities than in the rural areas. The urban organisation was more vocal and strong than the rural.\textsuperscript{54}

**Discipline**

Party discipline was often stressed. The Party leadership emphasised that defection for personal ends would undermine the strength of the Party Organisation. The Party leadership enjoined the Party workers, to make the Party a strong national organisation.\textsuperscript{55} Yet in practice there was no discipline in the party for obvious reasons.

\textsuperscript{52}Morning News, February 21, 1958.
\textsuperscript{53}Interview with Habibur Rahman.
\textsuperscript{54}Interview with Kamruddin Ahmad.
\textsuperscript{55}Interview with Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani.
The Party was heterogenous in character. The ideology of the Party was too bare and \textit{jejune}. There was a wide gap between the leaders and the lead. Factionalism was rampant in the party. The dictatorship of Mujibur Rahman and Suhrawardy was resented by the rank and file. Many influential men either left or removed from the Party. The elitist group deviated from the programme of the party. As a consequence there was conflict between the leaders and the lead.\textsuperscript{56} There was also clash between two powerful personalities, Chief Minister Ataur Rahman Khan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the General Secretary of the Party.\textsuperscript{57} The Sheikh tendered his resignation from the Cabinet ostensibly on the plea that he should devote more time to strengthen the Awami League.\textsuperscript{58} The Sheikh's love for the organization was suspected by many as a cloak for love for power. It was thought he wanted to strengthen his hold over the organization in order to dictate terms to the Chief Minister.\textsuperscript{59}

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman could not strengthen the Awami League. He could not prevent the organizational weakness at various levels.\textsuperscript{60} Factionalism was rampant. In some places there were two separate executive committees.\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Details see, \textit{Pakistan Observer}, April 5, 16, 22, 1955.
\item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{Morning News}, Sept. 7, 1957.
\item \textsuperscript{58} \textit{Ittefaq}, May 31, 1957.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Abul Mansur Ahmed, \textit{Fifty Years of Politics}, Op.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ataur Rahman Khan, \textit{Two Years of Ministership}, Op.cit.
\item \textsuperscript{61} pp.221-222.
\end{itemize}
When the Awami League came to power, businessmen captured the party and the old workers were driven to the background. H.S. Suhrawardy understood the situation and tried to settle the intra party differences through the good offices of Abul Mansur Ahmed, an Awami League minister of the Central Cabinet, but was not successful. Thus the East Pakistan Awami League was extremely weak and morale low.

**Party Finances**

The primary membership fee was two annas per year. The number of members was over 5 lakhs in 1958. Besides, 

Finances came from public donations, compulsory contributions by members of the legislature, liberal contribution by some wealthy members of the organization, contributions from petty-traders who were mostly of jute business, rising Bengali bourgeoisie and non-Bengali business houses like Ispahanis, Karims, Dawoods, Harouns, Dadas, Adamjees, Bhavanis and so on. These big business houses financed the party because they felt that it, under the leadership of Suhrawardy would be a force to reckon with not only in the politics of the Province but also at the Centre. In fact, they financed the party mainly because of Suhrawardy who was an able

62 Ibid., p.222.
65 Interview with Zahur Hussain Choudhury, a well-informed journalist, Abul Mansur Ahmad, Yar Mohammad Khan, the Party Treasurer.
and popular political leader with an upper middle class background. Therefore they felt that their interests would be safe in the hands of the Awami League led by Suhrawardy. Rising Bengali capitalists, petty traders and Jotadars also found in the Awami League an instrument which would protect and promote their interests.

Party's main finance came from Suhrawardy who earned a lot from his legal practice. Whatever he earned he gave it to the Party. Besides big business houses used to give him lakhs because, they thought, that he would become something in future. For the businessmen it would be a long term investment.

It was also believed that C.C. Desai, the then Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan, had given money to the Awami League through Chittagong Marwari businessmen.

In fact, finances came to the party from these sources through Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the General Secretary, who was Suhrawardy's close associate. It was alleged that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman used to spend the money for his personal purposes and this money hardly went to the Treasurer. Suhrawardy rebuked Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for this.

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66 Interviews with Kamruddin Ahmad and Captain A.R. Shatrjahan, who were very close to Suhrawardy.

67 According to Yar Mohammed Khan, who was the Party Treasurer during the period, Indian High Commissioner told him about it. Interview with Yar Mohammed Khan.

68 Interview with the then Party Treasurer, Yar Mohammad Khan.
Student Front

The East Pakistan Awami League had strong base in the students. The East Pakistan students League, the most powerful student body, was the student wing of the Party. The student organisation had played a crucial role in the language movement and other democratic movements in East Pakistan the fruits of which were accrued by the Awami League. The student League also played an important role in making the Awami League popular among the people. In fact, the East Pakistan Awami League became a mass organisation mainly through the students who came mostly from the rich peasantry and therefore had close contact with the country-side.

Labour and Peasant Front

The East Pakistan Awami League did not have strong base among the industrial workers who constituted only a very small portion of the total population. The workers were not even a sizeable portion of the electorate. That may explain the lukewarm interest taken by the political parties in trade unionism and its affairs. Trade unions and their leaders also did not want the politicians to exploit them for their own political ends. But that did not prevent a number of politicians from working in the labour movement. Among political workers who were long active in APCOL (All-Pakistan Confederation of Labour),
which was formed by a merger in September 1950 the Pakistan Federation of Labour and the All-Pakistan Trade Union Federation were Shiraji and Zuhur Ahmad of the Awami League. The Awami League had a labour Secretary Abdus Samad, who was in charge of labour affairs and problems. Moulana Bhashani, who was Party President till 1957, was popular among the peasants of East Pakistan. However, because of its middle class constituency, the East Pakistan Awami League could not create strong trade union base for the organization.

In short, the East Pakistan Awami League was not a well organized party. Rather it was a platform. It did not have organised membership. It always suffered from internal feuds which showed its poor organisational character. The East Pakistan Awami League also did not have a strong and well-trained nucleus of party workers, educated and enlightened enough to build up a philosophy and programme of the Party. The affairs of the Party were managed by a 'top echelon' which very often disregarded party interests in its lust for power. As a result, very often the personal whims and fancies of a self-seeking individual became the policy and programme of the party he headed. The sources of party finances clearly showed that the Awami League was a middle class organization.