CHAPTER V
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OLD ISSUES, NEW LEADERSHIP

The revival of the EPAL and also of the WPAL was approved by the APAL working committee at its meeting in Dacca which also decided its own revival on the eve of the three day-long EPAL Councillors' and Delegates' Conference.¹ The order in which the APAL, the EPAL and the APAL were revived indicated its structural weakness as a national party of Pakistan reflecting the basic, inherent contradictions within Pakistani society. This weakness was further reflected in APAL's failure to evolve a manifesto applicable to both WPAL and EPAL. Hence, though technically the revived EPAL remained a constituent of APAL, for all practical purposes it retained its independent entity as a political party of East Pakistan.

Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmed stated:

Although there were talks about the drafting of a manifesto of the AL on all-Pakistan basis, yet this could not materialise because of the different viewpoints, the desire of the WPAL to have more or less united democratic movement. No manifesto could therefore be drafted, more so as most of the EPAL leaders were in prison.

¹ Ittefaq (Dacca), 6 March 1964.
The EPAL's line of thinking was rigid towards attainment of autonomy and this is where the actual difference in mood and thinking of the two wings lay.

Technically however the EPAL was a part of the APAL. 2

Even the aforementioned approval by the APAL of the EPAL's revival was a mere technicality. Long before the approval was declared the revived EPAL had started functioning. In early February the EPAL Working Committee had met to discuss the franchise issue and condemned the Government's persistence about continuing the prevalent electoral system against the expressed wishes of the people and the recommendations of the Franchise Commission. The EPAL Working Committee had called on other parties to join hands for a peaceful and constitutional movement for the realisation of people's demands and also instructed various party units of EPAL to mobilise all democratic forces in their respective areas. 3 Following this, party-building activity was immediately taken up starting with district and subdivisional level workers' conferences where the top-ranking party leaders explained the importance of political parties for realisation of people's demands and the need for the party's revival. These conferences

2 Interview with Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmad in Dacca in summer 1976.

3 See Morning News (Dacca), 11 February 1964.
were invariably coupled with public meetings where the visiting party leaders along with local leaders would discuss the politico-economic situation of Pakistan with special emphasis on the plight of East Pakistan. They would also mention local problems of the area they were visiting which required an immediate solution. Though these were a prelude to the ensuing Councillors’ and Delegates’ conference to be held shortly, this pattern for reaching the masses became a permanent style of the revived EPAL’s functioning.

The difference in viewpoints of the EPAL and APAL were quite discernible even during the Councillors’ and Delegates’ session. In his inaugural address Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, President of the APAL, referred to the repressive measures of the Government, criticised imposition of the system of electoral colleges which sidetracked the national demand and recommendations of the Constitution Commission, and said that political consciousness of the masses could not be brought about by the Basic Democrats, nor could they discuss the political problems of the country; he mentioned that not only were political activities being scuttled, the Government publicity media was deliberately engaged in diverting

4 For details see Ittefaq, 15 February to 4 March 1964.
public attention from the basic problems of the country in order to confuse the people. The Nawabzada assured the nation that revival of the AL would strengthen the democratic forces of the country. He claimed that the AL was the first political party organised on an all-Pakistan basis and explained that strong and organised political parties were essential for the restoration of fundamental rights and safekeeping of democracy and that with this in view the AL had been revived. He also assured that in the fight for restoration of people's rights the AL would stand by the people of East Pakistan.5

Significantly, there was no mention of East Pakistan's special problems, the main plank of EPL, in the Nawabzada's speech. But the pandal where he was making the speech was plastered with posters which carried East Pakistani demands like: Naibahitir Prodhan Karyalava Chittagramme Chai (Naval Headquarters at Chittagong); Janasankhyar bhittite soinya bahinite loke nivog korte habe (Recruitment in the Army proportionate to the population of each wing); Pater nyavumalla dite habe (fair price for jute), and Arthanaitic sudhinata dite habe (Economic independence for the wing).6

The twenty-six resolutions passed by the conference also covered the oft-repeated demands of the EPL since

5 See full report of his speech in ibid., 7 March 1964.
6 See ibid.
its inception, in fact, with greater emphasis than ever before. The resolution for a fully democratic constitution also demanded constitutional guarantee for full autonomy for both the wings of Pakistan.

Another resolution demanded constitutional guarantee for separate economies for each wing and determination of economic policy and preparation of development plans on the basis of this.

Constitutional guarantee was also demanded for

(a) direct election through universal adult franchise;
(b) justiceability of fundamental rights;
(c) provision against illegal arrests and detention without trial;
(d) separation of the Judiciary from the Executive;
(e) supremacy of the legislatures;
(f) unfettered right to organise political parties and to express public opinion through news media and organisations.

Other demands included

(a) implementation of long awaited measures for controlling floods;
(b) construction of bridge over the river Jamuna near Bahadurabad for faster economic developments of Northern Bengal;
(c) construction of embankment from Rangpur to Sirajganj all along the Western banks of Jamuna;
(d) long-term interest-free loans for betel nut and coconut growers in the areas near the sea;
(e) raise in the pay-scale of primary school teachers and raise in the dearness allowance of the secondary school teachers and private college teachers;

(f) Reform in Madrasa education system and opening of employment opportunities for Madrasa-trained students;

(g) immediate publication of the Pay Commission Report and raise in the salary of low-paid Government employees;

(h) removal of prohibitory orders against strikes by workers;

(i) modification of legislation regarding assessment of landownership to avoid hardship for the poor;

(j) autonomy of the universities and removal of prohibitory ordinances imposed upon universities in West Pakistan, and

(j) release of political prisoners.

The need for an East Pakistani militia equipped with modern armaments was repeated in the context of the alleged emergency situation arising out of extensive military aid to India by the Western Powers.

Protest was also registered for shifting the Union capital from Karachi to Islamabad. Demand was made that if Karachi was unsuitable, Dacca should be the alternative.

Some other resolutions criticised communal riots, expressed anxiety over rise in commodity prices, and expressed support for the self-determination of the Kashmiris.
An independent foreign policy was advocated for the establishment of world peace and stable conditions in the country.

Significantly, one resolution declared that only a socialistic economy could ensure economic freedom to the people and hence gradual implementation of socialist economy was essential.

In a lengthy resolution about the revival of the party and the role of the NDF it was said that the councillors and delegates felt that organised political parties were needed for creating public opinion and expressing it for restoration of democracy and fundamental rights. They also felt that NDF had lost its representative character with the revival of the main political parties constituting it and, therefore, it had become ineffective. Nevertheless, need for collective efforts was acknowledged and the Conference authorised the General Secretary to adopt - in consultation with the Working Committee of the party - suitable programme in close co-operation with other revived parties and democratic forces. 7

Obviously, the above resolutions were to provide guidelines for the already appointed Manifesto Sub-committee. Except for the demand regarding democratisation of the constitution two demands which had not figured in the earlier

7 See the text of the resolutions in ibid., 9 March 1964.
manifestoes since 1949 were emphasised upon in the above resolutions. These were: (a) inevitability of socialist economy, and (b) constitutional guarantee for two economies. The eleven-point draft manifesto of the revived B'PAL published a few months later, in essentials, therefore, remained more or less the same as the original, pre-split B'PAL manifesto except for the introduction of the demand for two economies as one of the fundamental laws of the land, and socialist economy as an inevitability.

Though the term "two economies" was not used in the earlier manifestos this had been used by the Awami Leaguers before, and Maulana Bhashani also had mentioned it in his Presidential address in the 1957 pre-split Special Council Session held at Kagmari.9

The stress on the inevitability of socialist economy, however, was a notable addition. The 1949 draft manifesto of B'PML conceived Pakistan as "an independent, sovereign socialist union of states", visualised nationalised industries having workers' representation in the management. But at the same time it revealed an anti-Communist bias.10 Later, apprehensions about "Communist menace" were totally

8 See text of the draft manifesto in Bengali in Ittefaq, 6 June 1964. See English translation of the same in Appendix.
9 See excerpts from Bhashani's speech cited in Chapter II.
10 Already referred in Chapter I, pp. 22-23. For the text see Shamsul Haq, Parba Pakistan Awami Dalaim League Khaara Manifesto (Dacca, n.d.), pp. 3-4.
absent from the EPAML/EPAL's public utterances. Nothing positive, however, had been publicised highlighting the party's choice of any particular economic system. The clear option for the adoption of "socialist economy" as the only practicable means for societal upliftment, therefore, indicated a significant change in the politico-economic perception of the leadership. This also indicated more effective participation of the so-called progressives in the decision-making apparatus of the party. Whether this was a genuine transformation or a strategic move to counterbalance any possible threat from the NAP may remain debatable. But either way, it indicated change in the political trend.

The question of regional autonomy apart, the stand on the future economic system must have strengthened the wedge between the EP and WP leadership of the APAL and weakened the 'national' character of the party, highlighting the independence of one of its wings that is, the EPAL. This had been frequently pointed out by the EPAL leadership before. And revival of the party under new leadership did not at all alter the relationship.

The General Secretary's Report presented at the conference pointed out that it was the EPAL that had for the first time drew attention to the economic and other disparities between the two wings; it was the EPAL which had for the first time disclosed that foreign exchange earned by hard labour of poor East Pakistani peasants was being
utilized for a handful of industrialists and affluent men in the West, further increasing the gap between the two wings. The General Secretary reminded that the Awami League leaders were once penalised for such exposition, but the facts revealed by them had become widely acknowledged later, and formed the basis of a mounting popular discontent which had compelled both the Martial Law and the successor Government to admit the validity of those complaints. It was also mentioned that in the 14-15 years of its existence the party was in power in coalition governments in the province and at the Centre for about one and a half year only and therefore it could not do much for the economic betterment of the common man. But as steps to democratisation all political prisoners were released, no detention without trial was accepted as a principle, about seventy-six crore rupees worth of rice was imported during famines in East Pakistan, autonomous bodies like the Small Scale Industries Corporation, Inland Water Transport Authority were created in East Pakistan and as a first step towards decentralisation Commerce and Industries was being transferred from the Centre to the province.

The General Secretary's apathy for the NDF was clear from the emphasis in the report that any fight against a Government backed by the reactionary forces was an impossible task for any "front" not backed by strongly organised political parties because "statements and publicity" alone were not adequate instruments for persuading
the utterly reactionary ruling coterie to accept popular demands. An active method was to be adopted. And that was not practicable with unity among the leaders only. Unity among the people, which was an essential prerequisite, could be achieved by organised political parties alone. Any minimum programme-based movement had to have the support of organised political parties for any tangible effect. 

The conference was attended by 944 councillors and delegates from the districts and they left Dacca after having taken an oath to organise popular movements in every village. In his speech at the concluding session, the General Secretary said that those who were unable to organise movements at the grassroot level, who were not prepared to make sacrifices, could sit idle but the Awami Leaguers were prepared to sacrifice everything for the revival of democracy in the country. It was also pointed out that those who claimed to be Suhrawardy's followers should remember that he was a life-long devotee of democratic values and therefore the non-revivalists ought to accept the majority decision for revival. They would be welcomed if they returned to the Party. If not, they would forfeit their right to use the name of the Awami League. He concluded by saying that since the Awami League had leadership, organisation, workers and ideals - the four pillars of any political

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11 See further details of the speech in Ittefaq, 7 March 1964.
According to some party members and political observers, the EPAL conference was significant in many ways. From the rank discussions in both the open and closed sessions the party workers seemed to have realised that there was a considerable difference between political movements in the pre- and post-Martial Law periods. In the changed context of rule by a coterie around a single individual, formal unity among parties and leaders based solely on promises was not enough to establish the political rights of the people. What was required was unity based on definite programmes and mobilisation of the people at the lowest administrative level down to the villages which could be achieved only by well-organised political parties. The myth that the Awami League organisation had become incohesive was also proved wrong by the large attendance, frank discussions and unanimity about the resolutions and the determination about carrying out the programme of mass mobilisation. EPAL’s position as the most effective party was also demonstrated by the fact that Shah Azizur Rahman, once a staunch Muslim Leaguer and the pre-Martial Law General Secretary of the EPML, joined the revived EPAL because he felt that the AL was not only capable of leading the opposition it was also capable of taking up responsibilities

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12 Ibid., 9 March 1964.
in future.\textsuperscript{13}

Tofazzal Hosain, editor of the daily \textit{Ittefaq} and a close associate of Suhrawardy, who reportedly had initially opposed revival, also admitted that there was no alternative particularly in view of the fact that party workers in rural areas were getting restless for lack of programme-oriented organisational work and felt that they were fast losing their credibility with the common people.\textsuperscript{14}

Who were these "common people"? They were the vast number of poverty-stricken rural peasantry of East Pakistan. For them what mattered most was availability of the bare necessities of life. The majority of them, i.e. the Muslims, had voted for the AML in 1945-46 in the hope that in Pakistan they would be provided with these. They discarded the Muslim League in 1954 for its non-performance. By mid-sixties they had realised that the system of Basic Democracies along with the Rural Works Programme introduced by Ayub Khan was more instrumental in fostering and legitimising the power of an already existing economically

\textsuperscript{13} Stated by some Awami Leaguers and others in Bangladesh in 1976. See Shah Azizur Rahman's speech at the EDM conference in \textit{ibid.}, 7 March 1964.

\textsuperscript{14} Mosafir, "Rajnaitik Mancha", \textit{ibid.}, 10 March 1964. This was also confirmed by almost all Awami Leaguers and some others I met in Bangladesh in 1976, including Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmed, Abdul Mannan, Amina Begum, etc.
dominant class - the "surplus" farmers - than in the upliftment of the rural downtrodden. The maladministration of the PL 480-funded Rural Works Programme, instead of providing relief for the impoverished and indebted peasantry, furthered concentration of coercive power through accumulation of wealth in the hands of the rural notables comprising the "surplus" farmers constituting the bulk of the Basic Democrats. "Their overwhelming endorsement of the Government in the byelection of 1963 was merely an expression of their gratitude at this bonanza which had been dropped into their laps through the benevolence of the regime....Through the prism of their frustration they [the poor peasants] saw the Basic Democrats as lazy and corrupt, using the funds in the most shameless manner to further their own personal ends." The BNPAL had been branding the Rural Works Programme a fraud. And by being the only Opposition party having an organisational set-up, even at the union level, it naturally was the only visible and viable alternative for the poor villagers. The BNPAL workers were part of them. So was the local leadership at

15 For details see Rahman Sobhan, Basic Democracies, Works Programme and Rural Development in East Pakistan (Karachi, Dacca, Lahore, 1968). See also Badruddin Umar, "Ayub Khaner Amole Bangladeshher Krishak" (Bengali) Bichitra (Dacca, weekly), 1d Number, 1978, pp. 27-34, 275-76.

16 Sobhan, ibid., pp. 243-4.
union and thana levels. Urbanisation being at a very low level, the subdivisional and district-level leadership, even if they belonged to the so-called middle classes, belonged to the same genre. The leaders at the apex of the party (EPAL) were not different except for the fact that they had closer linkages with the urban notables. The latter obviously had some vested interest in the management of politics in the province. Their aspirations—which were being thwarted by the preponderance of West Pakistanis in both the decision-making and decision-implementing machineries of the Government—could be fulfilled only if Pakistan had a fully participatory democratic system within a federal structure with extensive decentralisation of powers. The EPAL had always stood for these. Therefore, the interests of the common people, that is the poor villagers and the comparatively better off urbanites, converged providing the EPAL a wider support base as well as resources for sustenance. The EPAL draft manifesto published in mid-64 in fact served the dual purpose of representing the interest of the urban groups by including the demand for two economies, and reflecting the aspirations of the masses by an avowed preference for a socialist economy.

17 According to the 1961 Census in Pakistan only 5.2 per cent of East Pakistanis lived in urban areas comprised of four cities and seventy-seven towns. Of these seventy-seven towns twenty-three had population between 25,000-100,000, twenty-three had population between 10,000-25,000 and thirty-one towns had population under 10,000. See A. Raschid, C.S.I., Census Commissioner, Pakistan, Census of Pakistan Population 1961 (Karachi, n.d.), Part II.
What exactly was envisaged by the term was not made clear, but it was known that nationalisation of industries and radical land reforms were part of EPAL's programmes and that in 1957 the AL-CD-Cong. coalition government in East Pakistan did convene a Land Reforms Conference to make recommendations for definite ways and means to solve problems regarding agricultural rent in the post Zamindari phase in East Pakistan. The recommendations made by this conference were considered to be quite "progressive" under the prevailing circumstances. Hence, technically, notwithstanding a constituent of the APAL led by feudal elements like Nawabzada Nasrullah, for various sections of East Pakistanis the EPAL stood for causes nearer to their hearts. For the same reasons, in the West Pakistani mind, there were misgivings about EPAL and the Government in its turn used this to drive a wedge between them. While the EPAL conference was being held in Dacca, President Ayub Khan at Nilphamari warned against certain political parties whose ascendance, he said, would mean the end of the country as an independent state. He called the politicians attached to such parties as kiraya ka tattoo (hired mules). He spoke in the same vein to PML workers also. The EPAL, however, assured that

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18 For some details see Umar, n. 15.

19 Morning News (Dacca), and Pakistan Observer (Dacca), 7 March 1964.

20 Pakistan Observer, 16 March 1964.
the demand for the development of East Pakistan did not mean arresting the progress of West Pakistan and that EPAL's struggle was not against the people of West Pakistan and that it stood for harmonious growth of both the wings of the country. 21 Apparently reassured, the APAL working Committee at its meeting on 9 March 1964 adopted a resolution which said that development of both wings of Pakistan being important for the integrity and unity of Pakistan, the meeting called upon the Government to adopt all possible measures to remove the existing economic disparity between the two wings. 22 Although a guarded statement, this was considered to be a significant step forward for the EPAL towards acceptance of their demands by West Pakistanis. But as later events proved, this acceptance did not in any way widen West Pakistani support for East Pakistan's demands. Otherwise, in the first instance, the idea of a common manifesto for the party would not have remained unrealised.

By the time the EPAL was revived in 1964, the contradictions of Pakistani politics seems to have been clear to its new leadership. As active participants in the Muslim League politics of prepartition India they could not have overlooked the fact that inter-regional tensions

21 See concluding speech by the General Secretary at the EPAL Conference in Ittefaq, Pakistan Observer and Morning News, 9 March 1964.

22 Ittefaq, 10 March 1964.
were, in fact, rooted in the nature of the All India Muslim League politics itself. Bengal, despite the fact that it was the largest Muslim majority province, had never had proportionate representation in the decision-making bodies of the AIML. And Bengali Muslims, as distinguished from the Bengal Muslim Leaguers, were almost totally absent from the crucial decision-making council of the AIML. This state of affairs could be remedied only at the root. Hence, the revived EPAL changed its shortlived priorities. From being the major wing of an opposition party at the national level it decided to transform itself completely into an avowedly provincial party whose primary objective was fulfilment of East Pakistan's desire for a better deal, for securing its rightful position through restructuring the Pakistani polity. The change, however, was in substance and emphasis of the EPAL's priorities and not in its form. In fact, it maintained the front of a national party till it was banned in March 1971. Until then, while maintaining the facade of an all-Pakistan party, it turned East Pakistanis' "desire" into "demand" through its programmes and action.

The objectives of the EPAL were pre-determined. What was yet to be determined was the modality of achieving these objectives. The possible alternatives nevertheless were known. One was attaining a vantage point through elections. The other was creating a widespread popular urge. Either way, mass mobilization was necessary. In
the immediate next phase the EPAL’s efforts were directed towards this. Whether it was participation in the All Parties Action Committee formed on 11 March 1964 to launch a united movement for adult franchise and direct elections, or participation in the Combined Opposition Party (COP) formed in July 1964 to fight the Presidential and the Assembly elections - the aim was to condition people’s minds for eventualities beyond the limited objectives of these programmes. This was quite evident from the tenor of the speeches made by the EPAL leaders. Their rebellious mood was immediately detected on the first day of the two demand days for adult franchise and direct election convened by the All Parties Action Committee. Students and other processionists were tear-gassed and lathi-charged and a large number of them, including prominent Awami Leaguers like Tajuddin Ahmed and Korban Ali, were arrested.23 The next day in the midst of a hartal in Dacca a mammoth public meeting held at Paltan Maidan converted itself into a huge procession led by Bhashani and Mujib. At the meeting Mujib, convenor of the APAC, declared that never before in the history of civilisation, could mankind be deprived of the basic human rights. The Pharaoh, Napoleon and Hitler had failed to do so and the present rulers of Pakistan also would follow suit. A day would surely come when the people

23 Ibid., 19 March 1964.
would seize their birth-right through an irresistible upsurge. Anticipating further arrests, he requested the audience that if all the leaders were put behind the bars, the people while remembering them should also remember that they had left their family members behind and keep the struggle on. He asked, "To-day when under a terrible situation, your son is going to jail, your son is sacrificing his life with police bullets in his body, can't you also go to jail, can't you also sacrifice your life with police bullets in your person?" He asked, "Brother Bengalis, I want to know clearly to-day if we go behind bars, would you be able to organise struggles in all the villages to bring back the lost rights....Will you in thousands be able to fill up the prisons of the Ayub Government?" The audience was reported to have replied in one voice, "We will do it, we will do it." Sternly warning those Chairmen of Union Councils who had been sending telegrams to newspapers supporting limited and indirect franchise, he said that his party was compiling a list of those "puppets of the Circle Officers or even higher echelons of bureaucracy" and "we will go to every village in every union to teach these touts a lesson." 24

Maulana Bhashani, the founder-President of East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, the parent organisation of

24 Ittefaq, 20 March 1964.
the EPAL, then leading the AWP, also spoke in the same vein. He said:

Bangalees did not obey Emperor Ashoka. Neither did they become followers of the Mughals and Pathans. They did not bow down to the British either. The fierce anger of the masses for not having given national status to the Bengali language has sent the once powerful Muslim League to the grave. The same will be repeated if now the Government do not accept the demand for universal franchise. 25

There was a hint of an ultimatum that made the above speeches a departure from the previous ones but fell in line with the offensive posture taken up by the student community in the last one year or so, indicating once more the importance of the student community in the decision-making process of the political parties. It was all the more significant because it underlined some degree of unity of perception of these two leaders who had once left company under severe antagonism based on the alleged departure of one of them from the accepted principles of the party.

Though the mood was revealingly rebellious, neither Mujib nor Bhashani at that stage called for any actively rebellious programme. Mujib asked his "Bengali brethren" to fill up the jails, not to break them. Bhashani also suggested a united "constitutional and peaceful" movement and appealed to the people not to resort to violence. But

violence erupted soon when the Dacca University students protested against the Governor's presiding over the annual convocation. They pleaded that being a non-academic and a political appointee, Monem Khan did not even qualify for the Chancellorship and, therefore, they were not prepared to receive their degrees from him. In the ensuing clashes between the students and the police the pandal was ransacked, many injured and punitive action taken against students. Two were ripped of their M.A. degrees, being "found guilty of gross misconduct and of indulging themselves in activities subversive of discipline and of taking part in organising the disturbances on the Convocation Day" on March 22, 1964.26

One of them was a prominent Chhatra Leaguer, Sheikh Fazlul Haq. Four students were expelled for five years. They included a prominent Chhatra Union leader, A.S.M. Rashed Khan, and another Chhatra Leaguer, K.M. Obaidur Rahman. Six students were expelled for three years and fourteen for two years. These included promising students leaders like Abdur Razzak (CL), Sirajul Alam Khan (C). Twenty students were asked to furnish individual guarantee of good conduct endorsed by their guardian on prescribed forms.27

Sheikh Mujib's press statement in protest against gagging of the Press seems to have taken note of the violent mood of the students.

26 See Registrar's Notification in Morning News, 4 April 1964.
27 Ibid.
He said:

In this connection I would like to issue a warning to the ruling coterie that they should take note of the history of those countries where democratic movements were throttled.... It is possible to strangulate those who believe in democratic norms and institutions only temporarily. If repressions are not stopped, if democracy is not revived and if the authorities do not permit democratic movements, then the authorities should know that under such circumstances the people may adopt undemocratic means and that would be the most unfortunate chapter in the political history of the country. 28

Though technically Bhashani represented an all-Pakistan party - the NAP - he obviously did not represent a wide section of West Pakistanis. Therefore, to strengthen the movement, an all-Pakistan organisation of Opposition parties had to be thought of. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General Secretary of the EPAL and convenor of the APCA, after having discussions with some WP leaders announced the possibility of forming such an organisation. 29 Nothing materialised immediately. But later this was given a trial during the elections in 1964-65 through the formation of the Combined Opposition Party (COP). But in the meantime, the EPAL was charting its own programme and giving vent to it also. In a public meeting at Dacca Paltan Maidan organised by the APCA in protest against the introduction of the

28 Ittefaq, 4 April 1964.
Franchise Bill in the National Assembly, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General Secretary EPAL, declared that if the right to vote was not given to the people, a civil disobedience movement might be launched and the people might have to refuse payment of taxes. Maulana Abdur Rashid Tarkabagish, President of the EPAL, asked the people for a sustained movement. The EPAL working Committee at its meeting held on 5 April 1964 firmly resolved to speed up organisational work. It directed all its units to start enrolment without delay and set up union committees, subdivisional committees, and district committees by June 30, July 31 and August 31 respectively to enable the new Provincial Council to meet on 30 September. The EPAL seems to have made some headway afresh for people from various walks of life were reported to have been enrolling with the party. The newcomers reportedly felt that in the prevailing political situation, when fundamental and human rights had no guarantee, universal adult franchise was inoperative, public money was being wasted for the welfare of a coterie, and the East-West disparity was looming large - the EPAL was the only party capable of resolving these anomalies. They believed that revival of democracy would be possible only through the EPAL because the EPAL was founded by Suhrawardy, it was

30 Morning News and Pakistan Observer, 30 March 1964.
31 Morning News, 5 April 1964 and Ittefaq, 7 April 1964.
the only organisationally strong disciplined political party, the leader of the democratic camp, symbol of the hopes and aspirations of common people, and also because the EPAL ideal was: 'work is more important than self'.

In order to further strengthen the organizational network all over the province the EPAL leaders undertook extensive tours of the districts, everywhere addressing a public meeting and a meeting of the local workers of the party. In April they covered Chittagong, Jessore, Faridpur and Barisal. The efforts in these meetings were to appeal to the primordial loyalties of the audience. For example, in Chittagong Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said: "This country is ours, this land is ours, these rivers are ours. The Awami League will continue to fight for the real deliverance of this country and for the freedom of the land."

In Barisal he said the sole purpose of the Martial Law was to deprive East Pakistan in every possible way. While East Pakistan was devastated by natural calamities, crores were being spent for a luxurious capital in Islamabad. Everywhere he declared that the EPAL was prepared to cooperate with any political party committed to real struggle for restoration of democracy, but would not enter into any entente with any party or group. In these speeches and later

32 Compiled from Ittefaq, 1-30 April 1964.
33 Ibid., 10 April 1964.
34 Ibid., 19 April 1964.
also he frequently used the word "swadhinata" (freedom) which, in that context, meant freedom to have democracy reestablished in the land. Among other speakers Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmad pointed out that another fight (since the Pakistan movement) had become unavoidable because the rulers had rendered ineffective the objectives of creating Pakistan. He also stated that unless the policy for taking foreign aid was changed the country's economy would crumble down. 35 Abdul Malek Ullil, MPA, mentioned that utter confusion had been created in the name of development plans. Gourhandra Bala assured minorities' support for the struggle for democracy because only democracy could ensure them security. 36

While the EPAL was engaged in a drive for mass mobilisation for pressing the demands for restoration of full democratic rights, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, the President of the APAL, was "appealing" to the Government for a much limited concession. In a statement he

appealed to the Government to create such conditions in the country whereby people could express their will freely and exercise their rights, however limited and unsatisfactory the mode of election might be. He however, hoped that the nation would continue its struggle for achieving basic rights of people and give

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 21 April 1964.
a verdict even under the Government's own peculiar system of elections. 37

This clearly underlined the difference that existed in the levels of politicisation of the two wings of Pakistan. This conciliatory approach of the West Pakistani opposition towards the Government not only continued, there were persistent efforts also to minimise the thrust of the EP opposition considerably at the later stage.

Some details about the revivedAll's mass mobilisation drive would explain how and why in a very short time the party could amass popular support all over the province.

The party leadership toured the whole province according to a pre-fixed schedule. As a rule, at least three of the provincial-level leaders along with local leaders would address a public meeting followed by a meeting of the local party workers or vice versa. In May 1964 they addressed 22 such meetings and 18 in June, indicating the mobility and drive of the leadership. Usually, a particular leader would tackle a particular point in all his speeches. For example, Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmad would always mention that Pakistan had not been created for the conditions prevailing under the present regime ("Aamra ki Ai abasthar janya Pakistan Hashil Koriachilam"), that

37 Morning News, 17 April 1964.
public opinion was stronger than armaments. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman would always mention that Pakistan was created on the basis of popular votes and therefore it was illogical and absurd to deny the people the right to vote, that the so-called "revolution" (of 1958) was stage-managed by the military-cum-vested interest entente to minimise the political power of East Pakistan, that the Government was anti-people, that transfer of the federal capital was not only unjustifiable, but it was sheer madness, that the EPAL was following the path laid down by Suhrawardy. Zahiruddin would always mention that the present government had not only driven the country towards economic and moral bankruptcy, but had undermined the basic national unity also and that the Awami League was the custodian of national unity and integrity. It is also noteworthy that usually at any particular meeting the same points were not repeated or elaborated by more than one speaker. Asked whether this was predetermined, Khondkar Mushtaque Ahmad and others indicated that it was more or less a natural development. Between the two most frequent speakers, Sheikh Mujib and Khondkar Mushtaque, the latter usually followed the same pattern of speech with limited points almost everywhere. His were more like prepared speeches. The former, however, would usually start with the role of the military-vested interest entente to curb East Pakistanis' political power and then mention and elaborate other points at random. During a two-month period of May-June 1964 the EPAL leaders toured
the whole of the province, addressing about fifty meetings
(public and workers') where they touched upon and/or
elaborated about sixty items related to four broad
categories, viz.,

(1) The EPAL - need for revival, aims, ideals and
objectives, past performance.

(2) The Government - its nature, dubious origin and
malfunctioning and bleak future.

(3) Democracy - urgent need for restoration of people's
rights.

(4) East Pakistani grievances - economic disparity,
political subjugation and cultural suppression.

Of these, 2 and 3 were dealt with most frequently.38

The efforts of the EPAL to make the people aware of
their rights and of the need to fight for their rights
appears to have been systematic and organised. And in terms
of turnout at its meetings and rapprochement with the
student community the response was positive. But to what
extent it had been able to create an effective support
structure was yet to be tested. In fact, under the existing
system there was hardly any opportunity for doing so. In
the normal democratic process fighting periodic elections
would have sufficed. But all that the Pakistani system could
provide under the 1952 Constitution was not adequate for

38 Compiled from reports in Ittefaq, May-June 1964.
such a trial of strength. Hence, though elections were held and an oppositional front participated, the popular mood still remained veiled. Taking into account the various anti-government outbursts like the *Julum Protirodh Vibes* in July, the widespread strikes in the mills, the railways, the postal services, etc., it was not difficult to diagnose the popular mood. But the people were not direct participants in the elections. Most of those who were (the basic democrats who formed a privileged class), in order to protect their own interests, naturally sought to perpetuate the existing system. The EPAL leadership could not have been unaware of the irrelevance of the elections under restricted franchise for initially they opined against wastage of time and energy of party workers by participating in the coming elections. But, as usual, the WPAL must have been taking a different line. Zahiruddin, the General Secretary of APAL, announced a few days later in Lahore that his party might form a common front for the democratisation of the Constitution. This was not exactly in tune with the EPAL threat which encompassed much more than mere democratisation of the Constitution - a very limited political objective as far as East Pakistan was concerned. As will be seen later, Zahiruddin himself gave in to this limited objective, along with a few others from East Pakistan and fell in line with

39 See statement by the Publicity Secretary of EPAL in *Ittefaq*, 25 May 1964.
the WPAL. Zahiruddin's hint in this statement that delay in forming such a front would only make difficult the task of reconciliation of views between the EPAL and other West Pakistan-based political parties, therefore, was not without significance. 40

Unity among the Opposition was advocated by the APNAP also. Some degree of rapprochement was believed to have been reached between the AL and the NAP about a programme to "strike a final blow" on the "anti-people ruling coterie". The AL was reported to have felt that if necessary along with this programme participation in the elections was possible. 41 Maulana Bhashani was reported to have appealed to the opposition parties to unite for the greater interest of the country. 42 Other opposition leaders like Khwaja Nazimuddin, Choudhury Mohammed Ali also were advocating united opposition although for the limited demand for democratisation only. 43 Keeping in line with this trend and the obvious preference of the WPAL, the EPAL Working Committee authorised Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, President APAL, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General Secretary EPAL, and Abdus Salam Khan to discuss the possibilities of sponsoring

41 Ibid., 3 July 1964.
42 Ibid., 6 July 1964.
43 Pakistan Times (Lahore), 30 June and 6 July 1964.
a single presidential candidate by all the opposition parties with a minimum objective as specified by the EPAL working Committee. These were:

(a) A federal type of government with full regional autonomy.
(b) Universal adult franchise and direct elections.
(c) Removal of various interwining disparities and adoption of future developmental plans based on two separate economies for the two regions of Pakistan.
(d) Repeal of all repressive laws including 'border crimes'.
(e) Release of all political prisoners held without trial.
(f) Reforming the tax structure so that wealth could no longer be accumulated in a few hands, and the tax-burden on the poorer section including the middle classes was progressively lessened.44

Here again the EPAL effort was to 'nationalise' its region oriented demands reflecting the regional aspirations (or, the effort was for legitimisation of East Pakistan's aspirations on a national level). As a matter of fact, the EPAL seemed to have achieved some success in this regard. The nine-point programme of the Combined Opposition Parties

44 Ittefaq. 6 July 1964.
(COP)\textsuperscript{45} included in substance, if not in words, the above-mentioned points specified by the EPAL working committee. In fact, only the phrase "two economies" was not used. Moreover, the EPAL's predominance over the NAP in the alliance was also ensured by non-inclusion of demand for disbanding of One Unit and Pakistan's immediate withdrawal from military alliances.\textsuperscript{46}

But it was quite obvious that the EPAL did not have much faith in the ultimate success of the COP in its endeavours. Hence, the call for a "total and final" struggle, for a "do or die" mission, and warnings that in the process many might have to sacrifice their lives on the gallows.\textsuperscript{47} The fight certainly was not only over the ensuing electoral contests but it had been made clear earlier that the fight the AL was engaged in did not aim at capturing power, that this was a struggle of ten crores of Pakistanis for their existence, that it was a fight for

\textsuperscript{45} The COP was formed at an opposition meeting in Dacca in July. It comprised the Council Muslim League, the National Awami Party, the Awami League, the Nezam-e-Islam and the Jamaat-e-Islami and decided to contest the elections at all levels, i.e. the electoral college, National and Provincial Assemblies and Presidential. The COP also agreed to put a single Presidential candidate. For some details see K.P. Misra, etc., ed., Pakistan's Search for Constitutional Consenso (New Delhi, 1967), pp. 47-51.


\textsuperscript{47} Sheikh Mujib at EPAL public meeting at Dacca Paltan Maidan. See Ittefaq, 13 July 1964.
economic freedom, for ending all deprivation.48 But again, lack of confidence in the efficacy of the COP did not turn AL participation into a mere formality. The AL, particularly the EPAL leadership, availed fully this additional opportunity of reaching the masses in East Pakistan. Moreover, Miss Jinnah by openly declaring that Ayub Khan was "the Chief architect of the continuing disparity between the two wings", and by branding his concern for EP as "utterly false"49 greatly helped the EPAL strategy of reinforcing East Pakistan's demands through open acknowledgement of them by West Pakistan-based leaders. For the EPAL its participation in the COP with Miss Fatema Jinnah as its Presidential candidate was certainly an opportunity to project its image to a wider section of the people of West Pakistan.

The EPAL leaders accompanied Miss Jinnah in her campaign tour of East Pakistan and spoke in the same manner as before, that is, highlighting the East-West disparity and challenging the claims that the Government had been able to minimise it to some extent. The government's claim was based on the fact that the regime had formally responded to the EP grievances with some policies for the economic development of the Eastern wing. Removal of interw

49 Dawn, 9 November 1964.
disparity had been declared a constitutional obligation and one of the objectives of the twenty-year perspective plan. The Third Five-Year Plan had allocated more funds to the East than to the West. The Rural Works Programme was also claimed to have been introduced for helping economic development. And in 1964 the National Finance Commission reported that the East Pakistan economy had registered a significant improvement. The guidelines of the Third Five-Year Plan also stated that interregional disparity was on the wane. But the crucial indicators of economic development showed the contrary. The interregional disparity not only continued to exist, but gained in dimension also, and that explains the strong criticism of the Government by the EPAL. The EPAL leadership constantly tried to enlighten the East Pakistan people of the magnitude of the disparity and also of the instrumentalities that were responsible for it. And during the electoral campaign against Ayub Khan the EPAL did bring some of these into popular notice. They cited the examples of the plan for the Ruppur Atomic Energy Plant, wood procurement plan of the Forest Development Corporation, paper manufacturing at Sylhet, full utilisation of the natural gas resources of East Pakistan, the fertilizer factory at Ghorashal, etc. as proposals on paper only which were much publicised to impress the East Pakistani people.

50 See Tables and Charts V.1 for details.
It was also alleged that the Government had been obtaining foreign loans by practically mortgaging East Pakistan. While eighty per cent of such loans was being spent in West Pakistan the debt burden was to be carried mainly by EP since it was EP that earned more than seventy per cent of the total foreign exchange earning. There was in fact, it was claimed, a three-pronged plan to retard East Pakistan's industrial growth in the interest of the involved parties, namely, the Ayub Khan Government, a small group of West Pakistani industrialists and the foreign loan-giving agencies and their experts.51

Undoubtedly, such disclosures exposed Ayub Khan's failure to fulfil his promises to East Pakistan and should have made him less popular not only among the urbanites solely because the discontent emanating from the actual situation was not confined to the urban middle classes only. The feeling of the common villagers were also roused though they might not have been aware of the neat statistical details. A typical expression of such feeling is found in the verses composed by village poets on the eve of the Presidential election of 1965. Some of these verses not only expressed the economic grievances of the common man of East Pakistan, but also gives a graphic depiction of regional disparities in the Pakistani economy as perceived

51 Sheikh Mujib's long statement with lots of relevant facts in Ittefaq, 7 November 1964.
by the common man. These unsophisticated expositions in plain language also reflected the level of political consciousness of the common man in the then East Pakistan. And perhaps this was what made the EPAL leadership entertain some hope for the ultimate success of the people through a prolonged struggle, if not through the immediate COP success in the elections. For them participation in the elections under an unacceptable electoral system was part of the total struggle they would be compelled to undertake. And that explains why even after the defeat of the COP candidate in the Presidential elections which exposed the equation between the Basic Democrats with the ruling coterie, and in the face of reluctance of the NAP to continue with the COP, the EPAL participated in full swing in the campaignings for the National and Provincial assemblies elections. The EPAL was not alone to adopt this strategy. In the first Council session (post-revival) of the EPNAP, Haji Mohammad Danesh also spoke in the same vein. He said: "According to our party, election also is a movement. Organisations can be built up and strengthened around a movement only." He also admitted that after the defeat in the Presidential elections NAP workers out of despair became quite inactive." They forgot the purpose of participating.

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52 See the English translation of one such verse in Appendix
the elections. But while the NAP workers were victims of apathy and inaction the EPAL continued with the programme of approaching the masses with a plea to build up resistance. The marginal decline in the position of the PML in the Provincial Assemblies election in East Pakistan could, therefore, be attributed to the EPAL efforts. For, as Danesh admitted, the NAP was not much in the picture because of lack of mass contact. The trend observed in the number of votes polled by the PML in EP respectively in the Presidential, the National Assembly of the Provincial Assembly elections can be interpreted to indicate that the Basic Democrats were gradually being won over by the Opposition. Alternatively, it could also mean that, having secured the bulwark of a system beneficial to them, they could afford to keep some local rebels in good humour by helping them become part of impotent legislatures. In view of the widely accepted fact that large-scale rigging in one form or other was practised at one stage or other of all these elections, it would perhaps be futile to attempt


54 Ibid., p. 18.

55 See Sharif n. 46, for the number of votes polled.
any rationalisation of the results. 56

The EP Awami Leaguers had interpreted the situation quite objectively. This was made clear when the EPAL Working Committee at its meeting on 3 April 1965 announced that the struggle for democratisation within the precincts of the Lahore Resolution (1940) would continue. 57

In view of the continued repressive measures adopted by the Government against the people, the EPAL Working Committee reiterated its previous decision at its extended meeting on 7 June 1965 where the General Secretary announced the resolution to start a mass movement on the basis of the Lahore Resolution (1940). 58 Some efforts were made for coordinated functioning of the APAL which evidently yielded no result for even a common manifesto could not be drawn up. On the contrary, at an APAL leaders' meet in Karachi under the chairmanship of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, General Secretary EPAL, he made the abovementioned EPAL resolution known. This, however, was not an isolated incident.

56 Besides the existing published accounts of the allegations about rigging, I was told by very reliable sources associated with the then Pakistan Election Commission that the publication of a detailed report about these elections had to be finally abandoned after futile attempts were made to manipulate the actual statistical data to conform to the hastily announced results.

57 Ittefaq, 4 April 1965.

58 Ibid., 8 July 1965.
In the National Assembly, the MNAs belonging to EPAL like Kamruzzaman, Mezanur Rahman Choudhury, Prof. Yusuf Ali, etc. had already become aggressively vocal against the Government on matters concerning East Pakistan. 59

Retaliatory repressive measures like repeated arrests of EP Awami Leaguers and student leaders continued, presumably strengthening the EPAL's resolve. Anyway, the political situation took a dramatic turn with the Indo-Pak hostilities beginning with the dispute over the Rann of Kutch and ending with Indo-Pak war over Pakistani infiltration in Kashmir. 60

During the war the attitude of the ruling coterie of Pakistan towards the eastern wing was glaringly exposed when East Pakistan felt that it had been left militarily unprotected at the mercy of India. East Pakistan's feeling of betrayal acted as the proverbial straw on the camel's back and exploded the myth of the one Pakistani nation bringing into the open the worst possible colonial relationship between the two wings. If, hypothetically, it was not so, that only proved Pakistan's military incapability to defend the whole country in any armed confrontation with


60 For details of the Kashmir issue see Sisir Gupta, Kashmir: A Study in India-Pakistan Relations (Bombay, 1965), and the 1965 war, Russel Brines, The Indo-Pakistani Conflict (London, 1968).
India in spite of Pakistan's much talked-about defence potential. Hence the fact remained that either by design or because of sheer incapability of the Pakistan Government, East Pakistan, comprising the majority of the Pakistani population, was defenceless. And if, as was claimed by the Government's henchmen, East Pakistan's security had been entrusted to foreign powers, why not leave the choice to the East Pakistanis themselves unless the prevalent colonial relationship was meant to be perpetuated? The politically conscious East Pakistanis could and would surely have legitimately raised such questions if Pakistan had been a practising democracy and there were constitutionally guaranteed forums for effective discussions of such issues. There was none. The only alternative was to create strong public opinion as a groundwork for effective popular movements. This was what the EPAL sought to do. And it struck while the iron was hot by giving the emotionally charged East Pakistan the symbol of 'autonomy' through the Six-Point Formula to fight for.

Publicised at a time when East-West relations had reached a new low after the disenchancing experience during the September war of 1965, the formula, in fact, acted as a catalyst for the transformation of East Pakistan's long-felt "desire" for a better deal into specific "demands" for fiscal and political autonomy.