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Pakistan

Building the LPP

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

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This is a compilation of several previously-published articles, prepared for the Fourth International Committee's discussion on "New Parties of the Left" in March 2013, for which Pakistan was one of the "case studies".

The political perspectives of the LPP have been put to the test several times in a rapidly changing political situation. From day one we opposed General Musharaf military dictatorship. We oppose both American imperialism and religious fanaticism while some feel they must support one side or the other.

Almost all of the present LPP leadership, including women leaders, were jailed under the Musharaf regime for demanding democratic rights or in the struggle for workers' and peasants' rights. The LLP has worked to maintain its political space and refused to be driven underground.

Independence of social movements

Unlike the traditional Left parties, who set up organizations controlled by the party, since its inception the Labour Party Pakistan has put special emphasis on helping to develop independent social, labour and peasant organizations and other social movements. For example, there is no trade union wing of LPP. Instead we supported the development of the National Trade Union Federation, formed in 1998, and also aided the Pakistan Workers Confederation from its beginning in 1994.

Likewise the LPP has no peasant party wing. It helped a peasant movement, Anjaman Mozareen Punjab at Military Farms, and in 2003 facilitated bringing together more than 22 peasant organizations. This Pakistan Peasant Coordination Committee united under a common platform.

In 2000 the LPP helped to develop the Women Workers Help Line. As an independent women's organization, the WWHL has become the first organization many working-class women join. [\[1\]](#)

LPP also helped to develop a youth organization, the Progressive Youth Front, in 2003. It is making steady inroads among the youth. The LPP devoted energy to help the National Student Federation form in 2000. We continue to help this traditional Left-wing group develop into a major student organization.

The LPP strategy of working with the social movements has been one of its distinctive characteristics. During a discussion in 1992 among the Struggle Group, a predecessor of LPP, the decision was made to help social movements develop, even to the point of starting and nurturing social organizations. We opened schools for working children and with the help of the Swedish Teacher Union, we expanded this network. Other Swedish trade unions and progressive organizations helped us start several projects. These ranged from organizing new trade unions to establishing a trade unions' resource center, making a video documentary on trade unions, as well as campaigns for peace and democracy. This work was coordinated by the Education Foundation, which today has become the Labour Education Foundation. Since 2000 the LEF has established itself as an independent social organization and played a vital role in developing the trade union movement in Pakistan. [\[2\]](#)

The origins of the LPP

Back in 1992 The Struggle group joined Joint Action Committee For Peoples Rights Lahore (JAC) at its founding and that relationship has continued when the LPP was formed. Although the LLP was criticized by many on the Left in the mid-1990s as an "NGO party," the LLP chose not to respond directly to this attack with the expectation that our work in practice would be the best answer.

The LLP strategy of building networks and alliances includes Left unity in Pakistan. We were part of the Awami Itehad in 1997 and later of Awami Jahoori Tehreek (2006). Today we are part of a coordination committee for progressive parties.

LPP supporters have worked to develop several other networks with other left groups and social movements. These have included the Anti-War Committee Pakistan (1991) and the Anti-Privatization Alliance (2005). Since 1996 we have held the Faiz Ahmad Faiz Amn Mela annually. Faiz Ahmad Faiz , the revolutionary poet had inspired millions in the Indian subcontinent and worldwide, one of the most respected poet of Urdu. He devoted his life to strengthen Left and the peace movement.

We believe it is important to learn to work together in a country where there are many who actively oppose a socialist perspective and some who refuse to even listen. It is important to be, at the same time, very firm in one's ideology and very flexible tactically. This means we express our opinion, even when disagreeing with others, but work to maintain cordial relationships.

Magnifying Our Voice

Within 24 hours of launching the Labour Party Pakistan on Facebook, we received responses from over 200 friends. Just launched on 19 January 2010, our LPP Facebook page has more friends joining the group every day. [<http://www.facebook.com/p.php?i=564237409&k=5YA5ZYS23T6O4FGAVDXY2USUP3DAY42&oid=255529099498>]

LPP has also build a Yahoo email group called Socialist Pakistan News, mostly known as SPN. With over 5400 members, it is the largest of any Pakistani political email group. Launched in 2004, it has become a source of information, views and debates among the progressive forces not only in Pakistan but internationally.[socialist_pakistan_news@yahoo.com]

While in 2002 the LPP website [www.laborpakistan.org] was the most read political website in Pakistan, it could not maintain the momentum. However it still has a solid readership and is a good source of information about trade unions, the peasant movement and progressive views.

Since 1997 LPP supporters have regularly printed a weekly magazine in Urdu Mazdoor Jeddojuhd [www.jeddojuhd.com]. For the prior 17 years appeared as a monthly. The weekly has a small subscription-based print edition within Pakistan and is widely read in an on-line edition within Pakistan and across the globe.

The LPP has a proud record of its democratic internal life. We have held all our congress in a timely manner. The 5th Congress took place on 27-29 January 2010. For the first time the LPP concluded the congress with a mass rally. Two labour and peasant movements joined together with us to organize this event; we anticipated an attendance of 30,000, the largest gathering of Left forces in Punjab within recent times.

These events are taking place at a time when the parties of the rich have abandoned the working people of Pakistan. They have been left on the mercy of the sheer exploitation of so called free market and the imperialist aggression. Prices are going up and there is no wage increase.

The religious and right wing parties are giving full political support to all the violent actions of the religious fanatics on the name of fighting "imperialism". The daily drone attacks by Americans are giving some political justifications to the fanatics to carry on. The space for progressive politics has been saturated by the conflict of right wing parties of the rich and the religious fundamentalism.

The LPP congress and the convening of the mass conference of workers and peasants is to build a progressive space in Pakistani politics. It is a new beginning. This is our answer to the rise of religious fundamentalism.

Mass mobilizations of the working class will strengthen their voice and empower them to challenge for their rights. We all are making financial contribution to these events by all means but we have no rich backers.. We have succeeded in a fund drive of almost one million rupees (8500 euros) and a fund drive for 3 million rupees (25 600 euros) is underway.

International Solidarity Essential

LPP is very keen to participate in international and regional movements and alliances. It has been part of the anti-globalization movement and has helped to organize some of the largest anti-imperialist demonstrations and rallies from a progressive point of view in Pakistan. Our supporters have participated in all the World Social Forums since 2004 when WSF Mumbai was held. This work included the Pakistan Social Forum, and led the way, in 2006, for the World Social Forum Karachi.

During its initial year of existence, the LPP was part of an International called the Committee for Workers International (CWI), but left within the year. Since then it has established close links with several international trends, groups and movements including the Democratic Socialist Party Australia, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Fourth International (FI), as well as both the LIT and UIT in Latin America. With others who left the CWI, the LPP formed a Socialist discussion group. We have also established close links with Swedish trade unions and lately with the Social Democratic Party Sweden Goteburg and Kalmar districts. The LPP became a permanent observer of the FI in 2004.

Left influence grows

The two-day Labour Party Pakistan Fifth congress helped to advance the revolutionary process in Pakistan. It brought together comrades from different traditions and trends to discuss the central topic: "build a mass working-class party independent of the influence of the capitalists and feudal elements." The congress was a bravura expression of the growing influence and strength of emerging left-wing politics in Pakistan.

Over 140 delegates and few observers representing 7263 members of the LPP discussed the political and organizational aspects of the party. For the first time in the LPP's 13-year history, delegates attended, representing Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan, Sareiki Waseeb, Puktoonkhawa and Kashmir. There were leaders of trade unions, of social movements, of peasants and from the labour movement "all eager to learn from each other and discuss their future course of action.

Comrades travelled overnight to arrive at the Faisalabad Centre for Peace and Harmony, a social organization, for a residential congress followed by a mass rally of workers and peasants held at famous Dhobi Ghat grounds. (On the way to the congress one comrade from Baluchistan was seriously injured in a train accident and had to be hospitalized at Multan. As a result of the unfortunate accident he lost three of his toes.)

The three-panel chair presided over the congress proceedings with a three-member standing order committee to help organize the congress.

The congress opened with a two-minute silence in memory of seven comrades who, since the 4th LPP congress, are no more with us: Abdullah Qureshi (killed in a suicidal attack in Swat on 9th December 2007), Jilal Shah (died 2008), Master Khudad (killed in a Peshawar suicidal attack October 2009), Rehana Kausar, Najma Khanum and Abdul Salam Salam (died in road accident December 2009). At the congress Comrade Farooq Ahmad read some of the solidarity messages received from the following organizations across the globe Congress opened up with reading of some of the solidarity messages received, including the Fourth International Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL), Central Committee Communist Party of Cuba, New Anti Capitalist Party (NPA) France, International Socialist Organization USA, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), Independent Lawyers Association International UK, Revolutionary Socialist Party (Australia), Consumers Action Committee Pakistan (CACP), The South Asian Peoples Solidarity group Toronto, Canada, Action Aid International, Workers International Network (WIN), South Asia Alliance For Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) and Organization of Communist International Greece.

The 120-page draft documents on national and international perspectives were presented.

The international perspectives discussion was opened by comrade Farooq Tariq, who explained the basis of international capitalist crisis, the ecological disaster, and the imperialist occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. Adding to this crisis, is the decline of reformism and growing Islamic fundamentalism. Is there a way out? Where are the forces that can save the planet and challenge the new face of counterrevolution? Where in Africa, Latin American and Asia do we see a challenge to imperialist globalization? He outlined the class struggle ahead, highlighting the role of women and building international ties as part of constructing a coming revolution. Comrade Pierre Rousset of the NPA (France) and comrade Simon Butler of Socialist Alliance (Australia) spoke about the crisis of capitalism and climate change. Comrade Arif Afghani of Afghan Labour Revolutionary Organization (ALRO) outlined the worsening social and economical conditions of the Afghan masses. A discussion by more than 12 comrades enriched the topic, covering aspects insufficiently mentioned in the draft document.

LPP perspectives

The perspective discussion was introduced by comrade Farooq Ahmed. His main emphasis compared the policies of the present civilian government with those of General Musharraf military regime. These are remarkably similar. In addition, the rise of religious fundamentalism is direct threat to the organizations of the working class. Washington's imperialist aggression and daily drone attacks are fueling the popular appeal of the religious fanatics. He argued that, in order to cover up its anti-people policies, the present civilian government is making a lot of noise about a possible military takeover. While there is little probability of a takeover in the near future, implementing policies to raise the standard of living of the masses remain the government's best defense.

Over 30 comrades spoke on different aspects of Pakistan's political and economical situation, once again deepening the analysis. These ranged from discussion on the national question, the rise of religious fundamentalism, imperialist economic policies, and the declining living standard of the masses.

The organizational perspectives were laid out by comrade Nisar Shah. Describing the achievements of Labour Party

Pakistan since the last congress at the end of 2007, he cited its magnificent growth. For the first time, the LPP has a presence throughout Pakistan, including Baluchistan, Gilgit Baltistan and Tribal areas. The most important growth area has been in Pukhtoon Khawa, where the LPP has over 2000 members. He stressed the need for more study circles and schools for the integration of this new membership.

A second, and interrelated, point is that the LPP is working to develop the social and labour movements in Pakistan. It has promoted regional and international solidarity and actively participates in anti-imperialist globalization initiatives.

Before the opening of general discussion on organizational issues, After LPP secretaries from Sindh, Baluchistan, Pukhtoon Khawa, Punjab and Sareiki Waseeb gave provincial reports to fill in the overall report with specifics. A constitutional amendment to change the name of National Committee to Federal Committee was accepted unanimously. Another amendment to hold two annual meetings of Federal Committee instead of three was defeated. The election of 31 members Federal Committee was held through secret ballot organized by a three-member election commission. Thirty-seven comrades contested. The newly elected members of the Federal committee include Nasir Mansoor, Mukhtiar Rahu, Farooq Ahmad, Beena Fida, Azra Shad, Rehana Shakil, Maqsood Mujahid, Bukhshal Thallo, Aziz Baluch, Farooq Tariq, Bushra Khaliq, Zara Akbar, Nisar Lighari, Younas Rahu, Latif Lighari, Moeen Nawaz Punno, Nazli Javed, Mehr Abdul Sattar, Mian Abdul Qayum, Choudry Imtiaz Ahmad, Riffat Maqsood, Baba Jan, Ihsan Ali, Suhail Javed, Salim Noshad, Khalid Mehmood, Kafait Ullah, Abdul Jalal, Irfana Jabbar, Nisar Shah and Talat Rubab. This includes nine women.

The Federal Committee held its first meeting and elected the Federal Executive Committee, who is the main LPP officials. For the second term comrade Nisar Shah was elected general secretary and comrade Farooq Tariq as spokesperson. Bukhshal Thallo was elected secretary of Education and Culture, Nisar Lighari secretary of Youth, Nasir Mansoor secretary of Labour and Mehr Abdul Sattar as Kissan [peasant] secretary. The decision to elect the secretary of Women was postponed until the next meeting.

Historic gathering of workers and peasants

On 29th January an international conference of workers and peasants took place at Faisalabad, the third largest city in Pakistan. The event was jointly organized by the Labour Qaumi (National) Movement and the Anjuman Mozareen Punjab (Punjab Tenants Association), two movements of workers and peasants that, by their defiant activities in several Punjabi districts, have caught the imagination of thousands. The leaders of the two movements earlier participated in the LPP congress as delegates. For the first time, these two important movements of workers and peasants in Punjab shared a common platform. Several social organizations including South Asia Partnership (SAP), Pakistan Institute for Research and Education (PILER), Patan Taraqiyati Tanzeem, Women Workers Help Line and others mobilized the women for the event alongside with AMP and LQM. Over 1000 women participated: peasant women from Okara Military Farms and other areas as well as women workers from different factories.

LQM activists worked day and night for two weeks in order to cover all the roads with signs. Normally only the parties of the rich are able to muster resources enough to colour the city. In this case, however, activists' sheer determination to reach as many as possible got out the message of a new labour-peasant movement. Banners, posters and wall chalking signaled the message. The famous Dhobi Ghat parade ground was a sea of red flags. Several bookstalls by left-wing organizations and publishers reminded me of the 1960s. Many hundreds visited the book stalls. For two weeks prior to the conference, the city was decorated with the red flags of the Labour Party Pakistan and of the LQM.

The high point of the conference must have been the arrival of peasants from areas including Lahore, Okara, Depalpur, Renala Khurd, and Kulyana Military Estate. After travelling from different areas of the country, over 3,000

peasants joined one procession. They wore their traditional dress and carried Dhool Damaka (drums).

Challenge met

During a time of daily suicide attacks and bomb blasts, holding the workers-peasant conference was a significant development, uniting the under-privileged class under their own leadership. Aside from religious gatherings and rallies, it had been a long time since that many workers and peasants had gathered together in Punjab. Following the end of the conference, a young worker from Faisalabad told me, "I have come here to see what a labour and peasant conference is. Now I have a telephone number of Mian Abdul Qayum, the LQM leader; I am going to organize workers in my factory". At present, there is no union at his textile factory in Faisalabad.

The conference took place in a tense atmosphere, so only committed activists and workers of the two movements participated. Altogether there were over 10,000 participated. Local city officials prepared for any unwanted incident by installing security doors and placing ambulances and fire brigade buses on the site. (We had hoped to mobilize 30,000 but in this atmosphere many local sympathizers stayed home.)

The two main conference slogans were the issuing of social security cards to all industrial workers and land ownership rights to the Mozareen of Military Farms. But solidaristic and revolutionary slogans were very prominent: "Workers of the world unite," "One's sorrow is everyone's sorrow," "Long live working-class solidarity," "Those who cultivate should sow," "Asia is red," "Give one more push to demolishing walls," "Socialism is the only answer," "Revolution is our path," "Struggle is our strategy," "Ownership of land or death," "Trade union rights, our human right," "Issue social security cards," "Down with capitalism and feudalism," "No to the IMF and World Bank," "Down with American imperialism," "No to drone attacks and religious fundamentalism," "For a peaceful democratic Pakistan," "Equal rights for women," "No to discriminatory laws," "Stop violence," "Give peace a chance."

Speakers came from all over Pakistan as well as from France (Pierre Rousset for the NPA) Britain (Nasim Bajwa, an eminent human rights lawyer) and Australia (Simon Butler of the Socialist Alliance) emphasized the indispensable nature of workers' and peasants' unity to defeat the policies of the rich and feudal landowners. They demanded that all the agricultural land occupied by the Military farms be given back to the peasants who have been working it for more than one hundred years. They demanded a minimum monthly salary of 15 000 rupees (130 euros) in all factories. They announced their intention of participating in the next local elections in Faisalabad and other cities. They condemned the atrocities committed by the military in Baluchistan and assured the Baluchi people, who are fighting against exploitation and injustice. Finally they called for the presentation of the disappeared.

Renewal of proletarian identity

"It is a new start and it will not be the last event in this regard, we reject the economic and political policies of the present government, which are dictated by American imperialism." They noted that Washington stands empty-handed before the people of Pakistan. They commented that IMF and World Bank policies are adding misery and poverty to the everyday life of the working class. They refused to accept the dictates of IMF and World Bank. They demanded that the government stop privatization and provide subsidies for agriculture's input. At the same time they demanded that the government must end discriminatory legislation: All citizens of Pakistan must be treated equally in the eyes of the law and constitution.

Finally, they noted they were sick and tired of the in-fighting of the Pakistan People's Party and the Muslim League Nawaz. They do not battle over issues of concern to the working class but only on how to share power and status. Speaker after speaker stressed the need for an independent politics from those parties of the rich. Many pointed to worker and peasant unity at the conference as a practical alternative. Speakers urged the government to control

poverty, price hikes, unemployment and the power crisis.

Pierre Rousset, a leader of New Anti Capitalist Party France (NPA) and organizer of Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres (ESSF), said that the French workers had secured their social security rights after years of struggle. Nonetheless, aided by the WTO, multinational companies were trying to deprive ordinary people throughout Europe from their basic rights. The response is concrete international solidarity by the workers of all countries. Simon Butler of Socialist Alliance Australia conveyed revolutionary greetings from socialists in Australia, mentioning that Pakistan and Australia might be opponents in the cricket match but the workers of both countries will unite to fight poverty and unemployment together.

For all those attending, the conference was very positive. Most felt the power of unity: "We did this despite all the threats of security. The police kept pushing us to restrict the event inside the grounds, however, we carried out our own plan and we did well" Rana Tahir, one of the main LLQM leaders, told me. "It was like an Eid (festival) day for the Faisalabad power looms workers. We are all happy with the outcome. It is beginning of working class politics in the city. Just, six years on, LQM did what the big parties cannot do. It was a challenge to fill the ground and we did it. "We feel the power, the power of the working class to change the society. If we can do this, we can do many more things in support of the workers. Now the administration has to listen to us and take us seriously" he commented after the rally.

[1] www.wwhl.org.pk

[2] www.lef.org.pk