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Pakistan - Why I am not joining AWP, for now!

Saturday 1 December 2012, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 29 November 2012).

The formation of Awami Workers Party (AWP) —as a result of merger between Labour Party Pakistan, Awami Party Pakistan (AWP), and Workers Party Pakistan (WPP)— has generated a lot of enthusiasm particularly among a younger layer of activists. However, certain ex-leftists and isolated individuals have expressed cynicism.

Both reactions are understandable. Activists of all varieties want unity. Mergers and united fronts of like-minded groups are expected to generate lot of energy. Hence, the enthusiasm of young leftists, and some of the old guard as well. As for the cynics [especially those posing as intellectuals], a common denominator is by and large a loss of confidence in Marxist ideas. Many have renounced their past and have converted to a neoliberal faith. 'The world has changed!' they tell us without explaining what has changed, or when.

I have no truck with disillusioned ex-leftists. I am all for the merger and full co-operation between the various leftist currents in the country. I consider the recent merger a welcome step. Pakistan's miniscule, marginalized left does not need organizational fragmentation [though hoping total organizational unity will be utopian].

Still I haven't joined AWP — at least for now.

Here are my reasons:

1. I consider the cult of leadership as an anathema to revolutionary politics. Pakistan's organized left [all varieties] as well as the trade union movements have been plagued by the cult of individual leaders. As a journalist and activist, I have criticized bourgeois parties like the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Muslim League, or the ANP for that matter, for being family fiefdoms that perpetuate dynastic cults. In fact, I can say the same about all the left grouplets in Pakistan. In some cases the leadership deservedly achieved a central position by virtue of its role in struggle. Mirza Ibrahim's resolute face springs to mind! One may name half a dozen other left and trade union stalwarts.

However, in the absence of democratic structures, often our larger-than-life leaders outgrow their organizations. In the absence of democratic functioning of workers' bodies (be it unions or parties), even every Trotskyist outfit in Pakistan has a Stalin of its own. If it is serious in practicing the 21st century socialism, the AWP could have broken with this tradition. Before the merger, in informal discussions with some comrades involved in merger talks I argued for a different conception of leadership.

'There are no young leaders at hand to take up the responsibility,' I was informed. But why? Why there are there no young leaders?

I maintain that the AWP leadership should be young, under 30. Second, there should be a rotation of leadership [a mechanism the English trade union movement discovered some two centuries ago,

when they first organized unions at the dawn of capitalism]. Third, the AWP [and leftist parties, for that matter] should not copy the leadership structures of the bourgeois parties. The AWP has a chairman, a president and a general secretary. Can anybody explain the difference between a president and a chairman? It seems these awkward slots were created to accommodate the inflated egos of our leaders-sans-followerships.

2. Gender blindness is my second reason for staying away. How can it be that three major left parties were only able to recruit exactly one woman to its Executive body? The picture of the elected leadership making its rounds on facebook was a sad spectacle with one woman amid ten 'leaders'! I do not want to go into the never-ending debate over whether or not there should be 50 percent reserved seats for women in the party leadership. But clearly 21st century socialism cannot be gender blind! I would strongly advocate having two public spokespeople instead of a plethora of bourgeois-style office-bearers. One spokesperson should be a man, the other a woman. Imagine such a dynamic left party!

A digression: an AWP poster promises heaven to workers and peasants, youth and students, but has only 'Izat' (Respect) to offer to women. I always thought the left in Pakistan wants equality for women.

Most importantly, I'm not advocating for 'dummy' female representation. I think the party has the opportunity and the obligation to organize the women in its circle of influence and strongly encourage their participation in full party life. Further, I strongly believe you cannot have socialism without feminism!

3. I stand for total and absolute democracy. However the AWP does not promise that. I stand for a unified party that allows and respects the right of every individual to publicly disagree with the leadership. At the same time, collectives/tendencies inside the unified party should have the full right to publish, project and propagate their ideological, organizational and tactical viewpoint. A party should have no right to expel any one or any tendency. My fear is that, as has been the case in the past with mergers, my demand for absolute democracy will not be tolerated under the guise of 'unity'. Yet the AWP cannot foster unity without attending to the basics of harmony: the need for fearless speech.

4. I also have problem with many left outfits and parties that engage in revolutionary politics but their leaderships remain petty bourgeois. I do not doubt anybody's commitment. I wish more middle-class, even rich, individuals become sympathetic to leftist ideas. However, every left outfit in Pakistan has a 'class hierarchy' of its own, often reproducing class structure. With few exceptions, working-class comrades almost never rise to leadership positions. And even in such cases, it is often more symbolism than substance.

I hope in the coming months AWP takes a pluralist, democratic, feminist, green turn. I will wait on!

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P.S.

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