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Bangla Desh: Results and Prospects

Editor's Note : Tariq Ali is a renowned Pakistani-British public intellectual, historian, and political activist. He is a member of the editorial committee of the *New Left Review* and *Sin Permiso* and contributes to *The Guardian*, *CounterPunch*, and the *London Review of Books*. He has authored numerous books, including *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power* (1970), *Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State* (1983), *Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads, and Modernity* (2002), *Conversations with Edward Said* (2005), etc. He wrote this article amidst the war situation, published in *New Left Review* in July-August 1971. Considering the historical importance of the article, we are re-publishing the article after almost fifty years of the incident. The main aim is to create an opportunity to understand and comprehend how the liberation war was being considered and analyzed by different genres of literature at that time and to create space for contemporaries to engage critically with them. It should be noted that at that time, 'Bangladesh' was written separately as 'Bangla Desh'. The author's original spelling is retained here. The views expressed here as of authors.

The struggle in Bangla Desh between the Bangali liberation forces and the armed might of West Pakistani capital represents both a continuation of the mass movement which erupted in 1968-69 and a qualitative break. In that sense we can say that the present course of events in East Bengal was not unpredictable.¹

The war in Bangla Desh is an event of the greatest international significance. Its immediate effects extend well beyond the present frontiers of conflict and in the long term it may well be seen as a decisive phase of the Indian revolution. Together with the uprising in Ceylon, it signals the approaching demise of traditional bourgeois politics in the entire subcontinent and puts armed struggle on the agenda for the not-too-distant future. The implications of this for the politico-military strategy of imperialism in Asia are evidently very serious ones.

It is therefore vital for Marxists to study in detail the present stage of the struggle and the path towards the ultimate liberation of the Indian subcontinent.

There have been two distinguishing features of politics in Eastern Bengal since the beginning of 1971: on the one hand, the enthusiastic participation of the masses in every level of an escalating social and national struggle; and on the other the political bankruptcy of the petty bourgeois notabilities of the Awami League, whose whole tradition of compromise and manoeuvre rendered them completely incapable of providing leadership in a real independence movement. Even before the formal invasion took place on March 25th, 1971, this tradition had led to the loss of hundreds of Bangali lives at the hands of the oppressor Army of General Yahya Khan. These earlier demonstrations of its brute power should have convinced the Awami League politicians of what was likely to follow unless they prepared the Bangali people for a protracted struggle. This they refused to do despite the evident desire of the masses, expressed in thunderous slogans at Awami League meetings, for a total break with Pakistan. The rising tide of popular political consciousness was already clear in the enormous meetings which took place throughout the province both before and after the General Election of 1970. At every stage the masses assimilated the lessons of the past much more rapidly than their

parliamentarist leaders and showed their willingness to fight the colonial state in East Bengal. At every stage they were again and again checked by the visceral constitutionalism of the Awami League leadership. This conflict between the mass movement and the petty bourgeois outlook of its official guides was all the more tragic in that the existing organizations of the revolutionary left were localized and thus not in a position to influence the course of the struggle decisively. However, as we shall see, this situation is now beginning to change in favour of the revolutionary movement.

The Awami League

The Awami League has been a party of reaction since birth. Its formative years were dominated by parliamentary manoeuvre and intrigue. Its main social roots have always been in the functionaries, teachers, petty traders and shopkeepers who proliferate in East Bangali society. Its founder, H. S. Suhrawardy, who for a short time succeeded in becoming Pakistan's Prime Minister, distinguished himself in 1956 by supporting the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt. He became one of the most articulate defenders of imperialist interests in Pakistan and American policy in Asia as a whole.² Left-wing parties and organizations in East Pakistan who opposed these policies were physically attacked by Awami League 'volunteers' and had their meetings broken up with monotonous regularity. Suhrawardy's other notable achievement was to supervise the fusion of the provinces of Baluchistan, Sind and the North-West Frontier into a single territorial unit dominated completely by Punjab. In this way he showed his respect for the 'autonomy' of the West Pakistani provinces. After 1958, Suhrawardy played a dissident role during the early years of the Ayub dictatorship and was imprisoned for a short time as a result; but his opposition was always limited to the bourgeois constitutionalist framework. Suhrawardy's undoubted talents—he was a proficient lawyer, an artful political manipulator and a glib

conversationalist placed him head and shoulders above the rest of the Awami League leadership. His ambitions, however, were far removed from Bangali independence: his aim was to make the Awami League an all-Pakistan electoral machine, capable of winning power as a 'national' party and thus catapulting H. S. Suhrawardy into the highest possible office. His untimely death in 1963 put an end to this dream. His successor, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, had won prominence as a party organizer and hatchet man rather than as an astute politician. The very idea of the Awami League disavowing the legacy of its dead leader was considered heresy of the worst sort under the new leadership.³ It is essential to recall this early history in order to understand the recent attitudes of the League. It continued to play an oppositional role during the remaining years of the Ayub dictatorship. Ayub himself more than once considered the idea of reaching some compromise with its leaders and incorporating them in the Central government, but the gangster politicians from the East Pakistani underworld, on whom he had relied for so long to maintain 'law and order' in Bengal, constantly and successfully sabotaged this plan, as it would have meant the end of their own political careers. The Awami League was thus offered no choice but to continue as an oppositional force. It joined a multi-party alliance (Combined Opposition Parties) in 1964 to field a candidate against Ayub, but the elections were rigged by the Army and the Civil Service and the Field Marshal was returned with a comfortable majority. In March 1965, the opposition tried to regroup and met in Lahore to hammer out a joint strategy. It was here that the Awami League, in the person of Mujibur, dropped a bombshell in the form of its famous Six-Point plan for regional autonomy. The West Pakistani leaders were so shocked that they accused the Ayub regime's most Machiavellian civil servant, Altaf Gauhar, of having drafted them in order to split the anti-Ayub opposition. This marked the beginning of the gulf between Bangali nationalism and the West Pakistani oppositional parties. The abyss was to widen in the coming years. It was transcended for a time during the mass

upsurge against Ayub in 1968–69, but the absence of a strong revolutionary party guided by Marxism-Leninism meant that it came to the forefront again as soon as the upsurge subsided.

There were two important reasons why the Awami League was able to win mass support and hegemonize the politics of East Bengal. The first was its success in grasping the importance of the national question. The second was the failure of the groups of the extreme left, which had followed an extremely opportunist course during the Ayub dictatorship because of the latter's 'friendship' with China. Thus the Awami League could present itself as the only meaningful opposition force in the province. It constantly carried out propaganda in favour of its Six-Points; it called for free elections and it organized demonstrations against the Ayub dictatorship. Some of its leaders, including Mujibur Rehman were consequently arrested. The Maoist wing of the National Awami Party (NAP) had meanwhile shown complete blankness towards the national problem. Instead of joining popular agitation and deepening it by explaining to the masses that national and democratic tasks can today only be solved within a socialist framework, and thus preparing them for a long struggle, they entrenched themselves in sectarian isolation. In other words, they failed to see that uneven historical development would oblige Bangali revolutionaries to work out a strategy for their struggle independent of West Pakistan. Moreover, they insisted that the Ayub regime had 'certain anti-imperialist features' and was therefore in some ways to be preferred to bourgeois democracy. In these conditions, the Awami League did not have much trouble in establishing itself as a powerful mass force. The stupidity of the Ayub regime in persecuting its leaders, manufacturing conspiracy cases against them and throwing them into gaol could only help this process. Thus when the anti-Ayub upsurge resulted in the fall of the dictator and his replacement by the Yahya junta in early 1969, it was hardly surprising that the Awami League reaped the benefits. Yet it still could not disavow its heritage. In the weeks

before the army persuaded Ayub to retire, the Awami League eagerly participated in the 'constitutional' talks at the Round Table Conferences called by Ayub to reach a compromise. It had fuelled the mass movement and witnessed the anger of Bangali peasants and workers; even so it remained tied to its parliamentary past.

The Yahya military regime, unable to quell the mass upheaval in both parts of the country, was forced to promise a General Election on the basis of adult franchise. Its advisors evidently believed it could concede this as a diversionary tactic. They were confident that the bureaucracy, from long experience in such matters, would be able to manipulate the results satisfactorily. To give the latter some time to prepare itself, the elections were postponed ostensibly because of the cyclone disaster in late 1970, which claimed nearly a million Bangali lives. But the failure of the Army to provide any adequate flood relief only intensified the deep anger of the Bangali masses. When the different Maoist factions in East Bengal decided to boycott the elections, the Awami League was given a free hand. The result of the December General Election gave it a tidal victory. Of the 169 seats allocated to East Pakistan in the National Assembly, the League won 167 and it gained 291 out of the 343 seats in the Provincial Assembly. Its bloc in National Assembly gave it an overall majority throughout the country and entitled it to form the Central government. Such a prospect traumatized the West Pakistani ruling oligarchy. Given that the Awami League had fought the elections on the basis of the Six Points and had indeed on occasion surpassed them in its electoral rhetoric, it was clear that the Army would try to prevent a meeting of the Constituent Assembly.

The Six Point Programme

What did the Six Points represent? They were simply an attempt to reverse a situation which had existed ever since the partition of the subcontinent. The predominantly Hindu trader

and landlord class of East Bengal migrated to West Bengal (India) in 1947, leaving their businesses and lands behind them. From the very start this vacuum was filled by Biharis and non-Bangali businessmen from the Western portion of the country. The economic exploitation of East Bengal, which began immediately after partition, led to an annual extraction of some 3,000 million rupees from the East by West Pakistani capital. The most important foreign exchange earner was jute, a crop produced in East Pakistan which accounted for over 50 per cent of exports. This money was spent on capital investment in West Pakistan. The sums granted for development projects by the Central government offer an interesting case-study of discrimination. Between 1948 and 1951 a sum of 1,130 million rupees was sanctioned for development. Of this only 22.1 per cent went to East Pakistan. Over the period 1948-69 the value of the resources transferred from the East amounted to 2.6 billion dollars. The West Pakistani economy as a result has been heavily dependent on East Bengal, partly as a field for investment, but above all as a mine of subsidies and as a captive market. Thus the Six Points, which included both political and economic autonomy, directly threatened the immediate interests of West Pakistani capitalism. They demanded:

1. A federal system of government, parliamentary in nature and based on adult franchise.
2. Federal government shall deal only with Defence and Foreign Affairs. All other subjects shall be dealt with by the federating state.
3. (a) Two separate, but freely convertible currencies for the two parts of the country; or (b) one currency for the whole country. In this case effective constitutional measures to be taken to prevent flight of capital from East to West Pakistan.
4. Power of taxation and revenue collection to be vested in the federating units and not at the centre.

5. Separate accounts for foreign exchange earnings of the two parts of the country under control of the respective governments.
6. The setting up of a militia or para-military force for East Pakistan.

Immediately after the General Election we wrote: 'Will the Pakistan Army and the capitalist barons of West Pakistan allow these demands to go through? The answer is quite clearly no. What will probably happen is that in the short-term Mujibur Rehman will be allowed to increase East Pakistan's percentage of import and export licenses and will be allocated a larger share of foreign capital investment. These are the "concessions" which the Army will be prepared to make in the coming few months. If Rehman accepts them, he will be allowed to stay in power. If not, it will be back to business as usual in the shape of the Army. Of course there is no doubt that in the event of another military coup there will be no holding back the immense grievances of Bengal and the desire for an independent Bengal will increase a hundredfold. What follows will depend on whether Bangali revolutionaries succeed in building a revolutionary organization to pose the question of state power. If the political leadership remains in the hands of the Awami League, the result will be yet another betrayal. . . .'⁴

The Six Points represented the charter of the aspirant Bangali bourgeois: it articulated the latter's desire to create its own regional state apparatus and to have an equal share of the capitalist cake. But this was precisely the reason why the dominant bloc in West Pakistan was opposed to these two fundamental concessions. The Pakistani Army was organically hostile to the prospect of a Bangali civilian government because of the danger that it would reduce the lavish military apparatus which has been a built-in feature of the Islamabad regime since Ayub seized power in October 1958. Some idea of the enormous stake the Pakistani officer corps has in the present structure of the unitary state can be gathered from the fact that military

expenditures have through out the last decade absorbed no less than some 60 per cent of the total State budget. In the fiscal year of 1970 alone, some 625 million dollars were allocated for the Armed Forces. Awami League politicians had repeatedly denounced these colossal outlays on a military machine which was in its virtual totality non-Bangali. The Six Points meant the subtraction of Bangali taxes for its maintenance. Moreover, the Army was ideologically saturated from top to bottom with racist and religious chauvinism against the Bangalis, who had traditionally been regarded as dark, weak and infected with Hinduism. For its part, the Pakistani business class had its own extremely strong material reasons for resisting the Six Points. The complex economic system of inter zonal exploitation in Pakistan is amply documented by Richard Nations elsewhere in *New Left Review*. It is enough to stress here that while business interests in the West no longer regard the East as an optimal field of investment, Bengal remains of vital importance to them, both as a captive market and as a source of foreign exchange. In the late sixties, between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of West Pakistan's exports were taken by the East at monopoly prices. Where else could West Pakistani capitalism dispose of its high-cost manufactures?

Bhutto and the People's Party

The election results in West Pakistan had resulted in the emergence of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) as the largest Western Party in the new constituent assembly. But other smaller parties had also emerged with significant regional bases in Baluchistan and the North West Frontier, and it was clear to Bhutto that at best he would be a junior partner in any coalition government at the Centre. If the Awami League chose to govern alone, he would be acknowledged only as the leader of West Pakistan. Bhutto had won the elections in Punjab and Sind after his party had campaigned on a platform of demagogic radicalism: land reform, extensive nationalization, an end to the

economic power of the twenty-two families and other improbable promises. Because of the virtual eclipse of the extreme left, he was able to pose as a 'socialist'. His party organization, however, was an improvised assemblage of feudalists, racketeers, lawyers and band wagon petty bourgeois. Its electoral success owed a great deal to Bhutto's deals with powerful landlord cliques in the countryside (his pact with leading Sindhi feudalists was particularly notorious). However, the PPP also captured and confiscated the genuine popular aspirations for social change in the towns and villages. The extreme class tensions within Bhutto's electoral bloc and the hollowness of its party organization meant that the only ideological cement that could be used to hold it together was religious chauvinism (hence the illiterate slogan of the PPP; 'Socialism is our economy, democracy is our policy, Islam is our religion'). The overwhelming electoral success of the Awami League stunned Bhutto. It utterly upset his plans for taking power. He now emerged as the most vociferous defender of the traditional hegemony of West Pakistan, hysterically denounced the Six Points and after confabulations with top Army Generals started to whip up an intensely chauvinistic atmosphere in Punjab. The Assembly was scheduled to meet three months after the election, on March 3rd, 1971. In collusion with the Army, Bhutto now threatened not to attend any Assembly unless Mujibur Rehman was willing to compromise on the Six Points. If the Assembly met without him, he would unleash a 'civil disobedience' movement in West Pakistan. Immediately after this announcement, Yahya unilaterally decided, on March 1st, 1971, to postpone indefinitely the meeting of the National Assembly. The result was predictable. There was a spectacular explosion of public anger in East Bengal and in the ensuing unrest the Army shot down hundreds of demonstrators in its major cities. Unarmed masses were called out on to the streets by the leaders of the Awami League. The latter then watched troops firing on them, entirely unable to offer any effective initiative. A continuous General Strike brought the province to a standstill.

The Awami League was now forced to accept the logic of the situation and the result was a curious situation which could be described as a kind of bourgeois caricature of dual power. The League was able to set up Committees to take over the administration of key areas in the cities and countryside: only the Army cantonments were outside its control.⁵ The Bangali section of the local bureaucracy aligned itself with the Awami League and the newly arrived military Proconsul from Islamabad, General Tikka Khan, could not be sworn in as Governor because the Bangali Chief Justice of the High Court refused to administer the ceremony. But the Committees were very definitely Awami League Committees and had no autonomous mass character. They substituted a new authority for that of the Pakistani controlled capitalist state in Bengal, but did not significantly alter its normal functions. 'Law and order' was preserved; no effort was made to mobilize or arm the masses, or prepare them for the confrontation that was plainly imminent. The Awami League leaders firmly refused to declare independence, at a time when the balance of forces was more favourable than it was later to become. They had set their sights on autonomy and eagerly prepared to negotiate with the Yahya regime. In doing so they wanted to show themselves as a responsible party, concerned to preserve the existing social order. Addressing a mass meeting in Dacca on March 7th, Mujibur Rehman fulminated against intrigue, but rejected independence, much against the evident will of the masses. Having won such a large majority he could not believe that the army would crush it by force.⁶

The Military Coup of March

But in Islamabad the decision had been taken, no doubt after consultations with Bhutto. Staff plans were worked out to smash the Bangali national movement in a series of sharp and well directed military blows. What the Army needed was time to dispatch troop reinforcements to ensure the operation speedy and surgical success. The Awami League leadership, confident

of a compromise settlement, was only too pleased to resume negotiations. Yahya therefore flew to Dacca where talks started on March 15th. Bhutto was also summoned and the Awami League politicians were lulled into believing that a deal was now virtually clinched. Yahya dragged out negotiations for 10 days while extra troops were quietly flown in via Ceylon.⁷ On March 25th the Awami League leaders were waiting for an announcement of the settlement. It was to be a long wait. Yahya left for Rawalpindi with other West Pakistani politicians in the morning. That night the Army struck. Mujibur Rehman stayed at home and awaited his captors. Others could not afford the same luxury. Tikka Khan's first objective was a systematic effort to destroy the advanced elements of the Bangali working class and intelligentsia. The Army shelled Dacca University and wiped out all students and lecturers it could find; soldiers invaded the women's hostel, raping and killing its inmates. Artillery flattened working class districts, while newspapers and trade union offices were put to the fire: uncounted thousands were killed in the capital alone. The masses, unarmed and abandoned, attempted to fight back, without much success. Multitudes fled to the countryside. For two or three weeks after the attack of March 16th, scattered units of the East Pakistan Rifles and police force, under Awami League leadership, fought on. Their hopelessly incorrect policy of trying to fortify them selves in provincial towns, where they provided an easy target for mechanized expeditions by the Army, doomed them to rapid defeat and dispersal. By the second half of April Tikka Khan was in command of all the main cities and only those combatants of the hastily formed Mukti Fouj (Liberation Army) who had taken to the countryside survived. Yahya's Army had scored every initial success: yet it had also signed and sealed the death warrant of Pakistan as a state. For it had crippled the only force which could have temporarily contained the rise of the mass movement—the Awami League. It thereby laid the future basis for a protracted armed struggle in Bengal.

Imperialistic Reactions

The utter inability of the League to grasp or deal with the dynamic turn of events should not be blamed on individual leaders. It was a result of the Party's inherent addiction to bourgeois constitutionalism. It is clear that even today the lessons of March have not been learnt by it. The bulk of the surviving Awami League leadership, led by Tajuddin Ahmed (Mujibur's No 2), sits in Calcutta platonically relying on the international bourgeoisie for aid. The 'Provisional Government' of Bangla Desh exists by courtesy of the Indian ruling class. Its Ministers, all of them verbose parliamentarians, continue to behave in the same old way. They still preach the politics of pressure: Awami League envoys now tour the world telling their audiences that persuasion of their governments to halt aid to the Yahya regime should be considered as important as the opening of a 'second front'. It is obvious that this sort of activity, in fact, constitutes the first front for the Awami League. It goes without saying that to waste time, energy and resources in hoping that US imperialism will disarm the Pakistani Army is a vital component of its system for blocking social revolution in South Asia is to harbour the most empty illusions. The West Pakistani state machine is a tan gible and reliable entity capable of guaranteeing imperialist interests and mediating them with those of the local landlord and capitalist classes. The Awami League, however pro-American the subjective sentiments of its leaders, has always been a woefully inadequate substitute for it as an objective vehicle of imperialist domination. Not only has the absence of any solid pre-existent State apparatus in Bengal, with a proper police and Army, been a decisive deterrent to any real US backing for 'secessionism'. The Awami League, even as a party, has always fallen well short of the qualities necessary to induce imperialism to entrust it with the responsibility of creating a new one. It is not a structured mass organization, with a genuine cadre system or party discipline. It is a shapeless collection of political notables and their followers, which has

never proved that it can really handle the forces to its left, and prevent their capture of its own rank-and-file. Faced with a choice between Mujib and Yahya, the major imperialist powers naturally and unhesitatingly refused to gamble on the former, and concluded that they must continue to sustain the regime in Islamabad.

An Indian invasion of East Bengal is, of course, a possibility, although there is no need to point out its consequences for the real independence of Bangla Desh. Such a prospect is undoubtedly more congenial to the leaders of the Awami League than that of themselves organizing armed struggle for national liberation. Whatever happens, it is likely that a split will develop inside the Awami League in the very near future as many of its younger militants decide to go their own way. Today that way leads only to the revolutionary left. The Awami League is already a much diminished force, as a consequence of its disastrous blunders. Its fate, and that of the movement it led, is a terrible indictment of the ideology it espoused. Once again, it confirms the fact that in this epoch the petty bourgeoisie is not capable of carry ing through a real struggle for national independence. Moreover, the class limitations of the outlook of the League were compounded by the congenital defect of all such political formations on the Indian sub continent: constitutionalism. This pathetic strain in turn reflects the low historical level of the struggle against the British. A recent commentator in the Indian press candidly noted this common element of Indo-Pakistani bourgeois politics, in expressing his sympathy for Sheikh Mujib: 'The Awami League leadership in many ways corresponds to the leadership of our own Congress leadership which, with the backing of peaceful agitation, sought to arrive and ultimately succeeded in arriving at compromises with our colonialist masters. Our independence was the result of an understanding with the British masters. Sheikh Mujibur Rehman hoped to pull off a comparable deal with Islamabad. Like the Congress in India, the Awami League does not have the

stomach for the type of war circumstances have forced Bangla Desh to wage.'⁸

These musings, of course, unwittingly point to a very important difference between British and Pakistani colonialism in the subcontinent. British imperialism was able to grant a political decolonization because it nowhere meant the abandonment of its real *economic* empire, whose central segments were Malayan rubber and tin, Middle Eastern oil and South African gold, or Indian plantations. But the loss of political control of East Bengal would have affected the vital interests of the impoverished and wretched sub-colonialism of Islamabad directly. For the weaker a colonial power, the more dependent it is on formal political possession of its subject territories. Contemporary history has a striking lesson for us in this respect. The European imperialism which has waged the longest and most stubborn war for the retention of its overseas possessions was not industrialized England, France or even Belgium. It is the small, backward and predominantly agrarian society of Portugal. For 11 years now, Lisbon has fought a ferocious and unrelenting campaign in Africa to keep Angola, Mozambique and Guinea, because of the enormous economic and ideological importance to it of these colonies. The sub-colonialism of Portugal, whose own economy is deeply penetrated by the capital investment of the advanced imperialist powers, might furnish an instructive comparison with that of Pakistan. Neither has much politico-economic room for manoeuvre: both are in their different ways consequently driven to extreme and unmediated measures of repression.

The Revolutionary Left

The Awami League has been deeply discredited and weakened by the onset of the war in Bangla Desh. Its catastrophic failures have cleared the path for the assumption of political leadership in the underground struggle against the military occupation by the revolutionary left. What is the current condition, and what are

the prospects, of the Left? It has been seen how, prior to the 1968–69 upsurge, the whole development of its numerically most significant sector—that under Maoist influence—was warped by the friendship proclaimed by the Chinese government for Ayub's military dictatorship in Pakistan. The effusive relationship between the two states had disastrous effects on the development of the Left throughout Pakistan: in particular it greatly facilitated the rise of the Awami League and the Pakistan People's Party.⁹

However the bulk of the revolutionary Left in East Bengal learnt its lesson during the great upheaval in 1968–69. The National Awami Party had traditionally functioned as an umbrella organization of the Left in East Bengal, under the dominance of a heteroclitite pro-Peking majority. By 1969–70 the largest of the groups within this majority was the East Bengal Communist Party, led by Allaudin, Matin, Basar and Biswas.¹⁰ It numbered perhaps 2,000 militants. Its main regional strong holds were the Rajshahi, Chittagong and Pabna districts. Although it was by now too late to reverse in the short-run the effects of previous opportunism on the masses (the influence of the Awami league was at its zenith in this period), this tendency made a decisive turn, in two ways. 1. It grasped the central importance of the national question and conducted agitation for a socialist solution to it. 2. It started to prepare its own cadres for a long-term armed struggle. In other words, the EBCP grasped the essential *specificity* of class struggle in East Bengal, and rejected from the outset all electoralist illusions.

The three other pro-Chinese groups within the NAP gradually shifted in a similar direction, although with more hesitation. The Co-ordinating Committee for Communist Revolutionaries, whose leaders were Rashid Khan Menon and Kazi Zafar, was a smaller nucleus centred in Dacca itself. The veteran peasant leader Maulana Bhashani, himself no theoretician, was surrounded by a group of personal supporters who formed

another current. Finally Muhammad Toha and Abdul Huqí the former an experienced trade-union militant who had once been Bhashani's secretary formed the East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist). As its name suggests, this was the most rigidly 'orthodox' group, in that it alone rejected the Bangali right to self determination and insisted on the necessity of preserving the unitary State of Pakistan (a theme to which China was, for reasons of its own, particularly attached). It, too, was the only group to reject united action in the developing crisis from 1968 onwards. The other tendencies co-operated in implementing the boycott strategy of the NAP in the March elections, and in radicalizing the demands of the base of the Awami league. However it should be stressed that all four groups adopted an identical position in one fundamental respect. None of them harboured any illusions about either the capabilities of the Awami league¹¹ or the intentions of Yahya Khan. By early March, their cadres were alerted and instructed to go underground, many of them leaving Dacca and heading for their respective bases in the countryside. Thus not many leftist cadres were eliminated by the military blitz of March 25th. The only important leader to have been captured was the student spokesman in Dacca, Mahbubullah, a militant of the EBCP and one of the most talented Marxists in East Bengal. He had already been imprisoned in Dacca before the onslaught and his comrades fear that he may have been subsequently killed.

Investigations in Bengal suggest that after the Army's attack the military tactics adopted by the guerrilla units of the revolutionary groups have differed markedly from those of the regular soldiers and police enlisted under the banner of the Awami League. Thus an EBCP group in the Pabna area, led by Tipu Biswas, constantly harassed the Army garrison in Pabna, drew it out of its cantonment and after a week-long battle destroyed it. The guerrillas then occupied the city, ignored the hostility of the local Awami League, seized the arsenal and

distributed arms to the local population. They did not dig in and establish positions, but thereafter left the city. Such an experience is in evident contrast with the positional warfare employed by the League-dominated Mukti Foj in early April, which led to its utter rout in the cities.

It would be a mistake to exaggerate the size of the small detachments of the revolutionary left, who are now struggling to entrench themselves in the waterways and hills of East Bengal. No *mass* organization of the left existed prior to March 1971, and one will not be created over night. At the moment, scattered nuclei of revolutionaries are attacking and disrupting the Army communications and installations where they can, in their own localities—the EBCP in the Rajshahi-Pabna zone to the North East of the province, the EPCP (M-L) reportedly in the Noakhali district in the Ganges delta (Toha's home territory). They are under trained and under-equipped. The terrain is not uniformly hospitable to guerrilla warfare; the flat plains of the East do not afford extensive cover and water transport can increase army mobility. The hill country in the West, behind Chittagong, Comilla and Sylhet is more intractable.¹² However, it is perfectly clear that Tikka Khan's occupation forces have not succeeded in re-establishing normal trunk communications in the province. The bridges between Chittagong, the only deep-water port of entry for goods into the country, and Dacca were blown up in April, halting all rail traffic between the two. Goods are presently being shipped up the delta by barge. Economic life remains largely at a standstill. Many of the cities have become ghost towns with isolated military cantonments in the middle of them. The stage is thus set for a people's war, even if the full drama itself has yet to unfold. The task of the Bangali revolutionary groups is clearly two-fold: first to co-ordinate and unify their struggles on a national scale, and secondly to win the poor peasantry and proletariat firmly to the socialist road to independence. Only correct *political* practice and leadership can ensure ultimate military victory.

The revolutionary groups engaged in the struggle understand this and Awami league does not that is why the future should belong to them. Our latest information indicates that these groups, with the exception of the EPCP (M-L), have united in a National Liberation Front, whose objective is to pose a revolutionary alternative to the Provisional Government in Calcutta. The EPCP (M-L), traditionally the most orthodox of the Maoist groups, while organizationally apart, is nevertheless committed to a common struggle.

The Role of China

Yet if the pro-Peking currents are today actively involved in the armed struggle, they are fighting despite the positions adopted by the Chinese government, and without its help, moral or material. The Chinese leaders have given unconditional and blanket approval to the Yahya regime in its attempt to crush the Bangali resistance. Their support has extended far beyond state diplomacy: it has faithfully echoed the ideological justifications offered by the Islamabad military clique for its genocide in Bengal. Yahya has claimed that the whole upheaval was the result of a handful of separatist leaders of the Awami league conspiring in concert with the Indian government. The official West Pakistan propaganda machine has presented the revolt of an entire people as 'Indian interference'. The Chinese government has publicly endorsed this myth. In a fulsome personal letter to Yahya Khan, Premier Chou En-lai openly accepted and defended the right of the Pakistani Army to trample on the aspirations of an oppressed people.¹³ The Chinese government has thus deliberately aligned itself with a murderously reactionary capitalist state against a mass popular upsurge, which included many supporters of the Chinese Revolution.

The Chinese justification that they are upholding the 'unity and sovereignty' of Pakistan is grotesque. The Pakistani State, as every socialist militant must be aware, is a uniquely reactionary

and anti-national construct. It is, in fact, one of the only two confessional states in the world: the other is Israel. The People's Republic of China now apparently maintains that the sacred ties of religion are indissoluble. In fact, of course, the basic right of national self-determination, a fundamental principle of Marxism and Leninism, has scarcely ever belonged so unequivocally to a people as to the oppressed masses of East Bengal—who are not only ethnically, historically, linguistically and culturally a distinct community, but who constitute the majority of the population of 'Pakistan' anyway. The class nature of the State machine which now enforces the unity of Pakistan is equally plain: it is the repressive weapon of the landlord-capitalist ruling class against millions of poor peasants and workers. The Pakistani Army is a shock force of imperialist-trained and Pentagon-backed coercion, which has not only tyrannized its own country for the past 12 years. It has been an integral component of CENTO and SEATO, has provided officers and troops for the feudal despotism of Oman against the popular revolt in Dhofar,¹⁴ and advised and assisted King Hussein in maintaining the monarchy in Jordan. Moreover, China has by no means limited itself to merely verbal support for this Army and its dictatorship in Pakistan. Its military and economic assistance has been crucial to the Yahya regime. The tanks used to raze workers' districts in Dacca were Chinese made. The fighter-bombers which fly over Bengal are Chinese constructed. When Islamabad confronted a grave economic crisis because of its war, Peking stepped into the breach with a generous loan of 100 million dollars, delivered to Yahya free of interest.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the newly opened four-lane highway which links Sinkiang with North-West Pakistan across the Karakorum, from Sufu to Gilgit, has been a constant conduit for both military and civilian supplies to the Pakistani regime, throughout the crisis. Already in early March, when the General Strike in East Bengal halted shipments of paper to the West, Chinese trucks were bringing newsprint South to keep the official presses running in Pakistan.¹⁶ Later, when the war itself had started, a hundred

lorries a day were reported to be doing the run to Gilgit, with military supplies for the Ordnance Depots in Peshawar and Rawalpindi.¹⁷ There can be no doubt that this assistance has been of direct benefit to the cause of counter-revolution in Pakistan.

However, the Pakistan Army remains greatly extended in East Bengal. The next six months will be decisive in determining the long-term course of the struggle and the tactics followed by the fledgling NLF are, therefore, of great importance. Whatever the advantages of the Pakistani Army, it is clear that there will be a lengthy struggle and that it will, before long, extend beyond the geographical limits of Bangla Desh itself.

The Consequences of Bangla Desh

The revolutionary crisis in Bengal is already beginning to have its effects elsewhere. Its echoes are being heard today both in West Pakistan and in West Bengal. The quick and clear victory sought by the Pakistani generals has been denied them. This has seriously affected both the Indian and Pakistani ruling class, both of whose interests demand a rapid conclusion to the struggle.

1. West Pakistan

The Army's oft-repeated claim that it is independent of 'vested interests' has been finally exposed. Indeed, the whole historical role of the military and bureaucratic State apparatus which Pakistan 'inherited' from British rule in India has now emerged into the light of day for many young Pakistanis. This role was in many ways a peculiarly central and concentrated one in Pakistan, setting it off from that of most other Asian and African countries, despite the formal similarities of the military regimes which exist in them today. In South-East Asia, Japanese invasion and occupation during the Second World War temporarily smashed the old colonial apparatuses of government which had any way never had a very large indigenous quotient in Burma, Indonesia and elsewhere. After the War, there was little chance for the imperialist powers to reconstitute these, and considerable sections

of the armed forces and civil services which emerged in the post-independence period had often participated in a national liberation struggle against either Japanese or European oppressors. In Africa, on the other hand, the colonial administrations were usually staffed so completely by the colonizing power itself that a civilian bureaucracy and above all an army had to build up virtually from scratch after 'independence' had been granted. On the Indian subcontinent, however, neither of these two patterns prevailed. There, a large and locally recruited Civil Service was an absolute necessity, since the British could not hope themselves to staff the bulk of the administrative system necessary to control its immense population. The same situation obliged them simultaneously to create an extremely large Indian Army, whose junior and some senior officers were recruited from the feudal aristocracy of the subcontinent.¹⁸ These troops did sterling service for their imperialist masters both in the First and Second World Wars, and in constant domestic repression at home. No other colonial power could boast of such a capacious sepoy force. A precondition of it was, of course, the ethnic heterogeneity of India, which allowed the British to recruit their mercenary Army from selected 'martial races'—mainly Punjabis, Sikhs, Pathans, Rajputs, Jats and Dogras—who could be relied on to keep down the other subject nationalities of the Empire. However, in India the Congress Party led a strong bourgeois independence movement from the twenties onwards, which built a mass organization in the countryside, and succeeded in levering Britain out of its imperial suzerainty after it had been fatally weakened by the Second World War. The Congress Party was then able itself to knit the State together and dominate a parliamentary system that has survived ever since. The scenario in Pakistan was very different. The Muslim League was always an extremely weak organization by comparison. Originally created by Islamic princes and nobles in 1906 'to foster a sense of loyalty to the British government among the Muslims of India' (to cite from its statement of aims), it was captured by the

educated Muslim middle-class led by Jinnah in the 1930's and for a brief period was in alliance with the Congress Party. However, its main thrust was always anti-Hindu rather than anti-British. It collaborated with the Raj during the Second World War and received a separate State from it in 1947, without having seriously struggled for independence. Jinnah became the Governor General of Pakistan without having ever created a substantial party organization, let alone one of a mass character. The UP, one of the main regions of the Muslim bourgeoisie he represented, was not included in the new State. Largely a stranger to the present provinces of West Pakistan, he simply confirmed the provincial landlords and feudalists in power as the representatives of his party there. The result was that the ruling class in Pakistan never possessed a reliable political party capable of mystifying or controlling the masses. The Muslim League became merely a clutch of corrupt and quarrelsome *caciques* who soon discredited it permanently. Pakistan was thus from the outset firmly dominated by its civilian bureaucracy and army, both of which had faithfully served the British. The top echelons of each were composed of an exclusive upper-class élite, handpicked and trained for its tasks by British imperialism. In the first decade after Partition, the civilian bureaucracy exercised political paramountcy in Pakistan. The CSP (Civil Service of Pakistan) comprised a closed oligarchy of 500 functionaries commanding the State. Indeed, the two masterful Heads of State of this period, Ghulam Mo hammed and Iskander Mirza, were co-opted directly from its ranks. They manipulated the token parliamentarism of the time, until it became so discredited that in 1958 a military coup was engineered which brought Ayub Khan to the Presidency. This change was itself stage-managed by the bureaucracy, which initially wielded most of the real power. However, once in the saddle, Ayub surrounded himself with a clique of cronies and increasingly made his regime into a personal dictatorship (although not yet a corporate dictatorship of the Army as such. (There were no military Ministers in the Cabinet, for example.) A decade later, Ayub's

regime had in its turn become so immensely un popular that it provoked the largest social upheaval in the history of the country. It was henceforward useless to the ruling class. Thus, in the emergency of early 1969, with masses on the streets in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Dacca and Chittagong, and continuous strikes and riots in both East and West, the Army dislodged Ayub and finally assumed direct political command. The Yahya regime represents the end of a slow shift in the intra-State complex of power from the civilian to the military apparatus. Naturally, the CSP remains very influential within the present government: key civilian bureaucrats still concern themselves with those manifold problems of running the State machine and the economy which were beyond the competence of the Army officers. But the military are now the senior partner.

The Army and its Regime

The Pakistani Army is a force of 300,000 troops, mostly recruited from those sections of the Punjabi and Pathan peasantry who traditionally provided infantry for the British. 70,000 of them are now deployed in Bengal. The officer corps, from the critical rank of lieutenant-colonel upwards, is a select élite screened with the utmost care for its class background and political outlook. The generals, brigadiers and colonels of the Pakistani Army are scions of the feudal aristocracy and gentry of Punjab and the North-West Frontier, with a sprinkling of wealthy immigrants from UP, Gujerat and Hyderabad. The impeccable social credentials and English accents of this group, which so entrance British journalists, reveal their past. They were trained as mercenary thugs for imperialism in Sandhurst or Dehra Dun. So much so, that the first Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistani Army *after* Independence was actually the British General Gracey, whose 20th Indian Division seized Saigon and thereby started the Indo-China War in 1945.¹⁹ The Punjabi regiments now engaged in repression in Bengal thus include units who once practised their trade in Vietnam. Tikka Khan, the butcher of

Dacca, is a veteran of Montgomery's Army in the North African campaign.

Supreme power in Islamabad today is exercised by a small circle of these military officers, flanked by a few civilian advisers and accomplices. Yahya Khan himself is a dim and slothful figurehead. The clique which rules behind him includes some five generals: Hamid, the Deputy C-in-C of the Army; Umar Khan, the Chairman of the National Security Council; Akbar Khan, the Chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence Committee; Pirzada, the Deputy Chief Martial Law Administrator; and Tikka Khan, now Governor of East Bengal.²⁰ To these should be added the regime's top civilian bureaucrat Muzaffar Mohammed Ahmed, Chairman of the Planning Commission and heir to the tradition of Ghulam Mohammed and Iskander Mirza in an earlier epoch. The strength of this group lies in the very intensity of the social conflicts unleashed in Pakistan since 1968-69. Like all political expressions of class rule, the Pakistani Army and civil bureaucracy have always enjoyed a certain relative autonomy from the land lords and businessmen of West Pakistan.²¹ But unfortunately for the West Pakistani ruling class, the converse does not hold. Since the mass upsurge of 1968-69, the oligarchy in the West has become more and more acutely aware of its dependence on the continued strength of the military and civilian State machine. *The Army and its cohesion is thus needed as a political rallying-point over and above its purely repressive functions.* The Six Points of March 1971 thus struck at the heart of oligarchic rule in the West. This is what explains the refusal to compromise with the Awami League, the ferocity of the action against the East, and the remarkable degree of unanimity in West Pakistani ruling circles in immediately supporting the coup of March 25th. It is also what explains the fidelity of US and British imperialism to the military regime, despite the fact that it has jeopardized 'stability' in Bengal. At the present time, the USA is trying to inflect the Pakistani dictatorship towards 'moderation', while shoring it up otherwise. Economic pressure

will doubtless be used to render it more understanding of the international interests of world capitalism, which have hitherto been somewhat sacrificed to its narrow national egoism. It would be logical to drop Yahya himself, whose feeble intelligence and inertia are an embarrassment anyway, and whose disappearance could be suitably used to give the government a fresh look. But unless he could be prevailed on to resign voluntarily, his ouster might present some problems. The Pakistani military, steeped in British conventions, have hitherto always respected strict hierarchy of rank. Both Ayub and Yahya, when they assumed power in 1958 and 1969 respectively, were Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and formally acted in an *ex-officio* capacity. A Middle-East style putsch by younger generals or colonels would be a sharp rupture with this whole tradition. Such an eventuality cannot be excluded: but it would probably only occur if the domestic situation had already deteriorated greatly.

The Economic and Political Situation

For the moment, the war in Bangla Desh has badly shaken the Pakistan economy, which has been depressed anyway since 1968. Foreign exchange has dwindled drastically, while prices and unemployment have mounted. Jute exports have collapsed, precipitating steep falls on the Karachi stock exchange. Devaluation is probably imminent. The reason for this grave economic crisis is, of course, the cost of the expeditionary force in Bengal. Press estimates calculate this at something like 2 million dollars a day! a massive burden when added to West Pakistan's chronic import deficit of 140 million dollars a month. The Islamabad regime is thus faced with a domestic squeeze it did not bar gain for when it embarked on its genocidal operations in March. It has already unilaterally suspended payments on its foreign debts, and will need further large infusions of imperialist aid to ward off bankruptcy.

The political situation in the West is also becoming increasingly unstable. The initial wave of chauvinism which gripped the

population has receded and government propaganda that only 'Hindus and traitors' are being killed in Bengal has lost much of its effect. The main victim of the growing disillusionment of the masses has been Bhutto. His open role as a military collaborator and his efforts to act as a public relations officer for the dictatorship have fortunately destroyed much of his credibility. The People's Party is now rent by warring factions and one group has already broken away in Punjab, denouncing Bhutto as a 'Fascist'. Many of the more sincerely militant of its cadres are either in prison for protesting against the deteriorating economic situation or for leading workers' struggles. It is worth recalling that a few days before the invasion of the East, the workers in Lyallpur, a Punjabi industrial stronghold, seized factories and hoisted the red flag. They were brutally ejected and their leader, Mukhtar Rana, a stalwart of the local PPP, was imprisoned. He was released on bail in mid-June. On the other hand, some of Bhutto's feudal and business backers who were eagerly awaiting the fruits of office have become frustrated by the role he has played in helping to maintain military rule in the country. As a result, Bhutto has started to appeal to the dictatorship to transfer power to him in West Pakistan, and to negotiate a settlement with collaborationist Awami Leaguers in East Bengal. The fact that industry is operating far below capacity and that there is a general slump in West Pakistan could push the regime into some sort of pseudo-compromise settlement, with the United States and the Soviet Union acting as brokers. Another Tashkent may be in the offing.

Whatever happens, the working class in West Pakistan will play a central role in the final political outcome. It matured very rapidly in 1968-69 and is capable of remarkable levels of militancy. The coming period may thus see the beginnings of a new mass struggle in West Pakistan by the workers against the dictatorship, which would, of course, have a serious effect on supply lines to the East. While the intelligentsia in West Pakistan has been divided and disoriented by China's policy, many

student militants have nevertheless been imprisoned for precautionary reasons since March. The leadership of the small but active Kissan Mazdoor (Peasant-Worker) party has been arrested for defying the army. A senior vice-president of the Journalists' Union, Abdullah Malik, was promptly jailed for publicly declaring his solidarity with the oppressed of Bangla Desh. His newspaper *Azad* has been banned. It is becoming clear that the fog of chauvinism which descended on the country after the March invasion has here and there been lifted.

The fate of the ruling class in the West is visibly bound up with that of the military machine it has unleashed on the East. Every blow struck against it by the liberation forces in Bangla Desh will be a blow in aid of the oppressed masses in the West. A military debacle in the Bangali countryside would open up completely new perspectives for the revolutionary movement in West Pakistan. The latter country now becomes a weak link in the imperialist chain of domination in South Asia.

2. West Bengal

A protracted struggle in Bangla Desh will have critical repercussions in West Bengal. The latter province has been in the throes of profound social crisis for three years now, and only the inadequacy of the Left has postponed a revolutionary explosion. West Bengal is a powder keg and the Indian bourgeoisie, although far stronger than its Pakistani counterpart, is well aware of it. That is why Indira Gandhi was so quick in her demagogic response to the events in East Bengal. Every opposition party in India has been urging New Delhi to intervene more forcefully. However, Indira Gandhi's policy has been to prop up the Awami League, while repeatedly disarming guerrillas crossing the border and instituting strict political control over the so-called 'training camps' set up on Indian soil. Although it enjoys great military superiority, the Indian bourgeoisie has so far evidently been daunted by the prospect of an invasion of East Bengal, which would anger its imperialist

patrons and plunge the whole region into a turmoil which New Delhi fears it could not control. But whatever it does, the forces of the revolutionary Left are likely to grow in the field of struggle in Bangla Desh itself and this cannot but encourage revolutionary developments in the other half of Bengal. Indeed, even if the Awami League had succeeded in establishing what Indira Gandhi calls a 'secular and democratic state' in East Bengal, the weakness of the indigenous bourgeoisie and the virtual absence of a developed state apparatus would have posed the question of permanent revolution there with great rapidity. Whatever course the Indian ruling class adopts, it will confront serious perils to its own future.

At present, the most effective political force in West Bengal itself is undoubtedly the CPI(M), with its tens of thousands of militants and millions of supporters. The centrist limitations of this party were clearly revealed when it formed a coalition state government in the province, though it allows itself more revolutionary rhetoric now that it is in opposition. It argues that Indira Gandhi and Yahya Khan represent equally reactionary social and political forces. It still does not seek a decisive confrontation with the Indian state, however, and like the Indonesian Communist Party seems to imagine that its large size is a sure guarantee of its continued influence. It argues that just as East Bengal is specially exploited by West Pakistan, so West Bengal is specially exploited by the Indian Centre. The collapse on June 26 of the West Bengal Government and its replacement yet again by a Central governor only confirms this view. However, it refuses to draw what would appear to be the logical conclusion from this and develop a strategy for a United Socialist Bengal. To think in such terms would necessitate a break with parliamentarism and its record suggests that it will not be capable of making this. But it must be added that the Party continues to have within its ranks a mass of sincere and dedicated revolutionaries who feel they have no better alternative.

The Naxalite groups are split into several factions in West Bengal and there is a certain demoralization among them because of the lethally effective repression to which they have been subjected. The police force has quite consciously sought to kill as many Naxalites as it can and the CPI(M) made no move to protect them. On Bangla Desh the Naxalites are in disarray because of the Chinese statements, though undoubtedly a majority of them support armed struggle against Yahya Khan. At a mass public meeting in Shantipur near the border in April 1971, the Naxalites associated themselves with the speech of a leading Trotskyist militant who declared that 'the best way to help Bangla Desh was to extend the struggle against the Indian bourgeoisie'. It is safe to surmise that the idea of a United Socialist Bengal will be increasingly discussed among the revolutionary vanguard, while the governments of Indira Gandhi and Yahya Khan seek to suppress the revolutionary left on both sides of the border, and join in striking harmony to assist in the repression of the revolutionary movement in Ceylon.

Whatever form it took, a Red Bengal would sound the death-knell of imperialist domination over the Indian sub-continent and that is why the Indo-Pak ruling classes will wage a bitter struggle to prevent any possibility of it.²² Bengal, historically in the vanguard of the anti British imperialist struggle, the area which gave birth to the Indian revolutionary movement, may once again play a pilot role. The first shots have already been fired in a struggle to liberate a small portion of the peninsula. Whether those who fired them realize it or not, these shots may herald the beginning of a long process which would decisively change the map of the world—the subcontinental revolution.

Notes

1. In September last year, we wrote: 'The national question, coupled with the combined and uneven development of political consciousness in the two parts of the country, could well lead to a situation where the revolution is successful in Bengal before it moves to the West. In this situation, revolutionary socialists will be faced with the possibility of protracted struggles in the East and the need to combat chauvinism in the west.' T. Ali, 'Class Struggles in Pakistan', NLR 63, p. 52.
2. See T. Ali, *Pakistan. Military Rule or People's Power?*, London, 1970, pp. 66-67. 28
3. Thus one of the Awami League's most sophisticated spokesmen, Rehman Sobhan, writing in his journal, *Forum* (6. 12. 1969) could argue that if Suhrawardy had remained alive his 'vision of national politics' would still have existed. The article is a good example of the League's preoccupation with constitutionalist politics.
 'Pakistan: After the December Election, what next?', *The Red Mole*, January 1st, 1971, p. 10.
 Even in the army cantonments the tension was felt very deeply. For instance, when the Awami League decided on 'non-co-operation' all the Bengali cooks, servants and laundrymen left the cantonments; in the food-markets the vendors refused to sell soldiers any food and Bengali cars visiting cantonments had their numbers published in 'The People' newspaper. At one stage the situation became so desperate that special nourishment for the officers had to be flown out from West Pakistan.
6. In an interview with an AFP correspondent, Rehman was revealingly frank: 'Is the West Pakistan government not aware that I am the only one able to save East Pakistan from communism? If they take the decision to fight I shall be pushed out of power and the Naxalites will intervene in my name. If I make too many concessions, I shall lose my authority. I am in a very difficult situation.' *Le Monde*, March 31st, 1971.
7. Owing to a hijacking incident earlier in the year in which an Indian plane had been taken to Lahore by Kashmiri rebels and blown up,

the Indian government had banned all Pakistani over-flights. The Bandaranaike regime, however, was only too willing to offer re-fuelling facilities at Colombo airport.

8. Ranajit Roy, *Hindustan Standard*, May 20th, 1971.
9. See *Pakistan: Military Rule or People's Power?*, pp. 133–144, for documentation and discussion of the effects of Chinese policy on the Pakistani Left.
10. This organization should not be confused with the reformist pro-Moscow party of the same name, led by Professor Mozaffar Ahmed, which has, as usual, been tail ending the Awami League.
11. In fact, many of the leftist groups felt that if the Awami League had come to power, they would have to had to confront immediate persecution anyway.
12. The North-East of the province, in the region of Sylhet and Mymensingh, was the epicentre of the great *Tebhaga* peasant rising for rent reductions in 1945–47, the most militant social revolt of the rural poor in the subcontinent to that date. Its tradition will certainly not have disappeared. For a good discussion of the *Tebhaga* rebellions, see Hamza Alavi's essay 'Peasants and Revolution' in *The Socialist Register* 1965, pp. 265–268.
13. The full text of Chou En Lai's letter, printed elsewhere here, was published as the lead story on the front page of the government newspaper *Pakistan Times* on April 13th, 1971. For other Chinese statements on Pakistan, see *Peking Review*, April 9th and 15th, 1971. A Maoist sympathizer, Dilip Hiro, recently suggested in *New Society* that the Chinese might have backed Yahya for 'long-term motives', namely to enable him to smash the Awami League and pave the way for the left in Bengal. The implication is that the murder of half a million people was simply part of this elaborate plan. With the same logic, it could be argued that the Chinese loans and weapons dispatched to Yahya are in reality a way of sending arms to the resistance, since this is doubtless where some of them will end up. In their refusal to face facts, many Maoist comrades who support the struggle in Bangla Desh are prepared to cling to straws in order to explain away the Chinese position. They should be cautious, since such fantasmagoria will only lead to greater demoralizations in the future.

14. For documentation of the Pakistani military role in Muscat and Oman, see Fred Halliday's reportage in the *Black Dwarf*, April 6th, 1970.
15. See *The Financial Times*, May 14th and June 17th, 1971.
16. *The New York Times*, April 27th, 1971.
17. *The Daily Telegraph*, April 28th, 1971. The credibility of this information cannot be discounted merely because it was printed in the bourgeois press. In fact, it is clear that it was supplied to reporters by sources within the Pakistan government itself, and has an official character. It reveals nothing that Peking has not declared to be Chinese state policy anyway.
18. Lord Curzon's Memorandum on Army Commissions for Indians stated in 1900 that indigenous officers: 'should be confined to the small class of nobility or gentry... (and) should rest upon aristocracy of birth.' Such an officer corps would serve: 'to gratify legitimate ambitions, and to attach the higher ranks of Indian society, and more especially the old aristocratic families, to the British Government by closer and more cordial ties.' See *Select Documents on the History of India and Pakistan*, Vol IV, pp. 518-520, ed. C. H. Phillips, London, 1962.
19. See the account in Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina*, pp. 129-134, London 1962.
20. The similarity to the sinister generals' clique in Indonesia is striking. But Yahya by no means possesses the authority of Suharto.
21. In his very valuable essay 'Bangla Desh and the Crisis of Pakistan', *Socialist Register* 1971 (forthcoming), Hamza Alav stresses this autonomy of the Army between the local landlord and bourgeois classes and the imperialist powers. This emphasis is essentially correct, but there are two weaknesses in the way he argues the case. Firstly, he presents the Pakistani State as a typical example of a state machine in a 'post-colonial' society. Yet as we have argued above, the peculiar history of the establishment of Pakistan lends it certain quite specific features. Our own account of this specificity has been necessarily brief and the subject can do with further discussion. But unless a real attempt is made to grasp the special features of the military and civilian apparatus in Pakistan, no properly scientific account can be given

of the reasons for the Army's action on March 25th, and resort has to be made to impressionistic speculations about the psychology of Army 'hawks', a dubious category of political analysis. Secondly, it should be pointed out that the notion that the State or political level has a certain 'relative autonomy' is not a novel one, as Alavi appears to believe. The writings of both Lenin and Trotsky made it clear long ago that such a relative autonomy is a general law of all capitalist social formations, not just underdeveloped ones. For a recent statement on this question, consider the following: 'When Marx designated Bonapartism as the "religion of the bourgeoisie", in other words as characteristic of all forms of the capitalist State, he showed that this State can only truly serve the ruling class in so far as it is relatively autonomous from the diverse fractions of this class, precisely in order to organize the hegemony of the whole of this class.' (Nicos Poulantzas, 'The Problem of the Capitalist State', *New Left Review* 58, p. 74.) Marxists have further maintained that the ruling classes of the backward capitalist countries are, if anything, even more inclined to this particular 'religion of the bourgeoisie'. As we put it above, the Army or Civil Service may be relatively independent of the Pakistani landlord and business classes, but the Pakistani ruling classes are highly dependent on them. Indeed the very specificity of Pakistan throws this whole question into still sharper relief. The Pakistani ruling class has attempted to go one step further than the French bourgeoisie in the time of Louis Bonaparte: not only does it make the State its religion, but it has sought to make religion into the organizing principle of its State. That it may now in certain respects have become the victim of the irrationality it sought to exploit only confirms the essential teachings of Marxist class analysis.

22. The prospect of a Red Bengal is viewed with lively alarm by imperialism as may be inferred from the following editorial which appeared in the *New York Times*, entitled 'Bengal is the Spark'. The occasion for it was apparently some reflections of mine reported from Calcutta: 'Mr Ali's radical vision of chaos on the Indian sub continent cannot be taken lightly ... A prolonged guerrilla conflict in East Pakistan would have profound repercussions in the neighboring violence-prone Indian state of

West Bengal, already shaken by the influx of more than three million refugees from the Pakistani Army's campaign of terror. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi is under mounting pressure to intervene to try to check this threat to India's own internal peace and integrity. It is obviously in no one's interest to allow the Bengali 'spark' to explode into a major international conflict, one which might speedily involve the major powers. Nor is it wise to permit the situation in East Pakistan to continue to fester, inviting the gradual political disintegration of the entire sub-continent. To deprive Tariq Ali and his like of their "big opportunity" it is essential that Pakistan's President Yahya Khan come to terms speedily with the more moderate Sheik Mujibur Rehman and his Awami League, which won an overwhelming popular mandate in last December's national and state elections. Such an accommodation with East Pakistan's elected representatives should be a pre-requisite for the resumption of US aid, except for relief assistance, to Pakistan.' *New York Times*, June 2nd, 1971.