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Pakistan:

AWP founded: Will it sustain itself?

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The merger of three left wing parties – Awami Party, Labour Party Pakistan, and Workers Party Pakistan – has generated a lot of discussion among the political intelligentsia and activists. While it has been hailed as a trend setting exercise by many in and outside Pakistan, there are quite a few asking the question: will it sustain itself? The merger undoubtedly has lifted many aspirations of those wanting a just and equitable society. It has been welcomed all over despite a few relating sarcastically and instinctively with some of the failed attempts of the Left to forge unity among organizations over the past 30 years.

Four articles within a week of merger were printed in the editorial pages of commercial media including Dawn, Pakistan Today and Daily Times, written by well respected writers like I. A. Rehman and Professor Aziz-ud-din Ahmad, welcoming the merger on the theme of the “Left reborn”. Several Urdu papers also followed the English papers to welcome the most intelligent move by the Left in decades to expand its social basis in a society dominated by political Islam.

The arguments put forward by some questioning the sustainability of this merger are based mainly on lack of information within the left of Pakistan and are short of understanding the objective and subjective realities under which this bold initiative was taken. Let us look some of the starting points for this merger.

The merger was simply a local act. It was not taken because someone from outside had done this. It was not a mechanical imitation but a dialectical response to some of the successful recent experiences on the Left internationally. Many on the Left in Pakistan were inspired by the success of SYRISA of Greece (The Coalition of the Radical Left –a United Social Front). It won nearly 27 percent popular votes in the general elections in Greece and became the second largest and main opposition party. It brought together several different socialist and political trends to form the party in 2004. Within 8 years, it became the talk of the whole world. However, the merger in Pakistan is not a carbon copy of SYRISA. It has its unique features.

The beginning of merger process was purely a product of the young revolutionaries within the three parties who finally decided to unite in one single platform. The desire of the young revolutionaries for a bold and creative action for the uplift of the Left forces had all the foundations of a success story. It was not a hasty impatience of some “young petty bourgeoisie youth” to build a party overnight as described by some sceptical analysts. It was a painstaking long overdue strategy put into reality.

The merger would sustain and help to develop a radical left party in a short space of time. The main reason is the ideological basis for this process. It is done at a time when the very existence of the Left was in question because of the continuous growth of religious fanaticisms in all spheres of life. The insecurity among the left activists has been halted by this merger process.

The ideological differences in the history of the Left were long overtaken by the extraordinary events of the past 25 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union and euphoria among the capitalist class led them to go for an all out war against the working class in the shape of the brutal implementation of the neoliberal agenda. The result was, as expected, the growth of poverty at an unprecedented level and the gap among poor and rich widened to an historical high point. The international capitalist crisis worsened this situation even further.

However, Pakistan was a special case. Here, the growth of abhorrence against the “system” was not translated in the progress of progressive forces. On the contrary, the extreme right wing forces with their anti-imperialist demagoguery

were the main beneficiaries. They were better prepared with over 80,000 Madrassas and a whole range of social work they were involved in coloring with religious sentiments.

The Left was left out by political commentators as mere spectators from outside the mainstream political arena. However, the slow and patient work of some Left groups and parties in building social and labour movements paved the way for the present merger. One of the main aims of this merger strategy was to strengthen the labour and peasant movement that they were able to build in parts of the country over the years. The movements were in some confusion about the three parties pursuing similar ideology and tactics with three different names. The merger has eased their lives.

One of the main beneficiaries of this merger will be the National Students Federation, a traditional left organization which saw splits among its ranks whenever the Left split for any reason. That was the main consideration among the leadership of the three parties who left their year's long hard work building their parties to adopt a new name. It was the NSF leadership that initiated the merger process and it is the youth who are in the forefront of joining the new party.

The merger will survive because it has more positives and no negatives. The cementing phenomenon is the ideology of Socialism that all three parties have agreed upon. They agree that the commanding heights of economy be nationalized [under democratic workers' control and management???] Nations [and national groups?] must have a right of self determination with a voluntary choice of succession. An end of debt with an audit of all the local and foreign loans is the high point agreed to tackle the worsening economic crisis. At least 10 percent of the national budget spent on education and five percent on health with drastic cuts in military spending will ease the life of millions once put in practice.

With a radical programme, committed and experienced self sacrificing leadership and whole hearted support of all the members of the three parties have put the merger formula on the road of guaranteed success.

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