

The Socialist Imperative: Left Politics in Contemporary Pakistan

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Words: 6,065

Abstract

The anti-globalization movement, the beginnings of which can be traced to the late 1990s, has been justifiably credited with reinvigorating left politics worldwide after almost a decade of self-questioning in the wake of Soviet communism. For many anti-globalization movements were appealing because they broke from the class-centric party-state model of the twentieth century left, addressing other critical issues, such as ecology and indigeneity.

The most recent manifestation of the anti-globalization movement – which has passed through many phases – has been the Occupy mobilizations. Yet I contend that its crowning glory has been in Latin America in the form of the governments initially of Hugo Chavez and Lula and then later Evo

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Morales and Rafael Correa. The Latin American examples confirm that the broadening of the scope of revolutionary politics to include the so-called “new social movements” has not only encouraged changes in the popular base and focus of organized left parties, but has actually enhanced the viability of the socialist transformative project.

In light of these global experiences, in this paper I highlight how left debates and politics have evolved in Pakistan over the past fifteen or so years. I focus on the struggles of working people on issues as diverse as land rights, ecology, privatization, gender and ethnic equality – struggles with which I have been personally involved – so as to demonstrate how a new generation of political activists have developed a consensus on the building of an inclusive socialist party alive to contemporary contradictions and willing to move beyond the shortcomings of the past.

Keywords: socialism, party, civil society, globalization

It has been almost a quarter of a century since the onset of events that culminated in the collapse of twentieth century state socialism. In many mainstream accounts, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its allied regimes in Eastern Europe was a logical conclusion of the undemocratic essence of Bolshevism. According to this narrative, the Leninist state-party model was incompatible with democratic aspirations of people living under socialism.¹

In the wake of the Cold War, “civil society” erupted into the academic, journalistic and political mainstreams. Nebulous by definition, civil society was eulogized as the polar opposite of bureaucratic authoritarianism and was imagined to represent a new frontier of democratization featuring self-correcting market mechanisms and immutable individual liberties. Conspicuous in this idealized world was the steadily decreasing influence of the state, alongside “traditional” vehicles that negotiated power such as political parties (Chandhoke 2007).

This discourse was both cause and consequence of an emergent neo-liberal political economy in the post-USSR world. It was under the guise of support to civil society that western governments covertly interfered in the politics of many ex-Soviet republics to foment the famed “colored revolutions” (Sussman & Krader 2008).

A by-product of the growing dominance of neo-liberal discourses was the relegation to virtual anonymity of a rich tradition of theorizing about state, civil society and other seminal concepts of western political philosophy which could be traced back to the early modern period. Most notably, the entire Marxian philosophical tradition, starting with Marx himself, took as its starting point Hegel’s classical schema of state and civil society. Yet seminal Marxist – and other – debates on civil society were conspicuous by their absence during post-communist transitions, and more generally during this period.²

In this paper I do not attempt to take up the formidable theoretical task of critiquing mainstream narratives on “civil society” or, for that matter, offer an appraisal of the experiences with twentieth century socialism. I mention these global debates only to provide the broader context for what I seek to address in this paper: the leftist movement in Pakistan and how it has evolved over the past two decades in the wake of the dramatic ideological, political and generational shifts that have followed the end of the cold war.

Indeed, quite aside from mainstream narratives about the state, civil society and social change more generally, over the past two decades a plethora of debates and practical experiments have emanated *from within left circles* around the world that demand interrogation. For instance there is now a greater awareness of and interest in the ecological question, even if more work remains to be done to understand the intersection of the natural environment and structures of power. As I will indicate presently, ecology – alongwith other historically underspecified questions – is slowly being integrated with classical questions of class and state.

Ecology, indigeneity, and many other such concerns have all found a place within the so-called “anti-globalisation” movement, which has arguably provided the springboard for a series of diverse experiments with governmental power in Latin America that have been cautiously described as the harbingers of “socialism for the twenty-first century”.³ Below I critically appraise this movement, its sociological roots, and its ongoing evolution.

While I begin with a foray into developments that have framed the analyses and politics of the global left in the period under consideration, I go onto highlight Pakistani developments. The narrative details the evolution of left praxis in recent times, which has culminated in the formation of a historically distinct political party by a broad cross-section of left radicals in Pakistan (with which I am directly affiliated).

The “new social movements”

It is often argued that the trends that have become visible amongst many strands of the left in the post-cold war period are rooted historically in the movements of 1968. More specifically, political subjectivities other than those of class – most notably gender, race/ethnicity and sexuality – have risen to the forefront of both the discourse and practice of left radicals. Additionally, the ecological imperative has transformed what was previously only a “red” movement into a red-green one.

In short, the imperative of proletarian internationalism which underlay the “traditional” left through the 1970s was confronted with the claims of a set of variegated social actors which, while united in their opposition to the structural violence of patriarchy, state and capital, did not necessarily share a universalist vision of state socialism. More generally, postmodern ideas came to be inflected within the discourse of the radical left, in some measure or the other (Aronowitz 1987). Perhaps most famously, Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau (1985) employed an allegedly Gramscian method arguing for a post-Marxist theorization of politics, and rejected the ideal of proletarian dictatorship in favour of a more fragmented “radical democracy” in which the working class is one amongst many agents of substantive social change.

This shift in the terms of the debate within the left took place largely within Western countries, and not only on account of the legitimacy crisis of the major communist parties in the post-1968 epoch. These emergent political discourses and practices were also a reflection of changing patterns of capital accumulation and the steadily declining power of organized labour, which had been the lightning rod of left politics in Europe for more than a century since the middle of the nineteenth century onwards (Harvey 1989).

In much of the “third world” – as it was popularly known in the 1960s and 1970s – priorities were perceived differently; the struggle against imperialism was typically viewed as the principal

contradiction and the left agenda was framed accordingly. In most Asian and African countries, as well as post-1959 Latin America, “vanguardism”– the notion that a small and committed group of professional revolutionaries could foment radical social change – remained a cherished ideal, regardless of whether formal communist parties or highly disciplined guerilla forces were the designated agents of revolution.⁴ At an ideological level leftists remained committed to the fundamental tenets of Leninism, and in particular the imperative of building an alliance of the proletariat of the imperialist countries and the national liberation movement in the (neo) colonies.

This is not to suggest that dissenting views did not emerge from within progressive circles in non-western contexts. Most notably, the Subaltern Studies collective launched in India during the early 1980s not only challenged left orthodoxy in that country but also affected left discourse – and to a lesser extent, practice – in many other post-colonial countries. By the early 1990s “new social movements” akin to those in the western countries had also emerged in India as well as parts of Latin America and East Asia.⁵ Hence the intellectual and political climate remained different across “First” and “Third” worlds. Indeed there was, and is, significant variation even within post-colonial countries regarding both the evolving discourse and practice of left politics, particularly when one considers the experiences of progressives in government.

For instance, the Communist Party of India – Marxist (CPI-M) enjoyed an uninterrupted stint in power for almost three decades in West Bengal; as a “traditional” left force, the CPI-M enjoyed great popular support for much of this time, relying in particular on the support of a mobilized poor peasantry that was rewarded for its support to the party with grants of land and access to other economic, political and cultural resources. However, since the turn of the century, the CPI-M’s overt shift towards neo-liberal policies produced a severe backlash that precipitated an end to its long stint in power. Perhaps more significantly, the CPI-M government started to use force against peasants to

facilitate the land grabs of multinational companies; the most infamous case being the Nandigram massacre in 2007. In this sense the “traditional” left became completely alienated from popular resistance to neo-liberalism.

In a completely different “Third” world context, a very non-traditional left has been elected to government in a number of Latin American countries – intriguingly in the same period that the Indian left has been deposed from government. The “new” Latin American left is very much associated with resistance to neo-liberalism having risen to prominence on the back of popular mobilizations that are all broadly part of the “anti-globalization” movement, including identity-based ones. In particular, individuals like Chavez and Morales have been symbols of a politics of “indigeneity” inasmuch as they have consciously attempted to overturn the historic neglect of indigenous populations in the political mainstream, *as well as by the traditional left*.

It can be argued that the first “indigenous” movement of its kind – at least in the current era – was that of the Zapatistas which came to prominence in the early 1990s in Mexico. One of the major forerunners of the “anti-globalisation” mobilizations, the Zapatistas also confirmed the importance of anarchist and autonomist ideas and practices with the larger rubric of left praxis. Which is to say that the ongoing reassertion of the global left owes as much to anarchists and autonomists as to any other strand of the left-wing. I mentioned earlier the Occupy mobilizations which also featured a significant anarchist component – its ideological and organizational influence on that movement cannot be understated.

Indeed, it would be remiss to ignore the role of anarchist trends in the longer history of the global left, including in the rise to power of the Bolshevik party in Russia (cf Avrich 1967). It could well be that recovering some of these histories actually debunks some of the myths surrounding the “classical” party-state model that has dominated thinking on the left for so long.

In any case, the experience of Pakistan approximates neither the Indian, Russian nor the (North or Latin) American case, which is to confirm that there can be no straight-jacketing of left politics in the “Third”, “Second” or “First” worlds. With this in mind, I will now turn to a synoptic history of the Pakistani left over the past three decades.

Still Underground

The most notable characteristic of the Pakistani left during the cold war was its “underground” methods. Pakistan’s status as a “frontline state” of western imperialism in the war against communism translated into a zero-tolerance state policy against leftists. The Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) was banned in 1954, and for the remainder of the cold war, the left operated mostly through popular fronts led by cultural and political allies (Toor 2011). Following the Sino-Soviet split in the early 1960s, a dualism emerged in the state’s attitude towards leftists, with pro-Chinese elements subject to considerably less censure than their pro-Soviet counterparts. This was a result of the state’s close ties with the People’s Republic of China, as a result of which Maoist groups in Pakistan also maintained direct relations with the Chinese authorities (Laghari 1979). Nevertheless, this did not translate into substantially greater political gains for the Maoists nor into radically different organizing methods and/or conceptualization of radical praxis. Indeed, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and communist regimes in East Europe pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese groups looked to each other for support: in 1995 the CPP (pro-Soviet) merged with the Mazdoor-Kissan Party (pro-Chinese) to form the Communist Mazdoor-Kissan Party (CMKP) in an effort to consolidate amidst extremely challenging conditions.

While this survival strategy was nominally successful in the years immediately following the Soviet collapse insofar as it permitted the remnants of the left to maintain some public presence, by the end

of the 1990s the left had become a political non-entity, unable to maintain meaningful bases of popular support and exert any influence on political and intellectual debates within wider Pakistani society.

Crucially, it was at this time that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) became prominent, part of the global “civil society” explosion to which I referred earlier (Akhtar 2007a). Through much of the 1990s and into the first decade of the new millennium, the “left” virtually disappeared from the public realm, both in discursive and practical terms; progressives coalesced around NGOs and civil society organizations. The classical language of the left (class, imperialism, state) was replaced by development-speak (marginalized groups, human rights, participation), as accompanied by a shift away from classical organizing methods and vehicles (trade unions, student organizations, peasant associations) towards so-called community-based organizations (CBOs) that prioritized development interventions and “awareness-raising”/advocacy campaigns.

The implications were far-reaching: the ideologically-motivated political worker operating on a largely volunteer basis became an anomaly as a growing number of progressives accepted paid work in the NGO sector. In a manner of speaking it can be said that Lenin’s professional revolutionary was replaced by the full-time development professional.

Moreover, there was no meaningful regeneration of left parties, intellectually and in their cadre base. Through the cold war, left parties had maintained a relatively organic character over successive generations by updating their analyses of state and society and also inducting youth through tried and tested methods of ideological training (often referred to as “study circles”).⁶ But from the early 1990s, there was stagnation on both accounts.

Celebrating the multitudes

With the eruption of the anti-globalization movement in Seattle in 1999, a third option emerged both beyond NGOs and existing left parties. If in the global North the participants of the new upsurge were mostly middle-class youth refuting the supposedly benign development agenda of the international financial institutions (IFIs), then it was in the global South that practical struggles against neo-liberalism were taking shape. A revitalized radical politics started to be constructed around the ideal of spontaneous “resistance movements”; land, water, forests and other natural resources that constituted livelihoods for working people in large parts of the world were to be defended from the barely disguised thuggery of multinational corporations and allied states engaging in a form of primitive accumulation that David Harvey has called “accumulation by dispossession” (2003).

The World Social Forum (WSF) became the symbolic gathering place of both the emergent livelihood-based struggles and a plethora of identity movements. Meanwhile the intellectual underpinnings of this upsurge started to be framed by various left scholars, the “multitude” emerging as the most talked about conceptualization of all (Hardt & Negri 2000, 2005).

Enough critical comment – post-mortems, even – has been generated about the WSF (Worth & Buckley 2009) and the “anti-globalisation movement” more generally; these do not concern us here. What I want to emphasize is that even while the discourse and practice of self-contained resistance movements appeared to capture the imagination of progressives in many parts of the world, the so-called “pink tide” – namely the left-oriented popular movements that were translating their influence into electoral votes had already started to make its presence felt in Latin American corridors of power. Indeed, the WSF’s staging in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 2001-3 owed a great deal to the fact that the Workers Party (PT) was in government in that part of the country (and was soon to

take over the seat of government throughout all of Brazil with Lula's presidential victory in 2002). Hugo Chavez had already been elected to the presidency of Venezuela in 1999.

Needless to say, there was, and remains today, an organic link between the popular movements and the new brand of leftist leaders in Latin American. The "traditional" Leninist parties, while not isolated from either the emergent popular struggles or the political organizations of Lula, Chavez, Morales, Correa and others, have remained relatively marginal actors in the period under consideration. While there is as yet nothing of similar magnitude in Pakistan – or, for that matter, most other African and Asian contexts – both left discourse and practice have also moved beyond the supposed impasse between organized party-based politics and popular struggles of resistance.

Resistance reconsidered

To be sure, the reconciliation between different segments of progressives – the progressive parties, civil society, the NGOs - in Pakistan is far from complete. Indeed, reconciliation might be the wrong term to capture the various developments within left circles that have taken place since the middle of the 2000s. There remains a large segment of progressives that would rather be associated with "civil society" than with a political organization of the left. Nevertheless, I will outline below the evolution in the thinking of a critical mass of leftists – new and old – in favour of a political organization of the left, albeit one quite different from the classical Leninist organization of the past century. Below I provide details about three "resistance" movements with which a younger generation of activists became involved from the late 1990s – myself included – so as to illustrate how the emergent consensus in left political thinking and practice has come to pass.

1) Struggles of urban squatters against eviction by state authorities: Known as *katchi abadis*, squatter settlements are a major constitutive fact of urbanity, and also of great significance to mainstream political parties and even military dictators on account of their significant voting potential. Despite this, squatters face constant threats of eviction, which they ward off through a combination of collective action and patronage.⁷

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, both during the tenure of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) and the coup-making generals that replaced the PML, government initiated country-wide eviction campaigns. Most notably, Pakistan Railways (PR) – under the ministership of a former Director-General of the Inter-Services Intelligence, Lieutenant General Javed Ashraf Qazi – launched an eviction campaign in late 1999/early 2000 to reclaim land from “encroachers” across the country. As a federal organization, PR controls thousands of acres of land in major cities. Targeting well-connected land grabbers was out of the question, so it was *katchi abadis* – occupied in many cases by Railways retirees and widows of former employees – that were targeted.

Other government departments, including the Capital Development Authority (CDA) in Islamabad, followed suit, albeit on a smaller scale. These campaigns were resisted by the coordinated efforts of *katchi abadi* dwellers and urban activists, which eventually culminated in the country-wide, All-Pakistan Alliance for Katchi Abadis. The Alliance was notably not a classic left political organization, and depicted itself explicitly as non-partisan. It sought to both resist and engage the state to address the immediate question of low-income housing for the urban poor, rather than act as a vehicle for an explicit political project.

While left activists played a significant role in this movement, workers of mainstream parties such as the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), as well as individuals with little experience of political activism were also part of the mobilization effort. Of particular note was the involvement of “civil society”

activists keen to affect the policymaking process by conceptualizing and propagating models of low-income housing. Over the longer-run, however, the interest of ‘civil society’ elements waned.

2) Tenant farmers in the central Punjab region of the country resisting eviction by the state: Between 2000 to 2004 a prominent struggle took place at the Okara military farm, an estate of almost 17,000 acres controlled by the Pakistan army. Tenant farmers were threatened with eviction from lands that they had tilled for almost a century, and proceeded to resist this attempt through a platform called Anjuman Mazarain Punjab (AMP) – literally Association of Tenant Farmers Punjab (Akhtar 2006a). Here again the principal protagonists were tenant farmers themselves alongside a limited number of urban activists. While the movement did feature some of the left’s traditional political slogans including “land to the tiller”, it was not directly linked to a party organization and did not extend its struggle against eviction to a broader political project against the state (or, for that matter, capitalist social relations).

Again in this case left activists were amongst the more prominent moving forces of the movement, yet a majority of ‘traditional’ leftists actually maintained a distance from the movement, and on more than one occasion disapproved of it on account of it not conforming to the “ideal-type” peasant struggle. This movement gained considerable mention in the mainstream media which also drew “observers” into its fold, including foreign journalists, research students and even foreign donors keen to promote “human rights” agendas.

3) Struggle of rural collectives against mega-water projects: The regime of General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008) initiated a number of development projects to harness water resources in the southern and western regions of Punjab province (home to the Siraiiki ethno-linguistic group). Partly funded by IFIs, these mega-projects threatened immense social and environmental damage. Accordingly, localized resistance emerged, again supported by a diverse set of outsiders.⁸ In this case too there

was an obvious disjunct between the nature and discourse of the movement and the practices and ideology of the “traditional” left.

Activists formerly associated with the “traditional” left were nevertheless a moving force in the movement; many of them had abandoned left parties on account of the latter’s inattentiveness to issues of ecology, and the ethnic-national question in Pakistani politics.

This cursory look at a handful of struggle confirms that progressive activism in the past 10-15 years has employed means, methods and ideas somewhat distinct from those of the established left parties.⁹ For instance, ecological concerns which did not feature in left programs during the previous era became central to the resistance efforts, particularly in the sense that the movements emphasized the close link between sustainable use of natural resources and working people’s livelihoods and as an end in and of itself. Women were also mobilized, traditionally underrepresented in the cold war period.

Tellingly, during this time, most of the established leftist parties were either unwilling or unable to link up with many (relatively) spontaneous struggles, in large part because the former did not correspond to the classical forms of politics – particularly the organized trade union movement – with which most of the “old guard” is familiar.¹⁰

By the same token, these “new” movements have rarely extended beyond (successful or failed) attempts to resist “accumulation by dispossession”. That is to say that struggles have not been politicized beyond a particular point, and in any case, have not been able to transform state and/or corporate policy more generally. The only exception is the case of ethno-national movements such

as that Baloch liberation struggle which have longer histories and explicitly depict themselves as being anti-systemic (Akhtar 2007b).

Recognition of the limitations of “resistance” has precipitated critical exchanges amongst a new generation of activists about the extent to which the political party is still a necessary vehicle for the furthering of radical ideas and politics in Pakistani society. For those exposed to practical movements of resistance, the initial phase in which resistance is fetishized – alongside a disinclination towards formal political organizations – appears to be followed by a questioning of the meaning of resistance.

For instance, in the case of urban squatters and their movements of resistance, even when eviction operations by governmental authorities are successful warded away, the threat is never entirely eliminated. With each successive eviction drive, it becomes apparent to those organizing opposition that “resistance”, while potentially empowering in the immediate instance, does not necessarily alter the conditions within which working people are living.

It could plausibly be argued, as is implied in the broader set of arguments made by Partha Chatterjee (2004, 2011) with regards to “political society”, that the very fact that urban squatters continue to reside “illegally” on public land, and steadily acquire governmental welfare, represents a measure of success. In the case of the activists with which I am associated, another set of experiences has also come into play, namely the fact that the very “communities” whose resistance is fetishized in the initial phase of political engagement are actually quite instrumental in their evaluation of “friend” and “foe”.

As Chatterjee confirms, urban squatters routinely support political parties of the status quo during electoral contests in exchange for what is effectively recognition of their right to exist (even though there can be no formal award of legal title to the land being occupied). In the absence of a

substantive anti-systemic politics, it is these fleeting political engagements that offer some respite from the throes of a ruthless system. Such a “politics of the governed” is, therefore, both feasible and logical.

The fact that urban squatters – among others – regularly seek out patrons in mainstream parties, often in exchange for votes, even while left radicals have engaged more meaningfully with squatters’ efforts to resist eviction, has understandably raised questions about the efficacy and transformative impact of the “resistance” movements that I have discussed. If the critique of the “traditional left” from within radical circles was that the party-state model does not hold out the promise of true liberation for all, then what to speak of “resistance” that actually co-exists alongside willful support to status quo politicians? It has been such experiences that have confirmed for left activists the need to build a coherent political identity that can symbolize a transformative politics beyond reactive struggles. Where some on the left argued not so long ago that formal organizational structures were impediments to a truly transformative politics, the challenges posed by mainstream populism and the realities of a patronage-based political order have confirmed that the absence of left organizational structures is perhaps an ever bigger impediment.

The Need for a Party

In the aftermath of the Occupy movements that represent the most recent manifestation of spontaneous resistance to globalized capitalism, there remain many unanswered questions about the future of the left at a time when it could plausibly be argued that the hegemony of capital is seriously vulnerable. It seems to me that many of these questions are at least partially outstanding because there still remains a somewhat inexplicable aversion to a party-based politics.

The Pakistani experience confirms that this impasse can be dealt with, assuming that a critical mass of leftists move beyond polemical caricatures. In November 2012, three existing left political parties – Labour Party Pakistan, Awami Party Pakistan and Workers Party Pakistan – came together to form the Awami Workers Party which was a novelty for two reasons. First, the parties in the merger had historical links to all sects of the twentieth century left, namely pro-Soviet, pro-Chinese and Trotskyist tendencies. In other words, left factions that previously would never have countenanced alliance with one another willingly abandoned their previous incarnations and took on a new identity. Second, a significant number of young left activists with no previous membership within a left party joined the new formation. A majority of these had previously been involved in the various ecological “resistance” initiatives discussed earlier.

Partly because of the influx of a young cadre of activists, generational tensions are evident within the new party. It is natural for the more contemporary experiments of “resistance” with which younger activists are familiar to be held up against the successes and failures of left political organizations of the cold war, on both sides of this divide. The “old guard” remains largely convinced that the only way to take the left movement forward is to mimic all of the methods and organizational models of the past, whereas the youthful contingent remains suspicious of “organisational discipline” and the classical Marxist ideology, presumably because both inhibit the spirit of spontaneity with which genuine movements of liberation should be infused.

In fact, the building of a political vehicle for left ideas and practice is both a continuity of and change from the experiences of the twentieth century left. This vehicle must be an organic one that adequately represents the variegated political subjectivities that have come to the fore in the “post-modern” era, while at the same time continuing to emphasize the fundamental tenets of class struggle. Organizational methods must also move beyond the “underground culture” of the

twentieth century whereas the relative underrepresentation of crucial constituencies such as women has to be confronted head-on.

A party of the left is imperative to distinguish radical, anti-systemic political praxis from the increasingly haggard “civil society” constituencies that directly or indirectly reinforce neo-liberalism, and even imperialist war, thereby undermining the revolutionary political imaginary. In the “age of terror”, Pakistani liberals who often take on the identity of “civil society” have been prone to supporting anti-democratic rulers and even imperialist powers under the pretext that these forces offer the best possible means of checking the threat of the religious right (Saigol 2014). Needless to say, the left’s analysis of the complex contradictions of state, imperialism and the religious right preclude a simplistic siding with one of the three in the interest of eliminating another. To be sure, the challenge of confronting the millenarian right is a significant one, especially given that the latter has coopted the classical language of the left by depicting itself as the vanguard of “anti-imperialism”. Yet, by avoiding alarmism, and thinking deeply about the sociological roots of right-wing politics – and particularly that religio-political movements instrumentalize social fault lines such as class and gender – the left can recognize its own weakness and the potentialities for new popular mobilization to displace the right-wing (Akhtar 2010a).

The slowly developing consensus in Pakistan about the need to bring left radicals together to improve upon the experiments with twentieth century socialism under the considerably changed conditions of the twenty-first century is not without its detractors. Left sectarianism, not to mention liberal criticism, continues to be a constant drain on the left’s resources. Much also remains to be done with regards to updating analyses of state and society without which well-directed strategies will remain conspicuous by their absence. For instance, the “traditional” left’s superficial treatment of, and political engagement with, questions of caste, ethnic-nationalism and gender have to be

redressed. In this regard there is much to learn from the ongoing experiences of popular movements in Latin America.

Yet the latest experiments with revolutionary politics in Pakistan have their own organic dialectic which will propel the struggle forward.. Whether this dialectic is adequately comprehended, and the extent to which left politics can be made relevant to a wide cross-section of popular forces will determine the future of initiatives such as the AWP and wider progressive movement more generally.

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¹ There are of course numerous critiques of “actually existing socialism” from within the Marxist tradition itself. Most notably, Trotsky and his followers argued that the essence of Bolshevism – an otherwise profoundly democratic political movement – was distorted by bureaucratization initiated under Stalin. The most well-known Trotskyite treatise on post-Lenin USSR suggested that the revolution morphed into a variant of “state capitalism” (Cliff 1955).

² For a good recent compilation of articles that builds on these classical beginnings and seeks to separate academic traditions from contemporary “civil society” fashions, see Kaviraj and Khilnani (2001).

³ See Akhtar (2012) on the prospects of a parallel political project in Pakistan.

⁴ So, for instance, following the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959, the “foco” theory was popularized, according to which a small guerilla vanguard could focus the energies of the masses against a reactionary regime (Debray 1968).

⁵ The extent to which such movements were linked to donor funding is a separate matter which cannot be detailed here due to constraints of space and focus.

⁶ Parties included broad based alliances of ethno-nationalists and leftists such as the National Awami Party (NAP) as well as more explicitly left parties such as the Mazdoor Kissan Party. Of course, many communist factions also operated “underground”, one of the consequences of which is that it is difficult, even today, to ascertain exactly how influential these parties were, even in terms of number of members. Different parties were active in different parts of the country, although it would be fair to assert that the left found it hardest to establish a base and public face in Punjab, where state propaganda and cooption is most intense

⁷ For instance, faced with various forms of state excess, *katchi abadi* dwellers may approach a particular state functionary or elected member and offer under-the-table payments or a gift in-kind in exchange for relief from the difficult situation they face.

⁸ Among the names that the resistance movement took on at various points were *Lok Sath* (People's Assembly) and *Sindhu Bachao Tarla* (Save the Indus Movement).

⁹ It would not be out of place to mention here the so-called "Lawyer's Movement" that erupted in March 2007 against the dictatorship headed by General Pervez Musharraf. Constraints of space do not permit a detailed exposition of this movement but suffice it to say that it politicised a not insignificant number of young people who subsequently attached themselves to progressive struggles. For a description of this movement and the wider political environment in 2007-10, see Akhtar (2010b).

¹⁰ Even when such movements erupted, left parties were slow to link up with them, which indicated that they had become relatively alienated even from their classical proletarian constituencies. For details on the biggest trade union movement of recent years, see Akhtar (2005).