The Awami Workers Party held its first two-day congress on 27 and 28 September in Islamabad. It was preceded by a rally of slum dwellers, co-organised with the AWP branch in the city.

The main slogan of the congress banner was, ?Struggle, Solidarity and Socialism?. By mentioning the goal of ?socialism?, instead of the more frequently used terms like ?peace? or ?victory?, the AWP leadership aimed to present the party as more left wing in order to appeal both to militants outside its ranks and criticisms from within them.

The three hundred delegates at the congress represented some 5,700 members in four provinces and in Gilgit Baltistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, FATA. Of these, 3,100 were in Khyber Putun Kwa, KPK, which is heavily affected by the ?war on terror? so that much of membership is passive, representing an electoral base for AWP, rather than an active interventionist organisation.

In Punjab, membership numbers 1,200 and in Sariki Wasiab, which is officially part of Punjab but where AWP has an independent chapter, there are 415 members. The party has a very active membership of 520 in Sindh, where they have significant influence among the workers. The dominance of nationalist sentiment in Balochistan is reflected in a membership of just 35. Gilgit Baltistan has 415 members, most of whom are members of the Progressive Youth Front, and the remaining members are in FATA and Kashmir.

Compared to the ?provisional? congress two years ago, membership has sharply declined. Whilst the figure given at that time, 15,000 was probably grossly overstated and no proper membership criteria like regular payment of subs had been established then, it is nonetheless clear that during its first two years the AWP has shrunk.

The congress was composed of 300 delegates, most of whom came from the three, originally constituting parties; the former ?Awami Party?, the ?Workers' Party? and the Labour Party. This is further testimony to the fact that the party has not (yet?) made inroads into the broader ranks of the Pakistan workers? movement, the youth or the oppressed.

Amongst the delegates, about 40 percent were 50 or older, 30 percent between 36 and 49 and the remaining 30 percent were younger than 35. It also has to be recognised that there were very few women.

There was one delegate from the Left Party in Afghanistan and greetings were received from different left wing groups, parties and trade unions internationally. As well as many observers from different left wing parties, there were some from NGOs and liberals. Some of them spoke at the congress and expressed their greetings.
Congress opened

The congress opened with the singing of the "Internationale" by a group of young comrades and was chaired jointly by Abid Hasan Minto, Fanoos Gujjar and Farooq Tariq. In his introductory speech, Abid Hasan Minto, the president of the party, emphasised the importance of the unity of the three parties that merged to form the AWP. He said that holding its first congress, after many problems and hurdles, was a big step forward and he also highlighted the need for a different kind of mass party of the Left, which would participate in electoral politics as a way of seeking change.

However, as the further proceedings showed, the party leadership (or the leaders from the three constituting parties) were eager to avoid any open, democratic debate on the issues facing the working class and the youth or on the tasks of the party itself.

The session dealing with the AWP manifesto began with Akhtar Hussain reading out the document. This took over an hour and a half and was seen by many delegates as a tactical move to avoid any debate and discussion. After this lengthy reading, the delegates were asked for any suggestions that would be referred to the federal committee that was not yet elected.

Many delegates were unhappy, to say the least, with this procedure and the way the leadership conducted the congress. Many delegates said it was not a congress, but a rally and they were disappointed. The constitution session was conducted in the same manner, with no debate or discussion.

Reformist manifesto

This was even more problematic, since the lengthy manifesto presented by the leadership is clearly a reformist document. Whilst it refers to socialism as the goal, it is a collection of minimum demands, which are not linked to this proclaimed goal of the party. Moreover, the programme, whilst it refers to the need for revolution, internationalism and anti-imperialism, does not spell out what this means with regard to the Pakistan state. There is no mention at all of the need for the working class, in alliance with the peasantry and the poor, to take power, to establish its own rule based on workers' councils. Moreover, the programme, like the party as whole, is not revolutionary in any sense on the key questions of the class struggle in Pakistan today.

On key economic issues, it rather puts forward a clearly reformist strategy, proposing to use private capital to develop the economy. On page 31, the manifesto states: for industrial development we allow private capital specially in the under-developed parts of the country.

In the same section, it does not call for the expropriation of large scale capital (be that Pakistani or foreign owned) and indulges in the utopian perspective that the profits of the multi nationals will serve the nation and provide benefits for the people.

On the military offensive of the Pakistani army in Waziristan, the manifesto does not take a clear position. This is no surprise since the majority of the AWP leadership actually supports this war. Likewise, the document does not clearly support the right of self-determination of the oppressed nations in the country, such as the Baloch people. Neither does it clearly oppose the government in its attacks on the street protests in Islamabad headed by the PTI and PAT. On the contrary, it tends to side with the government!

We have criticised these points in previous articles (http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/political-turmoil-pakistan-and... [1] and http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/pakistan-left-and-"war-terror")

Sections of the AWP leadership also sided with the bureaucratic former leaders of the Labour Quami
Movement, a 45,000 strong rank and file union of power loom workers, and tried to manoeuvre against the new, more militant, leadership. Not surprisingly, this has severely harmed relations with one of the most militant trade unions in Pakistan.

The whole ?debate? around the manifesto, as around all other issues and the election of the leadership, was organised in a way that ensured no debate could develop. After an over-lengthy introduction, the delegates could only raise ?suggestions?. No vote was taken on any amendments, indeed no amendments or alternative formulations could be put. The documents were not voted on formally, the presidium declared them adopted ?by acclaim? and added that the incoming party leadership would decide which suggestions would be accepted.

The congress then ?adopted? a 41-member Federal Committee (FC) presented by Abid Hasan Minto, who made a very flattering speech to justify not having any election, telling the delegates that it was not possible under the current constitution but that further work would be done on this constitution in the next two years to make it democratic.

Baba Jan, the prominent left wing leader in Gilgit Baltistan, was also coopted as a member of the Federal Committee. Two days before the congress began, an anti terrorist court awarded him a life sentence with 11 other activists of Gilgit Baltistan. The court sentenced him for his role in organising resistance by local people against climate destruction. He is also the main leader of the Progressive Youth Front in Gilgit Baltistan.

Farooq Tariq presented a General Secretary?s report which covered the AWP's activities and organisational matters from November 2012 to September 2014. Again, there was no debate or discussion on it and no political report was presented to delegates either.

Speaking at the last session of the congress, Abid Hasan Minto said that we must study the lessons of the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union. The conclusions that he wanted to draw were that the world had changed and now we are working to win socialism through parliament and that a united left party was a unique idea and that we needed to turn away from our old way of doing politics. In the midst of a war, and in a society dominated by the Taliban, he argued, we first needed to fight for the rule of law and liberal values and the industrialisation of the country in order to help eradicate poverty.

Farooq Tariq spoke more radically. He talked about a society free from capitalist and feudal exploitation and the need for revolution and internationalism. This leader of the ?left? wing of the party spoke of the crisis of capitalism, saying it was obvious that there is no way out for capitalism. We needed to fight against the state and its injustice and against imperialism. He said the AWP was the only option for radical change in Pakistan. Many on the left, he said, criticise us for not being radical enough, they should join and work ?constructively? in the party.

Clearly, this final rally showed the division of labour within the existing leadership; the president, Minto, explains the real politics of the party; a reformist strategy to ?change? the country via parliament, with a focus on struggling for a ?real? bourgeois democracy, while Farooq Tariq presents the left ?revolutionary? cover for this.

Two years of the AWP ? a balance sheet

Clearly, the AWP has become a small reformist party, even though it still includes the vast majority of the ?left? of the country. After two years, it has been unable to rally thousands of workers, youth, women, unionists around it, despite the deep political and economic crisis of the country. Indeed, it has been the
populist bourgeois leaders like Imran Khan and Qadri who have been able to rally the anger of huge masses behind them. Of course, they do it on the basis of a populist, bourgeois programme and demagogy.

Nonetheless, it is a matter of fact that the AWP has been unable till now to present a radical working class alternative. The reason for this has to be seen in the electoralist and reformist strategy of the party. Moreover, this is made even more damaging by the party leadership doing whatever it can to prevent an open debate over strategy. When differences arise within its own ranks, it does not present them to members or a congress, but tries to solve this via compromises between different positions. This is a formula for disorienting the party.

At the congress, we, the comrades around the monthly newspaper Revolutionary Socialist, presented not only a critique and balance sheet of the failures of the past two years, but also explained the need for a revolutionary action programme, a programme based on the need for a socialist revolution in Pakistan to solve both the democratic and social demands of the masses.

Although a number of the more radical left members of the party expressed their sympathy with our proposals, they criticised us for raising these openly. This, they argued would put the left, meaning them, under pressure. They argued that we should rather try to get more posts and offices in the party first and then try to change the party’s politics.

We reject such an approach. Indeed, we think that this would only lead to further demoralisation and weakening both of the left wing in the AWP and of the party as a whole. It would mean that the left would be seen as responsible and supportive of the political mistakes and even betrayals of the leadership. In this way it would compromise itself as a weak player in the behind the scenes bureaucratic manoeuvres. At the same time, it would fail to politically alert and educate the membership via an open political discussion and struggle.

We believe that, if the revolutionaries and socialists, all those who fight for a programme of transitional demands, do not take up such a struggle in the party now, the AWP will further consolidate as a small reformist force. It will fail to realise its potential as a working class party if it does not conduct itself on the basis of working class politics. It will fail to be a vehicle for overcoming the crisis of working class leadership in the country and instead become an obstacle to that task.

This is why the comrades around the paper Revolutionary Socialist and the supporters of the LFI in Pakistan aim to unite all those militants in the AWP who want to fight openly for it to become a revolutionary working class party.

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