
MAOISM IN BANGLADESH

The Case of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party

Md. Nurul Amin

In 1962 the international communist movement was divided into two separate camps on the question of the adoption of Marxism. This division split the Communist Party of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) into pro-Moscow and pro-Peking factions in 1966. The pro-Moscow faction, led by Moni Singh, argued that socialism would be established through a peaceful parliamentary process, while the pro-Peking wing, led by Mohammed Toaha and Sukhendu Dastidar, advocated the line of revolutionary class struggle that came to be known as Maoist.¹ The pro-Peking Communist Party was divided into more than a dozen factions during and after the 1971 liberation war.²

In 1967 another group of young Communists under the leadership of Siraj Sikder founded the Mao Thought Research Centre in Dhaka. This

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1. Moni Singh is the descendant of a Hindu landlord family from Mymensingh district in Bangladesh. Quite early in life he left the family property and joined the Communist Party of India (CPI). Until the time of the split in 1966, the underground East Pakistan Communist Party (EPCP) was led by him. Mohammed Toha is the descendant of a middle-class Muslim family from Noakhali in Bangladesh. He did his M.A. in Political Science at Dhaka University. In 1956 he was elected as a member of the central committee of the EPCP. Sukhendu Dastidar is the descendant of a middle-class family from Chittagong district in Bangladesh. Dastidar became the secretary-general of the pro-Chinese underground East Pakistan Communist Party-Marxist Leninist (EPCP-ML) in 1966. For a detailed discussion, see Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Radical Politics and the Emergence of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International Limited, 1975).

2. See Md. Nurul Amin, *Marxist Politics in Bangladesh: A Case Study of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party* (M.Phil. diss., Dhaka University, Bangladesh, 1984).

group later formed the East Bengal Workers Movement (EBWM) in 1968. On June 3, 1971, Siraj Sikder abolished the EBWM and formed the East Bengal Sarbohara (Proletarian) Party (EBSP)³ which played a significant role during and after the liberation war.

The aim of this article is to examine the ideological, socioeconomic, and behavioral patterns of the party. In this context the following questions will be raised: How did the East Bengal Sarbohara Party come into existence in Bangladesh? What role did it play during and after the liberation war? What were the main bases of support for this party? Why did it split into so many factions after the death of its founder-leader Sikder? Why was the party unsuccessful in Bangladesh?

From the East Bengal Workers Movement to the East Bengal Sarbohara Party (1968–1971)

The year 1967 was a turning point in the history of East Bengal left politics. That year West Bengal, the neighboring state in India, witnessed the historic Naxalbari movement⁴ that changed the whole picture of the traditional Communist movement in India as well as in other parts of the sub-continent. That same year a young group of Communists in East Bengal under the leadership of Siraj Sikder came into contact with the teachings of Mao Tse Tung and were influenced by the Naxalbari movement. This group decided to fight against the traditional Communists through the weapon of Mao's thought, so Comrade Siraj Sikder founded the Mao Tse Tung Thought Research Centre in 1967.⁵ From its very inception it became the target of attack by other leftists as well as rightists. Jamaat-E-Islam, the extreme rightist political party, became aware of the activities of the Research Centre and made several attempts to destroy it. However, the Centre resisted the challenge of the extreme rightists and maintained its existence.

3. The East Bengal Sarbohara Party (formerly the East Bengal Workers Movement) uses "East Bengal" instead of "Bangladesh." Bangladesh in its literal sense means the land of Bengalis and, thus, includes West Bengal. Sarbohara Party leaders argue that the East Bengalis, within their own territory and with their own language, economic and social system, and distinctive culture, had evolved historically and as a distinct nation different from other nationalities of the Indian subcontinent. See *Purbo Banglar Ashomipto Jatio Ganatantrik Biplob Sampanna Karar Karmasuchi* (Program to Complete the Unfinished National Democratic Revolution of East Bengal), (published by the Central Committee, Purbo Bangla Sarbohara Party, n.d.), pp. 1–3.

4. Mohan Ram, *Maoism in India* (Delhi: Vikas, 1971).

5. *The Spark* (special issue), the East Bengal Sarbohara Party (SBP), May 1981, pp. 19–20.

During this time Siraj Sikder realized the necessity for a revolutionary organization to mobilize and expand the Centre's support base, so the East Bengal Workers Movement was formed on January 8, 1968, at a conference in Dhaka. The one-day conference was held at the house of a worker in the Dhaka Jute Mills and was attended by about 45 to 50 followers of the Mao Thought Research Centre. The conference unanimously accepted the East Bengal Workers Movement Thesis presented by Siraj Sikder, an elaborate document that dealt with the major contradictions, principal contradictions, stages of revolution, and strategies for the successful revolution of East Bengal. The thesis noted the following contradictions:

1. Between Pakistani colonialism and the people of East Bengal
2. Between feudalism and the peasants of East Bengal
3. (a) Between U.S. imperialism and the people of East Bengal
 (b) Between Soviet social imperialism and the people of East Bengal
 (c) Between Indian expansionism and the people of East Bengal
 (d) Between the bourgeoisie and the workers of East Bengal.⁶

The EBWM made a great contribution to Maoist politics in East Bengal by determining the principal contradiction in Pakistan society that plays the leading role in a society's development process. According to Mao:

If in any process there are a number of contradictions, one of them must be the principal contradiction playing the leading and decisive role, while the rest occupy a secondary and subordinate position. Therefore, in studying any complex process in which there are two or more contradictions, we must devote every effort to finding its principal contradiction. Once this principal contradiction is grasped, all problems can be readily solved.⁷

Following Mao's dictum, the EBWM theoreticians argued that the principal contradiction in Pakistan was between Pakistani colonialism and the people of East Bengal. The EBWM was the first organization that declared East Bengal a colony of Pakistan and that called for a national liberation struggle against the Pakistani ruling class. They advocated a national democratic revolution through armed struggle under the leadership of the proletarian party (the Communist Party) because, it was argued, in the epoch of imperialism and social imperialism the bourgeoisie has no right to lead the revolution. The EBWM also chalked out a program for establishing a sovereign, democratic, peaceful, neutral, progres-

6. Siraj Sikder, *Selected Work*, Vol. 1 (Dhaka: Chalontika Books House, 1980), pp. 5-17.

7. Mao Tse Tung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1 (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1975), p. 332.

sive Republic of East Bengal, uprooting imperialism, social imperialism, expansionism, feudalism, and all kinds of exploitation.

Guerrilla Activities

The EBWM started its guerrilla activities through wall writings at various locations in Dhaka city, quoting Mao's famous dictum: "Power comes from the barrel of a gun." In mid-1968, in the first guerrilla operation in the history of the party, guerrillas stole a cyclostyle machine from a business office in Dhaka City to print party documents. The EBWM then began publication of its theoretical organ *Lal Jhanda* (The Red Flag).

Between 1968 and 1970 the EBWM intensified its underground activities in several areas of rural Bangladesh and in small towns. During this time the EBWM recruited workers from various student and left organizations. The East Pakistan Students Union (EPSU), the student front of the pro-Peking National Awami Party (NAP) led by Maulana Bhasani,⁸ became their primary channel of recruitment. A large number of students from this organization joined the EBWM.

On January 8, 1970, the EBWM hoisted the flag of independent East Bengal (the present national flag of Bangladesh) in Dhaka, Munisigonj, and Mymensingh on the occasion of the second foundation day ceremony of the party.⁹ On May 6, 1970, two hand bombs were thrown into the offices of the Pakistan Council in Dhaka on Karl Marx's birthday. By October 1970, handmade bombs were also thrown into the Bureau of National Reconstruction, the American Information Center, and other places in East Pakistan. These activities were the signals of "direct revolutionary action" against the Pakistani ruling clique.

By mid-1970 the EBWM began guerrilla warfare in the remotest rural areas of East Pakistan aimed at killing the "national enemy."¹⁰ In January 1971 the EBWM tested its guerrilla tactics on Haru Babu, an assistant manager of a tea garden at Fotikchari in Chittagong,¹¹ in the first "national enemy" operation in the history of the organization.

8. In 1957 Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, a popular peasant leader of Bangladesh, formed the National Awami Party (NAP) together with the progressive forces of the country. By the end of 1967, the NAP split into "pro-Moscow" and "pro-Peking" factions. Bhasani became the Chairman of the pro-Peking faction. On the national level, the "pro-Moscow" wing of the NAP was led by Wali Khan, in East Pakistan by Professor Muzaffar Ahmed. After the independence of Bangladesh, the NAP (Bhasani) became divided into many factions.

9. *The Spark* (special issue), May 1981, p. 64.

10. The EBWM identified the "national enemy" as those who worked against the interest of the party and of the national democratic revolution of East Pakistan.

11. *The Daily Azadi* (Chittagong), January 1971.

Role of the EBWM in the Liberation War

The election results of 1970 made the future of a united Pakistan uncertain. After the elections, Yahya Khan, Bhutto, and Sheikh Mujib failed to determine the fate of Pakistan through constitutional procedures.¹² As a result Pakistan became divided into two hostile camps: the people of East Pakistan and the ruling class of Pakistan. The conflict between these two camps surfaced on March 1 when Yahya Khan postponed the forthcoming session of the National Assembly. As soon as this news reached East Pakistan over the radio, people from all walks of life revolted against the military junta.¹³ Realizing the pulse of the situation, the leaders of the EBWM quickly decided to form a national liberation front together with the various progressive parties.

On March 2, 1971, the EBWM published an open letter addressed to the Awami League urging the formation of a temporary revolutionary coalition government with representatives of all patriotic, open and underground, parties, and a national liberation front to include all of the patriotic elements of the country on the basis of a minimum program of launching a national liberation war. The Awami League headed by Sheikh Mujib rejected the proposal.

On March 25, 1971, East Pakistan's political situation became chaotic. At midnight, the Pakistan military launched its military action in East Pakistan. The Awami League chief Sheikh Mujib himself was arrested and many leaders fled to India. Bullets could not silence the voice of millions. On April 10, the Awami League formed an exile government in India.

Formation of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party

While the Awami League leaders took shelter in India, the East Bengal Workers Movement decided to resist the Pakistan army remaining in the countryside. After March 25, Comrade Siraj Sikder mobilized his organizational strength at Peara Bagan in Barisal, which soon became a mini-battlefield. From this base Siraj Sikder launched a guerrilla war against the Pakistan army that first spread to the southern part of East Pakistan.¹⁴ On April 30, the EBWM formed the National Mukti Bahini, which "liberated" an area of Peara Bagan. To guide this Bahini, the Sarbochcho

12. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *Radical Politics*, p. 27.

13. Jyoti Sen Gupta, *History of Freedom Movement in Bangladesh, 1947-1973* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1974).

14. Talukder Maniruzzaman, *The Bangladesh Revolution and its Aftermath* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Books International Limited, 1979), p. 148.

Shamorik Porichalona Mondoli (Supreme Military Managing Body) was formed with Siraj Sikder as president. On June 3, 1971, the EBWM was transformed into the East Bengal Sarbohara Party (EBSP) at the Peara Bagan battlefield, and Siraj Sikder was elected its convener.

By mid-June, Peara Bagan had become a principal target of the Pakistan army. As a result, fighting took place between the EBSP and Pakistani military forces, and the Sarbohara Party's guerrillas retreated from Peara Bagan and regrouped in different parts of the country.¹⁵

By mid-August 1971, the Awami League's Mukti Bahini "freedom fighters" returned to Bangladesh equipped with sophisticated arms and weapons supplied by India. The East Bengal Sarbohara Party proposed the two groups cooperate in fighting the Pakistan army, but the Awami League rejected this proposal and began to kill the Sarbohara Party guerrilla workers. As a result, direct conflict between these two groups began. In October 1971, the Sarbohara Party circulated a document that called on the people of East Bengal to fight against the Awami League, the Indian army, and the Pakistan army. By November 1971, both the Pakistan army and the Mukti Bahini had killed many of the Sarbohara Party's guerrilla workers.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India was worried about the political situation in East Pakistan, and decided to liberate Bangladesh through direct military action. The situation forced her to march the Indian army into the territory of Bangladesh, which on December 16, 1971, became an independent and sovereign country.

The EBSP and the Mujib Regime

After independence, the Awami League established its authority throughout Bangladesh, adopting the Indian model of a parliamentary system,¹⁶ with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as Prime Minister. From the very beginning, the Awami League regime allowed all political parties to function except the rightist Muslim League, the Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP), and other pro-Islamic parties whose leaders had collaborated with the Pakistan army in 1971. However, the real threat to the regime came from the radical Maoist parties that had been trying to bring about a second revolution in Bangladesh through armed struggle. There were several radical parties in Bangladesh: the East Bengal Sarbohara Party; the Purbo Bangla Sammabadi Dal (M-L); the Bangladesh Communist League; the

15. *The Spark* (special issue), May 1981, pp. 71–85.

16. Rounaq Jahan, "Bangladesh in 1973: Management of Factional Politics," *Asian Survey*, 14:2 (February 1974), pp. 125–135.

Purbo Bangla Communist Party; and the East Pakistan Communist Party.¹⁷

Among these Maoist parties, the Sarbohara Party theoretically, militarily, and organizationally became the main challenge to Awami League authority. On April 20, 1973, Siraj Sikder formed the Purbo Banglar Jatio Mukti Front (National Liberation Front of East Bengal) to challenge the Awami League government.

The East Bengal Sarbohara Party called a general strike throughout the country on December 16, 1973,¹⁸ that was openly supported by NAP leader Maulana Bhasani. During this period the Sarbohara Party's underground activities spread all over the country. The party recruited a large number of part-time and full-time workers from the various sections of the people. Col. Ziauddin, an army officer, joined the party. On December 28, 1973, President Mohammadullah declared an Emergency as the country faced a tremendous threat from the radical Marxists.¹⁹ During the Mujib regime, the Sarbohara Party launched massive operations in different parts of the country, and party troops established footholds in Dhaka, Barisal, Faridpur, Mymensingh, Tangail, Chittagong, Sylhet, and Comilla districts.²⁰

From 1972 to early 1975, the Sarbohara Party shook the foundation of the Awami League government by looting several police stations and killing a large number of progovernment elements who were branded as national enemies. The party, in turn, lost many workers at the hands of Mujib's Rakkhi Bahini, the Awami League's paramilitary force.

The Political Line of the Sarbohara Party

After the liberation of Bangladesh, the EBSP led by Siraj Sikder formulated a new political thesis evaluating the socioeconomic conditions in East Bengal. This new political line was accepted by the party's first National Congress that was held from January 12–16, 1972. In this thesis, Siraj Sikder identified the various contradictions in Bangladesh: (1) between the people of East Bengal and Indian expansionism; (2) between the people of East Bengal and Soviet social imperialism; (3) between the people of East

17. Talukder Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh: An Unfinished Revolution," in Emajuddin Ahmed, ed., *Bangladesh Politics* (Dhaka: Centre for Social Studies, 1980), pp. 30–65.

18. The Awami League Movement declared December 16 "Victory Day," whereas the EBSP declared December 16 "Black Day." According to the EBSP, "On December 16, 1971, expansionist India occupied East Bengal with the help of the social imperialist Russia and placed the Awami League in power."

19. *The Daily Ittefaq* (Dhaka), December 29, 1973.

20. For detailed discussion, see *The Spark* (special issue), May 1981, pp. 67–85.

Bengal and imperialism; (4) between imperialism, agents of imperialism and Soviet social imperialism, Indian expansionism and their agents; (5) between the people of East Bengal and feudalism; and (6) between the bourgeoisie and the workers of East Bengal.

The first National Congress also accepted the constitution of the party with some amendments. A presidium of seven members was formed to conduct the Congress, and Siraj Sikder was appointed its chairman. The Congress also elected by secret ballot a six-member Central Committee with Sikder as its chairman, Shahid and Fazlu as members, and Rana, Mojeed, and Sultan as alternative members.²¹

From the very beginning the party was plagued with leadership and personality conflicts. Because Sikder exercised an almost dictatorial hold on the entire organization, inner-party conflict surfaced. A few months after the formation of the Central Committee, the Sarbohara Party suffered some organizational setbacks. During this time it was alleged that Fazlu and Sultan, two Central Committee members, tried to capture control in collaboration with some important members of the party including Azam, Mohsin, and Rizvi. By early May 1972 the Sarbohara Party Central Committee under the leadership of Sikder expelled Fazlu, Sultan, Azam, and Mohsin, the alleged chief conspirators. Thus Sikder reestablished his complete hold on the party. In the meantime Shahid, a member of the Central Committee, was arrested by the police in Chittagong. By early June 1972 Fazlu and Humayun Kabir, important party members, were killed by party workers. Humayun Kabir was a Lecturer in the Bengali Department at Dhaka University when he joined the party as a full-time worker.

Some other anti-Sikder elements in the party hierarchy were also expelled by mid-1972 for their alleged anti-party activities. In 1973, Shahid, while he was in jail, was ousted from membership of the Central Committee. In August 1974, Mojeed, another member of the Central Committee,

21. Siraj Sikder was the descendant of a prominent middle-class Muslim family from Shariatpur district in Bangladesh. He earned an engineering degree in 1967 from the Engineering University of Dhaka. During his student life he joined the East Pakistan Students Union (EPSU), the student front of the pro-Peking NAP. In 1967 he was elected a vice-president of the Central Committee of this organization. Shahid (alias Mahbubur Rahman) was born in Barisal district. He was a B.Sc. (Hons.) student in the Department of Physics at Dhaka University. Fazlu (alias Salim Shanawaj) was born in Barisal district and attended college. Rana (alias A. K. M. Fazlul Huq) is the descendant of a rich peasant family from Shariatpur district. He was a B.Sc. engineering student at Dhaka Engineering University. Mojeed (alias Nasiruddin) is the descendant of a middle-class family from Comilla district. He was an instructor at the Technical Teacher's Training Centre in Dhaka. Sultan (alias Mahbur Rahman) is the descendant of a middle-class family of Jessore. He was a B.A. student when he joined the party.

was arrested by the police, and Rana, an alternative member of the Central Committee, tried to disassociate himself from Sikder. As a consequence of these expulsions and arrests, the important founding members of the party were out of the party scene by this time. Under these circumstances, the three-member Central Committee faced a leadership crisis, which the Sarbohara Party tried to solve by convening a meeting of the top ranking members in September 1974. At this meeting Rana was suspended from the Central Committee and two support and coordinating groups were formed consisting of Matin, Mahbub, Rafique, Rana, Ziauddin, and Jyoti. As a result, Siraj Sikder reestablished himself as the supreme leader of the party. But on the first day of 1975, Siraj Sikder was arrested and the day after killed by the Rakkhi Bahini. Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman indirectly claimed responsibility for Siraj Sikder's execution by publicly declaring, "Where is your Siraj Sikder?"

The EBSP After the Death of Siraj Sikder

After the death of Siraj Sikder, the Sarbohara Party entered a crisis phase. The party first became divided into two factions because of conflict and lack of proper communication among the top ranking members. When Siraj Sikder was killed, Col. Ziauddin and Jyoti were in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and Matin, Mahtab, Rafique, and Rana were in the countryside. On January 12, 1975, Khalil, Atique, and Iqram, members of the party, formed a Coordinating Centre in Chittagong. In the meantime Matin called an emergency meeting of the "support groups." Matin in collaboration with Mahtab, Rafique, and Rana formed the Asthayee Sarboccho Sangstha (ASS, the Temporary Supreme Association). Ziauddin and Jyoti were included in this association and Matin was appointed its coordinator. During this period the ASS killed Atique and expelled Iqram and Khalil from the party.

On August 15, 1975, the political atmosphere in Bangladesh changed when a dozen young military officers killed Sheikh Mujib and took power. The ASS formulated a political analysis in the context of August 1975 and identified the new Mushtaque regime as a paid agent of U.S. imperialism. In September 1975 police arrested Matin and the leadership of the ASS came into the hands of Mahbub and Rana, who joined with Ziauddin in taking a compromising line.

By the first week of January 1976, an Antorbortikalin Baybosthapok Mondoli (Interim Managing Committee) was formed under the leadership of Kamal Haider (alias Probir Nyogi), a member of the party. In mid-February 1976, it was abolished by an emergency conference and a new body was elected, the Sarboccho Biplobi Parishad (SBP, the Supreme Rev-

olutionary Council). Kamal Haider was elected its Secretary. On the other hand, a small section of the party formed the Asthayee Parichalona Committee (APC, Temporary Managing Committee) in March 1976, with Arif as its Secretary. By June 1976 Matin had disassociated himself from the SBP and formed the Purbo Banglar Sarbohara Partir Biplobi Satta Punorudhar Prokria (Restoration Process of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party Revolutionary Existence). He criticized the APC and SBP as cliques and reactionary elements.

On December 6, 1976, Kamal Haider was arrested by the police in Dhaka, and the EBSP (SBP) first conference, held in January 1977, reshuffled its high command. Anowar Kabir was elected acting Secretary, and at the end of November 1977 became the Secretary of the party by the decision of the second congress, which also unanimously gave up the ultra-left line of Kamal Haider. During this time Matin abolished the Purbo Banglar Sarbohara Partir Biplobi Satta Punorudhar Prokria and joined the SBP.²²

In 1980 the SBP led by Anowar Kabir rejected the "Three World Theory of China." The year 1982 is important for the EBSP (SBP), for the party formulated a constitution on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse Tung Thought. The Sarbohara Party's (SBP) constitution determined the following contradictions in East Bengal: (1) between the people of East Bengal and imperialism led by the U.S.; (2) between the people of East Bengal and Soviet social imperialism; (3) between the people of East Bengal and Indian expansionism; (4) between the vast peasant masses of East Bengal and feudalism; (5) between imperialism led by America, Soviet social imperialism, Indian expansionism, and their respective lackeys; and (6) between the bourgeoisie and workers of East Bengal. But the principal contradiction is between the people of East Bengal and the imperialism led by the U.S.

The immediate program of the party is to finish the national democratic revolution through armed struggle led by the Proletarian Party (Communist Party). The bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have no right to lead this revolution. The aim of the revolution is to remove imperialism, social imperialism, Indian expansionism, feudalism, and their agents. And according to the constitution party constitution, "East Bengal is a neo-colony of U.S. imperialism."²³ The EBSP claims that it will bring about peasant revolution through armed struggle. The Sarbohara Party (SBP), using leaflets, pamphlets, and circulars, bitterly criticized the activities of

22. *The Spark*, No. 3, May 1978.

23. See the draft constitution of the East Bengal Sarbohara Party (SBP), July 1982.

the Ziaur Rahman regime. In March 1980, it participated in prisoners' movements in various jails.²⁴

The EBSP (SBP) has taken action directed at several police stations in Faridpur, Madaripur, and Mymensingh districts. On September 9, 1980, guerrilla troops occupied Barirhat Police Camp in Shariatpur district. In this area the Sarbohara Party has to face the underground workers affiliated with the Jatio Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)—i.e., followers of the Gono Bahini as well as combined police and military operation.²⁵

After the death of Ziaur Rahman, Justice Sattar came to power with the support of the army generals, and immediately after legitimized his post through presidential elections. But on March 24, 1982, a few months after the election, H. M. Ershad, the Chief of the Armed Forces, took power from Justice Sattar and declared martial law throughout the country, and the military junta banned all political activities. The East Bengal Sarbohara Party (SBP) vehemently criticized the actions of the military regime and urged the people of East Bengal to overthrow this government through armed struggle as well as a mass movement.

The East Bengal Sarbohara Party (Asthayee Parichalona Committee)

The Asthayee Parichalona Committee (Temporary Managing Committee) was formed in March 1976 under the leadership of Arif and Ziauddin. In July 1977, Arif and Rana, the Secretary and a Central Committee member, respectively, were arrested by the police, so Ziauddin became the acting Secretary of the party. After Arif and Rana were released from jail in mid-1978, they advocated the line of an open mass party. For this reason the party ousted them and elected Ziauddin as the new Secretary.

At the early stage of its formation, the APC did not differ with the SBP on ideological grounds. Both factions upheld the political line of Siraj Sikder—i.e., Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse Tung Thought. Ideological differences between these two factions surfaced in 1977 when a moderate group took power in China. This group tactfully avoided the line of class struggle and adopted the “Three World Theory” line of Chairman Mao Tse Tung. The Albanian Labor Party headed by Enver Hoxa rejected this theory as anti-Marxist and anti-Leninist, and following the road of this party, the APC also rejected the Three World Theory in its sixth session, held on July 30, 1979. The Sarbohara Party (APC) evaluated the theory in the light of Marxism and Leninism and came to the conclusion that the

24. For the prisoners' movement, see *Holiday* (weekly paper), (Dhaka), April 13, 1980.

25. *The Spark*, No. 9, September–October 1980.

contradictions determined by Lenin still exist, that is, those (a) between the working class and the bourgeoisie; (b) between the oppressed people of the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America and imperialism; (c) contradictions among the imperialists; and (d) contradiction between the socialist system and the capitalist system.

The Sarbohara Party (APC) rejected the Three World Theory on the following grounds. First, that the Three World Theory has discussed only the contradictions among the imperialist powers, denying the other three contradictions. Second, that the method of class analysis has not been applied to the study of historical development of a society, while class struggle between the exploiter and the exploited remains the motive force of history. The leaders, enemies, and friends of revolution are determined by the method of class analysis. Third, under certain circumstances the feudal classes and the comprador bourgeois classes of the neo-colonial countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America can play a revolutionary and progressive role but as a class they are reactionary. The Three World Theory, however, considers them as revolutionary. Fourth, among the imperialist powers the U.S. and the USSR are the main enemies of the people. Both the U.S. and the USSR are equally aggressive because imperialism by its very nature is aggressive. But the Three World Theory considers the USSR as the number one enemy of revolution. And finally, the division of the world into first, second, and third worlds is anti-Marxist.²⁶

The year 1981 was important for the Sarbohara Party (APC) for many reasons since the party chalked out a program for national democratic revolution and a national front. Its thesis also determined the various contradictions of East Bengal on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse Tung Thought. According to this thesis, the present stage of revolution in East Bengal is national democratic, and from this point of view the principal contradiction in East Bengal is between the people on the one hand, and imperialism and feudalism on the other.

The Sarbohara Party (APC) formulated a program in 1981 for national democratic revolution whose major points are: (1) to form a government of the working people and patriotic people and excluding imperial and feudal elements; (2) to cancel all unequal treaties with foreign states; (3) to establish democratic rights of the people and equal rights of all minorities; (4) to recognize the right of all nationalities; (5) to confiscate all foreign capital, nationalize heavy industries, and to distribute land among the landless and the poor peasants free of cost; (6) to give equal status to all men and women; (7) to introduce a national democratic education system;

26. See *"The Three World Theory" in the Light of Marxism* (East Bengal Sarbohara Party [APC], 1980).

(8) to develop a new culture; (9) to organize a militia (a bahini) of the workers and peasants for national security; (10) to provide job security of workers and employees; and (11) to provide facilities of food, clothing, shelter, health, and education for everyone.

In 1981, the Sarbohara Party (APC) evaluated its activities from 1968 to 1974 and came to the following conclusion: During the Pakistan period the principal contradiction was between the people and imperialism, but the party led by Siraj Sikder determined the principal contradiction as that between the people of East Bengal and Pakistani colonialism. In the Mujib period the principal contradiction was also between the people and imperialism, but the party theoreticians identified the principal contradiction as that between the people of East Bengal and Indian expansionism. The formation of the East Bengal-based Sarbohara Party had been wrong because when it was formed East Bengal was part of Pakistan, and as a result the Sarbohara Party led by Siraj Sikder had taken a nationalistic line and was isolated from internationalism.²⁷ The Sarbohara Party (APC) evaluated Siraj Sikder as a petty bourgeois nationalist. This group also rejected the importance of the historic Bengali language movement of 1952 and termed it “nationalistic.”

In 1982 the Sarbohara Party (APC) rejected Mao’s thought as anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist theory. According to them, “the philosophy of Mao’s thought is mechanical and empirical, politics is revolutionary nationalist, and economy is haphazard and aimless.”²⁸ They evaluated Mao as a nationalist, not a communist. It should be noted here that Enver Hoxa and his labor party first evaluated Mao’s thought as anti-Marxist, anti-Leninist in 1978. Recently, the Asthayee Parichalona Committee led by Ziauddin decided to evaluate Stalin’s contribution to Marxism and Leninism, and the question of the role of Stalin has brought further division in the party.

On January 20, 1983, Abdus Salam, a member of the central committee, disassociated himself from the Sarbohara Party (APC) led by Ziauddin on the question of the APC’s present political line. The dissident elements under the leadership of Salam now work as a separate group. By the end of 1983, the Sarbohara Party (APC) led by Ziauddin changed its name to Bangladesher Sarbohara Party. It has established some hold in several subdistricts in Faridpur, Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tract, Jessore, Kushtia, and Borga districts. It is now trying to overthrow the military

27. See *The East Bengal Workers Movement and the East Bengal Sarbohara Party’s Activities from 1968-1974* (a draft document), East Bengal Sarbohara Party (APC), April 1981.

28. *The Spark*, No. 7, March 1983.

regime through armed struggle, but it has only a weak organizational basis.

Socioeconomic Background of the Sarbohara Party Members

The data I collected through interviews with 45 part-time and 45 full-time members of the Sarbohara Party indicate that most members were youthful, well-educated, and belonged to lower middle and middle-class families. About 96% part-time and 69% full-time members were under 30 and only 4% part-time and 31% full-time members were over 30 years of age.

Of part-time members, 33% had earned secondary school certificates, 17% held higher secondary certificates, 15% had bachelor degrees, and 6% master degrees. Similarly, of full-time members, 35% had secondary school certificates, 24% had higher school certificates, 17% bachelor degrees, and 8% master degrees. The majority of Sarbohara Party members belonged to lower middle-class and middle-class families—i.e., they were students, teachers, doctors, engineers, middle-level bureaucrats, and businessmen. Only 8% of the part-time and 12% of the full-time members were landless peasants and industrial workers. The majority of the part-time and full-time members were students in colleges or other schools.

Many Sarbohara Party members were recruited from NAP(B) and other pro-Peking Parties, i.e., 28% of part-time and 40% of full-time workers were the supporters of these Parties. Newcomers (i.e., having no previous political experience), were the second largest group, with nearly 35% of part-time and 20% of full-time workers falling in this category. Close to 20% and 22% part-time and full-time members, respectively, were the supporters of the Muslim League and other Islamic parties. Most probably this group of supporters joined the Sarbohara Party to take revenge against the Awami League regime. During and after the liberation war, pro-Islamic parties were suppressed by the Awami League leadership. A small number of workers (about 17%) were recruited from the Awami League, NAP(M), and other pro-Moscow parties.

Conclusion

The East Bengal Sarbohara Party that was formed on June 3, 1971, participated in the liberation war. After independence, several Maoist parties came into being and were active in efforts to overthrow the Mujib regime through armed struggle as well as mass movement. Among these parties, the East Bengal Sarbohara Party led by Siraj Sikder played a significant role recruiting anti-Indian elements and also a large number of young educated guerrillas from middle-class and lower middle-class backgrounds.

During this time the members of its guerrilla forces created some pockets at the subdivision level in Bangladesh. They shook the very strong foundation of the Awami League by killing many party workers including some members of Parliament and looting police stations and Rakkhi Bahini camps. By the end of 1974 the Sarbohara Party posed itself as the main source of challenge to the Awami League regime. So 1972 to 1975 was the most challenging and rewarding period for the party.

After the death of Siraj Sikder, however, the Sarbohara Party gradually lost its cohesion and, because of ideological and personal conflicts, became divided into three factions. At present these three factions are trying to overthrow the military government headed by H. M. Ershad through armed struggle, but the party has declined in membership and mass appeal. Like other Maoist parties, Sarbohara Party activities are localized and, except for a few local pockets, its support is limited to a section of the intelligentsia.