

POLITICS OF SIND: THE EARLY PHASE  
1947-51

BY

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In many ways Sind occupied a unique position in the Muslim's struggle for a separate homeland in the South Asian subcontinent. After its creation as a separate province in April, 1936, it was the second Muslim majority province in the subcontinent with the highest percentage of Muslim population.<sup>1</sup> The Muslims of Sind remained in the forefront of the Muslim national struggle: it was the Sind branch of the All India Muslim League that, in 1938, provided the platform for voicing the Muslim demand for a separate state and subsequently, in 1943, the Sind Legislative Assembly had the distinction of adopting formally a resolution in support of the All-India Muslim League demand for Pakistan. In the 1945-46 elections, the Muslims of Sind gave a clear verdict in favour of the All-India Muslim League and its demand for Pakistan. Later on, when the British government and the Indian National Congress accepted the Pakistan demand and the Partition Plan (June 3, 1947) was announced, Sind was the only province whose Legislative Assembly voted for Pakistan without any conflict or controversy.<sup>2</sup> Contrarily, the provinces of Bengal and Punjab were partitioned in the process of voting for Pakistan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) had to go through a referendum. Baluchistan was still not a full province and the accession of the Qalat State to Pakistan presented serious difficulties.

After the 1946 elections in Sind, Sir Ghulam Husain Hidayatullah, leader of the Sind Muslim League (SML) Assembly party, had formed the ministry. When he was appointed governor of Sind in August 1947, Muhammad Ayub Khuhro, the new leader of the SML Assembly party, who had played a leading role in the Muslim struggle for the creation of Sind as a separate province, succeeded him as chief minister. The parliamentary phase in Sind that began with the Ayub Khuhro Ministry covered about four years and four months, from August 1947 to December 1951, during which five ministries headed by Muhammad Ayub Khuhro (twice), Pir Illahi Bakhsh, Muhammad Yousuf Harun and Qazi Muhammad Fazlullah, held offices. All these were Muslim League ministries since SML was the only party in the provincial Assembly. Even outside the Assembly there was hardly an opposition party of any consequence. The Sind Hari Committee was the only constant political group which tried to pressurise the provincial government under the leadership

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of its president, Hyder Bakhsh Jatol, to take steps to ameliorate the condition of the haris (peasants). This Committee had been set up in 1931 but it became active after 1945 when Hyder Bakhsh Jatol assumed its leadership. Another political organization that might have emerged as an effective opposition was the Pakistan Peoples Party which G.M.Syed in collaboration with Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Red Shirt leader from NWFP, established in May 1948. However, it was suppressed and banned within two months of its formation.

Immediately after independence, the SML dominated the political scene in Sind. Its intra-party conflicts destabilized, and often toppled, governments in the province. These conflicts, partly the result of factional tussle among the various landlord groups in the SML, were aggravated by 'the immense problems successive provincial governments had to face in the form of Karachi's separation from Sind, influx and rehabilitation of refugees and the condition of the haris. The first Ayub Khuhro Ministry had little difficulty to establish itself. Ayub Khuhro had devotional relations with Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Governor General, whose advice was available to him in all important matters. He was known for his organizational abilities and within a short time proved himself to be a dynamic and efficient administrator. The way he controlled, under Quaid's guidance, communal riots in Karachi within two days proved his administrative gift.<sup>3</sup> His fault perhaps was that he was intolerant of criticism and opposition especially from within the ranks of his own party. He was also in the habit of presenting his viewpoint with tactless aggression which created difficulties for him unnecessarily.

Ayub Khuhro's problems apparently began when he openly differed with the federal government over the status of Karachi which was then provincial as well as federal capital. At the time of independence, the Sind Cabinet had generously offered to accommodate the federal capital in Karachi partly because no other province was in a position to make such an offer. At that time, East Pakistan itself had to establish a new capital while (West) Punjab had a capital, Lahore, but it was in a chaotic state due to communal violence and influx of refugees and NWFP was still ruled by a Congress Ministry. The SML leadership, however, had not realised the implications of Karachi becoming the federal capital. Karachi was then a small city incapable of accommodating employees of the provincial and federal governments. The provincial government had soon to share the meagre accommodation with the civil servants of the federal government which contributed to the bad feelings among the Sindhi politicians against the centre. For instance, a member of the provincial Assembly put it crudely: 'The root cause of the trouble (move to separate Karachi from Sind) were the wives of the Pakistan government officials who felt jealous of the good houses

occupied by the Sind Ministers and officials'. Another problem that arose was the administrative control of the city. It could not have two administrations to control its affairs for long. When rumours circulated that the centre might take over Karachi, the provincial leadership became apprehensive of being deprived of the resources of its leading city and provincial capital. Ayub Khuhro was among those who held strong views on the issue. He supported, and perhaps sponsored, demonstrations by the Sind Muslim Students Federation against any move to this effect.<sup>4</sup> On February 9, 1948, the SML council, in a meeting presided over by its Vice President, Sayyid Saleh Muhammad Shah, passed a resolution viewing with alarm the reported move to separate Karachi from Sind and appealed to every well-wisher of Sind to resist this 'unjust, impolitic and unwise move'.<sup>5</sup> The following day the Sind Legislative Assembly, in a unanimous resolution, opposed the move.

These activities swelled the ranks of Ayub Khuhro's opponents who resented his policies on other issues also. His policy towards the refugees particularly came under sharp criticism. The influx of refugees immediately after independence had been mainly into Punjab which could not accommodate all the incoming refugees since their number was far more than the non-Muslims leaving that province. It was felt that this burden should be shared by all the regions of Pakistan. However, Ayub Khuhro had his own views on the matter. He agreed with this proposition in principle but was not prepared to accept refugees beyond a limit that, in his opinion, could be absorbed in Sind. His firm stand on the issue made him unpopular in many quarters. He also came into conflict with the governor, Ghulam Husain Hidayatullah, with whom he had differences prior to independence. He was of the view that according to the provisional constitution it was not binding that the governor should preside over the cabinet meetings. Ghulam Husain Hidayatullah took it as a personal insult because in all the other provinces the governors were invited to preside over the cabinet meetings as was the practice before August 1947.<sup>6</sup> This conflict revived their pre-independence rivalry. Ayub Khuhro went a bit too far to prevent the governor's direct interference in the administration. He issued an order to all the civil servants not to send important files to the governor directly which not only annoyed the latter but also alienated the civil servants who were not used to this practice. Now Ayub Khuhro's two cabinet colleagues, Pir Illāhi Bakhsh and Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur, also disagreed with him and began to criticize him publicly, demanding even his resignation from the chief ministership.<sup>7</sup> The Karachi press, which had its own grievances against him, gave wide coverage to their criticism.

Ayub Khuhro wanted to remove the two dissenting ministers but before he could do so the governor on his own initiative without consulting him reallocated the portfolios in the cabinet in the hope of its 'more harmonious

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working'.<sup>8</sup> He accepted the reallocation under protest, waiting to consult the Quaid who was on a tour of NWFP. But tables had now turned against him. Before he met the Quaid, several charges of maladministration and corruption were brought against him and the SML Assembly party had elected Pir Illahi Bakhsh as its leader in his place. After Pir Illahi Bakhsh's election as SML parliamentary leader, his removal from the chief ministership was a mere formality. In these circumstances, the Quaid could only advise him to resign and contest the charges levelled against him constitutionally. On his removal from the chief ministership, the governor set up a tribunal to inquire into charges of maladministration, misconduct and corruption against him.

On May 3, 1948, Pir Illahi Bakhsh formed the next ministry, and the same month on May 22, the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan passed a resolution for the takeover of Karachi by the federal government. Ayub Khuhro, who had now no restraint of any official position and had public in Sind on his side to mobilize the opposition to this decision. Contesting a decision by the chief organizer of the Pakistan Muslim League, Choudhry Khaliqzaman, he revived the SML council with himself as the party president, and on June 11, this council under his chairmanship expressed its dissatisfaction over the resolution of the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan and appointed a committee of action which invited a convention of the SML, Sind Muslim Students Federation, Sind Hari Committee and Sind branch of the Jamiatul Ulama Islam on June 27, and gave a call to observe July 2 as the 'Karachi Day'.<sup>9</sup> However, four days later, the call was withdrawn on a suggestion that Quaid's advice should be sought on the subject. At that time Quaid was in Ziarat. Therefore, a five-member delegation consisting of Hashim Gazdar, Ghulam Nabi Pathan, Haji Ali Akbar Shah, Qazi Akbar and Ali Muhammad Marri went to Ziarat to know his views not so much as Governor General but as Quaid-i-Azam'. The Quaid advised the delegation to accept the decision of the Constituent Assembly because it would be 'a boon to Sind'. The proceedings of this meeting and the Quaid's advice to the delegation were issued in a Communique from the Governor General's office.<sup>10</sup> Finally, on July 6, the SML Assembly party agreed to the takeover of Karachi in a lengthy resolution only five members including Ayub Khuhro, Qazi Fazlullah and Ghulam Nabi Pathan, opposed it. On July 23, the central government formally took over the administration of Karachi and appointed Seyyid Hashim Raza as its first Administrator. The takeover was accompanied by assurances to Sindhis for due share in the Karachi administration.

The Illahi Bakhsh Ministry could hardly function peacefully for a single day. A section of the Sindhis held him responsible for handing over Karachi to the centre and accepting more refugees into Sind. The number of his critics increased when his thirty-year-old Hindu Confidential Assistant was detained by the Karachi Airport Customs when he was about to leave.

for India.<sup>11</sup> He had in his possession confidential documents about strategic defence positions in Sind. He had also letters from Premier Illahi Bakhsh to the Premiers of the Indian states of UP and Bombay certifying his integrity and one letter from Sri Prakasa, the Indian High Commissioner, recommending that he would be 'an asset to the Defence Department of India'.<sup>12</sup> This was an incident that no one could ignore. On October 27, 1948, five English and Urdu dailies of Karachi came up with a joint editorial demanding 'Pir Illahi Bakhsh Must Go', and the following day two other dailies, one Sindhi and another Gujarati, published the same editorial.<sup>13</sup> Pir Illahi Bakhsh reacted sharply. He banned five newspapers and externed from Karachi the President of the Karachi City Muslim League, A.M. Qureshi, who had criticized him. However, he could not maintain this strong posture for long and he had to retract these steps. Simultaneous to this development were reports of a rift in the Sind Cabinet.

Ayub Khuhro skillfully used this situation to rehabilitate himself. The elections of the reorganized SML were scheduled on December 6, 1948. Five Muslim Leaguers, Yusuf Harun, Yar Muhammad, Ghulam Nabi Pathan, Sayyid Ali Akbar Shah and Ayub Khuhro, filed nomination papers for the office of president. Yusuf Harun's nomination papers were declared invalid and all the other candidates except Ayub Khuhro, withdrew from the contest. In order to avoid an embarrassing situation, i.e., the unopposed election of Ayub Khuhro, the time for filing nominations was extended to bring in more candidates. But the three new candidates could not compete with Ayub Khuhro. On December 7, 109 out of total 137 councillors met to elect office-bearers and seventy-two of them voted for Ayub Khuhro while the second highest scorer was Ghulam Qadir Shah who secured thirty-five votes.<sup>14</sup> After his election as president, Ayub Khuhro, accompanied by seventy-five members of the newly constituted SML council, offered Fateha at the Quaid's mazar and prayed for the prosperity of Pakistan and the victory of the Kashmiri Mujahideen. He made another clever move. He resigned from the presidentship of the SML but managed to keep action on his resignation pending. In the meantime the SML Vice-President was asked to look after the party affairs. Thus, he not only saved his new office but also won general approbation for upholding moral values. The daily Dawn, generally critical of his policies, wrote approvingly in an editorial (December 10) that his election had 'destroyed the very moral basis of democracy and placed the provincial League Council under a cloud. Out of that cloud has now emerged a streak of unexpected sunshine and it is from Mr. Khuhro that it emanates.'

From December 1948, Pir Illahi Bakhsh's troubles began to mount further. He published the Report of the Hari Committee under great public pressure but withheld the note of dissent by its only 'experienced official

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member', M.Masud.<sup>15</sup> No one was pleased by this action. The protagonists of land reform were unhappy with the suppression of the note of dissent while the landlords were annoyed with the publication of the Hari Report. Interestingly, the initiative for an action against Pir Illahi Bakhsh was taken by a Committee of Newspaper Editors which, on December 11, submitted a fifty-three-item charge-sheet against his Ministry to the Governor of Sind. The following month, the SML working Committee called on Assembly members to oust the ministry for 'repeated violations' of the clear decisions of the provincial League. Now Illahi Bakhsh had little chance of survival but his removal from office came from an unexpected source. In February 1949 a decision on an election petition filed in 1946 against Qazi Muhammad Akbar, a member of the Legislative Assembly, disqualified him as well as Pir Illahi Bakhsh for six years.<sup>16</sup> Thus he lost chief ministership as well as membership of the Assembly.

On February 16, 1949, Yusuf Harun, who had Ayub Khuhro's blessings, became the next chief minister, after defeating Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur by 18 to 15 votes in the SML Assembly party meeting.<sup>17</sup> A few days later, the Sind Special Court of Inquiry gave its verdict which found Ayub Khuhro guilty of 'maladministration' and 'misconduct' but acquitted him of charges of corruption and debarred him from public life for three years under PRODA (the Public and Representative Offices 'Disqualification' Act of 1949).<sup>18</sup> Ayub Khuhro's disqualification gave Yusuf Harun free hand for a few months. In April 1949, he published M. Masud's note of dissent to the Hari Committee Report and also introduced a Tenancy Bill in the Sind Assembly which was meant to improve the condition of the haris. But his landlord colleagues in the SML who considered the provisions of the Bill too radical to be accepted manoeuvred its reference to a select committee. Before the Assembly considered the findings of the select committee, the Report of the Agrarian Reforms Committee appointed by the Pakistan Muslim League in April 1949, was published which recommended the abolition of the Jagirdari and Zamindari systems, fixing the limit on landholdings to 150 acres of irrigated and 300 acres of non-irrigated land, although it provided that adequate compensation should be paid to the zamindars. This Report generated popular pressure for land reform in Sind and other provinces of West Pakistan.

The jagirdars and zamindars, however, saw a serious threat to their dominance in these developments. They forged unity immediately, forgetting their differences for the time being. The jagirdars revived their twenty-five-year old Sind Jagirdar Association with Mir Bande Ali Talpur, the provincial Minister for Public Works, as its president, to protect their interests. It claimed regular membership of fifty-one and support of fifty other jagirdars.<sup>19</sup> A more solid opposition to land reform was put up from the platform of the SML. Ayub Khuhro provided the necessary leadership who resumed SML

presidentship after withdrawing his resignation. The SML council, besides demanding the revocation of the order under PRODA against Ayub Khuhro, called on the central government to shelve the Report of the Agrarian Reforms Committee till it had itself reviewed the Report. On August 27, a day before the working committee of the Pakistan Muslim League was to consider the Report, the SML council appointed its own five-member (Ayub Khuhro, Ghulam Nabi Pathan, Ghulam Ali Talpur, Hashim Gazdar and Abdul Fatah) committee to review the Report within one month. Later on, the Sind government formally informed the central government that Sind would not abolish the zamindari system.<sup>20</sup>

Yusuf Harun, a Karachi businessman-industrialist who had little landed interest, found himself quite helpless in this situation. His attempts to assert himself by reshuffling his cabinet twice, first in November 1949 and then in January 1950, brought him under Ayub Khuhro's control instead. In March 1950, Ayub Khuhro returned to the provincial legislature when the Chief Court of Sind, on an application filed by him, ruled that the Special Court of Inquiry constituted to try him was ultra vires. Now he had firm control on provincial affairs. He, rather than Premier Yusuf Harun, piloted the Sind Tenancy Bill. The select committee on the Bill accommodated the zamindars' viewpoint especially in regard to the Haris' acquisition of permanent rights. However, one member of the select committee, Qazi Muhammad Mujtaba, Secretary of the SML Assembly party, objected to the clause which provided that a hari could acquire permanent rights only if he had been cultivating personally at least four acres of land of the same landlord for at least four years. This clause alongwith another one which gave the landlords the right to terminate the tenancy rights of a hari at any time without reference to any court or tribunal made the position of the haris further insecure. Qazi Mujtaba who wanted permanent rights for all the haris irrespective of the number of years or the amount of land resigned from his office in the SML in protest.<sup>21</sup> The Bill as amended by the select committee was worse than the original one. The Sind Assembly passed it without any opposition after it accommodated further twenty-two amendments, moved by Ayub Khuhro, including one which amounted to postponing its implementation for about a year. Premier Yusuf Harun himself eulogised Ayub Khuhro's services in piloting 'the Tenancy Bill' in a House composed of landlords'. The Sind Hari Committee was the only organisation to denounce it as a 'reactionary' measure, designed to 'perpetuate the exploitation of the haris by the zamindars and jagirdars.'<sup>22</sup>

Yusuf Harun, who was rendered completely ineffective, resigned from the chief ministership in favour of a diplomatic assignment. Ayub Khuhro could have become the chief minister but in that case he would have been

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obliged to resign from SML presidentship. He did not want to take any such risk. He preferred to retain the presidentship and let his nominee, Qazi Fazlullah, form the ministry. His hold on provincial affairs was now complete. In September 1950, he was not only re-elected party president but was also authorised to nominate all the other office-bearers. He still wanted a more formal control over the ministry. On his initiative, the SML working committee created a novel party organ, the Muslim League supervisory committee under his chairmanship, 'to supervise the work of the ministry.' Chief Minister Fazlullah was accountable to this committee for the performance of his ministry. Ayub Khuhro tried to correct the national image of the SML and in January 1951, under his direction it pledged itself to abolish the jagirdari and zamindari system.<sup>23</sup>

Ayub Khuhro had not stayed away from public office willingly but was waiting for a safe return. When the Pakistan Muslim League lifted the ban on the ministers from holding offices in the party to facilitate Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan's election as the party president, he used this amendment in the party constitution to become the chief minister on March 25, 1951, retaining the SML presidentship as well. His first statement as chief minister was a negation of the SML pledge for land reform, in which he observed that the problem of the haris existed in newspaper offices. There was instant reaction to this statement. He then explained that the problem was not as acute as it had been made out to be.<sup>24</sup> He promised to abolish the jagirdari, and not the zamindari, system before the provincial election which, he said, would be held sometime in February 1952. In fact a bill on these lines was drafted and considered by the provincial cabinet as well as the SML Assembly party but the jagirdars in the party blocked its adoption. The bill caused a rift in the Ayub Khuhro cabinet. Interestingly, on November 10, the SML working committee in a meeting chaired by Ayub Khuhro himself, censured the Sind government for not abolishing the jagirdari system.

The rival factions in the cabinet now went to the extreme to humiliate each other. Six petitioners inspired by three Sind cabinet members, Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur, Ghulam Nabi Pathan and Ayub Khuhro's former right-hand man, Qazi Fazlullah, and one central minister from Sind, Pirzada Abdus Sattar, brought a case under PRODA against him. Soon after, Ayub Khuhro's supporters filed similar cases against the three ministers opposing him.<sup>25</sup> On December 18, 1951, the governor responded; he demanded resignation from Ayub Khuhro as well as Qazi Fazlullah within twenty-four hours; swore in a three-member caretaker cabinet; and directed Ayub Khuhro as party president to convene a meeting of the SML Assembly party within three days to elect a new parliamentary leader. Ayub Khuhro flung a surprise by refusing

to leave the chief ministership until a new parliamentary leader was elected and using a provision of the party constitution which required four days' notice for such a meeting called a meeting of the Assembly party on December 26. The governor had to accept the position taken by him. When the Assembly party met on December 26, Ayub Khuhro was outnumbered and realising this fact he adjourned the meeting till January 6, 1952, and walked out with his eleven supporters. The remaining thirty members elected Mir Ghulam Ali Talpur as the party leader. In this state of factionalism, on December 30, 1951, the first Sind Assembly was dissolved.

The worst sufferers of this political instability were the Hurs, the followers of the Pir of Pagaro, whom the British had declared as 'criminal tribes' under the Sind Criminal Tribes Act after the suppression of the Hur liberation movement against the British rule and the hanging of the Hur spiritual leader, Sayyid Sibghatullah Shah, in 1943. The Pir's two sons, Sikandar Ali and Nadir Ali, after studies at Aligarh till 1946, had been taken to a tutorial establishment in London. The British had kept the militants among the Hurs in twelve concentration camps in miserable conditions, although government made provision of about 300,000 rupees annually for their maintenance. The miseries of the Hurs did not end automatically with the establishment of Pakistan. About two years after Independence, in the Spring of 1949, on the initiative of Liaquat Ali Khan who met the two sons in London, the question of removal of restrictions on the Hurs was taken up by the government. The seventy-four-year old murshid of the ~~Shahed~~ Pir Pagaro, Sayyid Afzal Shah, also led several delegations of the Hur leaders to the provincial and central governments asking for the restoration of the gaddi and confiscated properties of the late Pir to his sons. Surprisingly, the Sind Criminal Tribes Act Amendment Committee appointed by the provincial government in 1949, which was first chaired by Ayub Khuhro and then by Hashim Gazdar, did not submit its report till May 1951. A final decision on this report was taken nine months later when, on February 4, 1952, the Sind Criminal Tribes Act was repealed to remove restrictions on the Hurs and Sikandar Ali, the eldest son, designated as Pir Shah Mardan Shah II was installed on the gaddi. Although the new Pir expressed his 'deep seated... goodwill for the Muslim League' which, he said, dated back to his 'boyhood at Aligarh,' he ruled out any direct participation in politics immediately.<sup>26</sup> But it was not long after the rehabilitation of the Hurs that they under his leadership began to play an important role in politics.

The second phase of parliamentary politics in Sind began in May 1953 when the first provincial elections after Independence were held.

### REFERENCES

1. The North-West Frontier Province had the highest percentage of Muslims while Bengal and Punjab had bare Muslim majorities and even these had been turned into minorities under the weightage system agreed in the All India Muslim League- Indian National Congress Pact at Lucknow in 1916 which was incorporated in the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935.
2. In the Assembly, 33 members voted for joining Pakistan, two nationalist Muslims (Haji Maula Bakhsh and Sardar Khan Khoso) remained neutral and twenty Congress members opposed the motion, Dawn, June 27, 1947).
3. Ibid., January 12, 1948. Quaid himself gave financial assistance to the Hindus affected in these riots out of the Quaid-i-Azam Relief Fund.
4. Ibid., January 30, 1948.
5. Ibid., February 10, 1948.
6. Mussarrat Hussain Zuberi, Voyage through History, Karachi, 1948, p.148
7. Dawn, April 1, 15, 16, 17, 1948.
8. Ibid., April, 17, 1948.
9. Ibid., June 12, 13, 1948.
10. Ibid., June 23, 1948.
11. Illahi Bakhsh had employed him when Ayub Khuhro's Assistant left the job with his chief.
12. Dawn, October 1, 1948.
13. Ibid., October 27, 28, 1948.
14. Ibid., December 7, 8, 1948.
15. The other two members of the Committee were Sir Roger Thomas and Siddique Keher.
16. 'Pakistan: A Relief of Tension,' Round Table, vol. XXXIX, No. 154 January 1949, p. 169.
17. On March 10, the SML working committee under the chairmanship of Ayub Khuhro formally expressed confidence in Yusuf Harun on a formal request from him.
18. It empowered the Governor General to debar from public life, for a maximum period of ten years, ministers, members of the central and provincial legislatures and parliamentary secretaries found guilty of corruption, maladministration or any abuse of official position. Action could be taken on a complaint filed by an ordinary citizen.
19. Dawn, May 31, 1949.
20. Ibid., October 1949. See the statement by Sayyid Miran Shah, the provincial Revenue Minister.
21. Ibid., March 25, 1950.
22. See the six-hundred word resolution of its working committee in ibid., April 7, 1950.
23. Ibid., January 8, 1951.
24. Ibid., March 28-30, 1951.

25. Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, Debates, vol. 1, No.22 (April 17, 1952), pp. 1442-52. It was after this experience in Sind that PRODA was amended to provide punishment for those petitioners who filed or gave false and malicious applications or evidences.
26. Dawn, December 14, 1951.