

*Yahya Bakhtiar to Fatima Jinnah [Letter],
2 February 1965**

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I am writing this letter to explain my position during the recent meetings of the COP conference and our Working Committee.

As soon as the reports of coercion, browbeating and all sorts of illegalities started pouring in at the Flag Staff House and soon thereafter the result of the Presidential election was announced I realized that the same thing will happen during the election to the Assemblies and openly expressed my opinion about boycotting the assembly elections. That night Shoukat Hayat, Pir Saifuddin and Manzar Bashir also arrived in Karachi and I told them about it. They also agreed with me and we came to the conclusion that we should not recognize the Presidential election as legal and proper and demand that election to the Assemblies and the

* Mohtarma Fatima Jinnah Papers, F.274, National Archives of Pakistan, Islamabad. Yahya Bakhtiar, M.A., Bar-at-Law was then President, West Pakistan Muslim League (Council) His address as shown in the letter, was Jinnah Road, Quetta.

office of the President be held on the basis of adult franchise and the National Assembly be moved to forthwith amend the Constitution accordingly. Two days later Mr. Fazlur Rahman arrived from Dacca and we discussed the problem with him also and he was already of the same opinion. Then I left for Quetta. It is not a fact that my opinion on the subject was formed by Shaukat or Fazlur Rahman.

Thereafter, I returned to Karachi to attend the meeting of our Working Committee and I moved the resolution for boycotting the elections. It was however decided that the resolution should not be passed on that day i.e., 16.1.1965 but a decision by a majority of 11 against 6 was taken in favour of boycotting the elections. This decision and contents of the resolution were supposed to be kept secret but some one from the Working Committee told the pressmen about our decision. The Working Committee appointed a delegation of 4 members to the COP Conference which including S.M. Fazal (Acting President) Shaukat Hayat (General Secretary) Abul Qasem (President East Pakistan Muslim League) and myself (President West Pakistan Muslim League). Z.H Lari thereupon left the meeting of the Working committee under protest as he wanted to be included in the delegation to the COP Conference and the next day i.e. 17.1.1965 his statement appeared in the press criticising not only the decision to boycott elections but also called upon us to resign from our positions in the Muslim League on the group that we had shown poor result in Presidential election. The Working Committee met again that evening and Lari was asked to explain his statement. He lied and said that the statement was issued to the press before the Working Committee took the decision about boycott and the next day withdrew his statement with regard to the Working Committee decision about boycott. All the same another statement by his son Shakil Lari criticising the decision about the boycott of the elections appeared in

the press and a statement by four of his henchmen was also published in the newspapers protesting against the inclusion of "non-entities" in the Muslim League delegation to the COP conference and for not giving Karachi representation in it. All this was directed against me. I was supposed to be a non-entity. Lari's statement about resigning from the party Offices for showing poor result at the Presidential election was also directed at me. I did not resign simply because it would have been embarrassing for a party at that time when the COP Conference was going on and because I enjoyed the confidence of the party.

At this stage Abul Qasem, Khwaja Khairuddin, Lari, Jamil Ahmed, Jafar Jamali and Durrani formed a separate group within the party (with Khuro and Daultana in the back ground) and reopened the issue of boycotting the election. Another meeting of the Working Committee was consequently held and the decision about the boycott was reaffirmed and the resolution that I had moved two days earlier was passed. Those who were in favour of boycotting the election were (1) S.M. Afzal, (2) Shaukat Hayat, (3) Shafiqul Islam, (4) Nawab Zahid Ali, (5) Begum Bashir Ahmed, (6) Shaikh Inayat Ullah, (7) Syed Mazhar Gilani, (8) Abu Said Anwar, (9) Nizamuddin Hyder, (10) Abul Wahid Sheikh and (11) myself. Thereupon Lari approached the Acting President to call a meeting of the Parliamentary Board with a view to defy the Working committee decision and to select representatives to the COP Parliamentary Board. Syed Afzal told him that till the decision about boycott was not revised he could not call a meeting of the Parliamentary Board. All the same Abul Qasem and Lari on their own called a meeting of the Parliamentary Board in Dacca on 25.1.1965 which was attended by only a few members and selected four representatives i.e. mostly themselves to the COP Parliamentary Board. This was done when our decision about boycotting the election had not been revised yet. All the same Shaukat and I did not make any fuss about it.

At the Dacca meeting of the COP when the resolution about contesting the election was moved our delegation abstained from supporting or opposing it. We did not oppose it as it would have broken the COP and we could not support it as it would have been contrary to the decision of our Working committee. We therefore explained this position to the Conference and informed them that our Working committee will reconsider the position in view of the COP decision to contest the elections. The Working committee met again in Karachi on 28.1.1965 and reviewed its decision about boycotting the election.

I know that all this annoyed you very much and I hold myself mainly responsible for it. Perhaps I was wrong on the issue of boycotting the election. All the same I assure you that I was not in the least influenced in this matter either by Fazlur Rahman or Shaukat or any other person and even now I am more than ever convinced that boycott is the only proper alternative left to us and the statements of some of the ministers welcoming the COP decision to contest the election lends further support to my belief.

The upshot of all this controversy about boycott is that the Muslim League is faced with a division and disruption. Abul Qasem (supported by Lari, Daultana and others) wants to become the President of the party and then get rid of us (particularly myself, Shaukat Hayat, S.M. Afzal Shafiqul Islam and others). S.M. Afzal the acting President has the support of the other group and will also contest the election to become the President of the party. You have unfortunately expressed your inability to accept the Presidentship of the Muslim League although you are making efforts to make it a strong party. The only way to avoid a contest and disruption is to surrender to Lari and Abul Qasem but I doubt if I will succeed in persuading all those, who do not want Abul Qasem and Lari to capture the party leadership, to do so. Any way I will do my best

so that men like Lari can have a free hand in the future policy making of the party.

I think by contesting elections to the Assemblies we have lost the battle. The magnificent movement and public upsurge that you had built during your election campaign will disappear. There will no longer be an occasion for us to go to people. People become irrelevant now. During your election campaign we approached the people directly so that they may elect such B.Ds who will vote for you and your programme. Now we have to approach the B.Ds, beg them for votes after condemning this system of voting or bribe them to get their votes. Thus we will be doing the same for which we are condemning the ruling party. I am convinced that not one member will be elected without bribing the B.Ds.

Boycott by itself would have electrified the nation. It would have given us the opportunity to approach the people and to expose the Government and the B.D. system and the sort of election held by the Government. Asking for permission to hold meetings and refusal of load-speaker and imposition of 144 Cr.P.C. would have meant a movement by itself. Boycott would have been our slogan. Boycott the government its functions, its receptions, its supporters. Boycott would have focussed the world attention on Pakistan and exposed the Government internationally also. Now we will be working this Constitution and hope to get 15% or 20% seats in the legislatures.

Inside the legislature an ineffective opposition will only be endorsing the ordinances passed by the Government and prove to the world that a real democracy with proper opposition exists in Pakistan. Those opposition M.N.As or M.P.As who will dare to attack the Government and its leaders and speak the truth will be subjected to pressures and hardships like three of our Baluchistan members -- Atta Ullah Mengal who is in jail for over 9 months on a false charges of

murder of Khair Bakhsh Marri who is removed from *Sardari* of this tribe and deprived of his property and involved in several cases, or Abdul Baqi Baluch who was first put in jail for several months under the F.C.R. and when released by the Supreme Court and he continued his attack on the Government in the Assembly has now been shot at and almost killed. In view of all this I fail to understand as to how can we concede so much and lose so much with view to have the occasional platform in the legislatures. As I said before I must be wrong particularly when you are in favour of contesting elections. I therefore feel that in the Muslim League Party also leadership should go to those who are for contesting these elections and for saving the COP at all costs even if it means becoming the camp-followers of men like Mujibur Rahman.

I hope you will not mind my writing this long letter to you. Just as I have been a devoted follower of the Quaid-i-Azam from the time when I was a student similarly my loyalty to you remains unshaken. You have always been very kind to me and you will not find me ungrateful. If after the Lahore meetings of the Muslim League I do not take active interest in politics you will kindly understand my position. Perhaps I do not understand politics or am unfit for it. All the same I shall always be ready for any service at your command.

Yours very sincerely

Yahya Bakhtiar
(Yahya Bakhtiar)

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