

## *Anti-Communist Front*

The formation of the seven-party United Front which won a resounding victory in the election that followed was a significant development in the politics not only of Kerala but of the whole country. It showed that the split in the Communist movement had not prevented the two parties, into which it had got split, from coming together in the struggle against the Congress monopoly of power.

The RSP which had kept aloof from the united Communist Party when the latter formed the first non-Congress government in the state and which joined the CPI when the Party got split, also joined the new coalition against the Congress. So did the Socialist Party, the KSP, the newly-formed Karshaka Thozhilali Party and the Muslim League—all of them active participants in the anti-Communist ‘liberation struggle’ of 1959 and in the electoral front of 1960.

Like its counterpart in West Bengal, the Kerala United Front brought together a broad spectrum of political forces which are left-oriented as well as those which are generally democratic, though not of a specifically left complexion. Unlike the West Bengal front, however, it was the dominant force in the legislature, in Kerala the Congress and the Kerala Congress in the opposition having been reduced to 9 and 6 respectively in a House of 133.

This overwhelming strength of the coalition in the Legislature in quantitative terms however, concealed its qualitative weakness. The ruling coalition’s massive numerical strength—around

115 out of 133—was counter-balanced by the fact that the constituents of the coalition included, as in West Bengal the CPI (M) and the CPI which had conflicting perceptions of the political situation in the country. They came into the coalition in the wake of bitter protracted struggle over policies as well as organization. The memories of this struggle haunted them at every step.

While this in general may be true of both parties, the CPI was prone to be particularly bitter towards the CPI (M), since it had suffered at the CPI(M)'s hands the humiliating electoral defeat in the mid term elections. Flaunting its "international connections" as well as "national character" i.e., being recognised as "the real CPI" by the fraternal parties headed by the CPSU and having greater representation in a larger number of State legislatures in the country, the CPI leaders felt that they were entitled to get larger representation in the Kerala legislature than was allowed to them in the correlation of political forces in the State while the CPI (M) was dominant within the coalition. This made them raise the bogey of "big party bossism" against the CPI (M).

The RSP joined hands with the CPI since it was the latter's partner in the anti-CPI (M) campaign during the 1965 mid-term elections. It simply transferred its traditional hostility to the united Communist Party to its major section, i.e., the CPI (M).

These two left parties raised the banner of revolt against the CPI (M) within the seven party coalition during the very first few months of the seven-party regime. Between these two parties themselves, the CPI took the initiative in "exposing" the CPI (M), the performance of its ministers and the "big bossist" attitude of that party to its front partners. It was joined in the campaign by the RSP to begin with and subsequently by a section of the Socialists and the Muslim League. The Congress-Kerala Congress Opposition and the monopoly press, of course, gave powerful support.

## II

The CPI fired the first shot at the Food Minister, accusing her of inefficiency and wrong policies which allegedly led to an extremely serious situation. In making this allegation, they were obviously shielding the Central Government whose responsibility it was for keeping the public distribution system in the highly deficit State supplied with its requirements.

The same thing was done later against other CPI(M) ministers who were in charge of General Administration, Home, Forests, Transport and Revenue. The monopoly press not only gave publicity to the charges levelled against the CPI (M) ministers by the CPI but added their own. These latter in their turn were utilised by the CPI in its campaign of vilification against the CPI (M).

This tirade against individual ministers belonging to the CPI (M) was subsequently turned into a concerted attack on the Party and its policies. The spokesmen of the CPI demanded of the CPI (M) that the latter give up its normal activity as the militant party of the working class—mobilizing the working people in struggle against the exploiting classes. This activity of the Party was denounced as inconsistent with the Party's role as a ruling party. "Either give up the agitational approach and remain in the Government, or go out of the Government and carry on your agitation"—such was the "advice" tendered by the CPI leaders to the CPI (M). The spokesmen of the latter for their part asserted their right to remain in the Government on the strength of the popular verdict. As for the "agitational approach" the CPI (M) made it clear that, as the militant party of the working class, it cannot give up the basic stand of remaining with the fighting people.

The inner-party struggle within the CPI (M), which led to the emergence of the break-away Naxalite group going in for quite a few adventurist actions like the attack on a police station and several murders, was used by all the enemies of the CPI (M), including the CPI leaders, to denounce and isolate the party among the people. The CPI did it in a two-fold way: on the one

hand, it said that the Naxalites and their adventurist actions are the result of the "sectarian" stand of the CPI (M) and, therefore, the Party should be held responsible for all that has been done by the Naxalites. On the other hand, it joined the chorus of the Naxalites themselves against "police atrocities", allegedly committed by the police under the orders of the "Marxist Chief Minister". Its leaders in other words attacked the CPI (M) for having inspired the Naxalites for their adventurist activities but organized "defence committees" to aid the Naxalite accused. They hoped to "isolate" the CPI (M), "cut it to size" by launching such an apparently contradictory but well-planned attack.

Another line of attack made by the RSP was to level corruption charges formally directed in the beginning against both the CPI (M) and the CPI. They, in fact, intended to hit the CPI (M). The RSP leader Srikantan Nair prepared a memorandum and submitted it to the Coordination Committee of the United Front, demanding that investigation should be made and necessary action taken concerning the charges. While formally being a document for discussion in the Coordination Committee, it was leaked out into the Press and became the basis for a concerted campaign against the CPI (M). The CPI and the opposition parties together with the monopoly press took up the charges and made them the basis of a concerted anti-CPI (M) campaign.

It was these "charges of corruption" that provided the basis on which the CPI and the RSP, together with the Muslim League and a section of the Socialist party from the ruling coalition, joining hands with the Congress-Kerala Congress Opposition, succeeded two years later in pulling the Government down. The facts leading up to this development may now be summarised :

1. Certain specific allegations were made against one of the ministers, Health Minister Wellington, who did not belong to the CPI (M) but to the Karshaka Thozhilali Party. The Coordination Committee discussed the charges and authorised the

Chief Minister to examine the material and come to a decision whether there is a *prima facie* case for instituting a judicial enquiry.

2. On an examination of the material placed before him, the Chief Minister found that there was no *prima facie* case. However, he added that, if there is any further material, it can and will be gone into. The decision in the case referred to, therefore, was that a judicial enquiry is not warranted.

3. Against this decision of the Chief Minister, a motion was moved in the Legislature demanding a judicial enquiry into the charges against Wellington. This was passed because, while the anti-CPI (M) groups in the Legislature were by themselves a minority not only in the Legislative Assembly but in the United Front Assembly Party as well, their motion was supported by the Congress - Kerala Congress Opposition. Thus began the open collaboration between the Congress - Kerala Congress Opposition and the "mini-front" within the coalition.

4. The Chief Minister was thus forced to order a judicial enquiry. However, since there was no *prima facie* case for such an enquiry into this case and since there were charges against some other ministers (belonging to the CPI, the RSP, the Muslim League and the Socialist Party) where too there was no *prima facie* case, the Chief Minister considered it unfair to order judicial enquiry into only one case. All the cases in which there were allegations but on which no *prima facie* case had been made out were therefore placed before the judicial enquiry commission.

5. Enraged by this, the mini-front moved a motion in the Assembly directing the Chief Minister to order a judicial enquiry into the ministers belonging to the CPI (M), the KSP and the KTP. The name of the Chief Minister himself, however, was left out. This too was adopted in the House through the joint vote of the Congress - Kerala Congress opposition and those constituents of the ruling coalition which had by then come to be known as the "mini-front".

6. At the very beginning of the debate on this motion, it had been made perfectly clear by the Chief Minister that, if it is adopted by the combined vote of the "mini front" and the Opposition, he would have no option but to resign. The motion was passed and the ministry resigned.

### III

The whole game was obviously to use the "charges of corruption" against an individual minister to begin with in order to cut the "big bossist" CPI (M) to size, wean away as many constituents of the coalition as possible from the CPI (M), expand the area of "corruption charges" as required and to bring about a realignment of political forces in the State. The strategies of the ruling Congress Party at the Centre, the all-India leadership of the CPI, the Congress-Kerala Congress Opposition in the State as well as those constituents of the ruling coalition in the State who together formed the anti-CPI (M) "mini front" happened to coincide here. The "charges of corruption" were only the alibi to carry out this common strategy.

This, in fact, was subsequently acknowledged by no less a person than Achutha Menon, one of the top-most leaders of the CPI in the State who took over as Chief Minister within a week of the fall of the United Front ministry.

In a letter written to Father Vadakkan, the leader of the Karshaka Thozhilali Party, explaining why his party and its allies has to take these steps against Wellington, Menon wrote that they had nothing against Wellington or his party as such. They were forced to resort to this method, he went on, because he was acting "in complete subservience to the Marxists".

In another letter written to the former Chief Minister of the CPI(M). Menon wrote that while a judicial enquiry was demanded against all other CPI(M) ministers, he (the Chief Minister) was excluded from its purview because they had hoped that he would be "sensible enough to reconstitute the front and the ministry".

The laying of "corruption charges", demanding and ordering judicial enquiries, were thus admittedly a political weapon in the hands of the opponents of the CPI(M) to bring the Government down.

An important all-India political development had in the meanwhile taken place, facilitating such a realignment of political forces leading to the "isolation" of the CPI(M), its transformation from the leading constituent of the ruling coalition to the major opposition party in the State. This was the turmoil in the Congress party after its electoral defeat of 1967 which was further confirmed by the mini general elections of 1969. Following the latter, a vertical split occurred inside the ruling Congress party—between the so-called "syndicate" led by Morarji Desai, Nijalingappa and so on and the Congress led by Indira Gandhi.

Championing as the latter did the cause of bank nationalisation, abolition of privy purses to princes, and so on the parties of the Left, including the CPI(M) and the CPI supported it in its fight against the "syndicate". It was in fact the support of the Left that helped the candidate of the Indira Congress for the Presidential election, V.V. Giri, to win in August 1969. This was followed in the course of three months by the open split of the ruling Congress party into the Congress(R) and Congress(O)

While the CPI (M) and the CPI had adopted an identical stand on extending support to the Indira Congress and its Central Government on such questions as bank nationalisation, Presidential election and abolition of privy purses, the two differed from each other on the assessment of the nature of the split and consequently, the tactics that should be adopted. While the CPI(M) looked upon the split in the ruling party as a manifestation of two tactical approaches within the framework of the same general policies of the ruling classes, the CPI considered it a division of great ideological and political significance. It required in their opinion a change in the Left parties' approach to the ruling Congress party, the abandonment of

confrontation with it, the adoption of a policy of cooperation. Hostility to the CPI(M) was thus supplemented by a "constructive attitude" to the ruling Congress party.

As for the RSP, its all-India leadership did not toe the CPI line. It continued to pursue the line of opposition to the Congress, both at the all-India level as well as in West Bengal where it was a partner of the CPI (M) in the united front and the Government. When the United Front and its Government in West Bengal were toppled in March 1970, the RSP refused to adopt the CPI line and went along with the CPI (M) and its Left allies.

In Kerala, on the other hand, the state leadership of the RSP continued its anti-CPI (M) line which it had earlier shared with the CPI. The Kerala RSP, therefore, was expelled by its all-India leadership and continued in the State as a purely State party.

The two Left Parties having thus joined hands with the Congress and Kerala Congress against the CPI (M), there was no difficulty for the Muslim League and a section of the Socialist Party to go along with them.

#### IV

For the CPI, however, it was by no means easy to make a complete turn by transforming itself from the partner of an anti-Congress coalition to the partner in a new coalition in which the Congress was a major partner. It had to adopt in the beginning a political stance of continuing the old left-oriented non-Congress coalition out of which the CPI (M), the KSP, the KTP and a section of the Socialists have been excluded. The CPI Chief Minister who took over within a week of the fall of the coalition Government, Achutha Menon, declared that he would quit the moment it was known that he could remain in office only with the support of the Congress. He also declared that the job of the Government headed by him would be to carry out the measures adopted by the earlier Government—measures which the CPI (M) had refused to

carry out by quitting the ministry.

In constituting the new ministry, therefore, the Congress was not included while the Kerala Congress was taken. It was only after the subsequent mid-term elections that the question of Congress participation was mooted; for a year even after the election, the Congress kept out of office. These manoeuvres were necessary for the CPI to make a complete turn from the earlier policy of opposition to the Congress to the new one of collaboration with it.

As far as the Congress party was concerned such a change in the attitude of the CPI and its left ally, the RSP, proved to be a god send. It had become clear from the developments since 1957 that the Congress by itself, or even with such allies of a rightist or communal character, cannot win the majority of the electorate and provide a Government. Nor could it repeat the 1959 experiment of unleashing a "mass upsurge" and topple the CPI (M)-led Government since the all-India situation had turned completely against it.

Here, however, is an opportunity for the Congress to wean away a section of the Left, even while mobilizing all the rightist, communal and casteist forces, in order to come back to power. From a small group of nine members in 1967, it could rise to a 32-strong Party, the biggest single coalition partner in a set-up formally headed by the CPI and including two other Leftist groups—the RSP and a section of the Socialists. The Congress, therefore, should be grateful to the CPI, the RSP and a section of the Socialists for having rehabilitated it from the depths of isolation and defeat.

#### V

A good deal of controversy has taken place during the last decade and more on the line adopted by the CPI to the Left oriented non-Congress Governments of Kerala and West Bengal. It may, therefore, be proper to conclude this chapter by giving an extract from the subsequent assessment made by the CPI at its Bhatinda Congress in 1978 on the mistakes committed by them during this period.

“The party leadership came to the mistaken understanding that a split has taken place between the anti-imperialist democratic sections of the bourgeoisie and the pro-imperialist, most reactionary pro-monopoly, pro-landlord, anti-Communist sections and that the Emergency could be used to bring about progressive shifts in the correlation of forces and State power in a national democratic direction. Thereby the progressive potentialities of the national bourgeoisie and Indira Gandhi’s Government, and the capacity of our party and other democratic forces to bring about these positive shifts in the situation were over-estimated. The potentialities of the favourable international situation and the progressive foreign policy in relation to its impact upon the internal situation were understood in a very mechanical manner. It was insufficiently realised that the fight against the increasingly anti-people internal policies of the Indira Gandhi Government had to be given priority by our party even while supporting its anti-imperialist foreign policy as well as its progressive internal measures. It was not properly realised that a progressive foreign policy cannot eventually be safeguarded without progressive internal policies.” (Document of Eleventh Congress, p. 67).

It is thus obvious that the charge of “big bossism”, the political and organizational attacks on the individual ministers belonging to the CPI (M) and the “corruption charges” on the basis of which the CPI (M)-led Government was pulled down in 1969 were all so many pegs on which to hang the political line of collaboration with the Congress which has at last been admitted to have been a mistake.