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The Fiasco of Anti-Communism

The Congress was reduced to a minority in three state legislatures (including that of Travancore-Cochin) which were formed after the first (1952) general election.

Each of these had the possibility of a non-Congress government coming into power. The tactics adopted by the central leadership, however, varied.

The bulk of the opposition in one of these — PEPSU — was of a rightist character. The Akalis constituted its backbone; the Communist Party, not to speak of other left opposition parties, was extremely weak. On the other hand, in the other two states—in Madras and in Travancore-Cochin—the Communist Party, together with some other left opposition groups and individuals, constituted the major opposition.

Taking this difference into account, the Congress leadership adopted two different courses: it allowed the Akalis and their allies in PEPSU to form their non-Congress government. In Madras and Travancore-Cochin, on the other hand, the leader of the minority Congress Party was asked to form his Government.

In all the three states, however, the ultimate game was identical—to break the unity of, and win over, a section of the opposition to the side of the Congress and then to consolidate its position. This common objective could be attained, the Congress leaders thought, by appeasing the right opposition in PEPSU, while an uncompromising stand had to be adopted to the left (mainly Communist) opposition in

Madras and Travancore-Cochin.

The position inside the state legislature was the same in PEPSU and Madras. The combined strength of opposition legislators was more than that of the Congress in both the states. They had, after the election, come together in a united front, elected a leader and informed the head of state (Raj Pramukh in PEPSU and the Governor in Madras) that they were ready to form a government. While the Raj Parmukh of PEPSU took the leader of the United Front at his word and allowed him to form a government, the Governor of Madras rejected the claim of the leader of the United Front. His argument was that the United Front was not a party but a post-election combination — precisely what the PEPSU united front also was.

Such an obvious political discrimination may appear repulsive to decent and democratic-minded people. But the Congress rulers had no use for decency or democracy. What they wanted above all was to prevent the formation of left governments anywhere. This could be done only by creating divisions and rifts within the opposition — as between the right and left opposition, and between the Communists and the rest within the left opposition. As the new Chief Minister of Madras, Rajagopalachari, said, “the Communist Party is enemy number one and will be fought from A to Z.”

This tactical line was successful for the short time being. A section of the Akalis in PEPSU was gradually won over for the Congress. When this process had been initiated to an extent when it became clear that the Congress, in alliance with this section of the Akalis, could win a new election, the Central Government dismissed the state government (on the ground that the state government was helping the Communists!). The election which followed in 1953 resulted in complete victory for the Congress.

In Madras and Travancore-Cochin, the formation of the (minority) Congress government enabled the new Chief Minister to win over some non-Communist opposition groups

and individuals who offered their support to the Congress Government. The danger of non-Congress governments (including the Communist Party) was thus averted.

This, however, was temporary. The basic causes of the crisis remained. The non-Congress opposition was very powerful both in Travancore-Cochin and in Madras. Furthermore, the new allies of the Congress were not dependable enough to facilitate ministerial stability. Mid-term elections had therefore to be ordered in Travancore-Cochin in 1954 and in the newly-formed state of Andhra (that part of Madras where the left opposition was the strongest) in 1955.

Each of the three states where the Congress had been reduced to a minority in the 1952 general elections had thus to go through a mid-term election. This helped the Congress in PEPSU and in Andhra but not in Travancore-Cochin. With a section of the Akalis allied to the Congress, it was an easy walk-over for the Congress in PEPSU. Andhra was a tougher nut to crack, but the anti-Communist hysteria and the united front of anti-Communist forces helped the Congress to retrieve its 1952 loss. In Travancore-Cochin, on the other hand, even the mid-term election (1954) brought the Congress back to its 1952 (minority) position. What was worse from the Congress point of view was that the combined strength of the Communist and other left opposition parties was sufficient to form a government.

This was a threat which had to be met somehow. The Congress leaders evolved a new plan—allow the formation of a non-Congress government but not by the united front including the Communist Party. The PSP whose leaders had shouted from hundreds of platforms during the election campaign, “we (the Communist Party, RSP, KSP and PSP) fight together, shall govern together”, was asked to form “its own (one-party)” government. The only condition was that it should not depend on or cooperate with the Communists and other left parties. The Congress itself would be ‘in opposition’; its leader in the legislature would be the leader of the

opposition; it would however vote with the PSP government — this was the arrangement according to which a puppet PSP government totally subservient to the Congress ‘opposition’ came into existence and governed the state for about 11 months.

Gradually, however, frictions developed between the PSP government and the Congress ‘opposition’. Apart from the personal and factional quarrels between PSP and Congress leaders, there were political differences which could not be suppressed for all time. The relentless pressure put by the real (Communist-RSP-KSP) opposition forced the PSP government to introduce certain land reform bills in the legislature. This became the starting point of a statewide hysterical campaign, unleashed by the Congress, against the PSP government.

To this was added the discontent roused in the Tamil-speaking South Travancore area by the hostility shown by the PSP government to the demands of the Tamilian people. Clever use was made of this by the Congress to pull down the PSP government and to form a Congress government with the support of the South Travancore Tamilnadu Congress.

The new government was also short-lived. Not only were the conflicts between the Congress and the (South Travancore) Tamilnadu Congress continuing, but conflicts were developing inside the Congress leadership itself. A group of “dissident Congressmen” emerged and challenged the leadership and authority of the Chief Minister. When this inevitably led in February 1956 to the adoption of a no-confidence motion in the legislature, followed by the dissolution of the legislature and the establishment of president’s rule, the outgoing Chief Minister exclaimed: “It is not the opposition that defeated my government, but my own party people”.

The dissolution of the legislature should have been followed by another mid-term election. But since the second general election was to take place in a year, it was postponed. Meanwhile, the state of Travancore-Cochin minus South Travancore was transformed into Kerala by the addition of Malabar and part of South Kanara.

II

The developments described in the previous section indicate that the political crisis gripping the ruling Congress party had become much deeper in Travancore-Cochin than anywhere else in India. Not only could its alliances (with the South Travancore Tamilnad Congress and the PSP) fail to stabilise the Congress government here (as it could in PEPSU — with a section of the Akalis; in Madras — with the Tamilnad Toilers Party and other groups; and in Andhra — with those parties and groups with which the Congress formed an anti-Communist United Front in 1955), but the Travancore-Cochin Congress itself had become so crisis-ridden that it could not provide a stable government. Nowhere had the prestige of the Congress as the ruling party sunk so low as in Travancore-Cochin which now became the new state of Kerala.

Another, still more serious, aspect of the crisis was that the tactics pursued by the Socialist Party in 1952 and by the PSP in 1953-54 discredited the one political force which could have prevented the growth of the political influence and strength of the Communist Party. The Congress as well as the Socialist leaders had thought that the anti-Communism of the Socialist Party would help the formation of a non-Communist opposition which would absorb the growing mass discontent against the Congress. It was with this objective that the Socialists made a bid for the position of the major opposition (with a majority in a few states) in the 1952 election. It was again with this perspective that the well-known Nehru-Jayaprakash talks took place.

But the miserable all-India record of the Socialists in the 1952 election, coupled with the disgraceful performance of that party in Travancore-Cochin in 1954-55, brought the leaders of that party to the lowest depths of political prestige. No more would the people of India—the people of Kerala in particular—look upon this party as a serious opposition to the Congress. All those who genuinely wanted to defeat the Congress, to replace it in the seats of power, would flock to the Communist Party and its allies, since they alone had consistently played

the role of genuine opposition.

Coming as it did against this background, the formation of the new state of Kerala and the election that followed it raised the possibility of the Congress being replaced by the Communist Party as the ruling party.

This was, in fact, one of the considerations why a section of the ruling classes opposed the formation of the new state. Their point of view was turned down because the continuance of Travancore-Cochin would not solve the problem. After all, the Congress position in Travancore-Cochin as it stood was as bad as it would be in the new state; in one sense it might have been worse. For apart from the Communist Party which was as strong in Travancore-Cochin as in the new state, there was the South Travancore Tamilnadu Congress which would cease to exist in Kerala.

Furthermore, the separation of Malabar would strengthen the Congress in Madras. The formation of Kerala state would therefore be a lesser evil from the Congress point of view.

Another consideration which the Congress leaders had at the time was that a persistent anti-Communist campaign would help them to isolate the Communist Party as it had in Andhra. The chances were, if possibly even more favourable than in Andhra. For, the revelations made at and after the 20th Congress of the CPSU, followed by the Polish and Hungarian events, provided plenty of ammunition to the anti-Communist campaign. Added to this were the laudatory terms in which the Soviet, Chinese and other world Socialist leaders spoke of India's achievements. The Congress leaders hoped to cash in on all this to claim that it was they and not the Communists, who would take the country forward along the path of democracy, peace and even socialism.

One more favourable factor for the Congress was that every one of the leftist allies of the Communist Party had given up the earlier policy. The PSP (which was with the Communists in Travancore-Cochin in 1954 joined the anti-Communist

chorus. Even after the end of the brief honeymoon with the Congress in 1954-55, it did not realise its mistake: the utmost that it did before the 1957 election was not to join the Congress, preferring the Muslim League for its ally. As for the Praja Party of the Malabar area (which had an electoral understanding with the Communists in 1952), its leaders had joined the Congress. Even the RSP and KSP broke with the Communists and fought the election on their own.

The congressmen hoped that this virtual isolation of the Communists, would make it impossible for the Communist Party to reach any where near a majority of seats in the legislature. This was also the fear of the friends of the Communists most of whom had taken it as an incontrovertible truth that only a united front of left parties would help to defeat the Congress. (It may be relevant in this connection to recall a statement made by the late Ajoy Ghosh, then General Secretary of the Communist Party, that a majority for the Party was unlikely. It fell to the writer of these lines, who was in the midst of his election campaign, to publicly contradict this and say that victory for the Party was quite possible.)

The result of the election, therefore, was surprising to the Congress leaders. The Communists and their allies (Independents) emerged successful in 65 out of 126 seats—just the number that was required to form a Government. No amount of anti-Communist campaigning by the Congress or its allies could sway the voters of Kerala from their determination to defeat the Congress.

The verdict would have been far more decisive if the PSP, RSP and KSP had cooperated with the Communist Party. But even without their cooperation, the Communists, together with the Independents allied to them, secured an absolute majority of seats and 40 per cent of the votes polled, compared to between 30 and 35 per cent of the votes secured by the Congress in 1952 and 1954.

This was indeed a new stage in the development of Kerala politics—a stage in which the Communist Party could success-

fully challenge the Congress.

The absolute majority of seats won by the Communist Party and its Independent allies put the Central Government and the all-India leadership of the Congress on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, there was no constitutional argument with which the Communists could be prevented from forming a government : 65 members of the state legislature (out of 126) met, formed a legislature party, elected a leader and told the Governor that they were prepared to form a government. On the other hand, the formation of such a government would have serious repercussions throughout the country; the image of the Congress as the unchallenged and unchallengeable ruling party of India would be erased and the contagion might spread all over the body politic of the country.

The dilemma was broken in the end by a division of labour as between the Central Government and the central leadership of the Congress. The former took the constitutionally 'correct' stand of permitting the formation of the Government and 'offering its cooperation' to this non-Congress Government. The President of the Indian Union went to the extent of characterizing the formation of this government as an instance of applying the principle of 'peaceful coexistence' to internal political questions. The central leadership of the Congress, on the other hand, resorted to the tactics of forging the unity of all anti-Communist forces for opposition, obstruction and subversion.

Even the attitude of the Central Government (acting through its representative, the Governor) was not above-board. The Governor, for instance, did not accept the letter given to him that a Communist Legislature Party had come into existence. He called the Independents who had joined the Communist Legislature Party individually to 'satisfy himself' that they were genuinely with the Communists. Only after finding that they stood firmly behind the Communist Party, that they would not be available to the Congress for disruption, did the Governor call on the leader of the Communist Party to form the Government.

Even at this stage, the Governor used his discretionary power to nominate an Anglo-Indian to the legislature to strengthen the Congress; thus rejecting the claim of the Communist Party that the nomination should be made on its recommendation (since it was the new ruling party). The Governor nominated a person who was committed to vote with the Congress.

While it was clear that the Central Government would do everything to create difficulties for the new government provided it had some semblance of constitutional validity, it did not go out of its way to obstruct the working of the Government. As a matter of fact, when a dispute arose between the Governor and the new Government on the granting of mercy to a prisoner condemned to death, the issue was finally settled to the satisfaction of the government. There was, from this point on, an appearance of constitutional propriety on the part of the Governor as well as of the Central Government.

The central leadership of the Congress, however, did not hide its displeasure at what had happened in Kerala. Hardly had the new government been sworn in when the General Secretary of the Congress, Shriman Narayan, 'discovered' a 'sense of insecurity' among the people of Kerala. The formation of the new Government, it was suggested, heralded a situation of serious danger to the person and property of peace-loving and law-abiding people. This line laid down by their all-India leader was further elaborated by the Congress leaders of Kerala who unleashed a vicious campaign of lies and slander.

This, however, did not make an impact on the people. On the contrary, this anti-Communist, anti-Government campaign boomeranged on the Congress. The people had seen with their own eyes how the Congress had for so long misruled the state; how, it was unable even to maintain its own internal unity. The record of ministerial crises and changes, manipulation and intrigues by its leaders, individually and in groups, had thoroughly discredited it as the ruling party. But the moment the people punished them by not only reducing them into a minority but by giving an absolute majority to another party, the Congress

leaders tried to pull/down the new government. This 'dog in the manager' attitude—unable to rule, but unwilling to let somebody else rule the state—was resented by impartial people.

This was not all. The way in which the new government began functioning created a tremendous favourable impression. There was, to begin with, the policy statement of the new ministry which put forward the modest objective of sincerely implementing those progressive policies and measures which the Congress Party and the Central Government had laid down but which the previous Congress governments in the state refused to implement. This cut the ground from those who were trying to scare unwary people with stories of 'Russia and China repeating themselves in Kerala'. Then there was the announcement that the ministers would take very low salaries of Rs. 500 each per month which was in strict accordance with the Karachi resolution of the Congress. (It may be mentioned that only the Independents who were ministers took Rs. 500, the Communists drawing only Rs. 350). Above all, the first legislative measure undertaken by the new government was the complete and fool-proof ban on all ejections of tenants pending the drawing up of a comprehensive land reform legislation. These and other indications of the functioning of the new ministry showed that here was a group of dedicated servants of the people, rather than self-seekers who use politics for their own personal and factional ends.

All this was making a big impact on the people not only in Kerala but throughout the country. That, however, was all the more reason for the Congress, the PSP, the Muslim League and even the smaller parties which were not represented in the legislature, to think it necessary to join forces in a firm anti-Communist united front. This they did in the first weeks after the ministers were sworn in: the very first sitting of state legislature which took place before the end of one month after the formation of the ministry witnessed the unity of the opposition under the leadership and the Congress. This anti-government unity inside the legislature was supplemented by a unity outside, not only among these parties as parties but in the columns of the newspapers. The majority of the newspapers in the

language, numbering over 30, switched to a policy of distortions and lies intended to defame and discredit the ministry as a whole, as well as the ministers individually. 'Take advantage of every available opportunity, use every specific issue to slander them; if there is no opportunity, no issue available, create them'. This became the motto of anti-Communist newspapers and agitators. Let us enumerate a few (only the most important) examples :

1. The formation of the new ministry coincided with a very bad food situation. Those who know anything about the economy of Kerala know that no government in the state—Congress, PSP or Communist—can do anything about the food unless the Centre helps by arranging supplies in time and at cheaper rates. Yet the combined opposition launched a campaign directed against the state government. Black-flag demonstrations directed against the state ministers with slogans demanding food were organized throughout the state.

2. With a view to meeting the difficult food situation, the government sent its officers to Andhra (the main source of rice supply) and purchased rice. The need being urgent, the normal formalities of calling for tenders and coming to agreement with the lowest bidder were not gone through. A contract was signed with a party who agreed to supply quickly at current market price and the supplies did come in time. But a big furore was raised over the fact that tenders were not called. Allegations were made that the price paid by the government was more than what the dealer got, the difference being pocketed by the Communist Party. (It is significant that neither the ministers concerned nor anybody else was accused of pocketing the difference for himself. The ministers had such a reputation for incorruptibility that no charge of corruption against them would have been believed by the people. It was, however felt that the charge of 'collective corruption by and for the Party' would go down, since the ministers are known to be dedicated persons with high standards of personal integrity, living and working for the Party — 'They will do anything to strengthen the Party'!) This became one of the points of persistent cam-

paign against the government and the Party since then.

3. The new government laid down a new police policy. It was a departure from the old hated and discredited policy in two respects. First, it impressed on the officers and men of the service that they formed the arm of a democratic state and therefore (like the entire state machinery) servants of the people. Their attitude and behaviour towards the people should have this basic outlook—the exact opposite of a bossist outlook towards the people. Second, it laid down that in all cases of worker-capitalist or peasant-landlord disputes, police intervention should only be at such a stage of the dispute when there was an actual threat to peace. These directives were naturally welcomed by the common people who heaved a sigh of relief that the police would not be the oppressive machine that it used to be. For the same reason, however, the landlords, capitalist and other vested interests were up in arms. 'Our persons and properties are in danger', was their slogan. This was loyally and dutifully taken up by the combined opposition whose leaders echoed the slogan of insecurity. 'The Communists are out to demoralized and disrupt the police in order to create disorder in the country' they shouted.

4. The police policy, however, was only one aspect of the general outlook of the official machinery towards the people, their organizations and leaders. Government officers were asked by the new government to be responsive to the representations of people's leaders. The ministers themselves showed the way by constituting non-official committees to advise and help the government at various levels and for various departments, with representatives of all political parties and organizations. This naturally gave the Communist Party, along with other political parties, a position which had so far been denied to it. This was galling to the local gentry who were shocked to find government officials giving a respectful hearing to a backward-caste poor peasant, or worse still an artisan or agricultural labourer who was the local leader of the Communist Party. How could they tolerate a state of affairs in which the worker-peasant cadres of the Communist Party could have the same rights as were enjoyed by the 'respectable' upper class (or educated middle

class) leaders a 'respectable' parties? This is nothing but 'Communist totalitarianism'! Administrative services were being subordinated to the Communist Party!!

5. A particular instance of the change in the relationship between the Communist Party and the administration was the notorious "police verification" of the antecedents of recruits for government service. When the new ministers assumed charge and began to familiarize themselves with various problems, they came across a directive of the Central Government (the existence of which they had earlier suspected) that nobody should be recruited to government service (even if he or she had the requisite qualifications) if his or her past record showed association with the Communist Party or any organization connected with the Party. This was an obvious discrimination against the Communist Party, since association with the Congress or other parties was no bar to appointments. It was, therefore, resolved that this directive would no more be observed. A hue and cry was then raised that an effort was being made to fill government services with Communists. Removal of discrimination against Communists was thus paraded before the people as discrimination in favour of Communists!

It was against the background of such a vicious anti-Communist political campaign that the joint struggle to remove the Communists from office was organized. This struggle did in the beginning take the form of parliamentary manoeuvres—the efforts to "buy over" one or two Communist MLAs. This was the game played earlier by the Congress leaders in Kerala both against factional rivals in their own party as well as against any other party which might form a ministry. Beginning with the first Congress Ministry in Travancore, every one of the Congress Chief Ministers was forced to reshuffle his ministry and in the end to resign. It was in the same way that the PSP ministry of 1954-55 had been discredited, made ineffective and in the end toppled.

It was hoped that the same tactics would prove effective against the Communist ministry. If it did, if at least two Communist MLAs crossed the floor, the ministry would fall. If

only one crossed the floor, the fate of ministry would hang in the balance. The Communist had an original strength of 65, and a voting strength of 64 (one of the 65 had become Speaker). If two crossed the floor they would be reduced to 62; the combined opposition, on the other hand, would be raised from 61 to 63. The bosses behind the Congress, therefore, tried their utmost to purchase one or two MLAs. The efforts however failed; the victims of their pressure exposed the whole game.

Another, attempt of a constitutional character was the concerted all-India drive to defeat the Communist candidate in a by-election caused by the unseating of the very same candidate who had won the seat in the general election. The Congress leadership, not only of Kerala but of the entire country, did everything possible to bring about the defeat of the Communist candidate. Other opposition parties, too, joined them and helped them. They, however, failed. The Communist candidate came out successful.

IV

All this made it obvious that the Communist government could not be removed through ordinary constitutional methods, that it would remain in power for its full term of five years. This was unheard of in Travancore and Travancore-Cochin, where there were six ministries in eight years. Furthermore this stable ministry would lay the basis for a stronger, even stable ministry after the third general election because the policies and practices of the Communist ministry were making the Government and the Party more and more popular.

If only the Agrarian Relations Bill (which was being considered by the legislature) became the law of the land, the mass of rural poor would rally themselves behind the Communist Party. While scrupulously adhering to the principles laid down by the Land Reforms Panel of the (all-India) Planning Commission, the bill provided for such safeguards for the tenants (fixity of tenure, lower rents, right of purchasing ownership) and for the landless labourers (fixity of tenure, etc., on the homesteads occupied by them, possibility of getting land through the distri-

bution of surplus land) as have never been provided for by any Congress Government either in Kerala or anywhere else in India. The implementation of this legislation by a Communist government would release such forces throughout India as to make it impossible to resist the demand for radical land reforms.

The central Congress leadership therefore "agreed" with the state leadership that the time had come to break the "fetters of constitutionalism", to resort to extra-constitutional means to remove the Communist Government. A whole campaign of direct action was evolved by the President of the KPCC and his colleagues on the one hand and the representatives of the Congress High Command on the other. This campaign included all those items which are denounced as "anti-social" by the Congress leaders themselves—obstructive picketing in front of government offices, attacks on government property, call to people not to subscribe to government loans, etc., and so forth. It included also such forms of struggles as are considered reprehensible by all decent people—physical attacks on women teachers, and foul abuse against passengers travelling in state transport buses. All this had the blessing of no less a person than the Congress President, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Not only was such a plan of direct action evolved, but its objective was laid down in unequivocal language—"to paralyse the administration of the state". Here, therefore, was a party which ruled the entire country but whose state unit (with the undisguised support of the central leadership) was trying to "paralyse the administration" in a part of the country! Here was a call to the people to refuse to contribute to loans being collected under the directives of a (central) Government of the very same party which was calling for the boycott of the loans! These contradictions, however, did not worry the Congress leaders for whom, whatever they say in public, the guideline for practice is "everything is fair in war—particularly in a war of survival fought against such an enemy as Communism!"

The public stand taken by Prime Minister Nehru in the beginning was different from that of his colleagues in the organization—President Indira Gandhi, former President Dhebar, etc.

He did not give his blessing to the 'liberation struggle'; he even criticized some aspects of the 'struggle' like the caste and communal approach involved in the opposition campaign. Even at this stage, however, he did not denounce the shamelessly unconstitutional 'struggle', did not put his foot down on the attempt to 'paralyse the administration' in a part of the country of which he was the Prime Minister. Gradually, as the tempo of the struggle began to heighten, he began to glorify this attempt at 'paralysing the administration' as a big 'mass upsurge.' Changing himself from the Prime Minister of the country to that of an elder statesman who was anxious to 'build a bridge' between the two banks of Kerala politics he 'advised' the Communist government to resign and arrange fresh elections.

The Communist Party or its government could not accept his 'advice'. They, on the other hand, asked the Prime Minister to use his authority to stop this attempt at paralysing the administration. The 'mass upsurge' was not a spontaneous popular movement but the result of a calculated plan prepared by the party in whose name the Prime Minister was ruling the country. The main force behind the 'upsurge' was the hope given to the participants of the 'liberation struggle' that the Centre would intervene and dismiss the Communist Government of Kerala, if only 'enough trouble is created for a sufficiently long time'. Would Prime Minister Nehru disabuse them of this, would he make it clear that there was no question of dismissing a ministry which enjoyed the confidence of the legislature; would he use the authority of his government and his position as leader of the nation to put a stop to the efforts to 'paralyse the administration'—these were the questions posed to him.

The questions were answered by the Prime Minister not in words but in action. He advised the President to dismiss the Kerala ministry. The only ground on which this step was taken was that 'the normal constitutional machinery has ceased to function', because, let us add, the Prime Minister's own colleagues were acting with the declared objective of 'paralysing the administration'.

This was undoubtedly a victory for the Congress in Kerala,

whose leaders got what they wanted. But, as we shall see in the following pages, it was a 'pyrrhic victory', the beginning of the growing and protracted crisis of Congress policy which, in the end, further isolated the Congress from the people of Kerala and led to a situation in which the state of Kerala was finally and irrevocably lost to the Congress.

Let us, in the meantime, put on record that the way in which the Communist Ministry functioned for two years and four months and the way in which it was in the end dismissed was a moral and political victory for the left progressive forces represented by the Communist Party. For, this was the first ministry in Kerala to function without internal crises; not a single one of its 65 MLAs fell for the tempting offers placed before them. The Ministers also created a record for personal integrity and incorruptibility—again unheard-of in a state notorious for the personal corruption of ministers. As for the policies pursued by the ministry, it is admitted that they provided a lot of immediate relief to the people, even though, as a state Government functioning under an all-India set-up, the ministry could not go beyond the limits set by the central leadership of the Congress. Above all, even in the midst of the biggest hysterical attacks, the ministry did not lose its head, did not resort to such semi-fascist measures as preventive detention. It was with the support of masses whom it was serving, combined with the ordinary law, rather than with emergency powers, that the ministry proposed to deal with the "mass upsurge" whipped up against it. Not a single truthful observer could thus say that this Government deserved to be dismissed unless, of course, the Communists are to be barred from ministerial offices for all time.

Let us also note that the mid-term election which followed (in February 1960) exposed the claim made by the Congress leaders that they dismissed a ministry which had lost the confidence of a section of the people who were behind it in 1957. The Party and its allies increased its votes by 12 lakhs in 1960 as compared to 1957; the percentage of votes rose from 40 to 44. The concerted anti-Communist campaign launched by the combined opposition, obviously proved a damp squib so far as the class-conscious and radical masses were concerned. The

Communist Party came out of the ordeal a stronger and more popular party.

V

The Congress-led united front of anti-Communism, forged at the time of the 1959 "liberation struggle", was a mixture of political, socio-economic and religious forces which had nothing in common except their hatred for the Communist Government.

On the one hand was the ruling Congress party which was the leader of the united front; on the other were the PSP and the Muslim League which were in opposition to the Congress.

On the one side were avowed opponents of the Agrarian Relation Bill and other radical legislations introduced by the Communist Government—big landlords, plantation owners and other vested interests. On the other were the (Revolutionary, Praja and other) "Socialists" according to whom the policies and practices of the Communist Government were "not radical enough".

At one end was the Catholic Church, the spearhead of anti-Communism, the organizer of the anti-Communist front and the Christopher organisation. At the other end were "Revolutionary Socialists" for whom "Marxism-Leninism was an article of faith",

Brought together in the United Front were also the leaders of the major caste and communal groupings such as the Nairs, the Christians, the Muslims and the Ezhavas who had, in the past, shown that each of them fights the other for the preservation and strengthening of its "own" caste or communal interests.

The unity of such heterogeneous groups with conflicting interests to serve their common objective was praded before the people as a "magnificent achievement"—something which "could not be accomplished even in the days of freedom struggle".

“Kerala which had acquired notoriety for its caste and communal politics has shown the way to real national integration”. “The days of political instability caused by factional squabbles within the ruling party are coming to an end ; an era of unity of all democratic (Congress and opposition) forces is opening” !!

The falsity of such claims, however, began to unfold itself in the first few weeks after the dismissal of the Communist ministry. The Revolutionary Socialists, the Lohia Socialists and some other groups refrained from joining the electoral united front of the Congress, PSP and the Muslim League (though they did not join the Communists either). Even within the triple alliance, difficulties arose on the character of the United Front. The PSP and the Muslim League wanted their senior partner to commit itself to the formation of a coalition government after the election. This, however, could not be done because the central leadership of the Congress had to consider the serious all-India repercussions of a coalition, particularly with the Muslim League.

A crisis was in the end avoided : the PSP and the Muslim League expressed their willingness to be satisfied with a division of seats—no common programme, no pledge to the formation of a coalition ministry. The Congress, however, agreed to the practice of joint (three party) campaign, including the flying of the three flags together in all election meetings. This was enough for the Muslim League leaders to tell their ranks that they were going to have a coalition government . At the same time, the central Congress leadership could appease the anti-Muslim League sections of its own ranks and supporters that it was just a “no-mutual-contest arrangement”.

This, however, could not continue after the election. The triple alliance won 95 seats out of 126, but the Congress had only 64, the PSP and the League winning 20 and 11 respectively. A coalition was unavoidable from the practical end. All the more was it a moral responsibility arising out of the commitments made during the election campaign. But a coalition with the Muslim League would be embarrassing to the central Congress leadership. How to avoid this and yet preserve the unity

of the triple alliance ?

Protracted negotiations went on for a fortnight and an agreed formula was worked out in the end: a tripartite legislature party in which the League would be an equal partner of the PSP and the Congress; a Congress-PSP ministry with no representation for the League; the PSP leader to be the Chief Minister and the Congress leader to be the deputy Chief Minister; and the League leader to be elected the Speaker of the Legislature. This was expected to give some satisfaction both to the League and the Congress; the former could claim that the coalition legislature party was the ruling party of which it was an equal partner; the latter could say that the League was not a part of the ministry. Both would, of course, have to admit that there was an element of compromise, but that was justifiable, since this alone could help them to keep the hated Communists out!

The formula looked acceptable on paper. The arrangement worked for a year-and-a-half (from February 1961). But it contained within itself the seeds of discontent in all parties. Repeated crises broke out in the relations between the parties and within each of them. Each of these crises was overcome by the same method of compromise, overcome only for the time being. The solution of one crisis became the starting point from which a fresh crisis began developing. This unending process went on till the Muslim League was forced out of the legislature party in November 1961, the PSP in October 1962, and a section of the Congress itself in 1964.

When this process was completed, the Congress rump of the old three party coalition was defeated in the legislature on a no-confidence motion. The notorious anti-Communist coalition of 1957-59 came to as ignoble an end as the “pure” Congress and one PSP ministries which had preceded it.

The Congress leadership did not lose hope even at this stage. True to the proverbial drowning man, they clutched at the straw of a split in the Communist Party. They calculated that, if only a united front of the two Communist parties between themselves and with other left parties could be prevented, a repeti-

tion of 1957 could be avoided. This did not appear very difficult. The right-wing Communists proved themselves more anxious to "isolate the anti-national left Communists" (who, according to them, had "split the Communist Party at the behests of the Chinese Communists") and to "defeat the reactionary communal Muslim League" than to defeat the Congress. The campaign material brought out by the right-wing Communists thus became the biggest weapon in the hands of the Congress leaders not only for their political campaign but also for a countrywide swoop on the left-wing Communist Party. This was expected to "isolate the left Communists among the people", prevent the formation of a united front of leftist forces and thus pave the way for a Congress victory in the mid-term election that was coming.

These hopes, however, were fulfilled only partly—and that, too, thanks to the disruptive game played by the right-wing Communists. The right-wing Communist party and its ally (RSP) successfully sabotaged the efforts for the formation of a united front to defeat the Congress through their inflexible stand on electoral adjustments. Having done this, they proceeded to organize a political—practical campaign that was obviously meant to assure the defeat of as many "left Communist" or allied candidates as possible. The result was that as many as eleven "left Communist" or allied candidates lost their seats in constituencies where the right Communists or their allies lost their deposits. It was this policy of "trying to secure the defeat of left Communists even if in the process the right Communists lose their deposits" that prevented a clear majority for the "left Communists" and their allies.

The Congress, however, failed in its two main objectives— isolating the "left Communists", and securing for the Congress the position of "first party" in the new legislature. The much-hated, much-maligned "Left Communists" became the first party (40 seats), while the Congress had only 36. Far more damaging to the prestige of the Congress was that 29 out of the 40 successful "left communist" candidates were those who had been arrested and detained on the charge of being "Chinese

agents". Added to the 40 "left Communists" were 18 others (13 SSP and five Independents) who had pledged themselves to support a "left Communist" Government. Such a Government would have been formed if only the right Communists had refrained from contesting those seats where they actually lost their deposits.

This record of the "left Communists", plus the ignoble rout of the right Communists (only three seats won out of 100 contested; loss of deposits in 75), showed that the persistent and malicious campaign of "pro-China, anti-nationalism" was dismissed with contempt by the people of Kerala. The people were clear about their political aim to remove the Congress from power. They were clear also about the means to attain the aim— facilitate the formation of, and support, a Government of left democratic parties, groups and individuals in which the "left Communists" would play a big role.

VI

How did such a basic change in the situation take place? Why did the much-lauded "unity of democratic forces" break? What was it that made it possible for the Communists who were supposed to have been "given a crushing defeat" in 1960 to stage a come-back in 1965? How can one explain the fact that, when the Communists did finally stage a come-back, it was the "anti-national, pro-China" leftists, rather than the "national-patriotic" rightists, who became the challenge to the Congress?

Efforts are made to answer these questions by blaming everything on personal, caste and communal factors. The break-up of the Congress-PSP-Muslim League alliance, it seems, was the result of the personal ambitions of some leaders. Caste and communal squabbles are assigned major roles in alienating the PSP from the Congress and in splitting the Congress itself into the "official" and "dissident" Congresses. As for the right and left wings of the Communist Party, it is asserted, the personal influence and prestige of some leaders are the reasons why the left is stronger.

A moment's consideration would bring out the utter superficiality of these "explanations". No attempt at ascribing the break-up of the Congress-PSP-League coalition to personal ambitions would convince anybody unless two further questions are answered : why did the same thing happen to every previous Congress (and PSP) Ministry? Why did it not happen to the only Communist Ministry which functioned longer than any other (Congress or PSP) Ministry—that too with no internal crisis ?

Caste-communal factors, too, would not explain these big political phenomena, since it is well-known that the support which the united Communists secured in 1960 and the "left Communists" in 1965 cut across all castes and communities. The big Muslim vote secured by the "left" Communists in 1965 even as against the Muslim League and the relations of friendly cooperation which exist between the Communists and the leaders of what was once the Catholic-led anti-Communist front, show that caste-communal factors play a relatively minor role in the development of the Communist movement.

Both in relation to the personal ambitions of leaders as well as to caste-communal factors, therefore, a difference exists between the Congress and its allies on the one hand and the Communist Party on the other. A scientific explanation should note and find the reason for this difference.

As for the greater personal influence and prestige of the "left" Communist leaders, the fact is that a larger number of party leaders (MPs, MLAs, members of the National and State Councils of the Party) were with the right wing. They should therefore have been able to shift the Party ranks to the right if the ranks were to be guided by leaders of prestige and political influence. (This actually was the hope with which the right-wing leaders started their offensive against the left. Hence their hysterical campaign against "the small group of splitters who are acting at the behest of the Chinese".) Why did this not happen ?

There is something obviously wrong with these "explana-

tions". We should go a little deeper into the factors working behind the political developments of Kerala, study them without the prejudices which guide those who give the above-mentioned "explanations".

The first fact which has got to be noted is that contrary to the image reflected in the jaundiced eyes of the anti-Communists, the Communist movement is the natural product of India's national movement. It grew out of that combination of the general anti-imperialist movement of the entire Indian people and the particular class movement of the working people—the working class in particular—which is the specific feature of the freedom movement in the Asian and African countries.

The concrete manner in which this combination was brought about in Kerala has been described in the preceding pages. The Communist Party in Kerala represents all that is progressive in the anti-caste, radical democratic aspects of the social reform movement; the spontaneous upsurge of the peasantry which merged with the national democratic freedom movement; the aspirations of the people of the former princely states for an end to autocratic rule and for the establishment of democracy; the long-cherished dream of the people of Kerala for political unification on a national (cultural-linguistic) basis; and above all, the struggles of the growing working class which, in its turn, help the peasantry and the toiling middle classes to participate in the general democratic and anti-imperialist movement as organized detachments with their own special objectives, slogans and forms of struggle. This is precisely the reason why the Party was able not only to break the monopoly of power enjoyed by the Congress but also withstand the combined offensive launched by all other political parties and organizations by way of the 1959 "liberation struggle" and the 1960 mid-term election.

The second fact to be noted is that the essential outlook and the policies of leaders who forged the anti-Communist alliance were the very opposite of the aspirations of the masses who rallied themselves under the anti-Communist banner. This inhe-

rent conflict within the alliance could be kept suppressed under the barrage of anti-Communist demagoguery so long as the Communist ministry continued in power. It could be hidden also in the period of the election campaign when the possibility was real that the Communists might be restored to power. But, as soon as the new Congress—PSP ministry with Muslim League support came to power and began to “undo the damage done by the Communists”, the conflict came to the surface. The longer the ministry lasted, and the more its legislations implemented its major policies, the larger the sections of people who saw that they had more in common with the policies of the Communist ministry than with the policies of the leaders of the anti-Communist alliance.

Take, for instance, the Agrarian Relations Bill passed in the legislature just before the launching of the “liberation struggle”. That bill was the target of the most fierce attack of the vested interests who financed and otherwise strengthened the “mass upsurge”. Its provisions, however, were so much in the interests of the masses (including the bulk of those who rallied under the anti-Communist banner) that the coalition parties pledged themselves to implement that bill “with some further improvements”. But the moment the coalition Government assumed charge, plans began to be made to “improve” the bill so as to give satisfaction to landlords and plantation owners. Every major provision in the bill—fixity of tenure, rent-reduction, right of purchase, ceiling—was so watered down that the landlords began to see in the Congress minister who piloted the amending bill their “deliverer”. This created discontent not only in the ranks of the Muslim League and the PSP (who had left the coalition by the time the Congress ministry’s amending bill came before the legislature), but even among Congressmen.

This discontent manifested itself not only on the question of the Agrarian Relations Bill, but on several concrete peasant issues. There was, for instance, the burning issue of mass evictions from the high ranges areas; there was also the scandalous case of temple lands (under the management of the Devaswom Board which is controlled by a minister) being leased to some

rich people, even though these lands were in the actual possession of and cultivated by tenants. These tenants were therefore liable to be evicted, the bulk of these peasants being Catholics who had been rallied under the anti-Communist banner. The Catholics as a community were agitated over it. This naturally set Catholic Congressmen against their Nair colleagues who were in the forefront of the campaign for the evictions. A section of the Catholics went a step further and started fraternising with the Communists.

The most significant fact in connection with these developments is that the living core of the anti-Communist alliance—the lower section of the clergy and laity who had formed the anti-Communist Front—began to cooperate with the Communists. Nobody could have imagined in 1959-60 that the acknowledged leader of the anti-Communist Front, Father Vadakkan, would share platforms with Communist leader A.K. Gopalan in peasant rallies and demonstrations. That, however, was just what happened in 1961-62. Out of this emerged the predominantly Catholic Malnad (High Range) Karshaka Union which cooperated with the Communist-led Kerala Karshaka Sangham in a large number of mass struggles, including Satyagraha, against the Congress proposals for “improving” the Agrarian Relations Bill.

This was a major development in the politics of the state. It was taking place against the background of disillusionment in the ranks of several sections of the people who had joined the anti-Communist alliance. Demoralisation among the Muslim Leaguers since they had to keep away from the ministry; discontent within the ranks of the PSP at the way in which their leader (Chief Minister) Thanu Pillai was bossing over them and in the process bringing discredit to their party; a sense of frustration in those anti-Communist sections of teachers who had helped the “Liberation struggle” but who now saw that “their own” Government was “amending” the Education Bill to put them completely at the mercy of school managements; the indignation roused in all sections of the people generally—in the Congress ranks in particular—at the misdeeds of the Congress ministry which was fast becoming a synonym for

corruption; the disgust with which the people saw that the central Government "managed" to get PSP leader Thanu Pillai out of the way and "cleared" Congress Chief Minister Sankar of the serious charges of corruption (levelled by no less a person than KPCC President Govindan Nair)—these formed the background against which the Communist Party and the anti-Communist Front started working together on mass issues.

All this could not but have its impact on that section of the Congress which was fed up with the working of the Congress ministry but which was as anti-Communist as before. No more could they allow their anti-Communism to be used to perpetuate the misrule established by their leaders. They began to oppose their leaders and their policies—at first on single issues but gradually in a more comprehensive way; at first mildly, then very sharply and strongly; at first within their own party and in private, but subsequently in public. Making loud protestations of their "loyalty to the Congress organization and its all-India leadership" they turned the fire on the "corrupt gang which has taken power in Kerala". Completely in tune with their old anti-Communist posture, they charged the Congress leadership in Kerala with facilitating the strengthening of the Communist Party. This was the process through which what subsequently came to be known as the Kerala (Rebel) Congress began to take shape and did, in the process, bring the Congress ministry down.

To draw attention to these real political developments is not to deny the existence of personal, group, caste and communal squabbles in the leadership. They did undoubtedly play their part. They, however, could not have done so if the political background had not been favourable for their operation, if the leadership of the anti-Communist alliance was not getting isolated from the aspirations of big chunks of its followers, if from among their ranks were not emerging a new type of anti-Communists—those who would "fight the vested interests in cooperation with the Communists precisely in order to keep the masses away from the ideology of Communism".

The break-up of the anti-Communist alliance of 1959-60 is thus not accidental. It is the natural result of real socio-political

forces working in Kerala. These were the very forces which led to the emergence of the Communist ministry in 1957-59. The effort to suppress them artificially through the formation of a combination of incompatibles could not have any lasting effect. At the very first opportunity for the break-up of this artificial creation, it had to break; and it did break.

The question still remains: why did the Communist Party get split at the very time when its policy was getting vindicated, when large sections of the former anti-Communists started looking on the Communists as comrades-in-struggle, rather than as enemies? Why, if at all the Party was to split, should the left wing, which had all the disadvantages arising out of its being dubbed "pro-China" take over the role formerly played by the united party, and not the right with the advantages of its reputation for "patriotism"?

The answer is that, apart from the issues of foreign policy and India's own internal policy (on which the left and right wings sharply differed), there were differences between them on the assessment of the developing situation in Kerala; that they therefore had different political-tactical approaches to this situation; and that the assessment and approach of the left wing was more in tune with the consciousness of the people of Kerala.

The left wing looked upon the break-up of the anti-Communist alliance and, as part of it, the break-up of the Congress organization in Kerala as developments favourable to the growth of the democratic and socialist movement in the country. They knew, of course, that all those who broke away from the anti-Communist alliance and from the Congress were not radical or progressives, not to speak of revolutionaries. Some of them (like those who formed the rebel Kerala Congress) were as reactionary as in fact, (in some respects even more than) the Congress. But the very fact that they broke away was favourable if only the Communists would follow Lenin's wise advice that it is necessary "to exert the utmost effort and necessarily, thoroughly, carefully, attentively and skilfully, take advantage