

# **insecurity : the whole story**

**(vi)**

The Kerala Education Bill had given a big jolt to the vested interests in the State. The new policy towards industrial disputes and the rôle of the police deprived the vested interests of the traditional help they had always been relying upon in dealing with labour demands from a 'position of strength.' And then the State budget of 1957-58, in converting a deficit of Rs. 225.24 lakhs into a surplus of Rs. 7.33 lakhs, had taxed agricultural wealth and imposed a super-tax on companies with agricultural incomes over Rs. 25,000, getting Rs. 16 lakhs and Rs. 65 lakhs, respectively. All this was more than enough to derange the well-entrenched, powerful propertied classes in Kerala, and they would no more take things lying down. And so the power of money went into action. *Arakshitavastha* (state of insecurity) under Communist rule became the war cry. From the press, the pulpit and the platform, *Arakshitavastha* was the one common refrain. 'The Communists are out for the kill,' 'the Communists are subverting the Constitution,' 'lawlessness and insecurity of life and property is the order in Kerala'—such was the cry rising gradually to a crescendo not only in Kerala but in the whole of India.

Indeed, the propertied classes had reasons to be worried. Here for the first time was a regime which was earnest in keeping its election pledges, which was uncompromising in its championship of progressive causes and the interests of the toiling millions, which was not amenable to sweet advances made through rich men's receptions and red-carpet dinners in the secluded palaces of the planters—in short an altogether impossible type of people to deal with. The only

way to deal with such people was to pull them down from the pedestal of power to which they had ascended by popular vote.

What is more, the fresh breeze of the popular policies of the Communist ministry woke the dormant energies of the long-suffering toilers. The working class and other toiling masses of Kerala were highly elated by the victory of their Party. There swept all over Kerala a wave of mass enthusiasm and upsurge, something like what was witnessed in British Indian provinces when Congress ministries took office in 1937. The mass wave of elation and awakening of those days was remarkable for the kisan and trade union struggles against their long-standing oppressors. Even then, in U.P. for example, the Maharajas and Taluqdars, and their daily mouthpiece at Lucknow, had cried hoarse about growth of lawlessness under Congress rule. A similar process began in Kerala after Communist assumption of office. And since the Communist ministry prevented the coercive arms of the State from siding with the owning classes, as was the traditional practice, their bargaining power was very much reduced and labour and peasant masses could win substantial gains.

As in 1937, so now, the upsurge of the toilers led to the cry 'lawlessness.' Unable to withstand the demands of the working people, the vested interests started shouting about their *Arakshitavastha*. The difference, however, is that while in 1937 the Maharajas' and Taluqdars' shouting was ignored, in Kerala, in 1957, the Congress organisation itself piped the planter's tune.

There are about 27 daily newspapers in Malayalam. Only three of these are Communist Party dailies; of the rest, the most influential ones are owned by the Congress-rich, or the Catholic Church, and barring very few, almost all of them joined this chorus about 'lawlessness.' All popular struggles which broke out, confined though they were within legitimate limits, were played up. Wide publicity was given to one incident here, another there, of such struggles taking place in plantations, factories and the countryside. These reports, in several instances grossly exaggerated, were strung together to prove that 'lawlessness' prevailed in the State.

Nobody denies that there were a few clashes, sometimes serious and even violent, between the toilers and their

immediate employers or oppressors; but it was nothing very extraordinary or unusual. Such clashes took place even before the Communists came to power, just as they normally do in other States as well, as the daily press so often reports—these being the direct result of imbalance that prevails in our economy, specially rural economy. Any impartial observer cannot but come to the conclusion that there is no particular deterioration of the law and order situation in Kerala.

Behind all the hue and cry about *Arakshitavastha* was basically the panic among the vested interests at the very existence of a Communist ministry, which they could not tolerate, even if it worked within the Constitution. In an unguarded moment, probably, Mr. Calderwood, president of the United Planters Association of South India (UPASI) gave expression to this. Addressing the 64th Annual Conference of the UPASI, he said: 'The existence of this (Communist) government, however restrained it may be by the framework of our democratically constituted Union, is undoubtedly a source of grave concern to private enterprise of any kind to which its ideology is violently opposed.' He expressed the great apprehension of the planting community about possible nationalisation of the plantations by the Kerala government, and in the next breath reeled out stories about 'defiance of authority,' coercion of managers by 'plantation mobs,' even 'physical violence,' thus leaving no doubt that what ailed him was the threat to the planters' exploitation of the labourers.

How the anti-Communism of the vested interests is inextricably intertwined with their profits, and how the whole thing is cleverly related to pious abhorrence of 'force' and 'foreign' influences, etc., was revealed by the UPASI chairman in the following pronouncement: 'Our fear is that a foreign-dominated cult, alien entirely to the ordinary aims, beliefs and purpose of an overwhelming majority of the people of this country may be inculcated by legislation and imposed by force; and it is in the light of that fear that I see in taxation trends in Kerala today not the determination to build up or to foster our industry but to wreck it by subtle economic means.' (*Statesman*, 28 August 1957.)

It was obvious that the vested interests were not prepared to take things lying down. Deprived of traditional police

help for suppressing the people's struggles for their demands, the planters and landlords, as also the Catholic Church smarting under heavy blows against its vested interests in schools, decided upon a policy of creating private forces to carry out their purposes of breaking workers' strikes or evicting cultivators, or preventing processions and meetings to which the Church of planters, etc., are allergic. No longer could the police be relied upon for such unconstitutional activities and so they brought into existence the 'Christophers' organisation. Thus the correct behaviour of the police was sought to be made up by a large-scale organisation of mercenary forces.

In this context it is essential to say a few words about the rôle of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, which acted as the chief organiser of the 'Christophers,' backed by planters' money. From olden times the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy has always been the bastion of reaction. It is an old history. Right from the time of the French Revolution to this day, the Roman Catholic Church has sided with the most reactionary forces in society. If during the French Revolution it sided with feudal forces, in modern times it was behind Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. His Holiness the Pope blessed Mussolini's armies when he launched on the Abyssinian war. Nearer home, we are well aware of the rôle of the Church machinery in aiding Salazar to suppress Goa. The Roman Catholic Church, indeed, constitutes a world fraternity and acts in a concerted manner.

Notice, for example, the following fulminations of a Father in faraway Darjeeling. On 11 August 1957, when the Catholic reaction in Kerala was getting in stride to launch the fight against the Kerala ministry, a Father Farrol delivered himself as follows at Parish Priests' sacred Church at St. Joseph Busty at Singamari, Darjeeling: 'In Kerala a Communist government has been set up and the Communist ministry has been oppressing the Christians there, and Pandit Nehru is also a Communist. Nehru has done much more than giving mere support to this hated Communist ministry. During his tour in Finland and Norway, Nehru said, "the Red Ministry in Kerala has been functioning with utmost propriety, honesty, etc." What more is required to be a Communist than what Nehru has said about the Communist ministry in Kerala! We Christians all over India, should be united to launch a crusade not only against the

Communists but also against the Nehru government which is deliberately pro-Communist.'

The Catholic hierarchy in Kerala had no doubt decided upon a policy of relentless fight against the Communist ministry and the private mercenary 'Christophers' militia was built up for the same purpose. How this name 'Christophers' struck them is anybody's guess. It is known, however, that 'Christophers' was the name given to the semi-military organisation formed in Spain by the Catholic Church to overthrow the republican government elected by the people, and help General Franco. In Kerala the 'Christophers' organisation seems to have existed in certain Catholic centres ever since 1952, e.g., Kottamuri Church, Mala, Trichur district. Then its aim was simply 'social service.'

It is certain, however, that the present type of militantly violent 'Christophers' organisation did not exist either in Trichur or Kottayam districts, their main strongholds today, till the formation of the Communist ministry. It is true that in the Education Bill demonstration in Trivandrum on 26 August 1957, these 'Christophers' constituted the main body of the procession. It is generally surmised, however, that it was during and after their campaign against the Kerala Education Bill that the Catholic hierarchy appears to have resolved to turn this organisation into an anti-Communist armed militia. By the time the 'Christophers' were vested with a publicly declared constitution on 22 October 1957, with a view to 'give the lie' to the charge of its being a private organisation of doubtful objectives, it had already become an armed militia having received training in military style.

Though thus given a legal look, the 'Christophers' remain for all practical purposes a secretly functioning organisation. According to knowledgeable sources, in Kottayam district there are gangs of 50, 100, 200 or even 300 in Catholic centres like Mundakayam, Kanjirapally, Pambady, Changanacherry, Karukachal, Meenachil, Erattupetta and Ettumanoor. This organisation is open to Catholic males only and they are trained and drilled in military style. The training is given by NCC coaches, ex-army men, etc. The exercises are done in the night within the premises of the Church.

The basic unit of the 'Christophers' organisation is called a *desavayooham* (i.e., a platoon of ten). The higher units

are military in complexion—ten men under a chief, ten units under a commander, and so on. There is supposed to be a commander-in-chief also appointed by the Bishop. Over the *desavayoocham* are the *desadhipans*, and over them the *nayakan*. For a zone there is a *mekhaladhipan*. The spiritual adviser (*athmeeya upadeshtava*) is the Vicar.

'Christophers' are given training in the use of *kuru-vadis* (tamarind sticks). This three-foot long staff the 'Christophers' carry when they appear in public meetings, dressed in blue and white uniform.

Spiritually and politically led by the Catholic priesthood, the 'Christophers' are used as a kind of private militia, appearing and acting readily in any place at the request of vested interests to oppress the toiling masses. Motor vehicles are kept ready to carry them whenever they might be 'required.' They have no regular monthly salary. But when 'on active service,' each of them receives Rs. 3 within his district and Rs. 6 outside the district per day.

While mainly concentrated in Kottayam, the 'Christophers' organisation has ramifications in other districts also, but apart from Trichur these are almost insignificant. In Trichur the 'Christophers' units are believed to be at Pallithazham, Vadakkummuri, Alandur, Vennur and Valiaparambath; but sometimes it functions under different names such as 'Youth Federations,' 'Samithi For Protection of Civil Liberties,' 'Social Scouts,' 'Democratic Front,' etc. At most of these places they enjoy the support of leading Congressmen.

Law minister V. R. Krishna Iyer told the State assembly in December that the 'Christophers' organisation was like a 'private militia,' that there was an apprehension that it was a 'national menace' and that the government was closely watching its activities. According to the reports available to the Government, he said, there was a corps of 14,598 such 'Christophers' in Kottayam district, and they also were in Trichur district. He said that they were given training by ex-military and ex-MSP people in the 'holy premises of the Church' with financial assistance from Bishops. They were also given sticks which could quickly be turned as weapons if necessary. (*Indian Express*, 22 December 1957.)

While 'Christopher' lawlessness, violence and threat to peace was the reality, the combined voice of Catholic reaction, the Congress and the PSP raised a big noise about

the Communist ministry's alleged encouragement to Party cells to take law into their hands, about a veritable 'reign of terror' let loose in Kerala, and the ever-present threat to life and property of peaceful citizens. Following Hitler's adage that the very bigness of a lie makes it appear the truth, ghastly stories about 'cell courts' doing the death dance in villages and dominating over all and sundry were manufactured, and an obliging press owned by the vested interests, gave them good publicity. Distribution of government lands to starving landless agriculturists was represented as a diabolical plan to settle Communist rank-and-filers for further encroachments. Creation of popular committees at various levels to help the administrative authorities was conjured up as a long-term and dangerous policy of bringing all officers under the Communist grip and transforming the entire State machine into one vast 'totalitarian' juggernaut. In fact, the more fantastic the lie, the wider the publicity it received. The Catholic reaction was at the back of it, and the Congressmen and PSPers joined the chorus.

As a commentator, certainly no friend of the Communists, remarked: 'Passion, hatred, hankering after the flesh-pots of office are easily detected in the many utterances about the Communist government in Kerala. Neither the Congress, nor the PSP, judging by their own innings in office, has the right to cast the first stone.' ('Witness' in 'The Indian Scene,' *Indian Express*, 21 January 1958.) And again: 'The bogey about law and order is unworthy of any party to raise. The ghosts are evenly spread all over the States. In Kerala, it is a gossamer web spread by the death of some cherished ancient possessions about the proper rôle of the police. It is at least not in the mouth of the PSP to complain about it, seeing how Mr Thanu Pillai used the police power of the State against dissident Tamils.' (*Ibid.*, 7 January 1958.)

Indeed, for some time at least, the lie about 'Communist lawlessness' in Kerala became a major topic all over India, and the whole affair deserves close examination. The 'credit' for the 'achievement' must go to Congress General Secretary Shriman Narayan.

The Congress General Secretary is obviously completely unaware of the fact that the police force, together with the military, form the core of the State structure, and that the character of a State depends on the purposes for which, and

the manner in which, the police forces are used. Furthermore, this 'Sarvodayan' mind is so reconciled to the use of section 107 and 144, and other police coercive processes during working class and peasant struggles, the whole thing to him is so natural and axiomatic, that the declaration that the coercive arm of the State will no more intervene on the side of the owning classes appeared to him to be nothing but incitement to anarchy and creation of a state of lawlessness.

Only when these limitations of the General Secretary's mind are kept in view, can one understand his 'confusion' getting 'worse confounded' even after the following very clear statement of EMS on 23 July 1957: 'The government wants to make it clear to all concerned that the rights of freedom of speech, press, assembly, or organisation, being the essence of democracy, and guaranteed by the Constitution of our Republic, shall be allowed to be exercised by every political party in the country, and that the police will not be allowed to use the provisions of law and the duties of maintaining law and order in such a way as to suppress or restrict the democratic activities of any political party, big or small.'

The question is, why, in spite of the Communist ministry's public conduct being 'scrupulously correct,' the 'law and order' cry about Kerala assumed such all-Indian proportions? Above we have given a picture of the forces that were working in Kerala. In his articles on impressions of his visit to India early this year in the *New Statesmen*, Kingsley Martin wrote: 'The bitterest opponent of the Communists is the Archbishop, the head of a Church which claims with historical justification to date back to St. Thomas and the first century A.D. He is a most agreeable and hospitable conversationalist, highly skilful at denigrating the Communist regime. The organisation he improvised to oppose the government's Education Bill was highly efficient.' (*Times of India*, 16 April 1958.)

The question posed in the foregoing paragraph is answered when it is borne in mind that the 'holy crusade' of His Holiness the Archbishop against the Communists was joined by similar anti-Communist crusaders from the ranks of India's domestic reaction. It is not without significance that Shriman Narayan submitted his 'report' on 'lawless-

ness in Kerala' to the Congress president in July 1957, just at the time when the Catholic reaction in the State had mounted its batteries to fight out the Education Bill. This 'report' has never seen the light of the day, but 'extracts' from it were mysteriously leaked out to the press, and some dailies owned by the Marwari millionaires played them up.

The 'leaks' from the 'report,' however, revealed only the anti-Communist hysteria of the Congress General Secretary. He again hurled insults at the Malayalee people by calling the released politicals, and those whose death sentences were commuted, as ordinary 'criminals' and 'murderers.' The police policy of the Communist ministry was twisted and misrepresented in order to create an impression that utter anarchy had become the rule in Kerala.

One of the earliest to nail the lie of 'lawlessness' was Jaya Prakash Narayan whose independent testimony refuted the propaganda. He had returned to Gaya after a sojourn in Kerala in connection with the Sarvodaya Sammelan at Kaladi and Vinoba's walking tour of the State. In an exclusive interview to the *IPA* special correspondent at Gaya in August 1957, Jaya Prakash said, 'I like the way they (i.e., the Communist government) are working.' As to the question of law and order and the rôle of the police, he felt that 'too much noise' was being made by some Congress leaders. He said he knew that in the name of safeguarding law and order, the police had been given extraordinary powers which were being used in defence of the vested interests and against the people. It was obvious that what was being stopped in Kerala, he said, was the anti-popular behaviour of the police and not its drive against ordinary criminals and anti-social elements.

About the same time, Tridib Chaudhury, M.P., General Secretary of the Revolutionary Socialist Party of India came out with a strong denunciation of Shriman Narayan's lies. Tridib Chaudhury said that he had travelled over a greater part of Kerala and 'found people going about their work-a-day avocations' and there were 'no signs of the so-called break-down of law and order.' He went to observe: 'It seems no less striking that the charges levelled by Mr Shriman Narayan bear striking resemblance to those made by a spokesman of the UPASI—United Planters' Association of South India.' After recounting the conditions in the plan-

tations as revealed to him by his enquiries, Tridib Chaudhury said: 'I have been constrained to come to the conclusion that Mr Shriman Narayan is really arguing the case of the vested interests in the State.' And in conclusion he drew the attention of all concerned to 'the strange united front between plantation magnates, the Catholic vested interests and some top Congress executives, that is operating in Kerala today behind the agitation in regard to the Education Bill and the so-called break-down of law and order.'

Let us look at the situation more concretely. The *Monthly Abstract of Statistics* published under the cabinet secretariat of the Government of India decisively gives the lie to the 'lawlessness' slander against Kerala government. Special Table R on page 117, on 'Cognizable Offences in India,' gives picture of grave crimes committed in the various States in 1957. We will compare the situation in Kerala with some other States :

	Population (crores)	No. of Murders
Andhra	3.12	206
Bombay	4.8	489
Madras	2.99	218
Mysore	1.94	151
Kerala	1.35	70

Thus, Mysore with a larger population than Kerala had over twice the number of murders, while Madras with a little over two times of Kerala's population had over three times as many murders. In Bombay State, while population is about three-and-a-half times of Kerala, the murders were six times greater in number.

'Dacoities' in 1957 numbered 16 in Andhra, 186 in Bombay, 20 in Madras, 30 in Mysore and 6 in Kerala. The 'robbery' figures are: Andhra 51, Bombay 641, Madras 76, Mysore 45, Kerala 33. It would be seen that Kerala's figures are lowest on population ratio, and Bombay had 20 times more of robberies.

The 'rioting' figures are: Andhra 421, Bombay 495, Madras 462, Mysore 126, Kerala 196.

Under the head 'all crimes,' involving murder, dacoity, robbery, house-breaking, theft, rioting and other crimes

(such as, kidnapping, abduction, cheating, criminal breach of trust and counterfeiting), the publication gives the following figures: Andhra 8,130, Bihar (population 3.8 crores) 16,464, Bombay 28,368, West Bengal (population 2.6 crores) 16,340, Madras 13,296, Mysore 4,501, Kerala 3,282.

The figures are clear enough. But whether they will succeed in stopping the lies about 'lawlessness' is doubtful, since the cry of *Arakshitavastha* continues to be reported every now and then, and in March 1958, when the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill was introduced in the State assembly, it again tended to reach a crescendo.

There are many more honourable testimonies to the absence of lawlessness in Kerala. After critically evaluating the rival statements of Communists and the opposition charges about 'lawlessness,' 'Observer' writes as follows in the weekly column 'Covering the States' in Lucknow's esteemed *National Herald* (15 September 1957): 'It seems traditional use of the police force and their "anti-popular behaviour" still continues in some States, and if Kerala has made a departure, as Mr Jaya Prakash Narayan seems to believe it has done, its example should be studied by other State governments. They need not emulate it blindly, but perhaps they will agree that the police force should not be used in anger caused by the provocative behaviour of agitators, as was done during the British regime.'

Again, a 'special representative' of the *New Delhi Statesman* (31 August 1957), reporting from Mango Range in Kerala said: 'I came to Kerala in search of the widespread lawlessness and disorder of which we in the north have heard so much, but so far I have not been able to locate it.' And a special correspondent of the same paper reporting from Trivandrum a week later conveyed his 'impression' that 'while there certainly has been no break-down in law and order the owning classes are generally nervous about the Government's intentions while the workers feel that they, having installed "their own government," are entitled to preferential treatment.'

It is precisely because the owning classes were nervous about their vested interests that the hue and cry about 'lawlessness' was raised, a point which if added to the special correspondent's report would have made it yet more objective. And while the nervous owning classes of Kerala, aided by Indian domestic reaction, took up the line of war

on the Communist ministry with a view to pull it down, even the British owned *Statesman* (7 September 1957) said : 'To take alarm at conditions in Kerala because a Communist government is installed there seems premature.... the only real danger may be thought to lie in the possibility that the Kerala Communists will not fail but succeed in reducing poverty in that highly literate State without overstepping the bounds of legitimate action. That may not seem to everybody a good reason for denying to Mr Namboodiripad the chance that is being given to Dr. Cheddi Jagan.'

The following from Kingsley Martin's report on Kerala would also be found interesting and relevant. Martin was visiting a British plantation in Kerala where he was shown round by the European managers. Says Martin : 'I asked him about his labour problem. He said he had no trouble at all, though there had been some on neighbouring farms a year or two earlier. The workers, he said, were well-paid nowadays, an interim award gave them one rupee and 11½ annas a day. Unlike the Indian manager, who had spoken of this award as a shocking affair, he seemed pleased that his men and women pickers and labourers were reasonably content.'

It is not surprising, therefore, that in the course of his pleasant repartees which pressmen all over India enjoy, EMS called Shriman Narayan's reports 'tissue of lies,' and that these 'so-called reports' had all been called from people who 'manufactured tales.' A special representative of a Delhi daily, reporting a joint conference of EMS and law minister Krishna Iyer at the capital, said : 'In fact, apart from his obvious distaste for any mention of Mr. Shriman Narayan, Congress General Secretary, Mr Namboodiripad's views could well have been expressed by any liberal Congress leader.' And again : 'He (EMS) left it to his youthful looking law minister, Mr Krishna Iyer, to deal with allegations of widespread lawlessness in the State. Mr Iyer described such reports as "blasphemy if you are religious, slander if you have any conception of defamation. . . ." At this point Mr Namboodiripad interjected as effectively as if the scene had been rehearsed before, "and a total lie if you are a human being."'

The lie of lawlessness has been buried fathoms deep at Deviculom. As EMS told the IPA special correspondent at Trivandrum on 20 May, while explaining the reasons for

Deviculom triumph : 'Firstly, the new police policy we initiated about a year ago has given the much needed relief to the plantation workers of the constituency, who had, for a long time, been the victim of the police policies of the previous governments. I look upon this vote to be a vote for our new police policy. I hope that our opponents will, at least from now on, cease talking of "a sense of insecurity" among the people, which, if it had existed, would have made the voters in the constituency plump for the Congress.'