

communist rule : a balance-sheet

(xi)

On 5 April 1958, the Communist ministry completed a year in office. All opposition efforts to bring it down had ended in failure. The people of the State were happy. Meetings were held all over the State to celebrate the event and assure the Communist government of the fullest support.

The progress of the Communist government in Kerala was followed with intense interest not only all over India but by the world at large. And tributes came from the most unexpected quarters. Even the rabidly reactionary and anti-Nehru leader-writer of the *Indian Express* had accepted a few months earlier that 'Hitherto, Mr Namboodiripad's public conduct has been scrupulously correct.' A weekly columnist of the same paper, calling 5 April 1958 a 'notable anniversary', characterised 'Kerala's experiment' 'a great one' which 'should be allowed reasonable time to establish its soundness.' The columnist noted that so various a trinity as president Dr Rajendra Prasad, prime minister Nehru and Jaya Prakash Narayan 'have been warm in its praise,' and went on to remark: 'so far as the masses are concerned, it (the Kerala government) had induced greater caution in other State governments. The competition in the doing of public good ought to be welcomed.' ('Witness', 'Anniversary of Kerala government,' *Indian Express*, 9 August 1958.)

Kingsley Martin, well-known editor of Britain's *New Statesman*, who was in Kerala in March 1958, had personally observed Communist rule, and he told a BBC interviewer in London on 8 April that there were very good reasons to believe that the 'Communist government of Kerala means what it says—to capture power, seat by seat, by

abandoning force.' He also said: 'The government of Kerala has governed strictly within the framework of the Indian constitution.... and are conducting themselves correctly.'

A little earlier, Naomi Mitchison, writing in the *New Statesman*, spoke highly of the Communist ministry, and especially of chief minister EMS as 'a man of integrity, education and charm.' Mitchison opined that India was badly in need of an opposition party and the Communists filled in the gap. Posing the question as to whether Communism could be combined with democracy, Mitchison said: 'I cannot see myself how Kerala can be turned into a dictatorship or nice Mr Namboodiripad.... into a tyrant.' And she added: 'Communism, like Christianity or Hinduism, can be restated in terms of a new situation. Perhaps that is happening in Kerala.'

Even the American journal *Business Week* had said as early as December that 'on balance, the Communists seem to have been steadily gaining ground. Their small triumphs are taking on a larger significance in the eyes of other Indians.' And further, '....The Communist government has cultivated a reputation for integrity and honest administration. The man who handles this job is chief minister Namboodiripad—locally described as "the cleanest chief minister in India."'

Visiting the State in June 1958, the well-known scientist, Professor J. B. S. Haldane, said: 'The Communist government in Kerala has not so far done anything which a Congress government might not have done.'

In earlier chapters the Communist ministry's labour and land policies have been described and these follow the lines of the Congress programmes. Apart from the policy aspects, even in their living, in their austere ways and low salaries, the Communists came nearest to what had been expected of the Congress ministers. Despite persistent slander campaigns, the Communist ministry's reputation for incorruptibility and hard work rose higher and higher and even the worst critics of the government have almost unflinchingly said that they have no complaint against any minister personally. Kerala, with its discredited, parochial, communal and unstable régime of the past, had asked for a better, cleaner and stable administration, and the Communist government fully satisfied this wish of the people.

A test of the government's support among the people is provided by the success achieved in the small savings drive. Even in 1957-58, as a result of the intensive drive initiated by the government, the collections were higher than in 1956-57. The gross and net collection in 1957-58 were Rs. 461.03 lakhs and Rs. 126.99 lakhs as against Rs. 377 lakhs and Rs. 65.69 lakhs respectively in 1956-57. Encouraged by this result, and considering the importance of small savings scheme in mobilising resources for the Plan, the government fixed a target of Rs. 300 lakhs for 1958-59.

In place of the national savings organisation, the government has set up a small savings directorate for intensive publicity and propaganda and enlargement of the scope of the agency system. Primary school teachers, village officers, gram sevaks, village panchayats and NES blocks are being drawn into the agency system. The support of cultural workers, dramatic societies and others has been secured and the campaign is in full swing and is expected to achieve the fixed target.

To mobilise people in a big way, in the form of a mass movement, for specific programmes of national development, is really the best test of a popular party in power, and herein lies the key to the fulfilment of our plan objectives. For, thus alone will we be able to utilise the unlimited man-power potential of our people. In June 1958, the State government succeeded in a vast and planned mobilisation of the cultivation of Kerala in a campaign to grow glyricidia, a green manure shrub. Glyricidia has all the attributes of an ideal green manure, is perennial, grows quickly and supplies green manure twice a year. Artificial manures being available only in limited quantities, the only way open to Kerala is to take to intensive green-manuring practices, and glyricidia supplies the need.

Kerala requires about 14 lakh tons of rice a year, produces only 8 lakhs and has to import the rest. The target for the second plan is 3.5 lakhs of tons of additional food production. At present about 20 lakh acres are under paddy, and new irrigation sources are expected to bring another 1 lakh acres under the plough. The government slogan is to have 100 glyricidia plants for every acre of paddy and one for every coconut tree. The total target is of 26.6 crores of plants. Thus far, since the campaign was

started, 72.3 lakhs of glyricidia seedling and cutting have been distributed. For this year the target is 1 crore plants which is aimed to increase paddy production by 12,80,000 paras.

Mass organisations like the Karshaka Sangham, workers of political parties, social welfare workers and others participated in the glyricidia week in June in a big way and the campaign assumed a mass character. Never has such mass participation been seen in Kerala in a campaign sponsored by a department of the government, the agricultural department. Confident in its success, Kerala government has decided to discontinue the sanction of money to State farms for purchase of organic manure and they would be required to make their own manure.

This glyricidia campaign has so impressed the planning commission that it has asked all the States to emulate Kerala in the matter (*Indian Express*, 12 June 1958.) In fact, in the din created by the slander campaign of the anti-Communists against the Kerala government, the tributes paid to it time and again by responsible persons of the central government and Congressmen seem to have been lost on the public mind. Thus, for example, Dr. Panjabrao Deshmukh, union minister in the agricultural ministry, told the fourth meeting of the central board of forestry at Shillong on 14 December 1957: 'I am happy to find that the Kerala government has given us a lead in the integration of all State forest services.' (*Ibid.*, 15 December 1958.) A power and irrigation project study team of the planning commission under N. V. Gadgil's leadership visited the State in May 1958. The Kerala government's grasp over the problems created a great impression upon the team. Gadgil told a press representative that 'he was greatly impressed by the brilliant advocacy of the irrigation minister,' and hoped that the team's visit 'would be of help to Kerala in expediting her projects.' (*Ibid.*, 17 May 1958.) Union minister for community development, S. K. Dey, visited the State in the same month, and he told the *Hindustan Times*: 'I think the present Kerala government is very much alive to the needs of the programme (of community development). It is giving special emphasis on the production aspect of the programme as against the emphasis on amenities which was fairly high in Kerala.' Dey said

that the Kerala government had launched a programme of decentralisation and democratisation 'in the true sense of the term.' The 'ornamental' technical departments were now being made more alive.

Kerala government measures have also won the support of Congressmen. The education bill, as is well known, was praised by Congressmen outside Kerala. So also its land reform policies have been appreciated by Congressmen. A land reform team from Bihar visited Kerala in October 1957, headed by R. G. Prasad, deputy minister for revenue. He regarded the anti-eviction legislation of the Kerala government as 'a healthy measure to protect the rights of actual tillers of the soil.' (*Indian Express*, 22 October 1957.) In June 1958 the Kerala government announced its scheme of pay revision under which minimum basic salary has been fixed at Rs. 30 and the maximum Rs. 1000 per mensem. This step was acclaimed by the secretary of the Congress legislative party in U. P., Nawal Kishore. The move towards reducing the disparity between the highest and the lowest salaries was characterised by Nawal Kishore as 'a bold and correct step,' and he told pressmen that he had written to Congress president Dhebar requesting him to take up the question of removing disparities in pay scales at the highest level. (*Ibid.*, 27 June 1958.)

A sad commentary on the closed minds of Kerala Congressmen is provided by the following. They have been incensed by praise of Kerala government by Congressmen from other States. According to a correspondent, Kerala Congressmen 'have expressed concern at the irresponsible way in which certain Congressmen outside Kerala issue statements to the press without eliciting correct information about what is happening in the State.' (*The Weekly Kerala*, 28 June 1958.)

A minor, but nevertheless important, step of the Kerala government has succeeded in winning for it the gratitude of common people all over the State. We have inherited a police force from the foreign rulers who always connived at its misbehaviour towards the people, and which thus became a menace, especially for the rural people. Old habits die hard and even today the police force is noted for its high-handed acts towards citizens. From the very beginning, the Communist government of Kerala has made efforts to prevent such behaviour of the police and has not hesitated to

take action when it was warranted. Thus, the government punished a police head constable and a sergeant who handcuffed the Congress MLA, Kunhambu, and seven others when they were taken in custody for their 'satyagraha' at Kattampally. (*Times of India*, 3 June 1958.) The government announced that it will take serious view of any person being handcuffed by the police without justifiable reasons. According to a report, in June 1958, the inspector-general of police sent round a circular to his subordinate officials to say that he has received several complaints about misbehaviour of policemen towards members of public and that 'anyone persisting in this will be severely dealt with.' (*Indian Express* 24 June 1958.)

Indeed, what is increasingly endearing the government of Kerala to the people of the State is its responsiveness to popular difficulties, and its alert care for people's good. We will cite a few instances. The cultivation of Kuttanad suffered severe loss in this year's *punja* paddy cultivation. The government immediately came forward with loans for cultivators in March 1958, and the rules for the payment of outstanding loans were modified. Following distress in some coastal areas, the government immediately sanctioned road works costing about Rs. 4,29,000 as a distress relief measure in coastal areas. When gazetted officers of the transport department, following increase in their working hours, represented that bonus facilities be extended to them, the government granted them ex-gratia payment equal to one month's salary in April 1958. Following a clash between students and transport workers at Ernakulam in February 1958, when police used force to disperse crowds, there was a demand for an enquiry. A committee was immediately appointed which has now submitted its report. The committee has blamed the transport department employees for the clash and has found that the use of force, by the police other than use of tear gas, was excessive.

Special mention may be made of the government's work during the tragic food poisoning day at Sasthancotta camp in Quilon district on 28 April 1958. The chief minister along with some high officials was at Quilon on that day. He personally intervened at the most critical moment, personally directed the doctors of Trivandrum to rush to Quilon, arranged transport at the spot to remove the affected persons who were crowded in the Quilon hospital, and then

visited the camp 30 miles away comforting people and hurrying other immediate aid, and returning to Trivandrum after midnight.

The Kerala government is perhaps the only government which has provided legal aid to persons whose average monthly income is not more than Rs. 100, whether they be the accused or the complainant. The government also introduced a scheme for financial aid to discharged and dismissed workers. And in May 1958, a full-time government pleader was appointed to render legal assistance to the unions in prosecuting their cases before tribunals. He will also give necessary advice to local government pleaders in prosecution cases for violation of the provisions of labour legislations or when there is non-implementation of agreements and awards.

Mention may also be made of the steps taken by the Kerala government for industrialisation of the State. Persons who ruled over Kerala for ten years before, and who did nothing for the industrialisation of the State, have been very loud in their denunciation of the Communists for failing to develop new industries. Probably they expected that industries would spring up everywhere on the morrow of their coming to power. On their part, however, they did their worst to frighten away intending investors by stories of lawlessness and used other influences to keep them out of Kerala.

In May 1958, work was started at Sherthallai on the Pallithura Bricks and Tiles Limited. Of great significance for the building programme under the five year plan, when completed this factory will have a production capacity of 40,000 bricks a day and will give employment to a few hundred workers.

An agreement has been reached with a Bombay firm to establish a plant in the State for the manufacture of caffeine from tea waste. When in full operation, it will produce 2,000 tons of the product per month. The Kerala government has promised all facilities including exemption from payment of sales tax on tea waste purchased for a period of five years.

Among other steps for the industrialisation of the State may be mentioned the licence secured and facilities granted to the Bharat Electronic Company, Trivandrum, to start an electrical lamp and bulb manufacturing industry.

Further, in April 1958, the Kerala Water Transport Corporation was inaugurated which ends private ownership in passenger and cargo motorboat services in the Travancore area of Kerala and makes it a State industry. Mention may also be made of the energetic steps taken by the government to stop the rapid decline in the cashew industry of the State, the chronic crisis being caused by lack of capital and recurrent strikes and also difficulties in procuring sufficient quantities of raw nuts. A conference of government representatives and those of the labour unions has drawn up a plan to solve the problems facing the cashew industry, which is a national industry of Kerala.

The list of Kerala government's achievements in the course of a little more than a year of its rule can indeed be very long. Without going into any further details, we will present to the reader a picture of Kerala's performance in relation to plan targets under Communist rule. The following table (taken from *New Age Weekly* of 29 June 1958; see report of interview with E. M. S. Namboodiripad) gives the figures of achievement under each of the major heads of plan expenditure for the whole of the first five-year plan period and the first and second years of the second five-year plan.

	First Five Year Plan	Second Five Year Plan	
		Total for 1956-57	Total For 1957-58
		(in percentages)	
Agricultural and allied subjects	43.9	52.0	70.06
Irrigation & power	94.4	101.0	94.4
Industry & mining	52.3	47.0	55.8
Transport & communication	132.6	68.0	93.4
Social services	84.1	31.2	65.1
Miscellaneous	400.9	81.7	66.3
<hr/>			
Total :			
State sector	83.5	58.9	76.9
Central sector	—	51.6	100.4
Grand Total	—	58.1	78.6

It will be seen that the actual expenditure for the year 1957-58 is 78.6 per cent of the original budget estimates. It should be borne in mind that the Communists, wholly inexperienced in administration, took office only in May 1957, that is, more than a month after the budget year 1957-58 had commenced, and they had no hand in the drawing up of the plan which they were now called upon to implement. Nevertheless, the figures show that the record of fulfilment for 1957-58 is better than for the year 1956-57 and also for the whole of the first plan period in the matter of agriculture and allied subjects and industries and mining. These heads of plan expenditure are the most important since they are connected with the most important problems of food shortage and unemployment. In regard to irrigation and power the performance is 94 per cent.

The State was mostly under Congress rule during the first five year plan, and whereas the performance in regard to agriculture and industry is only 43.9 per cent, when the first plan was supposed to concentrate itself on the development of agriculture. All the shortfall in agriculture and industry which are vital for Kerala, were diverted by the Congress rule to transport and communications (132.6 per cent) and miscellaneous (400.9 per cent.) Behind this lopsidedness in expenditure lies the story of ministerial inefficiency, extravagance, corruption, favouritism and bribery of Congress rule in Kerala.

The fact of the matter is that the Communists have to work the plan through an administrative system inherited from those very people who charged them at their Cannanore convention of having spent less than 50 per cent of the plan allocations. Apart from the fact that this was just a guess estimate and entirely incorrect, it at the same time reveals that instead of turning the searchlight inwards and showing some humility following their failure, the Congressmen of Kerala persist in their old habits without realising that such distortions fall absolutely flat over an intelligent and well-informed electorate, and, if anything, lead to their further isolation from the people.

In the second plan as inherited by the Communist ministry from the previous administration, allocations for transport and social services are Rs. 5.57 crores and Rs. 23.67 crores respectively, while it is only Rs. 6.83 crores for industry and for agricultural and allied subjects (which in-

cluded minor irrigation, animal husbandry and soil conservation) it is only Rs. 6.24 crores. Thus, thanks to the outgoing rulers, Kerala's second plan is already unduly diverted towards non-productive sectors at the cost of production needs. And as a result of the recent curtailment in the plan expenditure and the consequent reallocation of resources, even these meagre amounts for agriculture and industry are likely to be affected.

Apart from certain modifications, no major departure from the scheme of allocations in Kerala's second plan is now possible. The only way open is to adopt methods whereby the physical target can be raised in the fields of productive activity without a proportionate increase in financial resources. The glyricidia campaign is a move in the same direction.

Here, as also in the entire field of administration, the Communist ministry has to work through an administrative machinery which is inefficient, slow moving and bureaucratic, which also has deleterious features inherited from the one-man personal rule of the dewan of pre-independence days. As the chief minister remarked, corruption is almost second nature in the inherited administrative machinery.

Thus far the Communist government has failed to achieve any significant success in remoulding this machinery and taking it out of its old rut to any considerable extent. In fact, at the State conference of the Communist Party at Kozhikode in January 1958, this failure to remould the administrative machinery was sharply pointed out.

It is almost habitual for departmental officers to put hurdles in the way rather than get a job done quickly. This tendency is symbolised by the fact that there have been officials who were nicknamed 'Objection M. Pillai', and they prided in it. Files move slowly, procedures are long-winded and delay is its most marked feature. Failure to tackle this problem make possible such happenings as the following. A lady teacher who had applied for transfer for health reasons a year ago was at last transferred, but she had died some weeks ago. Again, a medical doctor opting for Kerala from Madras State service was posted to a government dispensary near Calicut, but when he reached the place to report for duty, he found that there was no government dispensary.

Despite the achievements we have narrated above, the

fact remains that the performance in the field of agriculture, industry and mining in 1957-58 was only 70.96 per cent and 55.8 per cent of the plan target for the year. Thus while Kerala government's efforts thus far may be an improvement upon the performance of previous governments, the fact is undeniable that in relation to the actual needs of the State much remains to be done. As such, any one wanting to be critical can put forth an imposing array of problems not solved, as is being done by the opposition in the State.

The Communist ministers, however, never make any tall claims. They only say that they are getting into grips with the problems and are determined to achieve results. This attitude of humility wins the hearts of the people, more so because they are assured of the honesty of the ministers and their unsparing, hard work. In fact, EMS has said that the only major achievement of a year's Communist rule is that the wall between the Communists and others has been broken down and they are now regarded as similar human beings with like features and desires as against the satans that they were thus far depicted by interested parties and people. This, EMS said, was a great blow to the anti-Communists who seek to divide the nation between Communists and non-Communists.

Keenly aware of their shortcomings, the Communists make conscious efforts to remove the defects of their rule. Possessed of an intellectual approach and analytical mind, they are gradually succeeding in rousing the better element in the administrative hierarchy. Indeed, an increasing number of officers in the State, especially the younger ones, have imbibed enthusiasm and zest for work and do their best for the jobs in hand. The subordinate staff is also gradually moving in the right direction.

The Communist ministry, having realised the vital need of remoulding the administrative machinery, constituted an administrative reforms committee soon after it came to power. The report of this committee was signed in July, and it was widely acknowledged that a major job was done in record time, in just about nine months. The committee's report has not yet been published, so its recommendations are not known. Suffice it to say that never before has the problem of administrative reform in India been dealt with such attention and care. Democratic decentralisation is

supposed to be the keynote of the recommendations and the suggested reforms are expected to lead to expeditious despatch of business by the administrative machinery.

The greatest achievement of Communist rule in Kerala is that it has provided a stable and an honest government. This single fact has won for them innumerable supporters among all sections of the population. It is significant that all the banks of Kerala assured the government that they would subscribe to its loan, which was actually oversubscribed.

Kerala is proof positive that Communists are quite capable of working under a democratic constitution and that their Amritsar resolution about peaceful transition to socialism means what it says.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Government of Kerala today enjoys tremendous good will of people all over India. They want this government to continue, for in this they see an alternative to Congress rule which cannot be said to have come up to the expectations of the people.