

ways of india's domestic reaction

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By mid-October (1957), the law and order cry had been thoroughly exposed as a blatant lie spread by the vested interests and its supporters in the political parties. Naturally enough, those interested in pulling down the Communist ministry were disappointed. The disappointment, however, did not lead to any rethinking on the part of those who had indulged in the slander campaign. While it can be understood that the vested interests, seeing danger in the very existence of a Communist government even though it functioned within the framework of the Constitution, could never be reconciled and would strive their best to overthrow it, one is amazed at the continued hostility and hatred that characterise the attitude of the main opposition parties, viz. the Congress and the PSP.

From October, blackflag demonstrations against State ministers wherever they went became the order. Under the pretext of presenting a memorandum to a minister, Congressmen or PSPers would prostrate themselves before the car and block the way. In their blind frenzy they even stopped the car in which the British High Commissioner was touring, thinking it belonged to some minister. And when police removed them to clear the way for the car to move, they shouted 'Communist atrocities', and a section of the press played up the stories.

In the demonstrations the most indecent and vulgar slogans were shouted against the Communist ministers and the Communist Party. 'Beware chaste women, the ministers are coming!' is one of the slogans. 'We don't want the government of stammerers and lame men!' is another

slogan. The labour minister was called 'Rowdy Thomas,' and the learned education minister 'Mandan (idiot) Mundassery.'

It should be noted that the above slogans are the only ones which are fit to be printed. In this display of coarse taste, the daily newspapers are not to be left behind. Here are a few samples from banner headlines: '*The Asses Brayed And The Jackals Howled: The Temple Of The People Became A Den Of The Beasts*' (this is in reference to the Kerala State assembly); '*Kerala Communists Gone Insane And Indecent*'; '*Kerala Secret Police To Be Modelled After Russia*'; '*EMS Speaks The Razakar Language*'; '*The Cobra In Our Cabbage Patch*.'

Editorial writers wallowed in the same filth. Here is a random sample: '*When these monsters came to govern us peace and tranquillity reigned in this country... But as soon as these pests from a bygone age took up the reins, things changed. Things happened with stunning rapidity. They made it clear beyond any doubt that they and their cursed brood were above the law... We were confined to the ghetto or reduced to galley slaves chained to the wheel and beaten with cat-o'-nine-tails.*' (Kerala Mail, 8 December 1957.)

It should be noted that these poor ones '*confined to the ghetto*' are writing the above in a weekly published from Ernakulam, which is in Kerala, where the '*monsters*' of the '*cursed brood*' are ruling!

Let there be no mistake, this is a paper which enjoys Congress support. We are not quoting from the Malayalam papers, but the standards of many of them cannot be said to be higher. In fact, the speeches of Kerala Congressmen increasingly became inflammatory and incited people to lawlessness and violence. EMS challengingly said at Trivandrum: 'I am prepared to hand over a selection of newspaper reports of the speeches delivered by the well-known Congress leaders in the State for the examination by prime minister or by Congress president Dhebar. Let them give a verdict as to whether these speeches constitute an incitement to violence or not.' (Indian Express, 11 December 1957.)

And EMS added: 'I have with my own ears heard such slogans being shouted as 'Beware of your life, Namboodiri!' I have also heard from my friends that in demonstrations

led by prominent Congress leaders provocative slogans have been shouted. A collection of the provocative slogans at these demonstrations led by the Congress would be a disgrace to any democratic organisation, not to speak of the organisation whose leaders swear by non-violence.'

The reality is that burning hatred against the Communist ministers and blind anti-Communism were the motivating force behind opposition tactics in Kerala. The very sight of the Communists, whom these Congress and PSP leaders, when in power, had jailed and lathi-charged, condemned and vilified as unsocial rabble, now sitting on seats of power was intolerable. And while during their rule the Congress and the PSP leaders took free recourse to force, lathi-charges and firings, here were these very 'violence-believing' Communists refusing to utilise the coercive arms of the State even after the gravest provocation. As the Kerala chief minister told press correspondents in Madras on 15 September 1957, his government would never adopt a policy which 'is even today resulting in firings in Rajpur, Delhi, and other places.' And he declared: 'If that is law then out with that law,' adding that if on this issue they were asked to get out of the ministry they would get out and fight.

This genuinely democratic policy maddened the opposition whose new tactics were somehow to provoke the government to take resort to police aid. In fact, on some occasions it was openly stated that it will be seen how long the Communist ministry refrains from calling for police help, and how long it carries on without resort to lathi-charge and police firings.

Such being the approach, all sorts of pretexts were utilised with a view 'to keep the pot of opposition to Communist government boiling.' A major move towards this was the Kattampally satyagraha. It was all a matter of a small plot of seven acres of government land in the vicinity of central jail in Cannanore. Unauthorised occupation of government lands had been going on in Kerala for the last so many years. That continued and perhaps became even intensified to some extent after the new government took charge. To put an end to this irregularity, the Communist government decided upon a policy of distribution of government-owned cultivable wasteland to the landless and poor-peasants on a planned basis. After proper

consultations with the district collector, all action to evict unauthorised occupants till 26 April was stayed when the government announced its decision. The government also issued an order strictly prohibiting further occupation which could only defeat its plan for distributing land to those who deserve.

It was only after the government decision was announced that leading sections of opposition parties took it into their heads to organise a campaign of trespass, which was cleverly viewed as a double-edged weapon against the government. If the government did not take any action, they could shout 'lawlessness.' And in case the government did take action, they could cry hoarse about 'repression' of poor people by the Communist government.

Leaders of the Congress, PSP and RSP did really organise such a trespass campaign and the government took prompt action to evict such trespassers. Unauthorised occupants in Chavara (Quilon district), the collector's compound in Trivandrum and some other districts were evicted.

It would be of interest to note that very cleverly an answer was elicited in the State assembly from the government on 15 July 1957 that the question of distributing Kattampally *poramboke* land was under active consideration. And within three weeks, a responsible Congress leader (Kunhampu, MLA) organised a trespass by Harijans on 7 August 1957, to create difficulties in the way of the Communist ministry.

It should also be borne in mind that throughout the ten years of their rule from 1947-57, the Congress governments never once accepted this policy of giving away government wastelands to Harijans and other landless labourers and poor peasants, though the demand was there. And certainly in no other State in India have Congressmen sponsored campaigns for trespass on government lands.

Under Congress and PSP sponsorship 42 families of Harijans moved on to the Kattampally *poramboke* land. When the law minister personally met them and explained that the land was to be used for development department constructions, including a playground for children, all except nine families withdrew from those 7 acres. And on their behalf the Congress and the PSP got up a big outcry about 'Communist atrocity' at Kattampally. The drum-beating was superbly done and an obliging PSP National Exe-

cutive directed the observance of a Kattampally Day all over India, though it is not known as to at how many places it was actually observed.

The utter unscrupulousness of the Congress and the PSP in the matter would, however, be clear to the reader from the following facts. Most of these nine Harijan families had their own houses nearby in the compounds of the landlords who are pro-Congress. It was thus a strategy of killing two birds with a single shot. The Congress landlords were thus getting rid of their *Kudikidapukars* (dwellers in huts in the land of landlords) whom they could not otherwise eject because of the Communist ministry's stay of evictions legislation. And, in the bargain, a golden opportunity to slander and malign the hated Communists.

Soon enough the hollowness of the Congress and the PSP case was thoroughly exposed before the Malayalee people and the whole affair still further lowered the prestige of these sinking parties in Kerala. In a public statement, 120 Harijan families of the locality exposed the Congress and the PSP propaganda. Paid hirelings and 'Christophers' comprised most of the 'satyagrahis,' and hardly any Harijan joined them. Out for provocation, those who swear by 'non-violence' indulged in violence and at one stage the police had to resort to a mild lathi-charge following powerful and unbearable volleys of stones. This was reported in the press as 'firing,' since there were some cracker bursts at the same time. And the Congress and the PSPers drew great satisfaction that at least they have made the Communists 'fire' and 'lathi-charge.'

The Kattampally 'satyagraha' begun with unusual fanfare soon petered out, and one of the contributing causes was Communist ingenuity, which at each and every point has been beating the Congress in Kerala. When the whole situation was explained to the nine Harijan families which had trespassed into government lands they agreed to move back to their old houses. But the pro-Congress landlords had locked the huts and would not permit them to come back. They were told that this eviction is impermissible under the law and they were promised free legal aid to regain their right of living in their old huts, to which they agreed.

This left no ground for the 'satyagraha' to stand upon, and so the government was approached for an agreement.

Ever willing to have peaceful settlement of all disputes, the Communist ministry immediately released all arrested persons. In a press interview Namboodiripad expressed his genuine sorrow for the use of police force at Kattampally but pointed out that the Congress and the PSP were behaving in an impossible manner, and appealed for better sense.

Beaten and exposed in each one of their manoeuvres against the Communist ministry, the spirit of Kerala Congressmen naturally dropped, and their morale reached an all-time low. It was at this time that that anti-Communist crusader, Shriman Narayan, again made his appearance in Kerala.

The Ernakulam meeting of the Congress executive, obviously under Shriman Narayan's guidance, again adopted a resolution, reviving the bogey of lawlessness. The utter hypocrisy and hollowness of the assertion defies description. Once again the Kerala government was accused of having 'encouraged tendencies to violence in public life.' It was alleged that 'political pressure was being deliberately exercised by the Communist government on government employees,' and that under the eight-month's rule by the Communist Party 'the people have been subjected to violence and lawlessness.' The people were called upon 'to raise their protest at these blatant efforts of the Communist Party to sabotage the democratic freedoms guaranteed by the Indian Constitution,' for 'if these violent tendencies are not prevented in time all peaceful existence will be made impossible and a dangerous situation would emanate.'

And so to 'prevent in time' the 'violent tendencies' and ensure 'peaceful existence,' a drama was enacted in Kerala during these very days, which, for its technique and unscrupulousness has no parallel in India.

A plot was hatched to bribe Communist MLAs. One lakh of rupees each were offered to some legislators of the Communist Party to induce them to cross the floor so that a vote of no-confidence could be carried against the Namboodiripad ministry in the course of the winter session of the State assembly, commencing from 12 December 1957. It was a dirty plot which was revealed by R. Balakrishna Pillai, MLA, indicting certain very influential persons of conspiring to oust the Communist government. For reasons of space Balakrishna Pillai's long and detailed statement cannot be

reproduced here. Two points, however, emerge from it. Firstly, it shows the cleverness of the Communists in dealing with those who wanted to bribe them. Till the last moment the plotters did not have even an inkling of the fact that the Communist MLAs were in close touch with the Party, and were acting deliberately in a manner so as to find out who were the financiers and the key men behind the conspiracy. In fact, the 'prevention in time' of the 'violent tendencies' and assurance of 'peaceful existence' was regarded so certain that on 9 December, a day before the whole conspiracy was exposed, a shadow cabinet headed by a veteran Kerala politician had already been fixed up based on the unity of 'democratic parties,' namely, the Congress and the PSP. Even the portfolios had been assigned, and they were all prepared to be sworn in on 10 December, when the 'resignation' of the MLAs was to be handed over.

Secondly, the sordid plot showed the lengths to which reactionary vested interests could go in the blindness of their hatred for Communists, and the depths to which they could sink in their efforts to overthrow by foul means a popularly elected ministry functioning according to the Constitution.

After the sordid plot was exposed, Kerala's chief minister charged that the Congress party was also involved in the attempt to wean away some members of the Communist Party by offering them bribes in a bid to reduce the government majority in the assembly. Stung to the quick, KPCC president, K. A. Damodara Menon, characterised the charges as 'wild' and challenged him to prove the allegation.

The correspondent of *New Kerala*, an English weekly published from Trivandrum, detailed 'chronological data, involving moves against the Kerala government with the Congress party as active participant.' It should be noted that the correspondent's data is based on reports, culled from the *Mathrubhoomi*, which is a reputed Congress daily published from Kozhikode. We take the liberty of reproducing the *New Kerala* correspondent's damning and telling indictment in full :

1. The General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee, Sri Shriman Narayan Aggarwal, arrived in Ernakulam on 4 December, 1957 (reported in the *Mathrubhoomi*, 5 December 1958.)

2. The same day Sri Shriman Narayan attended a joint

meeting of the Executive Committee of the KPCC and the Kerala Congress legislature party which passed a resolution quoting the resolution of the Travancore-Cochin Medical Association and appealing to people to come forward to save democracy (reported in the *Mathrubhoomi*, 6 December 1957).

3. The next day (5 December 1957) at Alleppey Sri Shriman Narayan held secret talks with Sri Pattom Thanu Pillai, PSP leader, on Congress-PSP alliance against the Communist Party in Kerala. The leader of the opposition in the assembly, Sri P. T. Chacko, was also present (reported in the *Mathrubhoomi*, 7 December 1957).

4. It is known that the *modus operandi* for achieving the common objective, namely, overthrowing the Kerala government was finalised at these talks. The governor was to be presented with a list of members indicating a majority in the legislature for the Congress-PSP coalition (four or five members from treasury benches having been already 'shanghaied' earlier) and asking for summons to form a ministry. The plan was complete down to details as to allotment of portfolios. The entire non-violent *coup* was to be timed in such a way that at the time of the proposed meeting of the southern zonal council, Union home minister Pant, the strong man of the Congress, would be in a position to be present at the swearing in of the new PSP-Congress coalition.

5. Later at night on the 5th of December, back at Ernakulam, Sri Shriman Narayan had further talks with top-ranking Congress leaders including Sri Panampally Govinda Menon and Sri C. K. Govindan Nair.

6. Before leaving by plane for Delhi on 6 December 1957, the Congress general secretary told a press conference at Ernakulam that acts of violence were being committed in various parts of Kerala. These acts of violence, he suggested were of a political character. While the Congress governments which were in power in other States of India did not allow such acts of violence, he alleged that the Communist government in Kerala were encouraging members of the Communist Party to commit acts of violence against their opponents (reported in the *Mathrubhoomi*, 8 December 1957).

7. Meanwhile in New Delhi on the 6 December 1957, Congress MPs from Kerala told a specially convened meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party of the "development" in Kerala. The Kottayam PCC president, Sri P. C. Cherian, was among those who spoke. The Union home minister was present (reported in the *Mathrubhoomi*, 8 December 1957).

8. Sri Shriman Narayan arrived in Delhi on 8 December.

9. The *Hindustan Times* bearing the date 10 December 1957, featured as a three-column lead story the following despatch by its special correspondent, New Delhi, dated the 9 December. The *Hindustan Times* despatch is reproduced below in full :

INDEPENDENT MAY CROSS FLOOR
THREAT TO KERALA COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT

NEW DELHI, Monday.

Opposition parties in the Kerala Assembly are seriously engaged in moves to unseat the Communist Ministry now that its over-all majority is capable of being threatened from two sides.

Two of the five independents who have been supporting the Namboodiripad ministry are said to have changed their minds. They are expected to cross the floor in the next session of the Assembly.

More than this expectation is the positive step taken by the Congress and the PSP in arriving at an electoral understanding to avoid contest in future by-elections. This is the outcome, it is believed, of the recent meeting of Mr Shriman Narayan, AICC general secretary, with Mr Pattom Thanu Pillai, the State PSP leader.

The importance of this understanding is considerable in view of the verdict of the Election Tribunal, which has set aside the election of two members, one belonging to the Party in power and other to the opposition. Both the unseated members have gone in appeal to the High Court against the Tribunal's decision.

'The public of Kerala first knew of the conspiracy against the government elected by them on 11 December 1957, when the newspapers carried the sensational disclosures by Sri Balakrishna Pillai, Communist MLA, of the attempts to bribe him and four others to resign from the legislative assembly.

'But the **Hindustan Times** knew about it the day after Shriman Narayan arrived in Delhi and they got the news from sources which were so sure of success of their conspiracy that the paper gave a scoop story.

'Much political intelligence is not necessary, especially for the people of Kerala, to come to the conclusion which does not absolve the Kerala Congress of implication in the conspiracy.'