

E M S NAMBOODIRIPAD

Twenty-Eight
Months in
Kerala

A RETROSPECT



PEOPLE'S PUBLISHING HOUSE

75 nP.

E.M.S. Namboodiripad

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DECEMBER 1959

The contents of this book first appeared in the form of a series of articles in the Bombay weekly newsmagazine **Blitz**. But for a few minor alterations by the author and some rearrangement of the chapters, the text conforms to the original version as published in the said newsmagazine. — PUBLISHERS.

Printed and published by D. P. Sinha at the New Age Printing Press, Rani Jhansi Road, New Delhi, for People's Publishing House Private Ltd., Rani Jhansi Rd., N. Delhi.

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1. People give us a chance

"IT WAS A VOTE AGAINST THE CONGRESS, RATHER THAN FOR the Communist Party" was the assessment made by several Congress leaders, including Prime Minister Nehru, regarding the 1957 General Elections in Kerala. They did not answer the question why, if that was so, the voters did not choose the P-SP, the Muslim League and the RSP—the parties which were in the field against both the Congress and the Communist Party.

The P-SP and the Muslim League who had an electoral alliance between them, had put up 80 candidates for a total number of 125 contested seats. Their candidates included several former Ministers, including one ex-Chief Minister. The voters of Kerala could, therefore, have voted in such a way as to make the P-SP—League combination an absolute majority in the Kerala legislature, if their intention was *only* to defeat the Congress. As a matter of fact, this combination could secure only 17 seats; even out of these 17, two were secured with the support of the Communist Party, which, in the special circumstances of those constituencies, supported the P-SP candidate.

The RSP too, entered the field with 28 candidates. The voters of Kerala could have returned a sizable number out of them to the legislature if their intention was only to defeat the Congress. As matter of fact, however, none of their candidates was returned; what is more, 22 candidates lost their deposits.

Another fact worth mentioning in this connection is that *Communist candidates were returned with absolute*

majorities (50 per cent or more of the votes polled in the Constituency) in 34 constituencies. This, it will be noticed, comes to more than 25 per cent of the total number of constituencies in the State. In another eight seats the Communist Party secured between 48 and 50 per cent of votes.

What about other parties? The Congress was in an absolute majority in only 20 constituencies; the Muslim League in three constituencies, and the P-SP in two constituencies (of which one was won with Communist support). No objective student of Kerala can fail to see that these results of the 1957 General Elections were the logical culmination of the developments that took place since the country attained independence and the former Indian states of Travancore and Cochin got responsible Government.

The Congress had secured a big majority of votes polled in the 1946 Elections in Malabar, and in 1948 in Travancore and Cochin, but this unassailable position of the Congress was rudely shaken in the first General Elections under the new Constitution, which took place in 1952. It was in 1952 that the voters of the then States of Travancore-Cochin and Madras gave their first verdict *against* the Congress, though not for any one of the several opposition parties.

The formidable unity of the Communist Party and the Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party of Malabar was able to secure as many as 16 out of 30 seats to the Madras legislature from the then Malabar part of the present-day Kerala. Added to these were four seats secured by the then Socialist Party of India and five seats by the Muslim League. The Congress was able to secure only the remaining five seats out of the 30 seats in that area. As for the Travancore-Cochin State, the United Leftist Front of the Communist

Party, RSP, & KSP was able to secure 37 seats. To these were added 11 seats secured by the Socialist Party and nine seats by the Travancore Tamil Nad Congress. Here again, the Congress was reduced to a minority in the legislature, while, of the votes polled, it could secure only 85 per cent.

This clearly was a vote against the Congress but not for any other party. The Communist Party tried to consolidate and strengthen this unity against the Congress. It called for the unity of the Opposition based on a unity of programme with a view to the formation of an alternative democratic government. That the Party was giving expression to the feeling that were universal among the democratic-minded people became clear at the time of the 1954 General Elections in Travancore-Cochin, when the slogan "WE WILL FIGHT TOGETHER, WE WILL RULE TOGETHER" resounded throughout the state of Travancore-Cochin. The voters of the then T-C State reposed the confidence in the alliance of CPI, P-SP, RSP & KSP who raised this slogan and returned 59 of its candidates in a house of 117 legislators.

At this point, however, the P-SP played its treacherous role. The party that had pledged itself to the voters to form an alternative, non-Congress, leftist Government, formed a minority Government of its own, with the solid support of the Congress. Once the purpose of using the P-SP to break the leftist alliance was achieved, the Congress for its part played its own treacherous role by throwing the P-SP out of office, and installing the Congress-Tamil Nad Congress Coalition Government. As for the RSP and the KSP, they showed unmistakably that their sympathies lay with the traitorous P-SP, rather than with their own election-time ally the CPI.

It was these treacherous activities of the other non-Congress parties that the voters of the Kerala had in mind at the time of the 1957 General Elections. There was as much a vote against the Congress as against the P-SP and the RSP, which helped the Congress to resort to various intrigues during the five years between 1952 and 1957. The RSP was wiped out as an electoral force. As for the P-SP, it was able to secure only nine seats, and that too with League support in the case of four seats and with Communist support in 2 seats. The KSP did not dare set up even a single candidate; what is more, its leaders went about openly campaigning for the Congress as the only party that could save Kerala from the threat of Communism.

The shape of things that were to come in Kerala was already visible in the latter half of 1954, when an election took place for the District Board of the Malabar District of Madras. The Communist Party, together with democratic independents allied to it, emerged as the biggest single party in the Board having 24 seats out of 48; the Congress was the next biggest party with 15 seats. The Muslim League secured eight seats; the P-SP was left with one seat!

The Congress tried its best to have alliances with the non-Communist parties, and also to wean away a few members from the Communist Party, so that it could take over the administration. These efforts proved, however, a miserable failure. The Communist Party, on the other hand, was able, with just 50 per cent representation on the Board, to take over the administration and, what is more, to continue it for its full three-year term.

It was this accumulated experience of the people of Kerala that made them vote the way they did in 1957. The meaning of that vote was clear: finding the Congress

and Left parties including the P-SP wanting, the people of Kerala decided to give a chance to the Communists.

2. The release of prisoners

APRIL 5, 1957, WAS A DAY OF REJOICING FOR THE PEOPLE OF Kerala. For, on that day, the State which had been under President's Rule since its formation on November 1, 1956, was brought under an elected Government. To mark this occasion, the new Government decided to commute the death sentences on all those who were then awaiting execution.

A few months later, the whole country celebrated the Centenary of the 1857 Freedom Struggle. The President of India himself came to Trivandrum to preside over the celebration in the capital of Kerala. On this occasion, too, the Government of Kerala ordered clemency to the prisoners. Remissions of varying periods for prisoners undergoing varying terms of imprisonment were granted; and those who were undergoing the shortest terms of imprisonment were released from prison.

These are two forms of concession shown to prisoners in all the states of India on days of national importance. The inauguration of the newly-formed State of Andhra, in the year 1953, was marked by the Government of Andhra (headed by the late Sri Prakasam) by the total clearance of every jail in Andhra. The releases ordered by the Government of Kerala in commemoration of April 5, and August 15, 1957, were of far lesser magnitude than the Andhra releases.

The Government of Kerala also ordered that all cases connected with election clashes should be withdrawn. The text of the Order issued in connection with this decision was, a word-for-word repetition of an Order issued by the Government of Andhra.

Another decision taken by the Government of Kerala was that cases arising out of labour or agrarian disputes which had been settled, as well as cases arising out of political struggles, would be withdrawn. This too is a procedure adopted by several state Governments in our country. In the former state of Travancore-Cochin, for example, the then Chief Minister, Sri Pattom Thanu Pillai, ordered the release of prisoners convicted in the group of cases known as Punnappa Vayalar cases. Sri Pattom's successor in office, Sri Panampalli Govinda Menon, too, had agreed to withdraw cases and to release prisoners when strikes were withdrawn.

The decisions of the Communist-led Government of Kerala, however, came in for a good deal of criticism at the hands of the Opposition parties. This criticism has been repeatedly voiced by the leaders of the Congress, the P-SP and Muslim League parties and as repeatedly answered by the Government of Kerala on the basis of irrefutable facts and figures. And yet, the Home Minister of India thought it fit to repeat the same charge in his Lok Sabha speech. The "summary" of the report submitted by the Governor of Kerala to the Government of India also repeated it. Let us, therefore, examine this criticism.

The first point made by the critics was that a large number of criminals were released, thus giving them direct encouragement to continue to perpetrate such crimes. Facts, however, show that prisoners convicted for ordinary crimes were not released: it was only short-term prisoners (with

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less than three months or so) that were given full remission and that too only on one occasion, the Centenary of the Freedom Struggle. This itself was far milder than the total clearance of jails ordered by the Congress Government in Andhra.

The next argument was that many prisoners who were released on the pretext of being convicted for labour, agrarian and political struggles had been charged with such crimes as murder, arson, etc. This is equally applicable to many political prisoners who had been released by Congress Governments in various states, including the Congress and P-SP Governments in the State of Travancore-Cochin. The third argument was that the Kerala releases were intended solely and particularly to benefit the members and active workers of the Communist Party. This too is contrary to truth. It is known, for example, that among the ten persons whose death sentences were commuted there was only one Communist.

As for the beneficiaries of orders releasing prisoners and withdrawing cases arising out of labour, agrarian and political struggles, they belonged to *all* political parties. To take only one example, a large number of cases withdrawn by the Government of Kerala related to the "High Court Agitation." This was an agitation jointly participated in by *all* the political parties. The majority of the beneficiaries, therefore, were non-Communists, the proportion of Communists among them being relatively small.

It should be also noted that this policy of releasing prisoners and withdrawing cases in connection with labour, agrarian and political agitations continued through the entire period of the Communist-led Government of Kerala. It, therefore, benefitted all the political parties, particularly the parties of the Opposition in Kerala, who were very

active in organising such struggles even where the merits of the cases did not warrant the launching of such struggles. This has been admitted by the Governor of Kerala himself who, in the reported "summary" of his report, stated as follows :

"If the number of peaceful satyagrahis and picketers and others in the Kattampalli, Sitaram Mills and Students' agitations are excluded from the list of prisoners released, it will be found that it is mostly Communists who had been guilty of violent crimes that derived benefit from this policy."

One is surprised to find all the laborious efforts made by the Governor to prove the unprovable—that is, *that the Communists were the beneficiaries of this policy!* He does not care to explain why the Kattampalli and other cases should be excluded, unless of course he propounds the "theory" that crimes committed by the anti-Communists are not crimes!

One fails to understand why the attack on the police made by anti-Communists should be excluded from the list of crimes, while any Communist who is charged with the same crime should be considered a criminal. But then, it seems, that is the Congress conception of truth and non-partisan administration! The biggest refutation of the Congress charge in connection with the release of prisoners and withdrawals of cases consists in the fact that the President's rule has used the release of prisoners sent to jail in connection with the recent direct action.

Many of these prisoners were sent to jail on charges of attacking transport buses, causing personal injury to passengers, damaging such national property as school buildings and furniture, aggressive mass entry into Government offices and obstruction to the Government servants.

It should also be noticed that the leaders of the move-

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ment had made it clear that they were resorting to these anti-social forms of Direct Action with a view to "paralyse the administration." And yet the Congress and other opposition parties who were loud in their denunciation of the Communist-led Government's policy of releases are still louder in demanding the release of these prisoners! As for the Home Minister who repeated this charge against the Government of Kerala, he sanctioned the release of nearly 6,000 prisoners immediately after the establishment of the President's rule. As for cases, over 2,000 of them were subsequently withdrawn, involving about 10,000 persons. This includes several cases involving violence against person and property committed during the direct action movement.

The Home Minister remarked in the Lok Sabha that the number of prisoners released and cases withdrawn by the Communist-led Government of Kerala within two and a half years of its administration exceeds the number of such cases during the whole 12-year period of the Congress administration.

The facts mentioned above would make it clear that the number of persons released and of cases withdrawn after President's rule was established, comes to more than the number during the 28 months of the Communist-led Government.

One is, therefore, constrained to ask the Home Minister and other leaders of the Central Government and Congress High Command: *Is this not a clear case of one rule for Congress Governments and another for a non-Congress Government?*

3. Police in a welfare state

THE KERALA GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO RELEASE PRISONERS and withdraw cases, and the criticism of that decision made by the Congress leaders, have a wider and deeper significance than the mere question of whether or not to release a few prisoners and withdraw a few cases. As a matter of fact, it involves the whole question of what a democratic Government's attitude should be towards the struggles waged by the working people for the improvement of their living standards, and towards the political struggles and movements organised by the Opposition parties.

The question actually is whether a distinction should be made between ordinary criminals—that is, those who commit crimes in their normal day-to-day life—and those who are charged with crimes because of their trade union, peasant or other mass activities and political struggles. Such a distinction was undoubtedly made in the pre-Independence days even by the leaders of the Congress. No less a person than Mahatma Gandhi pleaded for the commutation of death sentences on revolutionary political workers for the reason that the crimes committed by them were not ordinary crimes, but those committed with noble motives; many of those "politicals" of the British regime were, in the post-Independence years, given the name of "political sufferers" and allotted land and given preference in Government jobs and various other concessions.

Is this distinction between ordinary criminals and the so-called "politicals" valid after Independence? Or, are all those who commit crimes to be considered alike, regardless of whether the origin of the case against them is political? This is the basic question asked by the leaders of the

Congress when they objected to the Kerala Government's action in releasing prisoners and withdrawing cases. Their obvious answer to this question is that such a distinction is not valid now.

One could have legitimately conceded the sincerity of Congressmen in raising this question, had not their own action in Kerala after the assumption of office by the Communist-led Government in April, 1957, belied their words. The very people, who objected to the Kerala Government's action in releasing prisoners and withdrawing cases relating to the periods in which the Congress or the P-SP was in office, demanded release of prisoners and withdrawal of cases in the period in which the Communist Party was in office.

Every time the Congress or the P-SP or other leaders of the Opposition negotiated a settlement of labour, peasant or other issues which led to strike or other forms of direct action—such as Kattampalli, Sitaram, Students' agitation, etc., etc., they made it a condition that cases arising out of these direct actions should be withdrawn and prisoners released. In making these demands, they did not make any distinction between petty crimes and major crimes; they demanded the release of even those who were charged with assault on ordinary citizens and police officers, attacking and damaging private and public property, etc.

All this came to a climax in July-August, 1959, when, acceding to their demands, the Central Government dismissed the Kerala Government and, following it, released all prisoners remanded to custody, or serving their terms of imprisonment, in cases arising out of the direct action they organised. This is an implied admission that the distinction between ordinary criminals and "politicals" is considered by them to be valid even today. The only condition

they attach to it is that the "political" who are to be given special treatment should be those who have committed crimes as part of their struggle against the Communist-led Government of Kerala !

While the Opposition parties in Kerala adopted a policy so divorced from any principle, the Communist-led Government of Kerala adopted a principled approach to the question. The essence of its approach is that every political party, mass organisation, group or individual, carrying on their activities in defence of the common people's living standards, has the right to carry on these mass activities in a peaceful and legitimate way; if, in the course of those activities, they happen to resort to actions which are crimes in the eyes of the law, they will of course be dealt with in the normal way, but their cases will be considered in a way different from the actions of ordinary criminals. It was from this basic policy that a new practice was established : That cases arising out of labour, agrarian or other disputes will be withdrawn, and prisoners in connection with them released, once the dispute is settled, provided, of course, the case does not involve serious crimes like murder, arson, etc. This is applicable equally to all political parties, organisations and individuals engaged in trade union, agrarian or other mass activities.

A variant of the same policy is that cases arising out of political struggles should not be dealt with in the same way as ordinary crimes. In a country where different political trends and different political parties exist and fight one another, two things are likely to happen : *Either* the parties of the Opposition sometimes transgress the limits of the law and therefore come within its clutches; or the ruling party and its subordinate officers sometimes abuse the law and harass the workers of the Opposition parties.

Cases arising in this way should not be dealt with in the same way as ordinary cases of crime. In those cases where the Opposition has transgressed the limits of the law, those who are committing the crime may be pardoned, once the mistake is recognised by those responsible for it, provided, of course, there is a certain amount of assurance that such a transgression of the law will not be repeated. In the case of the authorities themselves abusing the law to harass the Opposition, there is no room for doubt that proper amends should be made by them.

It was on these principles that the Kerala Government evolved its "new police policy". The crux of that policy is that it is not the job of the police to suppress the trade union, peasant and other mass activities of any mass organisation, or a political struggle waged by any political party; it is the job of the police to track down and punish those who commit ordinary crimes. The settlement of the labour or other disputes is to be left to the labour or other departments of the Government and not to be taken over by the police; the police should arrive at the scene of any labour, agrarian or other mass or political struggle only in case these struggles lead to an actual, or imminently threatened, breach of the peace or violent action.

The Communist-led Government of Kerala, however, did not consider the application of the above-mentioned policy to be easy. It, on the other hand, bristles with difficulties. That was why the Government decided to appoint a special committee to make a detailed investigation of the constitutional, political and practical implications of this policy. Only such a detailed investigation will yield the guiding lines for the solution of the problem: How is a democratic government in a welfare state to use the police for suppressing crimes, without curbing the right

of mass organisations and political parties to freely carry on their struggles ?

This, it will be noticed, is a question which is of great importance not only for the Communist-led Government of Kerala, but for the Congress Governments in other States as well. One is only surprised that this basic question has not, up to this day, been seriously taken up by the Congress Governments; but that, on the other hand, the Congress Governments and the Congress Party are even attacking the Kerala Government for having posed this question and started investigating it.

4. Planning and its implementation

ONE OF THE FIRST VISITORS TO CALL ON ME AFTER IT WAS announced that the Communist Party was going to form a Ministry was a boy in his teens. He had just appeared for the school final examinations; his family was in such poor straits that not only could he not continue his studies, but, for his very living, he should get a job immediately. He hoped and expected that, when I assumed charge as Chief Minister, I would help him to find a job.

I still remember the face of that boy; his pleading voice still rings in my ears. For, in him, I see the embodiment of the hundreds of young boys and girls, and relatively elderly men and women, who have approached me

during the 28 months of the existence of our Government, asking me to give them a job. Each of them has his or her own tale to tell; each has his or her own individuality, both as a person and as a member of the family to which he or she belongs. Yet they are all of basically the same type—people who are unable to eke out a livelihood and who think that the Government can do something for them.

Many of them even think that I as Chief Minister have the capacity to do anything and everything with regard to the distribution of governmental jobs. Many others, of course, know that I have not the authority to intervene in a sphere which has been left to the Public Service Commission, "but still—"; the obvious implication of the words "but still—" is that I may somehow "fix it up" with the Public Service Commission; some of them made it explicit through a request that I may write a "letter of recommendation" to the Chairman of the Public Service Commission!

There is nothing surprising in all this. For Kerala is the land of unemployment par excellence—both educated unemployment as well as uneducated; both rural as well as urban unemployment; unemployment in all communities and in all walks of life. As a matter of fact, it would be no exaggeration to state that food deficit and unemployment are the two biggest problems which the State of Kerala has to face; it is to the extent to which these twin problems are sought to be successfully tackled that any government would be judged by the people of Kerala.

It would be interesting, in this connection, to note that the first mass agitation that the parties of the Opposition launched against our Government was on what they characterised as our Government's "failure to solve the food problem." Within less than a month of the assumption of

office by us, they started organising local food demonstrations; and within three months, they took a demonstration to the State capital itself.

As for unemployment, the Opposition was insistently asking questions in the Legislature as to how many new industries have been established and how many new jobs created. In this respect, too, they characterised our performance as "full of failures." Let me readily admit that we cannot claim any notable success in respect of either of these two important problems. I cannot claim that food production in the State has made any sizable advance during our régime; nor do I claim that the effort at establishing new industries has led to any sizable increase in employment opportunities. But I would definitely claim that we have been able to bring about a very important reorientation in the State Government's approach to planning which, if pursued and carried forward, would put the State on correct lines.

Planning and development has for long been considered by the Government and people of this State as equivalent to developments in the field of social services and communications. With regard to these two lines of activity, the former State of Travancore and Cochin are known to be far more advanced than the rest of the country; the district of Malabar, which was then part of the Madras State, was also known to be more advanced in these respects than the other parts of that State. However, there was no corresponding progress in such fields of economic activity as agriculture, animal husbandry, irrigation, industrialisation, co-operation, etc. The former States of Travancore and Cochin were behind such part A States as Madras and Bombay in these respects. Malabar too was much behind the rest of the composite State of Madras.

The First and Second Five Year Plans made no significant change. The big hydro-electrical and other construction projects which are described as "places of pilgrimage" for those who want to "participate in the great adventure" of nation-building have all been located in other States; we have had a very small share of the nation's plans for progress. Far more important than this disproportionately small share allotted to our State is the fact that this inexcusable underestimation of the role of agriculture, industries, etc., was also visible in the way in which the amounts allocated were actually utilised. For example, while the percentages of fulfilment to targets in the first plan period in Travancore-Cochin were 43.7% in Agriculture and Rural Development and 52.3% in Industry, it was as much as 89.3% in Irrigation and Power, 132.6% in Transport and 84.1% in Social Services. It would be interesting to note, in this connection, that the former State of Travancore-Cochin was at the lowest rung of the ladder in the fulfilment of targets in activities connected with agriculture and small and cottage industries.

This is a State of affairs which has to be put an end to if the twin problems of food deficit and unemployment facing our people are to be tackled. We, therefore, announced our intention to put greater emphasis on activities that will lead to an increase in the production of material wealth. This was such a correct position that, when this was clearly stated in the Governor's speech in February 1958, the other parties had to say that they agreed with it; they went to the extent of saying that there was nothing new in this policy declaration as they have always been of that view. It was, of course, difficult for them to explain how, in that case, the performance of the Congress governments during the period of the first Five Year Plan

had been so pitiable.

Having thus laid down the policy, we tried to implement it. To this end, we took the following steps:

1. A vigorous drive was launched in order to push effective schemes of increasing agricultural production. The drive for the starting of a large number of small irrigation works with people's co-operation and the drive for the large-scale use of green manures were very significant steps in this direction.

2. Efforts were made to organise various forms of co-operatives for the small and cottage industries.

3. Initiative was taken to get large scale industries started in the State in the private sector with or without State participation.

These are undoubtedly three directions in which our State has to proceed if food production and employment opportunities are to be increased. That we have been able to make a start in these directions is a great achievement, although it will take some time for these efforts to yield concrete results. I should, at the same time, make it clear that these measures would not more than touch the fringe of the problem. What is required for a State like ours, with such a mass of unemployed people but with such an abundance of some of the most valuable economic resources of the country—with such a deplorably high degree of food deficit, but with such vast potentialities for improving the technique of agricultural production and thus increasing agricultural production—is a dynamic programme many times the size of our present Five Year Plan and which should be carried out with a dynamism unprecedented in any part of the country so far.

We, however, had inherited a second Five-Year Plan quite inadequate to meet our purposes and unsuited to

the conditions of our State. We were, therefore, quite clear in our minds that a basic reorientation will be necessary at the time of the preparation of the Third Five Year Plan. We had just started thinking on the size, shape and pattern of the Third Five-Year Plan by the time our Ministry was dismissed by the Centre.

Besides thus drawing the attention of the people and the planning authorities to the need for such a reorientation of our approach to planning and development, I may claim with satisfaction and pride that we have been able to bring about an improvement in the capacity of the administrative machinery to fulfil the targets set in the Second Five Year Plan.

While the fulfilment to targets during the whole of the First Five Year Plan was 83.5 per cent and the corresponding figure for the first year of the Second Five Year Plan (the year before the assumption of office by our Ministry) was 64.2 per cent, the figure for the second and third years of the Second Five Year Plan (which happened to be the first and second years of the existence of our Ministry) were 84.5 per cent and almost 100 per cent (18.48 crores out of 18.51 crores) respectively. There was thus a steady rise in the capacity of our administrative machinery to fulfil the target laid down in the plan.

To look at the problem from another angle, our State was behind most of the other States in the matter of fulfilment in the first year of the Second Five Year Plan; by the time the fourth year of the Plan has commenced, the record of fulfilment of this State is exceeded only by the State of Madras. It was such an improvement in the work of planning and development that was interrupted on July 31, 1959, when the President established his own administration in Kerala.

5. Tackling the food problem

THE FOOD SITUATION IN THE ENTIRE COUNTRY WAS GETTING difficult in the first half of 1957. All the more so in our State which, as is well known, is deficit to the extent of over 50 per cent of its food requirements. We, therefore, had to apply our minds to this problem as soon as we took charge.

Anybody who tries to tackle the food problem in our country should apply his mind to its three aspects. Increasing food production; organising proper distribution of the available stocks as between surplus and deficit states; and organising proper internal distribution in every State, so that consumers secure their supplies at prices which are within their reach, while being fair to the producer. We realised that it will be next to impossible for us to achieve any immediate success in appreciably raising production. We had to undertake that job as part of a long term programme.

While applying our minds to this first aspect of the problem, we stressed on the supreme importance of the second. No less than 35 per cent of our foodgrain requirements comes from outside. This was actually coming through the private trade channels when there was no control—before the war and after the decontrol. But, when the situation became difficult in 1956, the Central Government recognised its responsibility to this deficit State and supplied a part of its requirements. The supplies that were thus made in 1956-57 by the Centre came approximately to 25,000 tons a month.

This supply by the Central Government was suddenly stopped a couple of months after our Government assumed charge. Originally proposed in the National Development Council which met in June 1957, the Southern Food Zone became a reality some time in July. The assumption behind the decision to create this Zone was that the heavy deficit of Kerala and small deficit of Madras and Mysore would be offset by the heavy surplus of Andhra if only movements from this Zone to other States were completely stopped and free movement allowed within the Zone. Our representatives in the National Development Council and in the subsequent discussions with the Food Ministry expressed apprehension whether this arrangement would work. They would of course, have no objection if it helped our State to get its requirements at prices at which the Central Government had been supplying to us. They, however, urged that the Centre should not absolve itself of its responsibility to undertake to supply this State in case this arrangement did not work.

Our apprehensions did unfortunately become true in actual practice. It was only for the first few months of the existence of the Southern Food Zone that supplies came from Andhra to Kerala through the normal trade channel at rates declared by the Central Government as ceiling prices. The "free movement within the Zone" did not keep the prices below the ceiling. While the private trader could pay this above-ceiling price and get his supplies, it was an illegal price. The private trader did, of course, buy in Andhra, bring it here and sell it to the consumer, but he bought it at rates which are higher than ceiling prices and sold it at still higher prices. We, therefore, asked the Central Government either to enforce the controlled prices in Andhra, so that we may buy at those

rates; or supply us from any other stock which the Centre may have. The Central Government, unfortunately, did neither.

It washed its hands of all responsibility for sending supplies to us; it asked us to buy in Andhra, but made it clear that we should make purchases at or below the ceiling rates; while making this stipulation with regard to the price, however, they did not use their authority to see to it that our requirements are available in Andhra at or below the ceiling.

This, therefore, has been a continuing headache for our Government and the people of Kerala during the whole tenure of our office. Innumerable conferences were held of the Food Ministers of Andhra and Kerala, of the Food Ministers and officers of the Central and Kerala State Governments, and a few meetings at which either the Prime Minister or the Home Minister took part. In spite of all these conferences, however, the quantity of rice that we asked for was not forthcoming; the Central Government's order fixing the ceiling price in Andhra became a farce.

What about the third aspect of the problem, food distribution within the State? I have no hesitation in declaring that the arrangements made by us for this would have worked well if only the Central Government had discharged its responsibility of either itself supplying our requirements, or seeing to it that our requirements can be bought in Andhra at fair prices.

We decided to cover the entire State with what are called "fair price shops." These are different from the old ration shops: they do not make supplies to every family in the village but only to those who are below a particular level of income; the rest were expected to depend on the normal private shop for their requirements. These shops

did not exist in what are considered the surplus areas in this deficit State; the people in such areas were expected to depend on the working of the private traders. Nevertheless, the fair price shops were expected to partly meet the food requirements of 70 to 80 per cent of the people of the State. Their number was raised by our Government from less than a 1,000 to nearly 6,000.

This was an eminently successful arrangement so long as the State Government got physical possession of 20 to 25 thousand tons a month. Figures show that, whenever the Central Government's supplies or other stocks enabled us to run these fair price shops and supply two *edangazhis* (less than four lbs.) of rice per family per week—which, on an average, comes to less than two oz. per head per day—the level of prices was sufficiently low; whenever this supply was disturbed (which often happened, thanks to the failure of the Central Government to give us supplies), prices went high. That is why the people of Kerala were unanimous—cutting across all barriers, political and otherwise—that the fair price shop system should continue.

There are, however, a few problems to be solved if the fair price shops are to work successfully. How are the families to be selected to whom supplies are to be made? How are the areas to be decided where fair price shops have to be set up? How would it be guaranteed that the supplies made to a fair price shop are properly distributed? The story of "ghost-cards" in the days of rationing and the diversion of ration rice into the black-market is too well known for the above questions to require any further elaboration.

It was to solve these problems that we evolved the device of People's Food Committees. Committees composed of the representatives of all the major political parties are

to advise the Tahsildar in fixing the number of fair price shops in his Taluk, in locating them where they are required, in selecting the person who is to run the shop, etc. Similar committees are also to be formed to help the local officers and Panchayats in selecting the families of the lower-income groups to whom identity cards are to be distributed and otherwise ensuring that the shops are run properly. These Taluk and Village Food Committees, working under the directions of an All-Party State Food Advisory Committee, were the means through which abuses in the matter of distribution were to be avoided, and thus the proper distribution of what is made available to us by the Centre was to be organised.

It was on the successful working of these People's Food Committees, which, in their turn, were expected to ensure the successful working of the fair price shops, that the solution of the whole problem depended. The question, therefore was: would these committees work successfully? The Congress and other Opposition parties in Kerala unfortunately showed that they were interested not in making these committees work successfully, but in attacking the very act of forming these committees which, according to them, was calculated to strengthen the Communist Party. How they managed to oppose even such a step of associating people's representative in the solution of properly distributing foodgrains, we shall see in the next article.

6. Taking democracy to the people

EVERYTHING LOOKS YELLOW TO A JAUNDICED EYE. THE activities of the Government of Kerala appear to the anti-Communist opposition in their own way: they must attack it somehow or other; if there are no adequate grounds for such attacks, they should invent them.

It is obvious that the association of people's representatives with the food administration will prove effective in finding out the low income group families who require supply through fair price shops; in supervising the way in which identity cards are issued to them and used by them; in seeing to it that the dealers who run the fair price shops, and the wholesalers, who form the link between them and the Government, properly discharge their duties. It was with these objectives that local, taluk and state Food Committees were formed by the Kerala Government. Even this act of the Kerala Government, however, was attacked by the Opposition.

In attacking this, they put forward a funny argument: People's Food Committees were being set up by the Kerala Government in order to fill the coffers of the Communist Party! *But how, you may ask.* The answer is: those Communists who are members of these committees will be enabled to draw travelling allowances from the Government which would be passed on to the Communist Party! If this argument were seriously made, the formation of these committees would fill the coffers of the Opposition more than those of the Communist Party. *For, the number of Communists in them was less than the total number of*

those who belong to Opposition political parties. In almost every committee without exception, the Communist Party was in a minority. To this should be added that, at least in the case of Village Food Committees, members were not paid any travelling allowance.

What has been stated above with regard to Food Committees at various levels equally applies to committees formed in other fields as well. Our Government thought that the setting up of People's Committees at various levels for discharging certain well-defined functions would help every department being run to the satisfaction of the people. We, therefore, set up People's Committees to assist regular Government officials in the Forest, the Education, the Health, the PWD, the Land Revenue and other departments whenever they had to do some important job with people's co-operation—such as distribution of waste lands, fixing the location of a new school or hospital to be opened, a road to be constructed, etc.

In forming such committees, our Government took particular care to see that the Opposition was given the representation which was its due on the basis of the support which it received from the electorate during the last general elections. As a matter of fact, in most of the district and local committees, the proportion of members belonging to the Communist Party and the Opposition was, in general, even more favourable to the Opposition than the support, which they received in the General Elections, would justify.

To this reasonable representation given to the Opposition political parties should be added the representation given to unattached public figures who, because of their particular experience in the field, or knowledge of the affairs handled by the Committee, were suited to be co-

opted to the Committee. (Statements have been made by the politicians of the Opposition giving wild figures of Committee members and the proportion of Communists in it. But the list of members of the various committees formed by the Government ever since its inception would show that the Communist members were in a minority in almost every one of them without exception). And yet, the Opposition has been repeating the argument that the formation of these committees is a device to strengthen the Communist Party!

This raises the question as to what exactly is the reason why the Opposition has raised the hue and cry against Kerala Government's action in associating people's representatives with the administration at all levels. Is it because they want somehow or other to denounce everything that the Communist-led Kerala Government does! That of course, is one of their motives. But I don't think that that is the only motive. They are opposed to the very idea of making the administration as a whole more in tune with the feelings and requirements of the people. They are of the view that administration is best left with permanent officials who should not be "bothered with" by the "interference" of people's representatives.

Mention should, in this connection, be made of the Kerala Government's proposals for democratising the administration at all levels. Following the report of the Study Team on Plan Projects, set up by the Planning Commission under the leadership of Sri Balwantrai Mehta—a report which made proposals for what it called "democratic decentralisation", through the vesting of more powers on Panchayats, and Panchayat Samities—our Government decided to draft two important bills, the Panchayat Bill and the District Council Bill.

The first Bill vested in the Panchayats all the functions that are today discharged by the village revenue officials as well as the officials of other departments at the village level. The second proposed to transfer all the functions which are today discharged by the district officials except the functions of the Revenue Department and Law and Order (this will be left with the Collector), to an elected District Council headed by an elected President, who will be assisted by a permanent official of the status of Deputy Collector in carrying on day-to-day work.

These two bills would go a long way in extending the principle of the executive being responsible to the elected representatives of the people at all levels of administration, rather than confine it to the Centre and the States as is now the case. These proposals were violently opposed by the leading members of the Opposition parties, although there were several members of these parties who were in sympathy with the idea of vesting the people's representatives with more and more powers. Many of these leaders drew a lurid picture of the chaos and confusion that will set in if elected District council were allowed to have such a vast field of activity.

They said that the unity of the country and the integrity of administration would be impaired if the authority of the State Government was allowed to be so dispersed among a large number of district bodies and, further down, among a still larger number of village bodies. They also said that the set-up envisaged in these proposals would make administration at every level an arena of party and group conflicts, each party and group trying to have its own domination at each of these levels of administration. A few of them went to the extent of suggesting that even the conferring of the right of adult suffrage on the

people was a wrong step! But even those who agreed on the need for it in relation to the Centre and the States, questioned the wisdom of giving power to elected representatives at lower levels.

This is obviously a stand which has nothing to do with the basic policy declaration of our national movement. We have been fighting for a democratic set-up which means taking democracy to the lowest levels. It was this idea of a fully decentralised and democratic administration as possible that was conveyed by the term Panchayat Raj.

It would appear that those who are today at the helm of affairs in the Communist and other non-Communist political parties in Kerala would rather leave all administrative functions and privileges to the district and lower official who may do everything at their sweet will and pleasure; they may be subjected only to such remote control and guidance as may be exercised by the State and Central Governments. It was this basic opposition to the taking of democracy to the lower levels, combined with their anxiety to oppose everything that the Communist Government does, that led the Opposition to denounce the formation of People's Committees at various levels.

7. Role of officials in administration

THE DOMINANT IMPRESSION LEFT IN MY MIND, AFTER MY work as Chairman of the Administrative Reforms Committee set up by the Government of Kerala, is surprise at the strength of feeling in certain circles of our public that there is no need for administrative reforms. One of the

witnesses who appeared before our Committee (a gentleman who has had ample experience both as a non-official politician as well as in the capacity of an official administrator) sharply posed the question: "Is there anything seriously wrong in the present administrative set-up? On the other hand, is it not true that the system is good but is being worked in a wrong way?"

The same idea was expressed by several other witnesses, according to whom the system as it existed prior to the attainment of Independence and the establishment of responsible government in the former Indian states, was good and efficient. This "good and efficient" system has been undergoing a process of steady but rapid deterioration since the attainment of Independence and the establishment of parliamentary democracy. These friends would have us believe that the main, if not the sole, defect of the working of the administrative system today is that the honest and efficient government official is not allowed to work according to his conscience, but is constantly interfered with by the ignorant and selfish politician. Free the official from this interference from the politician, they would assert, and everything will be alright.

This approach is sought to be supported by the dictum "it is for the people's representatives (the legislature and the ministry) to lay down the policy; it is for the permanent official to implement it." The implication is that people's representatives (Ministers and Legislators) should leave actual, day-to-day, administration to permanent officials.

Let me state at once that there is an element of truth in this. For, after all, the job of the permanent official is a specialised one; execution of policies and administration of day-to-day affairs cannot be carried out by somebody

who has not had the benefit of some theoretical and much more of practical training in the art of public administration; the average people's representative cannot be expected to have this training and experience. It would, therefore, be unwise for a legislator, or even for a minister, to arrogate to himself the job of carrying on day-to-day administration. An exceedingly capable and efficient political leader may well mess things up if he takes upon himself the jobs which are to be carried out by a permanent official.

Furthermore, permanent officials under the present democratic set-up are citizens enjoying all the democratic freedom of a free citizen, though these freedoms are undoubtedly restricted to a certain extent by the mere fact of their being Government servants. They are, therefore, men and women with patriotism, self-respect and personal initiative, they are not the self-like automatons that they were expected to be under the British or princely rule. That being so, they should be allowed so much freedom and personal initiative in carrying out their jobs as is consistent with the carrying out of the general policies laid down by the people acting through their representatives in the legislature and the ministry.

Having admitted this much, it is necessary to state that leaving all questions of implementation to the permanent official would make a mockery of democracy. For, as our Committee stated in the Report, "it is difficult to draw a line between policy and implementation and say where one ends and the other begins. Moreover, it is proper implementation that makes policy significant. The Minister who is constitutionally responsible for all the executive actions of his Department has to ensure that the policy laid down by him is properly implemented."

The correctness of this statement will be clear if one

bears in mind that we are now having a planned economy and that, therefore, the administrative apparatus can no more remain a mere "revenue collecting and law and order maintaining" machinery. It should become a machinery for carrying out developmental activities. This has made a fundamental transformation in the jobs of government officials.

The jobs that the present administrative machinery has to undertake cannot be carried out by the mere process of "tightening up of the machinery" from top to bottom. Simultaneously with such a tightening up of the machinery itself, there is need for improving the relations between this machinery and the general public. This has been emphasised over and over again by the Planning Commission in the stress it lays on securing public co-operation in the implementation of plan projects. To this end, the key administrative cadres at all levels (from the Chief Secretary at the State level down to the taluk and village officials) have been asked to so readjust their tasks that they can become the "leaders of the team" carrying out developmental activities.

Now, the skill and experience which the permanent officials have acquired will not help them in carrying out this task. Even the most efficient among the permanent officials will lag far behind an average people's representative in his ability to feel the pulse of the people, to correctly assess the feelings, desires and even prejudices of the common people, to judge as to whether a particular proposal will be acceptable to the people, and on the basis of such a judgement, to take decisions and to carry them out.

Take a concrete example. The Agricultural Department has, on the basis of the scientific study made by it, come to the conclusion that a particular variety of green

manure is the best suited for an area. The Department and, under its leadership, the extension officers and non-officials in the Blocks go on popularising this particular variety. In the course of their work, they come across a group of cultivators who think that there is another variety which is more useful. This particular variety suggested by the cultivators may have already been tried and experimented on before the Department has come to the conclusion that this gives less satisfactory results. The Department officials will, therefore, naturally reject the view of the cultivators as unscientific and technically incorrect.

But a non-official political leader may be of the view that there is no harm in allowing the cultivators themselves to try both in different plots, so that either they find on the basis of their own experience that the Department's conclusion is correct, or these experiments force the Department itself to re-examine the problem.

It is, however, just possible that such a decision would go against the instruction which the particular officer of the Department has received from above. The officers would, therefore, stick to the instruction that he has received, rather than making the experiment which a non-official political leader would make. The result will be that the cultivators do not have that sense of satisfaction that the plan of increasing agricultural production is their own plan; the feeling, on the other hand, grows that they are asked just to carry out orders issued by the officials of the Department. This would prove a big hindrance to securing people's co-operation in fulfilling the task of increasing agricultural production.

Any number of such examples can be taken from every development department. The officials of the Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Co-operation, Industries and other

departments may each of them have received rigid instructions as to how schemes prepared above should be carried out not by the officials themselves but by tens of thousands of ordinary working people, the approach to the implementation of all these schemes should be as flexible as possible; innumerable adjustments will have to be made at every step keeping in view the difficulties which the people are facing and the problems which they have to solve.

This is something which is beyond the capacity of the average permanent official who is trained to do everything according to rules and instructions handed out to him. Let me take the most notable example which I came across when our Ministry was in office. According to the principles and policies laid down by the Community Development Ministry at the Centre, each Block is to prepare its own plans and frame its own Block budget in accordance with the "felt needs" of the people of that Block. The "Schematic Budget" which the Ministry framed for the guidance of the State governments was not binding on any single Block. This is a statement which was made to me by responsible people in the Community Development Ministry.

Despite this, however, I found that there was a universal impression among responsible people in the State that the Block Committees have to make their plans within the four corners of the Ministry's "Schematic Budget". Extremely ridiculous situations arose because the peculiarities of the conditions of a particular Block were not taken into account, such as: large provisions are made for irrigation and very little for industries in a Block in the coastal region where there is little or no scope for irrigation but there is ample scope for industries.

It was after this that the appropriate bodies in the State took necessary steps to modify the "Schematic Budget", broadly keeping in view the conditions of Kerala as distinct from the conditions of other States. Even after this was done, there was a tendency to overlook the differences between different regions in Kerala itself and the specific features of each Block; the easier course was to rigidly stick to the pattern set forth and sent from above.

The reason for this is that, the very strength of the permanent official—efficiency in carrying out clear orders according to rules—becomes a source of weakness in a situation in which the main job of the government official is to secure people's co-operation. Flexibility and willingness to make adjustments is of the greatest importance in the new situation and it is this that is lacking in the permanent official. This, on the other hand, is available in the non-official political worker. For, it is his daily and hourly job to deal with men and he knows how to make adjustments in accordance with the feelings of the people.

How is it to be ensured that this role of the non-official would be utilised along with the efficiency of the official? One possible suggestion would be to have democratic institutions set up at every level of administration. This would ensure that the permanent officials and elected representatives at each level will supplement each other and co-ordinate and co-operate with each other. This, however, is only the formal aspect of the matter. Even if these institutions are established, they may lead to conflicts and difficulties, unless a change is brought about in the attitude of both the permanent officials and the elected people's representatives. Both should look upon themselves as participants in a common endeavour and should have a sense of mutual co-operation. The generation of this proper at-

itude is the all-important pre-requisite for the evolution of an efficient and popular administrative set up.

8. The boot is on the other foot !

"YOU ARE NO MORE THE LEADER OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY; you are the Chief Minister of the State and, as such, our leader too"—several of my friends in the Congress and other Opposition parties told me when I assumed charge. The idea underlying this piece of advice is one with which I entirely agreed. The Government of the land should be carried on in the interests of all parties by persons who can rise above the narrow interests of their own party. It is only then that democracy will really become the rule of the people, rather than the domination of the majority over the minority. I was, however, tempted to explain: "Physician, heal thyself !" to those of my friends who belonged to the Congress Party. How I wish that the Congressmen who gave me this piece of advice tried to get that same piece of advice accepted by their own leaders, who have been in office at the Centre and in all the other States for over twelve years!

One of the most striking evidences of the "non-partisan" character of Congress Governments at the Centre and in the State was the instruction issued by the Central Home Ministry to all the State Government with regard to the screening of candidates for appointments in Government services. That instruction was as follows:

After the merits of the candidates have been properly assessed by the appointing authority, the antecedents of the candidates should be got verified through the agency of the police department. In this process of verifying the antecedents, care should be taken to find out the past political associations of the candidate. Anybody who had at any time been associated in one way or other with the Communist Party should be strictly debarred from service even if he or she has all other qualifications and has been already selected.

We have already had practical evidence of the way in which this instruction was being carried out all over India. It was, however, after we took charge that I came across the copy of the circular issued by the Home Ministry. On an examination of the way in which this instruction was carried out in our State, we found a sizable number of candidates, who are not appointed on this ground; also a good number of people who were thrown out while in service on the same ground. We, therefore, proceeded to put an end to this discrimination against a political party and to re-examine and cancel the earlier order issued on its basis. (We as a State Government were perfectly entitled to do so). I do not know whether the present Government of Kerala under the President proposes to revert to the old practice and thus bring Kerala into the all-India pattern.

And yet, the leaders of the Kerala Pradesh and all India Congress Committees have no sense of shame in charging us, the Communist Government of Kerala, of discrimination in favour of the Communist Party and against other political parties! I publicly challenged the then Congress President, Sri Dhebar, (when he levelled this charge against us) to contradict the above-mentioned facts

and to show that the Congress is not discriminating against the Communist Party in the matter of selecting candidates for employment under the Government. He has not done so for the simple reason that he cannot.

Wild charges have been levelled against our Government that we have so manipulated the process of appointments into Government service as to facilitate "infiltration" of Government services by the Communists. The fact of the overwhelming majority of appointments in Government service are made by the Public Service Commission, which incidentally, was composed of three members appointed by the Congress Government. (One of these happens to be a person who was an active Congressman till the day of his appointment as a member of the Public Service Commission). And the report of the Public Service Commission for the year 1957-58 (the first year of the duration of our Government) states clearly that there was not one single case of the Government over-riding the recommendation of the Public Service Commission.

This practice continued to the last day of our Government : we adopted the practice of accepting the recommendations of the Public Service Commission in the matter of selection of individuals; it was only in the matter of laying down certain policies that there have been differences between the Public Service Commission and the Government; and, even in such cases, it was only very rarely that the Government took the step of over-riding the recommendation of the Public Service Commission. As with appointments, so too with promotions, transfers and other administrative measures, our Government has strictly adhered to the normal rules of administration.

Promotions are made on the basis of certain rules which take account of the two factors of the order of senior-

ity and merit and efficiency of the person concerned; there are also rules which provide for consultation with the Public Service Commission in certain cases and consultation with an inter-departmental committee in certain other cases. All these have been strictly adhered to. As for transfers and other administrative measures, they are made by responsible officers in the interest of meeting particular situations in particular localities. It is possible that, in certain circumstances when these local situations assume larger proportions, the Minister concerned discusses the matter with the Head of the Department and sees that the necessary administrative measures are taken. All these are normal practices which are inevitable in any administration.

I quite concede that the ruling party can skilfully use all the provisions in such rules in its own narrow partisan interests. The Minister who is in over-all charge of the department concerned, and the leaders of the Party who keep contact with and advise him, can see to it that the particular interests of their party are safeguarded, rather than the interests of other parties. This is a possibility which should be provided against, if democracy is to be prevented from becoming the domination of the Party.

The question is: has our Government resorted to such manoeuvres when carrying on our administration? My answer may be summed up as follows:

1. We have conscientiously tried to prevent any such irregular practice; we have taken care to see that, in the process of remedying the injustice perpetrated on the Communist Party by the previous Congress Governments, we do not proceed to perpetrate similar injustices on other parties; our conscious effort has been to treat all parties equally.

2. It is yet possible that, despite all the care that we have taken to make the administration non-partisan, some injustice has unconsciously been done to some elements outside the Communist Party. We would have been happy to make proper amends for them if they were pointed out to us; we would still be happy to learn about such concrete cases if they are pointed out to us, even though it is beyond us to make amends now.

3. I have no hesitation in claiming that such cases of injustice done by the ruling party to the Opposition parties will be far less in the case of our Government than in the case of all the other Governments in the country. I would, as a matter of fact, suggest that a Committee, composed of representatives of all the political parties in the country and a few experienced administrators, be asked to go into the complaints that have been made in relation to all the State Governments of India as well as in relation to the Central Government in this matter of political discrimination and injustice. Let the country know who is better or worse in this respect—the Congress Governments in the rest of the country, or the Communist Government in Kerala (and, that too, for a short while).

4. I would also suggest that a similar examination be made by a similar committee of the existing rules and practices of administration. After all, many of these rules and procedures were laid down at a time when the problem now posed before us had not arisen—the problem of enabling the democratically-elected Government (which in the present conditions of India, is bound to be the Government of a party) to play an effective role in administration and at the same time of ensuring that the Government becomes really non-partisan.

That this is a problem serious enough to be examined by all those who are interested in the evolution of healthy conventions for the working of parliamentary democracy will be clear from the fact that the allegations made by the Congress against the Communist Government of Kerala are the same as are made against the Congress Governments in the country by the entire Opposition. Leaders of the PSP, Swatantra Party and others, who are notorious for their anti-Communism, have been exposing the partisanship and corruption of Congress Governments. The questions posed in these allegations are, therefore, not matters of ideology or political difference, but questions which require our serious study.

Failure to have this problem seriously examined with a view to evolve a proper system of administration is leading to serious consequences. People are coming to believe that parliamentary democracy being party rule is bound to be unjust to those who are not members or sympathisers of the ruling party. Cynical comments are being made both by sections of the people who are not attached to any political party, as well as by Government officials, that what they call "politics" is a dirty game and will lead to the country's ruin.

This tendency, if allowed to grow, is sure to breed anti-democratic movements as they did in Pakistan and in certain other Asian countries. These tendencies can be nipped in the bud only if all the political parties and non-party leaders of public opinion take timely measures to evolve healthy conventions guiding the behaviour of ruling and Opposition parties.

9. Land reforms

THE KERALA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FINALLY PASSED INTO LAW the controversial Agrarian Relations Bill on June 10, 1959. Within less than 48 hours, the Opposition political parties, in alliance with all the anti-Communist forces in the State, launched their "direct action" with a view to removing the Government which framed that Bill and had it passed through the Legislature in the teeth of vehement Opposition.

Prime Minister Nehru and other leaders of the Congress would have us believe that this sequence of dates is just accidental. They would violently protest at the suggestion that it was just because the Communist Government of Kerala had dared to have the Agrarian Relations Bill passed by the Legislature that the landlords of the State, acting through the Congress and other political parties, decided to launch a direct action, whose avowed objective was to "paralyse the administration". They would claim that, on the other hand, the Congress was an ardent supporter of the Bill.

They, however, cannot deny that among the Bills passed by the Kerala State Legislature are two which have not yet received the assent of the President. They are :

1. The Jenmikaram Bill, which completed the process, started nearly half a century ago, of emancipating the Kanamdars, and tenants holding other similar tenures, from the Jenmis of former Travancore.

(The legislation adopted nearly 20 years ago in the former State of Travancore had already brought these tenants in direct contact with the Government by fixing the Jenmikaram, i.e., dues to the Jenmi, to be paid to the

Government who, after deducting the collection expenses, would hand it over to the Jenmi. The Bill unanimously adopted by the Kerala Legislature provided that the Jenmikaram payment will be put an end to on payment of compensation at rates which are within easy reach of the tenants.)

2. The Agricultural Debt Relief Bill, which provides for reduction in interest rates as well as for scaling down of old debts in certain cases.

(Left to itself, the Communist Government would have provided for the scaling down of old debts on a far vaster scale, but had to satisfy itself with much less, since it knew that Presidential assent would not be forthcoming if these were provided for. The Opposition in the Legislature attacked the Government for this, saying that it was championing the interests of bankers and moneylenders! Government spokesmen clarified the stand of the Government that it would be better to have a more modest measure become law and really enforced than to have a more ambitious measure passed through the State Legislature, but blocked by the Central Government).

Both these Bills have been in the hands of the Central Government for the last several months. They are not prepared to give assent to them and yet they are afraid of refusing assent. This would be the fate of the Agrarian Relations Bill too, if we are not on the eve of a very hotly-contested general election.

The Congress Party in the State Legislature had made suggestions and moved amendments which, if adopted, would have made all the vital provisions of the Bill utterly ineffective. They, for example, made the suggestion that, before the ceiling provisions of the Bill are brought into operation, the landlords should be given sufficient time to

sell their lands to those who have less lands than the ceiling, thus defeating the very purpose of fixing the ceiling —taking over surplus lands and distributing them to the landless and land-hungry rural poor. They also demanded much higher rates of compensation, much wider fields of exemption and so many other provisions which would have together made the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill as ineffective as land legislations in Congress governed States.

The Congress Opposition in Kerala as well as the Congress Government at the Centre were put on the horns of a dilemma when our Government prepared our agrarian legislations. On the one hand, our legislations being in full conformity with the declared policies of the Congress as an organisation and of the Central Government and the Planning Commission, they could not raise any objection to them. On the other hand, they could not enthusiastically support them or allow them to be passed and fully implemented. For, that would rouse the anger of those very sections in society on whom they depended for support —landlords, money-lenders, large-scale employers of agricultural labour, etc.

My memory goes back to an event that took place 20 years ago. The then Madras Government had appointed a Committee to examine the question of reforms in the tenancy system in Malabar. That Committee was as sharply divided within itself as was the Government and the Opposition in the State of Kerala during the 28 months of Communist Government. The issues on which it was divided and the standpoint of each on those issues can be seen in the Majority Report and the Minutes of Dissent of that Committee.

On the one side was the Majority Report which was jointly signed by the majority of Congressmen in the Com-

mittee (who happen to be Congress leaders today) and all the non-Congressmen, including the one member of the Madras Legislature who was elected from the landlords constituency. On the other side were the Minutes of Dissent by three Congressmen who were members of that Committee. (These three Congressmen included the present writer, who was then the General Secretary of the Provincial Congress Committee and Congress MLA; the other two were the then President of the Provincial Congress Committee and the only Harijan MLA from Malabar).

The Majority Report virtually advocated the maintenance of the status quo, suggesting only very minor changes in the position as had been existing for nearly a decade. To the suggestion made by the peasant organisations that rents on paddy fields should be reduced from two-thirds to half, they gave the answer that that would not give adequate return for the capital invested by the landlord in buying his land. It was this and other arguments advanced in the Report that brought the majority of Congress members of the committee and the Jenmi representative together in signing the report.

The dissenting minutes, on the other hand, advocated, for the first time in the official records in Kerala, the complete abolition of landlordism without payment of compensation to the big Jenmis. However, since this was too radical a measure for its immediate implementation being considered practicable, they made other suggestions which would give greater immediate relief to the tenants.

This division between what was then the Right and Left, in the Congress has continued since then—continued, however, not as a division between the Right and the Left in the Congress alone, but as a division between the camps of (1) the Communist and other Left Parties together

with the large majority of ordinary Congressmen and (2) the leaders of the Congress and vested interests outside the Congress. It was this that was clearly visible when the Agrarian Relations Bill was being discussed in the Kerala State Legislature.

In all this controversy between the advocates of Agrarian Reform and its opponents the clear issue underlying the demand for reforms is : will the cultivator be allowed to keep to himself, and enjoy, the fruits of his labour, or will he be forced to part with the lion's share of it as rent to the landlord, interest to the money-lender, tax to the Government and unequal exchange and the consequent double loss in this dealings with the trader ? Again, will the large mass of the rural poor who have absolutely no land, or so little land that a moderately decent living cannot be made out of it, be allowed to have, or augment, their land holdings by the distribution of uncultivated land and surplus land owned by big landlords ?

The Congress does not take this as the main objective of land reforms. For, giving relief to the peasants from the rent and other burdens would deprive the landlords and other exploiting classes of the fruits of the exploitation that they have been carrying on for several centuries. This would deprive the Congress of the support which it has been enjoying from these exploiting classes. It has this solicitude for the income of the landlords that was visible when the majority of Congress members of the Malabar Tenancy Enquiry Committee opposed any rent reduction.

It was again because of this that the Congress Ministries in the former Travancore-Cochin State were not able to have any agrarian legislation passed during a whole decade of their existence.

It was this again that made the Congress in the legis-

lature make suggestions to the effect that the landlords may be allowed to sell their lands, so that they may get far higher rates of compensation than was allowed in the Bill. It was finally this attitude of the Congress leadership that has made the Central Government of India block to progress of the Debt Relief and Jenmikaram Bills.

It is now reported in the papers that the Central Government is not going to block the Agrarian Relations Bill and that Presidential assent will be forthcoming in the next few weeks. If these reports are correct, thanks for it are due to the electorate of Kerala, whom the Congress has to approach in the next few months. Congress leaders know very well that any attitude of indifference, not to speak of hostility, to the Agrarian Relations Bill would lose them lakhs of votes in what they consider as the "crucial" mid-term election in Kerala.

While our Party and other champions of land reforms would be happy if immediate assent is given to the Agrarian Relations Bill, they cannot afford to be indifferent to the motive with which assent is now being given. For, the same reports go to show that, while the Central Government would now give Presidential assent, the Congress Party will persist in making such "amendments" to the Bill as had been advocated by it when the Bill was being discussed in the Assembly. The idea seems to be that, while Presidential assent now would help their Party to catch votes in the coming elections, the Congress can, after the elections, continue to fight for the interests of landlords by subsequently making the Bill ineffective. This game of sabotaging the Bill behind the cover of giving assent to it has to be fought and defeated.

10. Attitude to the communal problem

THE FORMER STATE OF TRAVANCORE-COCHIN HAD ALWAYS been considered a "problem State". It was known not only for the continuous ministerial instability which was a feature of its political life, but also for the acutely communal nature of its politics. Politics in the State, it is said centered round certain castes and communities. People thought in terms of the Christians, the Muslims, the Nayers, the Ezhawas, etc., rather than in terms of political parties. As a matter of fact, the old Travancore State Congress was the further development of an earlier organisation called the Joint Political Congress—a federation of the Christian, the Muslim and the Ezhawa caste or communal organisations. The only visible improvement upon this earlier organisation was that a section of the Nairs also came into the State Congress and along with them, the founder-President of the Congress, Sri Pattom Thanu Pillai.

Naturally, therefore, the State Congress had this caste or communal complexion haunting it at every step; important policy questions as well as questions of organisation were always considered from the point of view of their impact on this community or that community. This heritage of the Travancore State Congress was naturally handed down to the Congress organisation and Government of the Travancore-Cochin State and subsequently to the State of Kerala, which was formed on November 1, 1956. Our Party and the Government that we formed had, therefore, to take this factor into account.

We could not take the highbrow attitude which certain

other parties were taking in the name of nationalism—the attitude of dismissing the caste and communal organisations with an air of contempt and of claiming for themselves the virtues of a national approach. Nor could we succumb to the ideas propagated by certain leaders of caste and communal organisations, according to whom, all talk of nationalism and non-communal approach was bogus. We had, on the other hand, to make an objective assessment of the historical process through which such development took place in our State.

Having made such an assessment, the Party came to the conclusion that caste or communal politics is the natural result of the caste or communal character of the society that has existed for centuries. When people are divided into castes and religious communities in their day-to-day social life, the caste and communal psychology that is generated by it is bound to reflect itself in political life too. The solution for the problem of caste and communal politics is, therefore, the abolition of caste and communal distinctions in daily social life.

A socio-cultural movement against caste had already emerged in Kerala, as in the rest of the country, long before the Communist Party came into existence. Many of those who had actively participated in that movement subsequently joined the ranks of the Communist Party. But the Communist Party improved upon this anti-caste and anti-communal movement by bringing to the forefront the unity of the working class, peasantry and other sections of the toiling people.

The Party tried to point out to the poor, downtrodden millions that they are being oppressed and exploited, not because they belong to a particular caste or religious community, but because they are poor and propertyless; that

there are people belonging to other castes also who are as poor and propertyless as they themselves are; that, therefore, it is in their interest to unite with all the poor people in the country regardless of the caste to which they belong and regardless of the religion in which they believe. It was with this appeal to the class instincts of the overwhelming majority of our people that the Communist Party tried to counter the prevailing caste and communal feelings among the people.

The Party, at the same time, saw that there are certain forms of oppression which the masses belonging to certain castes and communities are undergoing because they belong to those castes and communities. The scheduled castes and certain other non-caste Hindu sections have to bear the double burden of economic exploitation (since they belong to certain exploited classes) and of social oppression (since they belong to certain oppressed communities). It would, therefore, be idle to just preach the unity of the common people belonging to all castes and communities without taking steps to see that the common people themselves begin to see their unity. This will not happen so long as social oppression of certain communities continues. That is why the Communist Party supports the demands of these backward communities and scheduled castes for certain special concessions for a temporary period to enable them to catch up with the forward communities.

This broad policy of the Party was sought to be implemented fully and in real earnest by our Government. We enlarged the scope of educational concessions, of facilities for entering Government services and of other means of helping the members of the backward communities, kept backward by the old and rigorous caste system, to catch up with the rest of the society. (Let it be mentioned, in

this connection, that, till two or three decades ago, most of the Government services in Travancore and Cochin were monopolised by the Caste Hindus; even today, the overwhelming majority of these posts are held by the Caste Hindus and the Syrian Christians; the non-caste Hindus, the Muslims and the non-Syrian Christians are still very inadequately represented in Government services).

The steps taken by our Government to enable these backward communities to catch up with the forward has made them see in the Communist Party and its Government, their champion and supporter. Caste and communal leaders of the so-called forward communities naturally used this as an opportunity to mobilise the masses of their communities against the Communist Party and its Government. They tried to portray our Government as an enemy of the forward communities. It was this line of attack that was taken up by Sri Mannath Padmanabhan when he attacked the scheme of reservation of a certain percentage of posts for members of backward communities.


The majority of caste Hindu masses are, after all, workers, peasants or middle-class intelligentsia. They see how the measures introduced by our Government give relief to them. They also see how the caste and communal leaders who shed tears in the name of their community are opposed to the socio-economic reforms which benefit them. So, despite all the demagoguery indulged in by Sri Padmanabhan and others, larger and larger sections of the caste Hindus (whose interests are supposed to be adversely affected by our policy of benefitting the backward communities) are beginning to see in us their champion and protector.

In adopting this correct method, however, we had to reckon with the leaders of certain castes and communities who used the very caste and communal outlook of the

masses in order to wean them away from the progressive democratic measures which benefit those masses. For example, the leaders of the Nair Service Society went on campaigning among the Nair masses that the agrarian legislations which we introduced were harmful to the Nair community. For, according to them, the majority of the Nairs are small landlords and would, therefore, be ruined if these agrarian legislations are implemented. Combining this argument with opposition to reservation for backward communities (which would lessen the chances of the Nair middle class securing Government jobs), they tried to rouse the anger of the Nair masses against the Government which, according to them, was acting as an anti-Nair Government. The Christian clergy too tried to whip up the passion of the Christian masses.

Despite the fact that the Education Bill, which we framed contained the same provisions as had already been accepted and implemented by such a Congress Government as that of Andhra: despite the fact that some other State Governments and the Central Government have introduced measures more or less similar to the Anti-Dowry Bill that we framed; despite the fact that the Christian community did not actively campaign against these measures of the Congress Government; the Catholic clergy not only in Kerala but in other States too pointed in these measures of our Government as examples of our 'anti-Christian' attitude.

They carried on the lying propaganda that the Education Bill was intended to enable the Government to take over all Christian schools which would itself subsequently develop into the taking over of all churches. As for the Anti-Dowry Bill, it was said that this would disintegrate



and ruin the financially strong Christian families and the community

The fact of the matter is that the Education Bill, as certain other measures framed by our Government, attacked certain vested interests. The exploitation of the poor, unpaid teachers carried on by the school managers was so notorious that certain previous Governments in the former State of Travancore-Cochin had attempted to put curbs on them. But, every time any such measure putting on curbs on vested interests (like school managers and landlords) was prepared by these Governments, certain groups inside the then ruling party manoeuvred in such a way as to create trouble in the party and brought about a change of ministry. The groups that had indulged in such activities inside the ruling party were known as 'king-makers' and 'powers behind the throne'.

Sri Mannath Padmanabhan was always known as one of these 'powers behind the throne'; so was the Catholic clergy. These, however, were then rival powers behind the throne; each wanted power for itself as against the other. It was when our Party formed its Government that these 'king-makers' ceased to have any voice in the formation of the Government or control in its day-to-day work. This, naturally angered them.

All the more were they angered when they found that our Government was intent upon, and powerful to carry out those measures which they had previously, tried their level best to prevent from being implemented. This was how the leader of the Nair Service Society, Sri Mannath Padmanabhan, and the leaders of the Christian clergy, who had for nearly three decades been on inimical terms to each other, joined hands and formed the Vimochana Samara Saniti, under the leadership of the former.

11. The forthcoming mid-term elections

THREE-AND-A-HALF MONTHS AGO, THE GOVERNMENT OF KERALA was dismissed. Neither the President's Proclamation, nor subsequent speeches and statements of the leaders of the Central Government, gave the reasons for such an extraordinary action—extraordinary because the dismissal of a Government, which continues to enjoy the confidence of the legislature, has not been provided for in the Constitution.

It is significant, in this connection, that the Memorandum submitted by the Kerala Pradesh Congress (KPCC) to the President of India, containing a number of allegations against the Government, has not been taken by the Government of India as the cause of action; obviously because the reply given by the Kerala Government makes it clear that the KPCC allegations are wild and irresponsible.

Nevertheless, the speeches and statements of the Prime Minister make it appear that what he had characterised as the "mass upsurge" against the Government of Kerala, which took shape since April 1959, was the single factor which led the Government of India towards such intervention. The allegations contained in the KPCC Memorandum, it appears, were relevant only to the extent that they gave birth to this "mass upsurge".

But, what exactly was this "mass upsurge"? The Congress leaders and other opponents of the Communist Party and the Government of the Kerala would have us believe that it was the expression of discontent universally felt

by the people of Kerala for the Communist Government. It is said that sections of the people who had voted for the Communist Party during the last elections and who had supported the Communist Government since its formation, became disgusted of that Government, and therefore, decided to join the parties of the Opposition in "liberating" Kerala from Communist rule.

A moment's reflection would be sufficient to expose the utter baselessness of this claim. It is well-known that the Communist Party was returned as the majority Party during the last elections on a minority of votes (41 per cent); what is more, its majority in the Assembly was slender (only 4, the Party getting 65 out of the 126 elected seats; this majority of 4, however, was turned into 2 by the addition of a nominated member and by the election of the Speaker).

Therefore, if large sections of the former supporters of the Party had shifted themselves away from the Party and towards the Opposition, it would then have been unimaginable that the Opposition should consider the Party too strong to be defeated without the unity of all anti-Communist forces. But the Congress, which did not seek any united front with other parties in the last election and contested as many as 125 seats out of 126, is today making frantic efforts to have alliances with all the anti-Communist parties and elements in the State. Even at the risk of opposition from the nationalist democratic public opinion, the Congress has come to an electoral understanding with the Muslim League.

While thus conscious of the further accession of the Communist Party's strength and the weakening of the Congress since the last General Elections, the Congress believes the Communist Party to be too weak to face the

combined forces of the Congress, the P-SP and the Muslim League. They have, therefore, come to an understanding with the P-SP and the Muslim League with a view to avoid triangular contests. They hope that this will be a formidable force which would guarantee their victory.

They, however, are making a grave miscalculation. For, the intelligent voter of Kerala knows that the unity that they have forged among themselves is built on extremely weak foundations. Their unity is based on the purely negative slogan of "keep the Communists out". On every issue which affects the life of the people such as food, agricultural production, agrarian reforms, development of industries, extension of the democratic rights of the people, etc., etc., they are so much at variance with one another that views ranging from those of the Swatantra Party to extremely left revolutionary slogans may be found among them. They are unable to offer any constructive solution for any single problem that is facing the country.

How utterly bankrupt their policies are can be seen from the fact that the central issue on which the so-called "mass upsurge" took place in June-July—the issue of the Education Act— still remains unresolved. The Christian Bishops and other leaders of the School Closure Movement refused to accept our Government's invitation to attend the conference to discuss the issue involved in their agitation; they demanded that the entire Education Act should be withdrawn, and even certain executive orders that had been issued by the Government should be cancelled, as a condition precedent for their attending the conference. They had been told that all this can be done if only the Communist Government was removed from the scene.

That Government, of course, has been out of the scene for three-and-a-half months and, yet, the Education Act

and the Executive orders remain even now. The Conference which the Governor convened with a view to amending the Education Act (which, incidentally, was attended by the representatives of the Bishops and other school managers without any prior condition) could not come to any agreement, because acceding to the demand of the managers would be so undemocratic a step that President's rule cannot dare take this step.

The Congress Committee too is finding it extremely difficult to state clearly and categorically as to what it proposes to do with the Education Act. For, the Congress finds that the slogans which it had used against the Communist Government cannot be implemented without raising a storm of protest from the vast majority of school teachers and from the backward communities, both of whom derived much benefit from the Education Act.

The same is the case with the agrarian legislation. The Nair Service Society, headed by Sri Mannath Padmanabhan, had demanded the scrapping of the Agrarian Relations Bill along with the scrapping of the Education Act. Even after the dismissal of the Ministry, he had asked the President to withhold assent to the Bill. The Congress, however, cannot dare take such a stand.

There are ever so many such issues on which it is impossible for them to make a positive approach to the electorate. But the most vital of them is: what will be the character of the Government to be formed, if their United Front is returned by a majority: will they form a Congress Government, which would be supported by the P-SP and the Muslim League, or, will they have a P-SP Government with Congress and Muslim League support; or, will they allow to form a Muslim League Government which will be supported by the P-SP and the Congress or,

will they have a Congress-P-SP, or a P-SP-League Government with the support of the party that is left out in the coalition; or, lastly, will they have a regular coalition Government of the three parties? This is the central political question to which they have not yet been able to find a clear answer.

Even supposing that, after a good deal of protracted discussions, they accept any one of these alternative and states so clearly, what is the guarantee that the Government that will be formed in this fashion will not share the same fate as had befallen to the earlier Congress Governments in the State, i.e., continuous instability, the coming to power and upsetting of one Government after another?

The straight question which the electorate faces now, therefore, is, will they choose a combination of political parties, which, on their own admission, will find it impossible to give a stable Government, carrying out progressive democratic policies, or will they once again return to power that combination of Communists and progressive independents who had formed a stable Government and started carrying out progressive policies? I am confident that the intelligent electorate of Kerala would choose the latter.

I would, however, admit that this would be, by no means, easy. For, behind the combined forces of the Congress, P-SP and the Muslim League stands the combination of big money and power in the State: the big landlords, the big bankers and moneylenders, owners of big plantations, determined to use their full resources in order to assure a victory for the United Front of anti-Communist forces.

The landlords in several parts of Kerala have mounted a concerted offensive against the agricultural labourers who,

they expect, will vote for the Communist Party. Hundreds of them have had to leave their homes and villages because of organised physical attacks launched against them by the landlords and their armed gangs. Several houses have been burned and scores of families forcibly evicted from their homes. These attacks have been made with the double purpose of (i) forcing them to leave their unions and join the INTUC, and (ii) terrorising them out of going to the polls on the polling day.

The powerful Catholic Church has invoked religion to forbid all its followers voting for the Communist Party and all those who associate themselves with the Communists. The authorities of the State Government and the Election Commissioner plead helplessness in preventing such obvious election malpractices—tactics resorted to by the followers of the Congress and its political allies to wean the voters away from voting for the Communist Party. The question is: shall we be assured of free and fair elections? Will the people be allowed to vote as they please, or will the Catholic clergy and other religious authorities, money, Governmental authority—all be used against us?

This being the crucial question, we require all the sympathy and support which our friends in the rest of the country can give us in the difficult struggle that is ahead of us. It was this sympathy and support which had helped us to weather the many storms which we had to face at the time we were in office and we are grateful to them for all this sympathy and support. I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to them all once again to continue to give that sympathy and support in this most difficult of our struggles.

Let me recall in this connection with a sense of heartfelt gratitude, the warm and affectionate welcome which

was extended to me in all the States of India which I had the opportunity to visit during the last two months. It was a great revelation for me to find that large sections of Congress, Praja-Socialists and other non-Communist friends have disregarded their differences with the Communist Party on innumerable issues, particularly on the stand which the Party took on the India-China border question, and expressed their sympathy to us.

Many of them, I understand, have made their own contributions to the Kerala Election Fund, which our Party is now collecting. While expressing our appreciation and gratitude to them for this, I would like to appeal to them to continue to do so.

