

KERALA'S CRY FOR JUSTICE

**By
C. ACHUTHA MENON**

COMMUNIST PARTY PUBLICATION

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UNPRECEDENTED UNITY

On January 28 something big happened in Kerala, the like of which this country has not witnessed before. The *Bandh* organised on that day in order to protest against the reduction in the rice ration was so complete that it defied all description and would have been unbelievable but for the fact that there were lakhs and lakhs of people who actually went through the experience. All factories, establishments, cinema houses, hotels, restaurants, eating houses, schools, colleges, educational institutions, banks, etc., were closed and the workers and office employees poured forth into the streets in their thousands.

Even the *panvalas'* shops participated in the hartal and the street hawkers for once in their life had a holiday. It was reported that in Calicut, where one street coffee vendor tried to do business on that day, his pots, glasses, stove etc. and the whole outfit was removed and he was given a compulsory holiday. In some remote village ferries, the boatmen tied up their boats and walked away and people were put to a little difficulty in crossing over from one place to another.

All public transport went off the roads, the railways were stopped. Only a few government offices put up a show of working, actually no work was done on that day. Even private cars were not allowed to ply unless the people's volunteers were satisfied that there was some good and adequate reason for it such as taking a patient to hospital or a doctor to a patient's bedside, etc.

We have been accustomed to use such phrases as people's unity and united action and so on; but none even in his fondest imagination would have dreamt of such tremendous unity of a whole people on a single issue. But it did happen.

How did it happen and why? There is no need to make an elaborate or profound analysis; the reasons are so very obvious

for those who care to find out. Although the immediate provocation was the reduction of the rice content of the ration from 160 g to 120 g (i.e., from about 6 oz to 4 oz), there was in the background a deep sense of injury, neglect and frustration so far as the whole people of Kerala are concerned.

The Keralites are a hardworking, intelligent and educated people by all standards. They are willing to work hard and contribute their share in building a happy, united and prosperous India. Even now, Kerala is earning about Rs. 100 crores worth of foreign exchange every year by export of such products as rubber, tea, mineral sands, fish, coir, cashew, etc. This scarce foreign exchange has been of great use in India's industrial development, but Kerala or its people derived little benefit from it.

The state remains to this day one of the most backward in India although the tremendous pressure of population and the menacing degree of unemployment, especially of the educated, would have suggested to any administrator the imperative necessity of quick and all-round industrialisation of the state as a solution for these problems. But that was not to be. Even such natural advantages as the state possessed, for example the vast water-power resources, were not tapped adequately with the result that in the year 1965, after three five year plans, we are having a power cut to the extent of 50 per cent in this land of rivers and waterfalls and this too after borrowing power from neighbouring Mysore at three times the cost we were paying for indigenous power. (Kerala power costs 4 p per unit whereas we have to pay 12 p for the power we get from Mysore.) There are many such instances.

This is neither the time nor the place to dilate upon this subject. Suffice it to say that the whole people of Kerala nurtured in their hearts a sense of anger against the central government. It had penetrated deep into their soul. And the cut in the rice ration was only the proverbial last straw on the camel's back.

The food position began to deteriorate towards the end of 1964. In November 1964, a great wave of unrest swept the

whole state. There were student strikes and people's demonstrations demanding rationing throughout the state. That situation was somehow tided over by introducing informal rationing. Although at first the ration was only 120 g of rice and 160 g of wheat, the rationing being informal, there was the open market also and the prices in the open market never went beyond Re. 1 per kilo of the finest quality rice. (The cost of ration rice is at present 95 p per kilo.)

Moreover the ration was gradually increased until it reached the scale of 200 g of rice and 120 g of wheat towards June-July 1965. But again it was reduced to 160 g of rice and 160 g of wheat from August 1, 1965. Added to this was the fact that unlike last year, the price of rice in the free market was not at all moderate, it began to shoot up to Rs. 1.50 and even Rs. 2.00 per kilo.

It was at this time that left parties in the state held a joint meeting in Quilon in July 1965 and formed a Samara Samiti (Committee for Struggle), consisting of the representatives of the Communist Party of India, the Communist Party (Marxist), the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Samyukta Socialist Party, the Karshaka Thozhilali Party (Peasants' and Workers' Party), and also the representatives of the state units of the All-India Trade Union Congress, the United Trade Union Congress, the Hind Mazdoor Sabha, and the representatives of the Kerala Kisan Sangham, along with certain prominent individuals and representatives of independent trade unions.

The object of the Samiti was generally to agitate for the just demands of Kerala, to fight for a solution of problems created by power cuts and lay-offs, etc., to fight against arrest and detention without trial and the release of political prisoners, etc. But the most urgent and immediate problem the Samiti decided to tackle was the food problem. With a view to impress upon the authorities the intense feelings of the people, the Samiti decided to call for a general strike and hartal on September 28 and vigorous preparations were set afoot for the same.

Meanwhile the infiltration into Kashmir had started from

August 5, and the news appearing day by day was quite disturbing. There was no doubt in the minds of the members of the Samiti that if ultimately war broke out we will have to call off the entire agitation and dedicate all our energies to defence efforts. And this was what happened. War broke out on September 1. The Samiti gave a call to switch all activities in the direction of defence and instead of carrying out strikes and hartals on September 28 to bring out big demonstrations against Pak aggression, in defence of the motherland.

After the cease-fire, when the situation began to return to the normal the food position became worse. Suddenly, from January 9, 1966, the Kerala government announced a reduction of the rice content in the ration from 6 oz to 4 oz per adult per day. A tremendous wave of indignation swept the state; angry editorials were splashed in newspapers, protest meetings and demonstrations were held voicing the intense feelings of the people. In this situation, the Kerala Samara Samiti again met on January 18 and decided to call for a general strike and hartal on February 1.

It was not the left parties alone that thought and spoke in terms of agitation and struggle, and tones of anger. Shri C. M. Stephen, one of the stalwarts of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee and the INTUC, said on January 10: "If the central government intends to starve the people of Kerala and throw them into the sea after binding their hands and feet, the INTUC cannot be a party to it. The Union Food Minister should not treat the food problem of Kerala as a child's play. This is playing with fire. If continued, it is dangerous."

The *Mathrubhoomi*, one of the leading Malayalam dailies, and traditionally reflecting Congress opinion, wrote a powerful editorial asking Subramaniam to get out if he cannot give rice for Kerala. Here are a few sentences from the editorial entitled **WILL YOU GET OUT?** — "Will you please get out, or should we kick you out? We are putting this question to the Central Minister for Food and to all other Central Ministers who are incapable of an all-India vision and who cannot take Kerala in it. We are not in the least angry at every one of them. We

have even great admiration for the ability which Shri Subramaniam is reputed to have shown some time ago. But what is the use of saying all that now? Today India's Food Minister has become incapable of reaching food to the people of India—to the people of Kerala at any rate."

And again: "But he must step down and until such time as we find a Kidwai again let there be no Food Minister." "Winning the war in Kashmir and winning the peace through the Tashkent talks is all good. But if its message is reaching us through the denial of even 4 oz of rice to the hungry stomachs of Kerala, it may give rise to a tremendous flare up in these stomachs and brains."

These words were written not by any leftist agitator but by one of the doyens of Malayalam journalism, one of the founders of the Congress in Kerala, a man whom the Government of India thought worthy of their confidence by appointing him once as our High Commissioner in Ceylon and again by conferring upon him now the title of "Padma Vibhushan" in the year of 1965. These words were written by none other than Shri K. P. Kesava Menon, Editor of *Mathrubhoomi*.

Less vitriolic but none the less firm was the voice of *Malayala Manorama* another leading daily in Malayalam edited by another "Padma Vibhushan", Shri K. M. Cherian, who also has once adorned the high place of President of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference. Here are a few extracts from an editorial he wrote in the issue of the paper coming out on the morning of the *Bandh* itself: "Today, a one-day hartal is being observed according to the programme already announced. It is our belief that the success of the hartal will do some good."

And again, "In these circumstances the hartal has been organised with a view to open the eyes of the surplus states in India and of the Central Food Ministry and to apprise them of the serious food situation in Kerala. In our view, the hartal that is taking place today in Kerala will only strengthen the hands of the Prime Minister who is pledged to extend a helping hand to Kerala. Neither enmity to the central government nor the intention to create difficulties for it are the objects of this

hartal. This hartal should be considered as a demonstration to support those who like the new Minister of State, Shri Panampilli, Shri A. M. Thomas and other MPs from Kerala are working in cooperation with the Prime Minister for solving Kerala's food problem. This hartal is a kind of mental and emotional exertion of pressure upon both surplus states and foreign countries which can supply us with food."

For want of space, it is not possible to quote from other papers. Every shade of public opinion in the state was veering towards support to the "Kerala Bandh".

The Samara Samiti had fixed February 1 as the day of struggle. On the same day that the Samiti took this decision at Trivandrum, the Coordinating Committee of Trade Unions in the Cochin-Ernakulam-Alwaye area consisting of representatives of about 40 trade unions took a unanimous decision to call a general strike on the issue of food on February 3. This is the main industrial area in the state and in the 40 trade unions, there were, besides the AITUC, HMS and UTUC unions, independent unions affiliated to no central organisation and run by Congressmen such as for instance the unions in the FACT, Tatas, etc.

The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee meeting in Ernakulam on the 22nd in such circumstances decided to draw the nation's attention to the "explosive" food situation in Kerala by a statewide observance of a protest week from January 27 and a one-day hartal, besides sending a large contingent of Congressmen to the Jaipur AICC session. The meeting did not fix the actual date for the hartal but authorised the President to fix a date in consultation with the other political parties.

This was a very significant decision because the KPCC did not want merely a separate show of their own, but were prepared to join hands with all other parties and elements so as to present a united front on such a vital issue as food. This welcome decision enabled all parties to come together and ultimately January 28 was agreed upon as the common date for the *Bandh*, although the KPCC and the Samara Samiti were not able to form a united action council for conducting the struggle

but had to issue separate calls. The Coordinating Committee of Trade Unions in Ernakulam also changed the date of their strike to the 28th. Complete unanimity, more or less, was thus brought about on the question of having a "Kerala Bandh" on the 28th.

Nor were the state and central government employees remaining idle. Of course, they could not take part in a struggle led by political parties. But neither were they indifferent to the food situation. They felt the pinch of the rising prices much more than other sections of the people like the organised industrial workers, because they were not compensated adequately for rise in the cost of living by DA. This applies especially to the state government employees because they have not the benefit of guaranteed rise in DA for every 10 point increase in the index, which the central government employees have.

Besides, the Kerala NGOs had a particular cause for complaint at this moment. A Pay Commission, which was appointed by the Governor's regime some time ago to go into the pay scales of state government employees, had submitted a report recommending such meagre benefits for them, that all their organisations were compelled to summarily reject the recommendations of the commission. They had demanded a review of the report by an independent authority to whom they could submit their objection to the report. The Governor Shri Jain had at first accepted this demand, but did nothing to implement his promise and later on retracted his promise. This was an additional cause for grievances so far as the state NGOs were concerned.

So the coordinating committee of the central and state government employees in Trivandrum gave a call to attend office on the *Bandh* day with badges inscribed with the words: "We are hungry! We want rice!" and also organise demonstrations and meetings in the evening after office hours.

The only party which did not officially participate in the *Bandh* was the Kerala Congress, the organisation of dissident Congressmen who had broken away from the KPCC as an aftermath of the disciplinary action following the no-confidence motion against the Sankar Ministry. But it did not mean that

they were against the struggle. In fact they were the first to declare from the house-tops that they would organise a struggle when the cut in rice ration became effective from January 9. They were to have started picketing the government Secretariat in Trivandrum from the 12th, but owing to the death of Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, they had to postpone it to the 17th.

Shri K. M. George, speaking in Trivandrum while inaugurating the struggle in front of the Secretariat, invited the KPCC for a joint struggle against the food policy of the government. But strange as it may seem, the moment prospects for a real mass struggle opened up by the KPCC also entering the field, Shri George announced their refusal to join the struggle on the 28th. While doing so, he severely castigated the KPCC for joining hands with Communists. Credit must be given to the State Muslim League, which, in spite of their well-known partiality for the Kerala Congress, showed better sense in lining up with the other parties as far as the *Bandh* was concerned.

With the election of Smt. Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India, her reported intention of visiting Kerala immediately and the appointment of Shri Panampilli Govinda Menon as State Minister for Food, speculation was rife in certain circles whether the KPCC would reconsider their decision. The President of the KPCC in fact made a statement to the effect that if the government would immediately restore the cut in the rice ration and begin to issue 6 oz as before, the KPCC would be prepared to back out of the struggle.

But the proposal for the Prime Minister's visit was dropped and she could do nothing beyond promising to review the whole position towards the middle of February and as for the immediate present only an increase of 20 g from January 30 was all that was announced in the Republic Day broadcast. This did not satisfy any section of the population and therefore nobody thought of revising the programme of action for the 28th.

STORIES OF VIOLENCE

After the *Bandh* a great deal has been made of the so-called violence that is said to have broken out on that day. Certain newspapers inside the state as well as outside, echoing the views of Governor Jain and the bureaucracy began to splash big headlines about mob violence and hooliganism. The *Indian Express* for instance reported in its edition on January 29 thus: "It was a hey-day for hooliganism everywhere. They went about destroying property without let or hindrance for the most part of the day and the police remained passive spectators." Such stories appeared in other papers also.

But what was the reality? The reality was that it was one of the most peaceful actions ever seen in the whole of India considering the nature of the issue on which the struggle took place and the vast numbers who took part in it. The fact that the sentiment in favour of the struggle was so widespread and intense that there was hardly any occasion for a clash between different or opposing sections of people; nor was there any necessity even for picketing in order to induce workers to come out on strike.

The trains were stopped not by means of sabotage or any other violent methods, but by huge crowd of people just squatting on the railway track, as it happened in Quilon Railway Station where Shri N. Sreekantan Nair, MP, Shri T. K. Divakaran, Municipal Chairman, Shri J. Chittaranjan of the CPI were leading in this action. This was the pattern all over the state. And the pity of it is that these leaders who played a crucial role in actually preventing any outbreak of violence and channelling the mass protests into peaceful ways are precisely the persons now being singled out by the government and charged with all sorts of grave crimes like looting, destruction of property, etc.

That the demonstrations were on the whole peaceful is testified to by the editorials of several newspapers which had occasion to make a sober assessment just after the event. The *Malayala Manorama* wrote this on January 30: "If certain

untoward incidents had been avoided, the hartal observed all over Kerala on Friday last was one about which the people of Kerala can justifiably be proud. Except in very few places, the people in the large majority of cases are to be congratulated on the perfectly peaceful way in which they observed 'Kerala Bandh'." This is a paper which can never be accused of having any tendency or softness towards leftists or leftism.

Here is what the *Kerala Kaumudi*, an independent daily, had to say about the events on the 28th: "The hartal of the 28th was a complete success except for the few stray undesirable incidents. . . . But that in the course of a protest action, which was resorted to by the people of Kerala after having reached the lowest depths of despair, there was not 100 per cent non-violence is nothing unexpected or to be surprised at."

Apart from the big noise that is being made about violence by the interested quarters, the actual account of these reported instances of violence as put out by government agencies themselves will give the lie direct to these stories. The following extract from the report in the *Hindu* dated January 29 is quite revealing: "An official spokesman today said that the loss to state government property as a result of vandalism by unruly crowds and urchins was estimated at Rs. 50,000. About a dozen policemen including a Sub-Inspector were injured yesterday as a result of being mobbed by crowds in the Trichur Collectorate and before the office of a Malayalam daily in Ernakulam."

This is all! And to accuse a whole people or their leaders of mob violence and hooliganism on a vast scale and conjure up lurid pictures of burning, looting and rioting, etc., is a cheap exercise in sensationalism; nothing more. We in India have had ample experience of mass struggles in the past. Let us not go into the experience of the days of the national movement, especially 1942, led by Gandhiji himself. Quite recently, we have had the experience of 1965 anti-Hindi agitation in Tamilnad, and of Kerala's own "Liberation Struggle" of 1959. Let any honest man ask himself the question whether in the Kerala *Bandh* action there was even one-millionth part of the

violence associated with those struggles. The answer is obvious. Let us not lose all sense of proportion, let us not delude ourselves. The outstanding fact is that the Kerala *Bandh* was a surprisingly peaceful action by any standards.

The strangest part of this peculiar drama is this, that on January 28 the streets of the capital city of Trivandrum witnessed the very unusual spectacle of a Governor riding an open car along with his wife, greeting the people, exhorting them to be peaceful! And the people themselves cleared the road for him by removing obstacles—these streets are supposed to be the scenes of the orgies of violence about which all the penpushers and scribes of the kept press write with such gusto! Mr. Jain himself has said that he has never in his life before received so many cheers as on that morning. Is this the mood and behaviour of a people indulging in acts of violence?

What it was that brought about a metamorphosis in Mr. Jain in the course of the day, it is difficult to guess; but in the evening at about 5 o'clock we see quite a new Mr. Jain, completely transformed calling a hurried press conference regaling lurid stories of mob violence, holding out dire threats of suppression and punishment and altogether acting the part of a saw-dust dictator: "Mob violence had occurred and is occurring in parts of the state," he declared, and he further said that "neither the Government of India nor he could be coerced by a violent demonstration" and he appealed to all the parties to suspend the agitation.

Considering the fact that all parties had made it absolutely clear that the *Bandh* was only for a single day and that day was nearing its close without any great incidents and there remained only the public meetings in the evening, it was beyond comprehension what after all was the point in the Governor's appeal.

The President of the KPCC, Mr. K. C. Abraham, and Mr. Stephen of the INTUC immediately afterwards came out with statements condemning violence and calling off the agitation. The synchronisation of these appeals has legitimately given rise to a suspicion in people's minds that it was the result of a

conspiracy hatched between the Governor and the ruling party who were scared not so much by the violence they both condemned as by the mighty demonstration of the people to unite and fight for their rights. Whatever may be the reason, the fact is undeniable that the subsequent course of agitation was met with violence on the part of the police and the statement of the KPCC and INTUC proved quite handy to the authorities to justify their conduct.

SAVAGERY AGAINST STUDENTS

The next phase of the struggle was taken up mainly by the students and it was a phase attended with intense, brutal and calculated repression on the part of the authorities.

Meanwhile government had already set afoot its machinery of repression in other fields also. On the night of the 28th itself and in the early hours of the morning of the 29th Shri N. Sreekantan Nair, MP, and T. K. Divakaran of the RSP and J. Chittaranjan and others of the CPI together with other comrades had been arrested on very grave charges of sabotage, etc. They were refused bail. By about midday on the 29th more than 200 persons had been rounded up for cases in connection with the Kerala *Bandh*.

In Ernakulam on the 29th the police went on the rampage and indiscriminately beat up several people. They fell upon a crowd gathered near the Traveller's Bungalow who were there merely for the purpose of having a look at the cinema stars camping in the bungalow; they fell upon a crowd in front of St. Albert's College, Mahatma Gandhi Road, etc. About 50 people from several parts of the city were arrested.

The ostensible reason for all these arrests was an incident which involved the office and printing establishment of the *Mathrubhoomi* daily. A crowd of about 100 people had gathered in front of this office on the 28th and pelted a few stones. This was because the *Mathrubhoomi*, which wrote a powerful

editorial some days ago (quoted in part before) made a volte face and wrote another editorial on the eve of the *Bandh* calling upon people and political parties to give up the proposed *Bandh* on the strength of the assurances contained in the Prime Minister's broadcast on the 26th.

This was directly against the universal sentiment prevailing in Kerala at that time and naturally people were incensed. The incident would have passed off without anything more than the pelting of a few stones at the office but for the provocation given by the people inside the office at that time. They made a sensation out of it and frantically called for the police. The crowd became bigger and bigger until by about evening it swelled to 15 thousand.

It was with great difficulty that the leaders of the Samara Samiti, Mathai Manjooran and K. B. Panikkar, succeeded in taking out a procession of the people gathered there, holding a protest meeting and dispersing the crowd peacefully thereby. But blinded by mad fury the police next day began to terrorise the whole locality by entering houses, searching, arresting, beating up, etc. And it is said now a case has been registered against about 1,200 people for the attack on the *Mathrubhoomi*.

The government had instructed the educational authorities to close the schools and colleges on the 28th. Therefore the students could not participate in the *Bandh* action. 30th being a Sunday most of the schools and colleges opened only on the 31st. As soon as colleges opened there were immediate student strikes on the question of food all over the state. The call for strike was given in the city of Trivandrum by the Students' Action Council consisting of representatives of student organisations as well as by SF, KSU, etc. It was in dealing with these strikes that the police exceeded all limits.

Within the scope of this pamphlet it is difficult to go into the details of all the incidents. Neither is that necessary. The pattern was more or less the same throughout: students in several institutions of a town going on strike and taking out huge processions demanding increase of rice ration: the police

instead of allowing the procession to pass off peacefully resorting to cane charge, lathi charge, arrests, etc.; the students getting provoked and throwing stones at the state transport buses or setting fire to one or two of them.

Such incidents happened on January 31 and February 1 all over the districts of Trivandrum, Quilon, Alleppey, Kottayam, Ernakulam and Trichur, but not so much in the northern districts of Cannanore, Calicut and Palghat. In the city of Trivandrum as many as 14 lathi charges in several parts of the city occurred on that single day and tear gas was fired in front of and into the University College Hostel.

But the incidents which roused the conscience of the whole public by its sheer wantonness and savagery occurred in Sree Narayana College, Quilon, and Sree Narayana Polytechnic, Kottiyam (near Quilon). It is better to quote the words of the principals of these institutions. Here is the statement issued by Dr. M. Srinivasan, Principal of the Sree Narayana College:

"Along with students of other schools and colleges, the students of Sree Narayana College also abstained from classes in order to demonstrate their sympathy with the food agitation now going on all over Kerala. The public as well as the government authorities know that that was a perfectly peaceful demonstration. Today by about the time for the classes to begin several students were standing in the college compound here and there while the rest of them were already in the class rooms. Several students from this college as well as from other colleges and schools of the locality were shouting slogans on the road in front of the college.

"I along with a few colleagues of mine was trying to persuade the students standing in the compound to go to their classes. Suddenly about 6 or 7 vans of police came to the spot. Then I could hear the sound of stones being pelted on the vans by some mischief makers. While I and my colleagues were engaged in the task of persuading my students to go to their classes and for that purpose shouting to them, the police without any apparent provocation forced open the gates of the college and began to pelt stones. I have no words to

describe events that happened in the college compound afterwards.

"The police pursued the students running for life and beat them to pulp cruelly. Ignoring the protests of the teachers, the police sought out and beat poor shivering students who had taken shelter under desks and in the corners of the class rooms. Several students fell down unconscious. Even after I had assured the police by shouting through a microphone that I take all responsibility for the students inside the college, the police beat several students in front of me.

"When all our appeals to the police to spare the innocent and to leave the college premises failed, one of my professors lay himself down on the floor in front of the door to the library to prevent the police from entering the library. The police jumped over his body and continued their beatings inside the library also.

"It is difficult to correctly estimate the exact number of students who have sustained injuries. Even some professors and lecturers sustained injuries. Even I was in danger of being beaten up.

"By this time we have ourselves taken to hospital 28 people including 2 lecturers who had grave injuries. It is reported the police have removed another 6 to the hospital. There has been a complaint that the police had belaboured many students cruelly after they had been dragged into the police van and were being taken away. It remains to be seen how many more have suffered. The police did not fail in exhibiting their bravery on the cycles kept on the library verandah. Several glass panes on the first floor of the college building have been broken by stones thrown by the police. I cannot by any stretch of imagination understand what was the necessity for such cruel repression here.

"The fact that these brutal events took place before the very eyes of the District Collector and DSP seems to me to be more strange.

"I request the government that a judicial inquiry be instituted

into these tragic incidents and those found guilty be punished in an exemplary fashion."

The following is the statement issued by Shri G. Ravindran, Principal, Sree Narayana Polytechnic, Kottiyam :

"At a time when agitation on the food question was raging throughout the state, the students of this institution attended classes yesterday without taking any part in such agitation. At about 10.30 a.m. a batch of high-school students entered the Polytechnic courtyard and began to press the students of the Polytechnic also to go on strike.

"However without indulging in any provocative activities the students of this institution went to their residences. That the students of this institution had no part in this agitation will be evident from the fact that while the students elsewhere and people were engaged in a struggle from the 27th onwards, our students quietly attended their classes on the 27th and 29th. Though they attended classes today, in the light of the experience of the day before, they peacefully left their classes after some time.

"Up to noon the atmosphere was peaceful. At noon I along with some teachers went to the hostel for meals. Several students were then taking their food. Others were taking rest after having had their food. Still others were in their rooms. While I was standing in the verandah after my meals I saw some students running into their rooms. All around the college police shouts and whistles could be heard.

"I went out to see what was happening. Several police armed with lathis and shouting at the top of their voices were standing there. A high ranking police officer (IPS) suddenly appeared and gave an order. The police surged forward into the hostel. Cries of pain mingled with the noise of beating rose into the air. When I requested the officer not to beat innocent boys and assured him that I shall take the whole responsibility for the behaviour of my students, he said in a threatening manner that I also was under arrest.

"At that moment the PA to the Collector was also standing

nearby, smiling. Meanwhile the police under the leadership of a Sub-Inspector were running round the college and beating the students. I could not do anything except look upon helplessly while my students were piteously crying out with broken heads and bones. I cannot for a moment understand the mentality behind this brutal repression on innocent students. Students, who out of fear, had shut themselves in their rooms, were got at by forcing open the doors, dragged out and beaten.

"After exhausting all forms of repression, all the students were arrested. Not satisfied with this, the police went into the hostel kitchen beat the cooks and smashed the cooking utensils.

"Our life and security are in peril at the hands of these custodians of law and order. So until such time as we are assured of safety I am closing down this institution.

"I request that a judicial inquiry be conducted into these savage incidents and those found guilty be punished in an exemplary fashion."

Similar incidents occurred in Balaramapuram High School near Trivandrum and in the S.M.V. High School right in the centre of the city and later on in Tripunithura. But we need not go into the details of the incidents in all places.

The Quilon public must be given the credit for not letting these things pass without protest. All sections of the people came forward demanding judicial inquiry. The Bar Association passed a resolution demanding inquiry, the Municipal Council did the same, besides a number of political, TU, student and kisan organisations. Ultimately, a Citizens Committee was set up consisting of representatives of all shades of opinion, including even such institutions as the Lyon's club, merchant associations, etc., for taking up this issue.

But in spite of all these protests the outgoing Governor Shri A. P. Jain refused to order an inquiry. He went to Quilon in order to make a personal investigation and no doubt could have been left in his mind about the veracity of the allegations of police excesses, because the professors, advocates, etc., spoke to him. Still he refused to order an inquiry and it was

well-known that he left Kerala only after closing the files so as to forestall even the future administrators.

It was in these circumstances that M. N. Govindan Nair, MP, went on an indefinite hungerstrike in front of the Quilon Collectorate demanding a public inquiry. Ultimately the government had to come down and now (February 11) they have ordered a public inquiry into the incidents at Kotiyam Polytechnic and Sree Narayana College, Quilon, and Shri Govindan Nair has broken his fast after 9 days.

Certain other developments in connection with this struggle may be noted.

Shri A. K. Gopalan along with a number of other detenus had gone on hungerstrike inside jail on 28th. While other detenus confined the hunger strike to one day, Shri Gopalan continued it indefinitely even after January 28.

Shri E.M.S. Namboodiripad, who was on an all-India tour, returned to Kerala only on the 31st. He was arrested at the Trivandrum airport as he alighted and detained under the DIR. He along with 15 detenus in the Central Jail, Trivandrum, began a fast in sympathy with Shri A. K. Gopalan.

The Kerala Samara Samiti when it met at Ernakulam on February 3 decided to appeal to Shri A. K. Gopalan to give up his fast in view of the fact that his condition was becoming dangerous and the Samiti was continuing its struggle through other methods. Shri Gopalan ended his fast on the 4th in response to the appeal and as a consequence Shri E.M.S. and others who fasted in sympathy with him also ended their fasts.

January 30 witnessed another very striking development though it had no direct connection with the food agitation.

The Kerala NGO Union had called for a march of 1,000 representatives of the union from all parts of Kerala to the Rajbhavan to present a petition to the Governor. The march took place and was a very impressive demonstration. But the government had promulgated Section 144 within an area of 500-metre-radius around the Rajbhavan. The marchers were

stopped by the police before they entered and so all the thousand squatted in a small square in the very centre of the road, and fasted for the whole day.

FOR EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RICE

Now a word about a Kerala's case. The facts about the question are too well known by now. A traditionally rice-producing and rice-eating people, Keralites require at least a minimum quantity of rice for their daily consumption. There is bound to be discontent if the government fails to assure even this.

At present there is statutory rationing throughout the state. Each adult person is getting about 10 oz of grain daily, but the rice content is just below 5 oz and the rest is in wheat. Although the Samara Samiti, consisting of representatives of left parties, has demanded a daily ration of 12 oz of rice, it is obvious that taking into account the difficult situation that India as a whole is going through the people will be satisfied, and so will the Samara Samiti be, if they can be assured a ration of 8 oz of rice and 4 oz of wheat.

It may be remembered that this was more or less the demand put forward unanimously by members of parliament belonging to all parties (Congress, Communist, Muslim League and Independent) when the parliamentary consultative committee for Kerala met in Trivandrum on July 26, 1965.

The question has been asked why if they are assured of an overall ration of 10 oz or 12 oz that Kerala should insist that a definite quantity of it should be in rice. The answer is two-fold.

In the first place the people of Kerala are habitual rice eaters and it is not so easy to change their food habits. This is not so much due to any innate conservatism as to other factors mainly economic. Rice diets are the cheapest we can devise. Rice *kanji* (gruel) eaten with some boiled tapioca and fish or

vegetables is a satisfying diet. Wheat cannot be taken this way. Chappatis or pooris can be eaten only with subji or dall and moreover the majority of the common people in Kerala do not know how to make them properly.

It might be that if a long-range plan be devised with sufficient inducements to encourage wheat consumption such as lower prices for wheat in comparison with rice and popularisation of methods of preparing wheat chappatis and pooris, etc., Keralites may acquire a taste for wheat in course of time and part of their rice diet may be substituted by wheat. This however cannot be done immediately.

In the second place Kerala cannot be satisfied unless they are treated on a par with other rice-eating people. They cannot understand the justice or the necessity of their going on a rice ration of 140 g while their brethren in neighbouring Madras just across get 200 g in Coimbatore and 240 g in Hyderabad. The sheer injustice of such a discrimination has been pointed out by *The Indian Express*, *The Times of India* and other newspapers in their editorials in connection with the Kerala agitation.

Unfortunately the very person who ought to have appreciated this above all others, is precisely the one who has proved himself incapable of understanding this simple fact—India's Food Minister Shri Subramaniam. Every time he opens his mouth to make some pronouncement upon the Kerala food problem he adds insult to injury and rubs salt into the lacerated hearts of the Keralites. It is a wonder why this gentleman, who for all his reputed ability has proved such a colossal failure, should still continue as India's Food Minister while his sometime predecessor Shri A. P. Jain had to vacate office for very much lesser lapses.

It may readily be conceded that rice is scarce this year in the world market. No rice is included in the PL-480 contract that India has already concluded with the USA. According to the spokesman of the Government of India 20,000 tons of rice from the UAR and 150,000 tons from Burma are all that we are going to get from abroad, with probably a small addition

from Thailand if the efforts to conclude a contract with that country prove successful.

Our case for an increased rice ration is not based upon the necessity of unlimited imports of rice from abroad. Our case is rather that whatever is available within the country should be equitably distributed. A system of monopoly procurement and rationing in cities and industrial centres is the only way to bring this about. Why should the government resist such a scheme if it be not because of the pull of the hoarders, big landlords and profiteers on the government?

Why is it that only 2 towns, namely Madras and Coimbatore, have been put on ration in Madras state and only Hyderabad in Andhra? What about the other towns in these states? There is no earthly reason why all towns in these states should not be put on ration immediately with a ration of 8 oz rice and 12 oz wheat. Or is it that Subramaniam's lectures to rice-eaters to take to wheat does not apply to his state of Madras and neighbouring Andhra?

The key to the solution of the problem as well as the sine qua non to successful rationing is effective procurement. Subramaniam himself had to admit in Parliament sometime before that the central government had failed to achieve its target of procurement from Andhra, Orissa and Madras during 1964-65. Even this year when there was considerable failure of rains, the rice crop in Andhra is reported to be at least equal to last year's if not 50 per cent higher. Of course there has been failure of the millet crop in the state with consequent scarcity conditions in some areas. If Andhra is given millet or even wheat it will be able to spare as much rice to Kerala as before.

The Andhra Chief Minister Shri Brahmananda Reddy has made an offer of 2 lakh tons of rice in exchange for the same quantity of wheat. This is precisely one of the ways to meet the crisis. The union government could certainly have taken measures much earlier to divert all the rice to rice-eating states like Kerala and issue only wheat as ration in such places as Delhi. If after taking all these measures it is found that only

a ration of 6 oz can be assured to the people of Kerala as well as the people of Madras, Andhra, etc., they will be satisfied. That is the universal feeling in Kerala.

Some very atrociously stupid arguments have been used in this debate by very intelligent people like Subramaniam and Brahmananda Reddy. Is there no end to pampering Kerala?—they have asked in effect by pointing out that in certain parts of Andhra and Rajasthan the availability is not even 4 oz of grain. Whose fault is it? We have every sympathy for the starving people in parts of Rajasthan and Andhra, no less than for starving people in Kerala. They are all Indians—our brothers.

If in any part of the country the availability of foodgrains is below 12 oz it is a sign of maldistribution, for no economist of repute has put down the per capita availability of foodgrains in India at present at less than 13.5 oz. So if in Andhra or Rajasthan or any other part of the country there is starvation, it means only that the government should take steps to introduce rationing and procurement all over the country, and not that Kerala also should be starved.

Finally a word about procurement in Kerala. It has become the practice for the apologists of government policy, especially hailing from Madras, to point out that when the Kerala government has failed to procure even 25 per cent of the marketable surplus of rice in the state, it have no right to insist upon getting rice from Madras where the government have succeeded in procuring about 50 per cent of the marketable surplus. But it is very difficult to believe this claim of Madras in the absence of any authoritative pronouncement from the union government. But that apart, it should be made perfectly clear that the left parties in Kerala who have led the food agitation are no less anxious to make procurement in Kerala as effective as possible. But Kerala unfortunately is under president's rule and if procurement there is not effective the responsibility is Shri Subramaniam's. We are for monopoly procurement and nationalisation of wholesale trade in Kerala also. Let there be no doubt about it.