



The Marxist Dilemma in Kerala: Administration and/or Struggle

Author(s): Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr.

Source: *Asian Survey*, Vol. 10, No. 11, Elections and Party Politics in India: A Symposium (Nov., 1970), pp. 993-1003

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2642819>

Accessed: 04-08-2015 17:32 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Asian Survey*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE MARXIST  
DILEMMA IN KERALA:  
ADMINISTRATION  
AND/OR STRUGGLE

/ Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr.

**T**he political polarization envisioned by some in the wake of the Congress split has not materialized. It is clear, nevertheless, that the polar extremes of India's political spectrum are becoming more powerful, that the Jana Sangh on the right and the Marxists on the left have assumed increasing importance in India's political life. Their strength is geographically concentrated in different regions—the Jana Sangh in the Hindi heartland; the Marxist in West Bengal and Kerala. It is within Kerala that the Marxists have had their greatest appeal. Investigations of coalition government in the Indian states and where parties of the left have enjoyed wide electoral appeal is of increasing importance—two dimensions of party politics in India that have received but limited attention.

Kerala is a land of contradictions in a nation of contrasts. It is a miniature of India, with all variables pushed to their extremes. As India's smallest state, Kerala has the highest birthrate and the greatest pressure on the land. It abounds in agricultural wealth, yet must import half its food supply. Its international exports bring 25% of India's dollar earnings, yet Kerala's per capita income is the lowest in India. It has the highest literacy rate and the highest rate of unemployment. With the largest community of Christians, it has the highest Communist vote also. It is at once a bastion of orthodox Hinduism, with the most elaborate system of caste ranking in India and, at the same time, a region deeply affected by the process of social mobilization and change. With many of the "prerequisites" of political modernization, Kerala is regarded by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)—or CPM—as an advanced outpost of revolutionary struggle.<sup>1</sup>

In 1957, the Communist Party of India formed a ministry under E. M. S. Namboodiripad and governed the state for twenty-eight months until a "mass upsurge" brought central intervention and President's Rule. Ten

---

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the political sociology of Kerala, see Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr., "Caste in Kerala: A Preface to the Elections," *Economic Weekly*, November 21, 1964, pp. 1841-48; and "Caste and the Kerala Elections," *Economic Weekly*, April 17, 1965, pp. 669-72.

years later, in 1967, Nambudiripad again formed a Government, this time in a broadly-based, non-Congress United Front. Although the Communists had deepened their hold among Kerala's poorest classes, particularly the agricultural laborers, their support remained remarkably stable. Indeed, with a high degree of political literacy and participation, Kerala reflects a salience of party identity rare in India. In the four elections over the last decade in Kerala, the Communists have maintained approximately one-third of the vote, with fluctuations and a low of some 28% in 1965.<sup>2</sup> The Congress, like the Communists, has maintained a fairly steady third of the vote, and an anti-Congress alliance could securely isolate it from power. The seven-party United Front, with 52% of the vote, gained 117 of the 133 Assembly seats and 17 of the 18 Parliamentary seats in the 1967 election. Congress was reduced to 9 seats in the Assembly, despite the support of 35% of the electorate. For the second time, E. M. S. Nambudiripad took over as Chief Minister of India's "problem state."

In October 1969, the United Front government collapsed after 31 months in office—the longest tenure of Kerala's ten ministries and five periods of Presidential Rule. Hanging on after the resignation of seven of the twelve ministers and the withdrawal of four parties from the coalition government, Nambudiripad finally resigned in the face of a majority motion in the Assembly on the issue of corruption. The issue of corruption provided a convenient smoke-screen around which divergent parties, without regard to their class character and ideological incompatibility, might rally against the Marxists. The vote on the motion, 69-60, formalized what had been the deepening division among the constituent parties of the United Front.

A CPI Member of Parliament, Achutha Menon, placed responsibility for the Government's collapse on the big party bossism of the CPM, its disruptive behavior, and sectarian policies. To the surprise of all, in a bid to avert President's Rule, Menon succeeded in welding sufficient solidarity among the heterogeneous parties to form a Government—united more in their opposition to the Marxists than in the determination to fulfill the promises of the 1967 election. But on the basis of this commitment, Menon claimed his Government as heir successor to the United Front. The "mini-front," as it was called, in supplanting the anti-Congress United Front became essentially an anti-Marxist front. The new Government coalition, led by the CPI, included the Muslim League, the ISP, and the Kerala Congress, with the RSP in support outside the Ministry. Unwilling to test his claim to a majority without Congress support by calling the Assembly into session, Menon alluded to support from unnamed defectors from the Marxist camp. When they did not materialize, the Congress split conveniently opened the possibility of support from the "progressive" Indira Gandhi faction.

The Marxists had been thrown out, ostensibly on charges of corruption.

<sup>2</sup>For the best discussion of the split and contemporary background of the Communist party, see Mohan Ram, *Indian Communism*, (Delhi: Vikas, 1969).

Ministerial corruption, both for personal enrichment and party aggrandizement, had been an issue of increasing concern. In the Marxist view, however, some degrees of corruption, while not sanctioned, are perhaps inevitable—even in the most revolutionary parties—as they struggle in a corrupt society, to work in a dialectical process within the system in order to break the system.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, however, the real issues which brought down the Government were far more serious and lay in the nature of the United Front itself.

The UF had been forged as an electoral alliance of seven parties with a minimum program. Although less eclectic than Ram Manohar Lohia's "non-Congressism" (advocating a front of all opposition parties across the political spectrum to dislodge the Congress), the left-led United Front in Kerala came to power with serious internal contradictions. It was an electoral front with limited programmatic objectives, but the Marxists sought to establish their own hegemony within the Front and to transform it into an instrument of struggle.

The Marxists conceive of the United Front governments in Kerala and West Bengal as "*instruments of struggle* in the hands of the people, more than as governments that actually possess adequate power, that can materially and substantially give relief to the people." "In clear class terms," the CPM Central Committee stated in 1967, "our Party's participation in such Governments is one specific form of struggle to win more and more people, and more and more allies for the proletariat and its allies in the struggle for the cause of People's Democracy and at a later stage for socialism."<sup>4</sup> The United Front then is for the Marxists essentially a revolutionary concept. For the CPI and others, such a stance was "big party chauvinism."

The CPI has made much of a reported speech in London by B. T. Rana-dive, a member of the CPM Politburo. The task of the UF Government, he reportedly said, was "to unleash discontent" of the people rather than "to give relief."<sup>5</sup> Achutha Menon, Chief Minister of the new mini-front Government, in reviewing what happened in Kerala, accused the Marxists of a "wrong and sectarian approach." "Of course," he wrote, "the power and resources of a state government functioning under our constitution are limited and we should certainly not be a party to foster unwarranted illusions among the people that everything they desire will be done for them. But within all these limitations, it is possible to give some relief to our much suffering people and give them a better administration than the Congress had given."<sup>6</sup> The Marxists were alleged to have used the police and the ad-

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Mathew Kurian, Trivandrum, January 1970. Also see M. Basavapunnaiiah in *People's Democracy*, Oct. 19, 1969, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>*New Situation and Party's Tasks*, Calcutta: Communist Party of India (Marxist), 1967, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup>*Indian Express*, June 22, 1969.

<sup>6</sup>*What Happened in Kerala*, New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1969, p. 2.

ministrative machinery of the state government as an adjunct of the party, their efforts being directed mainly against the CPI. They were also accused of interfering with the administrative spheres under the control of other parties, notably agriculture and industry, under CPI ministers. At the same time, within the areas of their own administrative responsibility, the Marxists failed to provide any effective relief to the people—as in their handling of the food procurement program and in the two year delay in passage of the land reform act. The Marxists thus were charged with seeking to advance their own position at the expense of allied parties within the United Front on the one hand and with failure to implement the minimum program on the other.

The Namboodiripad government did indeed emerge with a relatively low performance record on a number of accounts, but ironically its failure to implement more of the minimum program was due in considerable measure to caution. In choosing to work within the system, they were inevitably limited by it, conditioned by “the possible” *in the system’s terms*. Indeed, some six months after the UF government came to power in 1967, the Central Committee of the CPM was highly critical of the Marxist leadership in Kerala for its failure to “independently mobilize the people” and for putting forward “only such proposals as are likely to be immediately accepted by other partners.”<sup>7</sup> A year later, the Central Committee again took note of the “serious shortcomings” of the Kerala leadership. It warned of the dangers inherent in the type of parliamentary struggle engaged in and of the “reformist and constitutional illusions it breeds.”<sup>8</sup>

While the CPI attacked the Marxists for failure “to give relief,” the “Naxalite” groups in Kerala, adhering to a Maoist line of revolutionary struggle, attacked the Marxists for their revisionist concern for incremental reform. Efforts to provide surplus land to the landless is regarded by the Naxalites, for example, as involving a danger of “en-bourgeoisification,” thus creating a class of small peasants with little revolutionary potential. The Marxists, as Lenin earlier had done, reject the argument that only through intensification of poverty can a revolutionary situation emerge, i.e., the worse it is, the better it is. In rejecting the left sectarian thesis, however, the Marxists have not really answered the problem. There are indeed serious risks in a program of land reform when there is simply not enough land for those to whom it has been promised, when the only viable economic answer in Marxist terms is not land-to-the-tiller, but collectivization.

The Naxalite groups in Kerala have received wide publicity and have aroused much concern.<sup>9</sup> With its leadership jailed or dead, the movement—never really larger than some 4,000 activists—has been severely setback.

<sup>7</sup>*Central Committee Resolutions*, adopted at Madurai, August 18 to 27, 1967, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup>*Political-Organizational Report*, Central Committee of the 8th Congress of the CPI (M), Cochin, December 23-29, 1968, Calcutta: CPI (M), 1969, p. 177.

<sup>9</sup>See Marcus F. Franda’s analysis of the Maoist groups in India in “India’s Third Communist Party,” *Asian Survey*, IX:12, December 1969, pp. 797-817.

There are now some six distinct groups: an ineffectual, largely verbal CPI (Marxist-Leninist) group, centered among the Trivandrum employees of the Indian Life Insurance Corporation; the Communist Revolutionary Party and its splinter, both led by defectors from the CPM; the "Kosalramdas groups," another Marxist offshoot with a limited trade union following; the Kunnikalites, the group which led the abortive raids in North Wynad in late 1968; and a Kunnikalite faction, nurtured by the conviction that their leader, Kunnikal Narayan, betrayed the revolution by surrendering to the police. Beyond the handful of Naxalites, however, there exists within the Marxist party considerable sympathy for the extremist position and a feeling of general unease with parliamentary—or at least governmental—participation.

Criticized by the CPM Central Committee and increasingly sensitive to the attack from the left—both within the Kerala Marxist party and from the Naxalite splinter groups—the CPM assumed a more aggressive stance within the UF, particularly after the Marxist success in the West Bengal mid-term elections and perception of expanding power on the part of coalition partners. This was most apparent in the case of the Muslim League. The League had, to begin with, come into the United Front under very favorable conditions. With a geographic stronghold, they elected 14 of their 15 candidates. Four of the eleven UF ministers were Muslim, although Muslims form only 18 per cent of the population of Kerala. Under the UF Government, the League won recognition for Muslim private schools, a Muslim majority district was created in Malabar, middle-class positions opened in the bureaucracy to Muslims, and a Muslim was appointed to the High Court. With the electorate of the Malabar region divided in a three-way split between Congress, the Muslim League, and the Marxists, the League holds the balance. In courting it, however, the Marxists had contributed to the League's enhanced status among all Muslims, thus threatening the Marxist hold among the poor Muslim peasantry and agricultural labor. The benefits secured by the League were in fact largely for the middle-class and the League leadership remained, as before, in the hands of a wealthy mercantile class. The League had, however, received a new respectability: its communal and feudal character had been soft-pedaled by the Marxists themselves. The Marxists eventually felt it imperative to recoup their position among the landless laborers of the Muslim community. The League in consequence became immediately defensive.

The CPI seemed to be the other beneficiary of the United Front Government. The split in 1964 had left the CPI with little more than its leadership, a hold on the trade union movement, and a pocket of support among the cashew workers of Quilon District. Using the industry and agriculture portfolios, the CPI sought to advance its position. Its policies, appealing to the middle peasant and the urban middle-class, came into direct conflict with the Marxist position from the beginning. Within the early months of the ministry, the CPI had already begun the maneuvers which were to culminate



in the isolation of the Marxists in the coalition. The CPM reacted "from below" in more aggressive trade union activity, cutting at the already minimal base of CPI support through the creation of parallel and competitive unions in some cases, or, in others, complete capture of the unions from within. "From above," the Marxists treated the CPI as the "main enemy" within the UF Government and sought to undercut its ministerial position.

If the Marxist attitude toward its coalition partners became more "big brotherly," however, the fear of losing office through central intervention led, for all the talk of confrontation with the Center, to ensnarlement in the bureaucratic imbroglia so much despised by the Marxists. Their experience did indeed demonstrate the difficulties of managing a coalition in a state government under the Indian constitution, but this made little impression on the people. And with their ignominious departure the Marxists lost the potential benefits of being cast from office because they had acted in the name of the people. Had the Marxists, once in power, simply begun to implement radical land reform measures, for example, rather than to placate their coalition partners and wait interminably for Presidential approval, the Government might well have been forced to resign, but the political capital accrued would have been enormous. Ranadive perhaps was suggesting such a tactic when he urged Marxist ministers "to press ahead with legislations which were likely to be vetoed by the center or the High Court. Such confrontations," he continued, "were designed to tell masses of the impossibility of carrying through fundamental reforms under the present constitution."<sup>10</sup>

The Marxists under the UF Government sought to combine administration and struggle, popular initiative plus utilization of the administrative machinery for the advancement of the "basic classes." The CPI, on the other hand, sought "efficient administration." M. N. Govindan Nair, the CPI leader and Agriculture Minister under the UF, denounced the Marxist strategy: "Administration and struggle cannot go together: either give up administration and continue the struggle or give up the struggle and carry on the administration."<sup>11</sup>

For all its administrative failures, however, the Marxist Government had not been without achievements. It was argued that whatever possible relief should be given, but that given "the extremely limited and curtailed powers and resources of the state Governments," only meager ameliorative relief measures could be provided. It was argued that "the devastating effects of the deepening economic crisis . . . can only be redressed by a radical and revolutionary change in the entire social set-up."<sup>12</sup> With little potential for immediate economic growth and dependent almost wholly on the Center for financial support, politics in Kerala approaches the character of a zero sum

<sup>10</sup>*Indian Express*, June 22, 1969.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted by E. M. S. Namboodiripad in *Right Communist Betrayal of Kerala U.F. and Government*, Calcutta: CPI(M), 1969, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>*Political-Organizational Report*, op. cit., p. 173.

game. The Marxists' achievements came at the expense of other parties; the relief of certain classes at the expense of others.

With limited resources, the Marxists relied more on symbolic output than on a redistribution of wealth. The Marxist police policy is a case in point. The Kerala Home Ministry specified as it did under the Communist Government in 1957, that the police should not interfere in mass struggles except when there was an actual outbreak of violence. The police, as an instrument of the State, would no longer be used against the people for the protection of vested interests. The *gherao*, coercive encirclement for "quick justice," was accepted as a form of peaceful demonstration and therefore as legitimate. The policy was attacked, however, as being selectively enforced so as to advance Marxist struggles. Local police were alleged to be willing to act only on the express instruction of Marxist cadre. The perceived threat to the propertied classes was equated with a "breakdown of law and order." Like the mass upsurge of ten years before, the situation was highly colored by class perspective.

O. P. Sangal has noted that:

The very fact of the CPM emerging as the dominant political force in the State changed the psychology of the overwhelming majority of the downtrodden and oppressed masses. They felt as if they had themselves come into power. And this feeling was strengthened by their everyday experience. For example, without any legislative or executive action on the part of the government, the wages of agricultural workers increased far above the normal market rate just because of the changed political atmosphere in the state. It became possible for ordinary workers and peasant leaders to get any oppressive government official transferred from his favorite area of operation.

"The greatest mistake that the CPI appears to have committed in Kerala," Sangal argued:

is its failure to make an objective assessment of the CPM's strength, its mass base and its place in the political life of the State. If the CPI leaders were not suffering from gross subjectivism, they would have seen that the CPM had become the chief vehicle and the main organizational expression of the communist movement in Kerala. Whatever mistakes the CPM might have committed in the past or may commit in the future, the CPI can never hope to replace it.<sup>13</sup>

During the period of "administration and struggle," the Marxists sought to extend their social base—particularly among agricultural labor. The reaction of the other parties in the UF was accelerated by the events within the Congress. The Congress split provided the ideological escape, for in the conception of the Indian situation held by the CPI, collaboration with "pro-

<sup>13</sup>*The Citizen*, November 8, 1969, p. 24.



gressive" elements of the Congress is possible. Herein lies the narrow, yet crucial ideological distinction, between National Democracy, as held by the CPI, and People's Democracy, as held by the CPM. Both are regarded as transitional stages to socialism and involve the same class alliances—a coalition of the anti-feudal, anti-imperialist, and anti-monopoly classes. People's Democracy, however, presupposes the hegemony of the working class, and such hegemony is only to be achieved by protracted struggle.

The Marxist assessment of the character of the Indian State is specified in the party program: "The present Indian state is the organ of the class rule of the bourgeoisie and landlord, led by the big bourgeoisie, who are increasingly collaborating with foreign finance capital in pursuit of the capitalist path of development."<sup>14</sup> The CPI denies that the Indian leadership is dominated by the monopoly bourgeoisie: "The State of India is the organ of the class rule of the national bourgeoisie as a whole, in which the big bourgeoisie holds powerful influence. This class has strong links with the landlords. These factors give rise to reactionary pulls on the State power."<sup>15</sup> The CPI takes the Congress split as opening "a new stage in the differentiation between the representatives of the monopoly and non-monopoly strata of the bourgeoisie in the Congress" and "a new alignment of political forces in the country."<sup>16</sup>

The various Maoist groups share the basic assessment of the CPI (Marxist-Leninist): "The Congress Government represents the interests of the Indian feudal princes, big landlords and bureaucratic-comprador capitalists."<sup>17</sup> There are no contradictions within the enemy camp, and the bourgeoisie in its entirety must be fought together. The Marxists regard the Naxalite position as politically unrealistic, a form of political expressionism best characterized by Lenin's diagnosis, "an infantile disorder." However, romantic the appeal of instant revolution, India is not at this stage in a revolutionary situation. The organization and consciousness of the working class remains "at a pitifully low level."<sup>18</sup>

This is felt to be the case since, "despite the intensifying economic-political crisis and the sharpening of class contradictions and the class struggle, moving the masses into action on an ever-increasing scale, the political crisis is far from maturing into a revolutionary crisis or ripening into a revolutionary situation."<sup>19</sup> A raid on a police station or the assassination of a landlord may reap psychic benefits to those engaged in such furtive efforts, but they cannot substitute for political organization and protracted conflict

<sup>14</sup>*Programme*, Calcutta: CPI(M), 1964, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup>"Programme of the Communist Party of India," in Documents Adopted by the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party of India, Patna, February 7-15, 1968, p. 297.

<sup>16</sup>Mohit Sen, "Differentiation Within the Indian Bourgeoisie," *Mainstream*, December 13, 1969, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted from the CPI (M-L) program by E. M. S. Namboodiripad in an interview in *The Radical Review* (Madras) Vol. 1, No. 2 (January 1970), 17.

<sup>18</sup>*Present Political Situation*, Report adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI (M), Calcutta, February 2-7, 1970, Calcutta: CPI(M), 1970, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

guided by a sense of what can in fact be *achieved*. Going back to Lenin, Mathew Kurian, Marxist theorist and economist, argues that extremism is another form of opportunism. "Both revisionism and extremism are two forms of expression of the same middle-class, petty bourgeois vascillation."<sup>20</sup>

In the path between the "revisionism" of the CPI and the "left sectarianism" of the CPI(M-L), the Marxists have been willing to align with the non-monopoly bourgeoisie for tactical purposes "in the interests of the bigger battle." They regard the contradictions within the Indian bourgeoisie as real and seek to fully exploit them. Indeed, even the Indian monopoly bourgeoisie may come in conflict with foreign monopolists, and in such instances the Marxists are prepared to cooperate with the class enemy in anti-imperialist struggle. The Marxists, however, have regarded the CPI's stance as being one of subservience to the national bourgeoisie, and their quarrel with the CPI, intensified by the internal conflicts of the UF governments, blinded the Marxists to the deepening strains within the Congress. After the Congress split in February 1970, the Central Committee of the CPM admitted underestimating "the inner contradictions in the Congress combine." In "utilizing the two UF state Governments of Kerala and West Bengal as the advanced outposts of the democratic revolutionary movement for unleashing big class and mass forces . . . we were, for the most part emphasizing the intensification of the class and social contradictions and the consequent sharpening of the class struggle in the country and tended to underestimate the political impact of the differences and split on the ruling Congress party and Government."<sup>21</sup>

In seeking to combine administration and struggle, the Marxists have been unwilling to abandon the opportunities afforded by electoral democracy for the isolation of the underground, although they remain prepared to do so in the face of serious attempts to outlaw the party or to force it into political isolation. "Elections," says P. Govinda Pillai, editor of the Marxist Malayalam daily, "are a means to reach and mobilize large numbers of people."<sup>22</sup> The political campaign becomes a vehicle of the party's expanding social base. It reaches potential allies which violence and terrorism would only alienate and repel. While "the ruling classes allow the luxury of parliamentary democracy only so long as their own class interests are not threatened, Nambudiripad, in so far as possible, would use the constitution as "an instrument of struggle."<sup>23</sup> "Our party is of the view that, so long as this system continues, it is in the interest of the working class . . . to so

<sup>20</sup>Interview, Trivandrum, January 1970.

<sup>21</sup>*Present Political Situation*, Report adopted by the Central Committee of the CPI (M) Calcutta, February 2-7, 1970, Calcutta: CPI(M), 1970, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>Interview, Cochin, December 1969.

<sup>23</sup>*The Republican Constitution in the Struggle for Socialism*, R. R. Kale Memorial Lecture, Poona: Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1968, p. 1. In this important statement, E.M.S. spells out the Marxist stance in relation to the constitution and introduces a program for overhauling the state structure, with the "widest autonomy for the various states." pp. 16-20.

utilize the institutions as built up on the basis of this Constitution as to further consolidate and strengthen the struggles of the working people for basic social transformations."<sup>24</sup>

"Any political party," Kurian states, "however revolutionary, if it understands real politics functioning within the bourgeois system, must play the game of the system, but though sometimes compromise may be necessary, a revolutionary party cannot build its program on bourgeois methods like horse-trading."<sup>25</sup> Thus, in addition to and inseparable from parliamentary tactics, the Marxists insist upon the necessity of extra-parliamentary forms of struggle. Success is the criterion by which tactics are to be judged. "The only criterion on which Marxism-Leninism bases itself when it selects a particular method for bringing about social transformations," according to Namboodiripad, "is whether it will serve the purpose." He does not reject or extol any particular form of strategy, violent or nonviolent, but he notes, "the form depends on the mood of the people, their sentiments, their unity and cohesion."<sup>26</sup>

The militant posture assumed by the Marxists immediately after the mini-front came to power served to cement what would have been an almost immediately unstable coalition. As it was, even the right wing Kerala Congress went along with the land reform implementation. Frustration seemed more to dictate the Marxist tactic than a sensitivity to the situation. On all sides, however, it was admitted that the CPM had not lost any of its own support. The Marxists hold the allegiance of the increasingly conscious and militant landless laborers, but their activities have alienated them from the broader base of support required to secure an absolute majority in an election.<sup>27</sup>

The September 1970 elections in Kerala would seem to confirm this perspective and to underscore the basic stability of electoral behavior in the state. While the results are not yet fully available as this journal goes to press, the Marxists, though reduced from 49 to 30 seats in the Assembly, retained the 23.5% of the vote they had captured in 1967. Even without adding the votes of the three Marxist-supported independents, who have since joined the party, the CPM emerges as the largest political party in Kerala, a position previously enjoyed by the undivided Congress.

The call for elections had come as a surprise. The contradictions within the mini-front Government were becoming increasingly evident with the demands for an expanded ministry. Buoyed by confidence of his own success, Chief Minister Achutha Menon dissolved the Assembly in June and called for fresh elections in the early Fall. The move was designed to strengthen the position of the CPI as well as to secure a decisive majority for the Government. Under the impending strain of demands for the apportionment of seats, the tensions within the mini-front deepened. The Kerala Congress and

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup>Interview, Trivandrum, January, 1970.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>Interview with K. P. Karunakaran, Trivandrum, January 1970.

the ISP withdrew, and an opposition "Democratic Front" was formed with an alliance between the Kerala Congress and the organization Congress, in electoral adjustment with the ISP, the Jana Sangh, and the Kerala Karshaka Party. The Marxist bloc remained intact, with the SSP, KTP, and KSP. The incumbent mini-front, composed of the CPI, the Muslim League, and the RSP, added the Praja Socialist Party and, most significantly, entered into and "understanding" with Indira Gandhi's "new" Congress.

The three front election, attracting visits by national party leaders, including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, brought roughly a 70% turnout. The election captured national headlines with the dramatic showing of the new Congress, portending the possibility of general elections in February 1971. After virtual eclipse in the Assembly, the Congress was again a force of considerable power, with 32 seats instead of its previous 5. Although choosing to remain outside the Government, the Congress provides Achutha Menon with the secure majority he sought. The new Congress received 19.2% of the vote, a decline from that secured by the undivided Congress in 1967, but the votes still held by the old Congress were insufficient to gain it even one seat in the Assembly. The victories of the new Congress bring into Kerala politics a powerful influence of youth, for much of the energy behind the party arises from the pro-Indira Gandhi Youth Congress and from the Congress-affiliated Kerala Student Union, which controls some 70% of the college unions in the state.<sup>28</sup>

The Congress victory was clearly not the triumph over the Marxists proclaimed so widely in the Indian press. The Marxists had, in fact, not only held their own in the percentage of votes, but with the inclusion of the independents, had actually augmented their position. The impressive Congress victories—as their defeats in 1967—were fundamentally the product of front tactics. This is especially clear in Malabar, where the Marxists suffered severe losses at the hands of the Congress because of the latter's understanding with the Muslim League. But the heralded defeat of the Marxist candidates did not apparently cut into their percentage of the votes.

The elections revealed the weakness of the Naxalites. All six of the "revolutionary communists" who contested the elections lost their deposits. The Marxists, however, have moved vigorously since their ouster in 1969 to establish their own militant credentials. Struggle was the dominant theme of their campaign, and they are unlikely to set it aside in electoral defeat. The Marxists have retained their base of support among the poor and landless of Kerala, and, with time, it is likely to expand. Under such circumstances, their reduction of seats and isolation in the Assembly may well serve as a catalyst to increasing militancy and the road of revolution.

---

<sup>28</sup>*The Hindustan Times*, September 26, 1970.