

# *Kerala without Democracy*

THE heavy poll and the spectacular advance of the Left Communist Party to the position of first party, are clear enough evidence that democracy is alive and alert in Kerala. That it has failed so far to produce the possibility of stability is the result of the inability of the Left forces to hold together combined with a resurgence of communalism. This disastrous combination is likely to leave Kerala without democracy for some years.

It cannot be insisted too strongly that the combined votes of the two Communist Parties, the RSP and, to an extent, of the SSP demonstrate that the Left has not retreated an inch in popular support since 1960, that it seems to have crossed the 40 per cent barrier even without unity. Given an united front, the Left will sweep Kerala. The accumulated and spreading discontent against the Congress is reaching the point of detonation in this State. More acutely than ever the problem becomes one of an alternative with a concrete programme of rapid development and equality.

It would be fatal for the Left to imagine that the people will mark time or that their anger against the almost inevitable continued Congress misrule will keep on increasing till the Left reaches a safe electoral majority. The point is that as of now popular anger is tinged with radical hope. It could become anger against the Congress combined with disappointment with the failure of the Left to produce a coherent alternative. If this stage is reached, the Left in Kerala will face a set-back from which it will take long years to emerge.

## **Strength of Communalism**

And it should be remembered that there are other contenders in the held. The Kerala Congress-Muslim League combine has shown a striking strength which is fairly formidable today and fraught with menace in the near future. The Muslim League suffered serious reverses in some of its traditional strongholds at the hands of the Left Communist Party, yet its vote has not gone down substantially. If we add to it the poll of the six "Independents", supported by the League and the Left Communist\* but who immediately join-

ed the League after their victory, then a slight increase can be noticed\* The communal incident at Tanur after voting is an ugly pointer to the allegiance of Muslims in Malabar to the unabashed communalism of the League.

The Kerala Congress was equally unabashed in its reliance on Nair and Catholic communalism, with the former slightly more to the fore. Mannath Padmanabhan demonstrated that in the game of communalism there are very few, indeed, who are his peers. He has also made it clear that he is now thinking in terms of using the success of the dissident Congress in Kerala to push ahead with the formation of similar groups, based on the same social conservatism, in other Southern States — Mysore to begin with. It should not take long for that other octogenarian, Rajaji, to catch on to this game and go forward with his absorption tactic. It may also happen that the Jana Sangh will acquire a real mass base in the South by uniting with and transforming this trend. It should be remembered that Hindu revivalism has got going on a vast scale in the South and that it does not necessarily need a Muslim antagonist to take on a political shape. It can emerge as a genuinely conservative party seeking to freeze social development for as long as possible.

## **Policy for Leftists**

The failure of the Congress to provide any sort of meaningful ethos will soon enough lead to the organised entry of open social conservatism, if it is not compensated by the significant emergence of a radical democratic standard of values. The resources of Hinduism for this are enormous and sufficiently flexible, too, to accept the most Western of models of economic growth.

It should not be imagined that the Kamaraj strategy for Kerala was free of communal considerations. While he banked heavily on rallying the Ezhavas to the Congress banner, he did not overlook the tactic of attempting to drive a wedge in the Nair-Catholic leadership by adopting the late P T Chacko's brother and a prominent Nair Service Society leader as official Congress candidates. At the lower levels there was no lack of appeal to all the

communal forces possible. This tactic did not pay off, since the silts of the Congress Ministry were so great and so recent that the electorate could not be cajoled. As things stand, there is very little chance of the Congress rehabilitating itself. What may happen, if Kamaraj follows up his recent attack on the "new class of new rich", is that the Congress will convert itself in Kerala into the minority party of the petty bourgeoisie. This would be such a revolutionary transformation that scepticism about it is more than legitimate.

What should be done by the various Left forces is to follow a policy of patient consolidation and continuous attempts at unity on all conceivable issues. The immediate is, quite obviously, the release of the Left Communists, particularly the detenus who have been elected. It is true that this is an all-India issue but the strength of the protest can and must be at its most formidable in Kerala. There should be no support by the Left to any party or coalition of parties, anxious to form the Government, who are not pledged to do their utmost in this regard. But even this minimum degree of unity will be far from easy. The election campaign has left a trail of bitterness.

## **Hopeful Trends**

There are indications that hopeful trends are emerging in both Communist Parties. It is only to be expected that Namboodiripad would, to begin with, rub home the fact that he has swung the major section of the traditional Communist base behind him. It is equally natural that Achuta Menon should underline the fact that the Left Communists have not been able to achieve the end of instability because of the strength of the Kerala Congress and Muslim League against whom they did not fight. But these initial reactions are wearing off and there seems to be an appeal for rethinking on both sides — each, of course, insisting that the other needs to do more of it! Rather than attempting ideological-political unity, much less organisational merger, it would be more to the point to try for joint campaigns and movements from issue to issue. If this approach is adopted the verdict of the election can still be the basis for the advance of democracy in Kerala even though the State may be without a democratic government