

(April 7, 2007 marks the 50th anniversary of the formation of the first communist ministry in Kerala. The measures taken by the communist government headed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad were a landmark in the country's political history. After 28 months in office, the government was dismissed by the Centre by invoking Article 356 of the Constitution. To mark this historic anniversary, we are publishing an article by Ajoy Ghosh, then General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, which provides a comprehensive account of the significance and pioneering role of this government.)

On July 31, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Indian Union, on the advice of the Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, issued a proclamation, dismissing the government of Kerala, dissolving the elected State Legislature, suspending even the limited autonomy of the State and imposing President's rule on the State. Thus was brought to an end the first Communist-led government in an Indian State.

For the first time in the history of the Indian Republic an elected State Ministry found itself dismissed at a time when it enjoyed the support of the majority in the State Legislature.

The ousting of the Kerala government was followed by spontaneous strikes and demonstrations in Kerala and in many parts of the country. This was the prelude to the massive protest demonstrations that took place on August 3, the day when the Indian Parliament reassembled after the summer recess.

Why did this happen? Why was the Kerala government dismissed? Why did its dismissal evoke such protests?

No answer can be found to these questions if one studies the Presidential Proclamation of July 31 alone. That Proclamation merely stated that the President is 'satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the government of that state (Kerala) cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of India'. No charge was levelled against the Kerala government, not a word was said as to how the Kerala government had violated the provisions of the Constitution or what the 'situation' was and who created it. The very silence was eloquently indicative of the guilty conscience of those who were responsible for the President's Proclamation and of their unwillingness to come before the people with their real reasons.

To know what these real reasons were, it is necessary to state how the Communist-led government of Kerala came to be formed, what it did, which

[?] *World Marxist Review*, English edition of *Problems of Peace and Socialism*, 1959, No. 11.

classes and interests its policies and measures benefited and whom they harmed, what impact Kerala had on the other states.

The Communist-led government of Kerala was formed in April 1957 after the second general elections. These elections marked an impressive advance of the forces of Indian democracy at whose head stood the Communist Party of India. Belying official expectations and the fears of some of its own friends, the Communist Party polled over 12 million votes (11 per cent of the total), double the votes it had polled in the 1951–52 elections. It won a majority of the seats in the predominantly working-class constituencies. It increased its strength in most of the State Legislatures, retaining its position as the second party in the Indian Parliament.

But by far the most significant result of the general elections, one that was to exercise profound influence on Indian politics in the forthcoming period, was the success of the Communist Party in winning, together with five progressive Independents whom it supported, an absolute majority of seats—65 out of 126—in the Kerala State Legislature. This caused consternation in the ranks of reactionaries and in the dominant leadership of the Congress Party. They would have liked, even in those days, to prevent the formation of a Communist-led Ministry. But democratic opinion in India would not have tolerated that.

The formation of the Communist Ministry, headed by Comrade E.M.S. Namboodiripad, a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of India, was hailed with joy by workers and peasants all over the country. Democratic-minded people in all parties, including those in the Congress, welcomed it, hoping that the measures taken by the Kerala government would be emulated by other State Ministries and that the movement for democratic reforms would receive a powerful impetus.

The hopes reposed in the Kerala government by the masses were not belied. It did not lie within the power of the Ministry, circumscribed as it was by the provisions of the Indian Constitution and the general policies laid down by the Indian government, to introduce radical reforms such as immediate transfer of land to the tillers, nationalisation of the British-owned plantations and effective democratisation of the administrative apparatus. It was a government with limited powers. Nevertheless, right from the outset, the Namboodiripad government set about its tasks in a manner which left no doubt in one's mind that, unlike Congress governments, it was serious about implementing the pledges that it had given to the people during the election campaign.

Frankly placing before the people the difficulties and limitations under which it had to work, the Kerala government proclaimed that it could not build socialism in Kerala, nor even lay the basis for it, but would strive to carry out what the Congress Party itself had always declared but had not implemented. In other words, its effort would be to carry out those democratic reforms which the national movement as a whole had accepted as desirable and necessary. It sought the cooperation of every party and individual in the State for this task.

Space does not permit a detailed narration of what the Kerala government did in twenty-eight months. A few facts, however, can be mentioned.

The police in every State in India had won unenviable notoriety in British days for its oppressive and corrupt character. This tradition was continued by the Congress. Ever ready to come to the help of big capitalists and landlords, the Congress and Praja-Socialist governments had used the police to suppress struggles of the working class, peasants and other sections. The Namboodiripad government formulated a new police policy, granting full freedom to the masses to conduct peaceful action to win their legitimate demands.

The Kerala government passed the Minimum Wages Act for workers in eighteen factories and for agricultural workers. The Maternity Benefit Act made things better for women workers. The National and Festival Holidays Act provided for seven paid holidays, including May Day. Contract labour in road building and in some other industries which had been a source of corruption and ruthless exploitation was handed over to forty-two labour contract societies.

The government also helped the workers to secure higher wages. Wage increases ranging from 10 to 100 per cent were effected in the various industries. Practically all workers received annual bonuses and improved their conditions to some extent. The Agriculturists Debt Relief Act gave substantial relief to the peasantry, safeguarding them from the rapacity of money-lenders. A comprehensive Education Act raised the status of teachers and freed them from the arbitrary rule of corrupt and oppressive managers. Changes were made in taxation policy – putting as far as possible the main burden of taxation on the wealthier classes. Simultaneously work was begun on a plan for full and all-round utilisation of the water resources of the state.

The Kerala government, whose head, Namboodiripad, has been one of the foremost leaders of the Indian peasant movement, paid special attention to the basic problem of India—the land reform.

The contrast between words and deeds, ever a feature of the Congress Party, stood out sharp and clear in its attitude to the agrarian problem. As for the Communists they earnestly set about solving this vital issue. One of the first acts of the Kerala Ministry was to prohibit the eviction of peasants. In recent years, vast numbers of peasants in every state had been evicted from their land. The big landlords, fearing the distribution of their land under a possible agrarian reform, sought to keep it in their possession as 'self-cultivated' land by evicting the peasants. The Kerala government put an end to this arbitrary rule.

After intensive study and preparation the government worked out a comprehensive Agrarian Relations Bill, which, when implemented, would go a long way to free the peasantry from the evil of landlordism. This Bill was hailed by the peasants all over the country. These measures enabled the Kerala government to win increasing support among the workers, peasants and working intelligentsia. This was strikingly seen in the by-election that took place last year at Devicolam and in the results of the local elections. The masses all over the country began to look upon the Kerala government as

the champion of the working people. The demand was voiced that other state governments should do what Kerala was doing.

The reactionaries in Kerala—landlords, British plantation owners and big capitalists—resented these reforms. So did their political allies—the Congress Party, the Praja-Socialist Party and the Muslim League leaders. In the forefront of the opposition stood the Roman Catholic Bishops. The Catholic Church, which receives heavy subsidies from America, is a powerful force in the social, political and economic life of Kerala; it controls a large number of private schools and owns vast landed and other property.

In these conditions, every progressive measure of the Kerala government had to be carried out in the teeth of bitter resistance. The resistance grew in intensity with every measure. It became most fierce when the reactionaries realised that the government was determined to carry out the land reform. At no time during its existence was the government given any respite. Seizing upon every pretext, utilising every grievance of every section of the people, resorting to every tactic, the opposition forces tried to hamper its work, to foment struggle against it.

But alone they could achieve little. And so they sought the support of the all-India leaders of the Congress Party who controlled the Central government and the governments in the other thirteen states. In this, they were not disappointed. From the time of the formation of the Communist-led government of Kerala, some all-India Congress leaders, headed by the then Congress President, Mr. U.N. Dhebar, slandered the government and called for Central government intervention against it. They were directly aided by a number of ministers in the Central government, including Mr. Morarji Desai—the present Finance Minister.

It was argued by the supporters of big business that the existence of a Communist-led government in one part of India was a hindrance to aid from the USA. It should be mentioned that a few months after the second general elections in India, in September 1957, Mr. John Foster Dulles said at a press conference: 'Local election victories by Communists in India and Indonesia are a dangerous trend. It is a dangerous trend whenever Communists move towards political control.'

A few days after this and as though commenting on Mr. Dulles' observations, Mr. T.T. Krishnamachari, then Finance Minister of the government of India, said in the course of an interview to an American paper on the eve of his departure to Washington for American aid: 'We have to try to explain to them [Americans] that the battle in India is a battle against Communism too. We lost the state of Kerala to the Communists and one of the reasons behind it was that we could not spend enough money for development there'.

Not one of the top leaders of the Congress alleged at any time that the Kerala government was trying to carry out 'communist measures'. Not one of them dared assail any of the specific policies of the Kerala government. The hostility sprang from the fact that the Kerala government was serving the interest of the workers, peasants, working intelligentsia and the impact that this was having on other states—discrediting the Congress and giving impetus to the demand for democratic reforms. The reactionaries feared the

growth of the democratic movement and the strengthening position of the Communist Party of India. At a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee a Congress leader frankly stated that if the Kerala government was allowed to continue, the 'infection' would spread all over the country. Kerala also caused apprehension among the leaders of the Praja-Socialist Party because they realised that the continuation of the Communist-led government would swing increasing sections of the masses still under their influence towards the Communist Party.

All this led to a continuous and sustained campaign on an all-India scale against the Kerala government. This, however, was effectively countered by the work of the Kerala government and by the campaign carried out by the Communist Party in cooperation with democratic elements all over the country.

A year ago, in alliance with reactionary forces, the Congress and the Praja-Socialist Party in Kerala launched a campaign of violence and lawlessness, trying to provoke a crisis which would justify intervention by the Central government. The attempt failed, thanks to the support the Kerala government enjoyed among the people in the state and the all-India campaign conducted in defence of Kerala; but it revealed the gravity of the peril. Reviewing these and earlier developments, the National Council of the Communist Party of India which met in October 1958 stated in its resolution:

The danger and threat of the Central intervention are by no means gone. The Congress leaders know that the Kerala government is gaining in prestige and stature every day, while their chances of returning to power in that state through elections are fast receding. With the Congress governments becoming increasingly discredited and isolated in other states, they are afraid of the success and achievements of the Kerala government.

The offensive launched against the Kerala government in June this year and which culminated in its dismissal was, therefore, not unexpected. However, some features of this offensive merit attention.

First, it was launched at a time when the Kerala government had considerably strengthened its position among the masses, when it was about to implement a number of measures passed by the state assembly and aimed at substantially improving the conditions of the people. Most important of these was the Agrarian Relations Bill.

Second, the agitation this time was not begun by the political parties. Conscious that their earlier agitation had failed to secure mass backing, they turned for support to organisations which could work up religious, communal and caste passions and hysteria—the Catholic Church and the Nair Service Society. It were these organisations that spearheaded the agitation and behind them marched the Congress and the Praja Socialist Party, drawing into the combination the Muslim League.

Third, the agitators did not put forward any specific demand. Not daring to assail any specific policy of the Kerala government except certain

clauses of the Education Act on which they too were not united, they put forward only one demand—the Kerala government should resign.

Fourth, their open and declared tactic, publicised in the press, preached from the pulpit and at hundreds of meetings, was to paralyse the administration and on this basis secure Central intervention to overthrow the Ministry.

Fifth, open backing and active support was given to the agitation by the all-India leaders of the Congress. Significant in this respect was the role played by Mr. Nehru. Here was the open declaration by members of his own party in Kerala that they wanted to 'paralyse' the administration of the state. Judging by the attitude Mr. Nehru had taken in relation to the peaceful struggles of the workers and peasants in other states for modest demands, one would expect him to denounce the anti-government struggle in Kerala. Not merely did he not do so, but in his very first statement on the Kerala crisis, made on June 3, nine days before the launching of the struggle, he spoke of a 'considerable upsurge among large masses of people against the government of Kerala', which in his opinion was 'due to a feeling of distrust against the government that has grown in the course of the past many months'. From time to time, confronted with sharp criticism even from circles which generally support him, Nehru made half-hearted criticism of the tactics of his party functionaries in Kerala. But these were always hedged in with reservations which rendered them worse than useless and actually encouraged the lawlessness. As for most of the top leaders of the Congress, including Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter and the Congress President, their attitude was one of consistent hostility towards the Kerala government and full support for the opposition.

Armed with this support and plentifully supplied with funds* by vested interests in Kerala and by big business from other states as well as by the Catholic Church, working up religious hysteria, caste sentiments and communal passion, the Vimochan Samar Samiti (Liberation Struggle Committee) of Kerala, in close collaboration with the Congress, Praja-Socialist Party and Muslim League, on June 12 launched their 'direct action' against the Kerala Government. Managers of many private schools closed educational institutions. Attempts were made to close others by intimidation, physical assault on teachers and students and even burning of schools. Attempts were made to disrupt the State transport system by damaging buses and boats and by attacking passengers. In the name of peaceful picketing, organised raids were made on government offices. Several police stations were attacked. Landlords threatened to refrain from sowing crops and to bring about a state of starvation. Banks declared they would not subscribe to the development loans to be floated by the government. Big industrialists tried to hamper production. Terror was unloosed against citizens who supported the government and resented hooligan tactics.

Simultaneously efforts were made to incite the officials against the legally constituted government; Congress leaders hinted that officials who

* According to the leader of the 'liberation struggle', Mr. Mannathu Padmanabhan, 5 million rupees were spent.

obeyed the orders of the government would be punished when it was dismissed, and the Congress returned to power.

In this way the reactionaries sought to disrupt the economy of the state, sabotage education, prevent normal life and create a state of chaos. In order to overthrow the constitutionally elected government, violence and lawlessness were let loose, with the open connivance and support of the Congress leadership which never tires of preaching the virtues of non-violence, the necessity to adhere to constitutional and peaceful methods and the sanctity of the verdict of the ballot box.

All in all, this was a striking manifestation of the length to which the party of the bourgeoisie and landlords is ready to go and of their scant respect for their own principles whenever their class interests are threatened. Mr. Nehru would do well to ponder over the significance of the Kerala crisis and the behaviour of his party as well as his own behaviour in this crisis. If he does so, he will refrain from repeating his pet thesis that Marxism is out-moded.

In these circumstances the Kerala government behaved with admirable restraint and moderation. It used the minimum possible force. Throughout the violent opposition, the Preventive Detention Act, which proclaims that a citizen can be arrested and detained without trial by mere executive order, never was invoked, nor were meetings and processions banned—a striking contrast to what Congress governments do. The Kerala government, expressing its readiness at all stages to negotiate with the opposition, made repeated overtures. All these had no effect because the opposition did not want a settlement and counted on the support of the Central government. Successive statements by members of the Central Cabinet, above all, by Prime Minister Nehru, strengthened their hopes and created the impression that Central intervention against the Kerala government would be forthcoming in the event of the law and order situation becoming more acute.

No one should think, however, that the opposition forces in Kerala had an easy success. They had openly bragged that they would win 'within a week'. Actually, they failed to paralyse the government and Central intervention came full fifty days after the struggle had been launched. This was due to two factors—mass support for the government inside the state and the powerful rally of Indian democratic opinion in defence of Kerala.

The vast majority of the working class, agricultural labourers and toiling peasantry stood firmly by the government. The opposition call for a general strike on June 29 was a miserable fiasco. A big majority of teachers opposed the struggle. So did important sections of the intelligentsia. Vast meetings took place in Kerala opposing the school-closure movement, condemning the hooligan tactics of the opposition and calling upon the Congress and the PSP to break with avowedly communal and caste elements.

The campaign in defence of the Kerala government developed into one of the most powerful campaigns that India has ever known. Workers, peasants, teachers, students, office clerks demonstrated in tens of thousands all over the country. Among them were many supporters of the Congress and the PSP. The majority of the leading newspapers, which have never been

known to harbour friendly feelings towards the Communist Party, nevertheless, criticised Congress tactics in Kerala as fraught with grave danger to parliamentary democracy. Criticism was voiced by such eminent public men as Mr. Patanjali Shastri, the ex-Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, former Governor-General of India, Mr. Gadgil, the Governor of Punjab, and others.

Backed by growing mass support inside the State and helped by democratic opinion all over the country, the Kerala government frustrated the efforts of those who tried to paralyse the administration of the state. Each of their moves for six weeks ended in fiasco. Though successful in bringing much suffering upon the people of Kerala and damaging public property, they were unable to achieve their objective of paralysing the government. Nor did they succeed, despite all the efforts, in provoking clashes between their supporters and the masses supporting the government, which could give the Centre the pretext for intervention.

The struggle, instead of ending in short and swift victory, was dragging on—doomed to inevitable defeat. Then towards the end of July the leaders of the struggle, in collaboration with several members of the Congress leadership, worked out their new plan. They announced that a 'massive' march would be staged on Trivandrum, the state capital. Twenty-five thousand volunteers would 'besiege' the government secretariat, determined not to quit until they had overthrown the government. The purpose was to provoke clashes on a vast scale and enact a bloodbath in the capital.

Within four days of the announcement of the plan, the Union Cabinet met and decided to dismiss the Kerala Ministry, dissolve the State Legislature and impose President's rule on Kerala. No reason was assigned for this drastic action. The sequence of events leaves no one in doubt that the crisis was manufactured, in order to justify intervention.*

The National Council of the Communist Party of India, which met at Trivandrum on July 15 and 16, called for meetings and demonstrations all over the country on August 3, in defence of Kerala. After the dismissal of the government, August 3 became a day of countrywide protest against Central intervention. At least 30,000 people marched to the Parliament in Delhi, condemning the Central government's intervention, denouncing it as an attack on the working people and on democracy and praising the achievements of the Kerala Ministry. It was a demonstration the like of which the capital city had seldom seen.

The demonstrations were not confined to Delhi. Tens of thousands, including peasants who had walked all the way from villages, took part in them in every place, especially in every State capital. But what took place in

* Even before the struggle began we had anticipated the course that events might take. On June 3rd, after discussion in a joint meeting of the Kerala State Committee Secretariat and Central Executive Committee Secretariat, I wrote: 'The Congress Party in the state, with the blessing of the Congress High Command, supplied by funds subscribed by British planters, landlords and other vested interests and in alliance with P.S.P., R.S.P. and dark forces of reaction, is out to create disturbances and deliberately bring about a situation of chaos and lawlessness. The Central Government, led by the same Congress Party, they hope, will step in to dismiss the Ministry for its alleged failure to put down lawlessness'. What happened, therefore, did not surprise us.

Calcutta, the biggest city in India, was something unprecedented. An avalanche of humanity descended on the streets, forming a mighty stream stretching over five miles. This was the biggest procession in the city's history since Independence—about 100,000 took part in it. Earlier, a rally of 200,000 had been held, addressed by Jyoti Basu, the Secretary of the West Bengal State Committee of the Communist Party of India, and Indrajit Gupta, the working-class leader.

Commenting on the demonstration in Calcutta, the *Statesman*, organ of British big business in India and an outspoken opponent of the Communist Party, wrote on August 4: 'If number is any index, the procession organised by the Communist Party in Calcutta was a massive demonstration of the Party's strength'.

The participants in all these protest demonstrations, which included a large number of women, were workers, peasants, office employees, teachers, students and others. The indignation of the masses, therefore, which found expression in these protest actions was not confined to followers of the Communist Party. It affected the membership of all parties, including the Congress Party.

This was seen even in the meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party which took place on August 2, to hear Prime Minister Nehru's explanation as to why the Central government had intervened. 'Seldom has the Congress Parliamentary Party been in such a highly critical mood', said the New Delhi despatch of the *Hindu*, the most influential paper in South India and a supporter of the Congress, 'as this afternoon when Prime Minister Nehru addressed it'. Summing up the speeches made by a number of Congress members of the Indian Parliament, the despatch commented: 'The Prime Minister has never faced such a critical party meeting as he did today'.

It can be stated without fear of contradiction that no single issue during the last twelve years dominated the Indian scene as Kerala did in the past three months. Never was condemnation of the Congress so outspoken. Never did Prime Minister Nehru and his government come in for such criticism at the hands of their own supporters. And never did the people of India, the peasants, the working intelligentsia and democratic-minded people in general rally so powerfully as in the defence of Kerala.

The Kerala government has been removed, but it has been a magnificent battle, a battle which has raised the prestige of the Communist Party, which has exposed the democratic and constitutional pretensions of the ruling classes and inflicted a political-moral defeat on the Congress. It has taught the people of India a lesson they will never forget.

The dismissal of the Kerala government was an outrageous attack, in violation of the spirit of the Constitution, on the masses, on their democratic right to elect the government of their own choice and the right of that government to carry out its policies and measures consistent with the provisions of the Constitution. It was also an act of grave provocation against the Communist Party of India and the democratic forces.

Some members of the Central government had hoped that, blinded by anger, the Communist Party would resort to 'retaliatory' actions of a violent nature—thereby giving the pretext for repression. In this, they were

disappointed. The mighty but peaceful and disciplined protest actions that took place all over the country on August 3 were unmarred by a single violent incident.

Central intervention in Kerala was followed by numerous acts of violence by the 'liberation movement' volunteers, Congressmen and others against the offices of the Communist Party, Party cadres and people generally. Attempts were made to terrorise agricultural workers and evict them from their homesteads. These seemed to be part of a plan to keep up the tension and prevent free and fair elections at the end of President's rule. Also, efforts are being made by the reactionaries to bring pressure to modify the progressive measures introduced by the Communist-led government.

Undaunted by what has happened, with its mass base intact and its ranks more firmly united than ever before, the Kerala State Committee of the Communist Party issued a stirring call to the people to defend the gains of the past twenty-eight months. The Communist Party demands that the Agrarian Relations Bill, passed by the State's Legislature in June, immediately receive Presidential assent and be implemented. The other measures enacted by the Ministry such as the Education Act should not be modified. The Party has appealed to all sections in Kerala, irrespective of the attitude taken by them during the struggle, to ensure that the gains of the past twenty-eight months are upheld, for they serve the interests of all, except a handful of vested interests. In the days ahead the Party in Kerala will make strenuous efforts to see that the Catholic masses, many of whom were misled by their so-called leaders, become conscious of where their real interests lie.

In the grave and difficult conditions, our Party in Kerala, preparing for the forthcoming elections, is confident that once again the masses will demonstrate their support for the Party and the progressive forces with which it is allied.

The developments in Kerala were not an isolated event. They are the product of certain trends that have developed in Indian politics in recent years.

In 1947, when British power was forced to quit India, the Indian people hoped that now that freedom had been won after many years of struggle, suffering and sacrifice, rapid and effective steps would be taken to liquidate the heritages of imperialism, to eliminate the grip of British capital on our economy, to carry out basic agrarian reforms, to democratise the state apparatus and to ensure all-sided national advance. And they ardently believed that the Congress which had led the battle for freedom, which enjoyed a position of unrivalled prestige and authority and had now come to wield power, would lead them to carry out these new tasks—thus completing the national democratic revolution.

Since then many things have happened. The democratic movement has gone forward, achieving many new successes. India has won a proud and honoured place in the comity of nations by her independent foreign policy and her role in defence of peace. Certain sectors of national economy have grown, substantially aided by the agreements which India has made with the USSR and other socialist countries. There have been other changes

too. But it cannot be denied even by the staunchest supporters of the present Indian government that, by and large, the hopes and aspirations of the masses remain unfulfilled.

British capital still occupies a strong position in our economy. Despite a certain amount of curbing of landlordism, the condition of the vast mass of peasantry has registered practically no improvement, and even the half-hearted agrarian reforms have been and are being sabotaged. Unemployment has assumed alarming proportions. Despite official claims of 'record' food production this year, food prices have risen steeply. Recently, the rate of industrial growth has slowed down. Tax burdens on the common people have grown intolerable.

The contrast between the wealth of a handful of multimillionaire monopolists on the one hand and the vast majority of the people on the other has grown more glaring than ever.

Utilising the difficulties which our economy is facing and emboldened by the concessions made to them, extreme reactionaries who have powerful allies inside the Congress and in the government have launched a furious assault against the policy of extending the state sector of economy, against even the limited agrarian reforms, against state trading in foodgrains, and so on. Ardent advocates of 'free enterprise', and of 'aid' from America, these elements among whom are to be found the biggest monopolists of India, have been systematically striving to sabotage economic relations with the Socialist states and even demanding a 'modification' of India's foreign policy.

A phenomenon of grave significance is that, in vital respects, the Indian government itself is succumbing to the pressure of these extreme reactionary elements.

Inevitably, therefore, though the Congress remains immensely powerful, there has been growing disillusionment of the masses with the Congress. The Congress is torn with dissension and internal conflict. Had there been another powerful party of the bourgeoisie and landlords or a strong social-democratic party, the mass discontent could have been directed into 'safe' channels. Such, however, is not the situation in India. Except the Congress, there is no other strong bourgeois party yet in the country. As for the Praja-Socialist Party, which at one time hoped to become an 'alternative' to the Congress, it has lost heavily in prestige and influence—thanks to its utterly reactionary and anti-national stand on foreign policy, its sabotage of mass struggle and its opposition to a united front with the Communist Party.

The Party which is winning more and more support among the people in this situation is the Communist Party of India. This is the most important development in Indian politics since the attainment of freedom—growing realisation by the people of the need for basic reforms, growth of mass struggles in volume and intensity and the emergence of the Communist Party of India as the spearhead of the democratic movement. No wonder, therefore, that the extreme reactionaries and their allies who want to thwart national progress and democratic advance, are raising the bankrupt banner of anti-communism.

The victory of the Communist Party in Kerala elections and the formation of a Communist-led government there, itself a product of this

entire process, carried it forward still further. It gave the masses new courage and confidence. It created consternation among the imperialists, big British capitalists, Indian monopolists, landlords. Also it gave rise to fear among many of the top leaders of the Congress, especially its right wing, that even the limited democratic rights which the Indian people enjoy under the present Constitution may create serious difficulties for them.

Hence, the paradoxical spectacle that India witnessed recently—the resort by the Congress Party which rules the country to violent and illegal tactics in order to overthrow a legally formed government in one state of India, subversion of the Indian Constitution by the government of India itself, the use of the special powers of the President for a purpose which was not visualised when the Constitution was formed. In this sense, the Kerala crisis has a deeper import. It is a manifestation of the crisis which bourgeois democracy is facing in India. It confronts parliamentary institutions in our country with a grave peril. It gives a shattering blow to the illusion entertained by many people that the ruling circles in India, reared in so-called Gandhian traditions, will necessarily respect the verdict of the ballot box and that the path ahead is a path of smooth and continuous advance—free from crisis and sharp conflicts.

The attack on the Kerala government was spearheaded by the forces of extreme reaction—those who want to destroy what the democratic movement has achieved during the last twelve years and take the country backward. There can be no doubt that, emboldened by the successes they have won, they will intensify their attack on the toiling masses, on democratic rights and civil liberties, on parliamentary institutions, and even try to reverse our foreign policy. Ahead of us lies a critical period, a period of acute conflicts and sharp changes which would demand utmost vigilance.

At the same time the conclusion would be entirely defeatist and unwarranted that the triumph of reaction is inevitable. Far from it. The Kerala crisis has revealed not merely the length to which certain bourgeois circles would go in their attack on the people but also the tremendous volume of democratic opinion that exists in our country, the forces that are there which, if mobilised and united, can defeat reaction and frustrate its designs.

We have already referred, in this article, to the powerful democratic upsurge which grew in the whole country in opposition to Congress tactics and in defence of the Kerala government, an upsurge which prevented Central intervention for full fifty days. Hence the Communist Party has reiterated its decision, adopted at the Amritsar session of its Congress sixteen months ago, that it will continue its policy of peaceful methods, defend parliamentary institutions and democratic rights with all its might, and strive to unite for this purpose all the patriotic and progressive forces in the country, including the vast number of democrats in the Congress. Our Party is confident that the Indian people, who have achieved impressive successes in their struggle till now, will be able to defeat the new plans of reaction and take the road that will eventually lead to socialism.

Delhi, August 1959