

Bombay

"The Ernakulam Congress of the Communist Party (Marxist) has been a very delicate but deft operation on the part of the party leaders. The congress took place in the midst of much publicised forebodings about a further split in the party, jockeying for leadership and the impossibility of establishing a programmatic-ideological platform for the party's unity and cohesion. That the pressures within the party and in its periphery were quite formidable were self-evident considering the recent activities of extremists in Kerala which were an open challenge to the Marxist party's political as well as organisational positions."

This is how the weekly Link of Delhi (January 5) summed up the outcome of the CPI(M) congress, the second since its formation after the split in the Communist party of India (CPI) in 1964.

Link adds: "These pressures have been fairly effectively contained by the leadership and their expression in the Congress was found no more forceful than differences in a communist party would normally be. Finally the leadership had enough support even to drop some of the more intractable elements, like Jagjit Singh Lyallpuri, Sankaraiah, Upadhyaya and Dinkar Mehta, from the leadership body, the Central Committee."

The success of the leadership at the congress is ascribable to two developments. The Maoist "extremists" by the very logic of their positions engaged in adventurist actions before the congress met. The shrewder among them had earlier been counseling patience till the congress, so they could convert it into a platform for an effective struggle against the leadership.

They had hoped to manoeuvre things in such a way that it would result in a split in the party at a formal congress. They counted on such a split to provide an effective foundation for founding still another Maoist Communist party on their own factional platform.

But the "adventurist elements" forced the pace prematurely and counted themselves out both organisationally and politically, leaving the leadership in better command of the party. Of course, in the process the organisational strength of the party suffered a serious decline. Its membership dropped from 110,000 at the time of its formation to 75,000. "The organisation had thus become more manageable."

The other development was that the party leaders managed to patch up their differences for the time being. A serious tussle had appeared likely at one stage over the office of general secretary.

B.T. Ranadive, the chief party theoretician, is known to have been in the running for that position with the active support of Promode Das Gupta of West Bengal. But E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Jyoti Basu stood in the way. Even though Sundarayya had been assertive for sometime, he lost much of his strength after the debacle of the party unit in his home state of Andhra, where Nagi Reddy and his followers have revolted. Sundarayya was therefore acceptable as general secretary.

The real problem in this context was the question of attitude towards the Kerala ministry, which the party controls, and defence of its continuation in office.

Jyoti Basu, meanwhile, was concerned with the coming midterm poll in West Bengal and the supposed possibility of the United Front* returning to power in the state with the CPI(M) retaining its position as the largest group in it.

But a powerful trend existed within the leadership led by B.T. Ranadive which had no use for the ministries and CPI(M) participation in them. Sundarayya reportedly went along with this trend at one time but has switched his position and joined with E.M.S. Namboodiripad and Jyoti Basu in defence of the party's participation in ministries and, in particular, maintaining the Kerala ministry at all costs. His reelection as general secretary and the strong defence of the Kerala ministry and parliamentary struggle at the Ernakulam Congress, in fact, "represent a signal triumph for E.M.S. and Jyoti Basu."

The rejection of the amendment favoring an immediate split in the All-India Trade Union Congress because the pro-Moscow CPI exercises dominant influence in its leadership, is a parallel to this development. Ranadive is known to be "the inspirer of the split move though he thought it more discreet not to come into the open in the congress itself."

* The United Front government in West Bengal was dismissed by the central government in November 1967. It was a class-collaborationist alliance of "non-Congress" parties, including left-wing, bourgeois, and communalist political formations. It was dominated by the CPI(M).

It thus became the baby of only the staunch Maoist faction still within the CPI(M) and was lost by a heavy margin. If Ranadive had succeeded in pushing it through, it would not have squared with the more moderate political platform of the congress, which finally laid much emphasis on "Left and democratic unity," a slogan which had earlier been derided by the CPI(M) leaders.

The decisive defeat of the Maoist elements in the congress, however, came on basic political and ideological issues which found the entire leadership fully united. Two key amendments were submitted on the political resolutions -- one calling for unconditional loyalty to the Chinese ideological line (Mao's thought), and the other characterising the present Congress government of Mrs. Indira Gandhi at the centre as "the stooge of American imperialism."

Both these amendments were rejected. The ground for the rejection of the first amendment had been laid well in advance and it was doomed by the intemperate attacks that the Chinese Maoists have chosen to direct at the CPI(M) leadership.

But the rejection of the second is considered by the supporters of the Dangeite CPI* especially as "even more significant in the present situation of the party."

Leaving aside all the semantics of raging controversies within the international Stalinist movement which finally resulted in the split of the CPI, a prominent question has always been the characterisation of the Congress government.

"It is useful to recall," says

* The pro-Moscow Communist party led by old-line Stalinist S.A. Dange.

Link, which is known for its pro-Dange bias, "that the Founding Congress of the CP(M) had described the present Government as a lackey of American imperialism and this had been probably the most important line of demarcation between the two Communist parties. If the CP(M) leaders have now changed their opinion, as they have frankly done at the Ernakulam Congress, the essential reason for the split vanishes. The rejection of this amendment and the call for Left and democratic unity are thus the most significant basis for united action, if not immediate unity of the two parties."

The weekly adds: "It should now be expected that the fierce rivalry which was the principal feature of the relations between the two parties after the split will now begin to abate and their relations develop along a more friendly and cooperative basis not only in the coming midterm elections but also in the mass organisations and mass movements."

It is indeed excluded that the CP(M) or for that matter even the Dangeite CPI will opt for organisational unity in the near future. Besides the formal denunciation of the CPI as revisionist, particularly some of its leaders, which the CP(M) leaders have to keep up at least "for the sake of morale in their ranks," an organisational split once accomplished has left many scars. The fact that the Ernakulam Congress is claimed by the CP(M) as its eighth even though it is just the second after its birth suggests that it does not recognise the existence of the CPI.

But it is a matter of some significance that on the very morrow of the congress, A.K. Gopalan invited the CPI unit in Kerala to meet his Kerala Committee "to iron out differences by discussion and resolve the tension which has been sharp between the two parties in Kerala."