

## **Kerala's Ruling Parties Face Difficult Alternatives\***

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The short-sightedness and petty-mindedness of Right Communist leader M.N. Govindan Nair was clear on January 16 in the Kerala Assembly when, immediately after the vote on the CPI (Marxist) amendment to the Governor's address, he gave expression to his glee at the majority of 18 with which the amendment was defeated.

More amendments were on the order paper and the CPI (M) had made it clear that all these amendments would be pressed. Govindan Nair said that, since it was clear that all of them would be defeated, they might be spared the trouble of taking a poll on these amendments. This was naturally resented by the Opposition. The Speaker himself pulled up Govindan Nair, saying that such remarks were uncalled for during voting, since it was left to the members concerned whether or not to call for division.

### **Seeds Of Utter Defeat**

This however, concerns only the constitutional impropriety of a legislator belonging to the ruling party making disparaging remarks on the legitimate right of the Opposition to call for division. The Right Communist leader was, in fact, gloating over a "victory" which, it can be seen, contains the seeds of an utter defeat, as the Secretariat of the Kerala State Committee of the CPI(M) explained after the voting.

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Let us, for a moment, examine the figures of voting. The CPI(M) amendment was supported by 55, including the CPI(M) (49), SSP (4), KTP (1) and a former ISP member now independent (1). Against this were 73, including the five Syndicate and four Indira-group Congressmen. Simple arithmetic would show that deducting the nine Congress members, the Government got only 64 votes out of 128 votes recorded. In other words, even after 2½ months of high-powered propaganda, they could not get sufficient number of defectors from the CPI(M) and the SSP to make a clear majority without Congress support.

As if this was not enough, the leaders of the Syndicate as well as the Indira Congress made it clear in their speeches that the Right Communist Chief Minister should not take the support of their respective parties for granted.

Syndicate leader Dr. George Thomas was forthright in explaining why his party is extending its support to the Ministry. "We find," he said, "that Congress Chief Ministers from Pattom Thanu Pillai to R. Shankar were carrying out the same (Congress) programme as Achutha Menon is doing now." To which he significantly added that the political changes that had taken place in the State had made it necessary for a fresh appeal to the electorate.

The leader of the Indira Congress, Karunakaran, also said that his party was supporting this Government only because this Government was reversing the policies pursued by the former Marxist-led Government, and carrying out programmes which were acceptable to the Congress.

The speeches of these two Congress leaders were clear indications that their parties would support the Government only so long as and to the extent to which the Government acts as a tool in the hands of the Congress in its struggle against the radical political forces headed by the CPI(M). If at all the Right Communist Chief Minister and the colleagues have some rethinking and start trying to reforge the links with the CPI(M) and revive the old Marxist-led United Front, the nine Congress votes now

recorded in favour of the Government would turn against it.

### **Choice Before RSP**

On the other hand, one of the constituents of the 'mini-front', the RSP, made its own political stand clear in the course of the debate preceding the voting. Its leaders, Baby John and T.K. Diwakaran, used the opportunity of this debate once again to appeal to the CPI(M) to facilitate the revival of the U.F.

Diwakaran, who is the Leader of the House, and therefore should be considered to be speaking for the Government, took a step which is unusual for a Leader of the House. He "appealed both to the Opposition and the Government" to take a "constructive" attitude and develop relations of cooperation between the Opposition and the Government, justifying this with the plea that, as Leader of the House, it was his duty to reflect the feelings of the whole House, including the Opposition.

It was clear that, whether it was because of their own personal feeling of embarrassment at Congress support or because of pressure from their ranks, the RSP leaders were trying to dissociate themselves from the other constituents of the ruling front who were happy at the Syndicate-Indira (and possibly Kerala) Congress support.

This does not of course mean that the RSP for its part is having any rethinking on its role in the toppling of the former Marxist-led United Front Government. The RSP leaders repeated the time-worn slander against the the CPI(M) whose "big party bossism" was allegedly responsible for the disruption of the United Front. Even after the forthright statements of the leaders of the two Congress groups, Dr. George Thomas and Karunakaran, explaining why they cooperated with the 'mini-front' in toppling the previous Government, and why they were supporting the present Government, the RSP leaders do not regret their role in the toppling of the former Government. They also joined the Right Communist leaders, as well as their new allies of the three (Syndicate, Indira and Kerala) Congress groups, in

repeating the slander that the CPI(M) was unscrupulously throwing its cadres into the arena of an adventurist struggle.

There are, however, clear indications that the RSP would like to preserve what is left of its revolutionary image. Its leaders are not as happy as their Right Communist, Muslim League, and ISP colleagues that the Government which they have to support has necessarily to depend also on the support of the Syndicate and the Indira group. But they are on the horns of a dilemma: if they take the forthright stand that they cannot have anything to do with a Government which depends on Congress support, they would have to part company with their Right Communist and other allies of the 'mini-front' and join the CPI(M) and other radical forces in a determined struggle against the landlord-bourgeois vested interests entrenched in the Kerala Congress, Syndicate and Indira Congress. On the other hand, if they join the Right Communist and other friends in their unconcealed hostility to the CPI(M) and fully justify the present regime of police terror, they will lose their revolutionary image and a good section of their cadres. It is extremely difficult for them to choose one out of these two different alternatives.

### **Muslim League's Difficulties**

It is, however, not only the RSP that is facing a dilemma now. Every constituent of the 'mini-front' as well as all the Congress groups, are today so situated that they have to choose between difficult alternatives.

Let us take the Muslim League whose leaders thought that the anti-Marxist unity which culminated in the joint voting of October 3 and October 24 would be followed by the formation of an all-inclusive non-Marxist ministry. They never bargained for the split that has occurred within the Congress. Their hope, on the other hand, was to get a second version of the notorious anti-communist United Front of 1959-60. That hope lies shattered today. They have to choose between the Syndicate and the Indira Congress. If they choose the Syndicate, they have to part company with

the Right Communists, not to speak of the RSP. If, on the other hand, they choose the Indira group, they are choosing that Congress group which at least in Kerala is weaker. In any future election, therefore, they have to contend against a strong Syndicate (perhaps with the support of a part if not the whole of the Kerala Congress), as well as against a strong combination of radical forces headed by the CPI(M).

No less difficult is the choice facing the Kerala Congress. Left to themselves, its leaders would like to join hands with, if not completely merge into, the Syndicate Congress with whom they are ideologically at one. That would mean parting company with the Right Communists and the RSP and therefore, leaving the Ministry. Which will they choose?

### **Pitiable Plight of Revisionists**

The Right Communists are in the most pitiable condition. For, despite their loud denunciation of the Syndicate as the most reactionary political force in the country, they cannot survive the situation that will arise if the Syndicate in Kerala starts playing the role of a genuine opposition. The five member Syndicate group in the Kerala Legislature cannot be dismissed as an insignificant political force. For, it is well known that the Syndicate has its sympathizers outside its own five-member group of legislators. The moment the sympathizers of the Syndicate as well as the Syndicate group itself decide that the time has come to strike, they can well bring this Government down and challenge the Indira Congress-Right Communist alliance for a trial of strength in a fresh appeal to the electorate. A call for this has, in general, been given by the Syndicate. If this is made an irresistible demand and a fresh election is held, the Indira group-Muslim League-supported Right Communists face a fiasco as serious as, if not more than, what they suffered in 1965. Such an eventuality can be avoided only by the timely retracing of the step taken when they took the initiative in the forming of the 'mini-front' and joining hands with the Kerala Congress and Congress.

### **The Two Congress Groups**

No less pitiable is the condition of the Indira group Congress in Kerala. For, no amount of support which they render to the 'mini-front' Ministry would save it if and when the Syndicate and its sympathizers in other parties start moving along the path of toppling this Government. The fall of this Government would, in its turn, be a very big blow to the Indira group Congress, not only in Kerala but in the whole country. Its leaders are, therefore, fondly hoping that the boastful Right Communists, who have been promising an increasing number of defectors from the CPI(M) and SSP, would prove correct and the Government (in which they themselves would get a share in return for the share given to the Right Communists in the Bihar and U.P. Ministries formed by them) would have a comfortable majority without the support of the Syndicate or its sympathizers in other parties.

The Syndicate, too, has its worries. For, although its leaders show a brave face and challenge the 'mini-front' and Indira group for a trial of strength, they know that they cannot have any spectacular victory in a triangular contest. There is, on the other hand, a possibility that their most hated enemy, the CPI(M), would come out creditably. But what can they do? Join hands with the Indira group and the Right Communists? Can they tolerate the Indira Group and the Right Communists who happen to be their main enemy now?

### **ISP—Unhappy Partner**

There remains the ISP, a constituent of the 'mini-front'. They would certainly like to continue in the 'mini-front'—Kerala Congress coalition. They are, however, unhappy that within this coalition, they have to play second fiddle to the Right Communists who are today dominating the coalition. Voices have, in fact, been raised within the 'mini-front'-Kerala Congress coalition that they have been made to fall from the frying pan of Marxist domination to the fire of Right Communist domination. "There is at least some justification."

say some ISP leaders, “for the Marxists to try to dominate, since they, after all, are a big party. But what about the Right Communists? They have nothing and yet they want to dominate the coalition.” There are persistent reports that the two ministers (who are comparatively junior in the party hierarchy to the two former ministers, Kunhu and Kurup) are acting at the behest of the dominating Right Communists. This party, too, is thus facing a difficult choice.

One can only sympathize with the right Communist leader who does not see these aspects of the political reality inside the legislature and gloss over what the leader of the Syndicate Congress called the “technical majority” behind the Government headed by his party.