

Holding Red Flag, A Crime Under "Communist"—Led Government*

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The "Communist" led Government of Kerala has come out in its true colours. It has surpassed all previous administrations—the British, the Princely, the Congress—in its brutal suppression of political agitations by Opposition parties and economic struggles waged by the working people.

November 1969, the first month of the new "Communist"-led regime, witnessed the unprecedented lock-up tortures at Muthukulam in Alleppey district, where the coir workers are engaged in the struggle for the realisation of a modest increase in their wages and against the mechanization of coir-making. Their employers had tried their level best to break the morale of the fighting workers. As is usual in such struggles, they employed goondas to attack and terrorize the workers. When these tactics failed, they persuaded the Government to use its police machinery. A large number of Special Armed Police (SAP) were posted in the area in newly set-up camps.

Sap Misbehaves with Women

This became a source of continuous harassment not only to the fighting workers and their families, but also to the common people who are unconnected with the coir workers' struggles. A few incidents took place in which some SAP men behaved rudely and indecently to the woman passing along the village road, as well as at the local pond where woman were bathing. The owner of the adjoining tea-shop politely pointed out to them that such behaviour was unbecoming of decent men. This infuriated the

men concerned who seized the man, took him to the police outpost, and subjected him to inhuman tortures within the lock-up.

This, however, was not a solitary incident. Nor was the torture against him the worst. The most bestial torture was reserved for the local leader of the CPI(M), Comrade P.R. Vasu. A Communist of 25 years' standing, he is the most influential leader of the CPI(M) in the area and naturally was the leader of the fighting coir workers. He was also seized, taken to the police station and subjected to such inhuman tortures that I was reminded of the Nazi concentration camps—the site of which in one place, Sachsenhausen, with all instruments of torture preserved as a museum, I had occasion to see during my recent stay in the GDR.

Not A Drop of Tear Then

It was with deep personal sorrow as well as pride as a Communist that I listened to Comrade Vasu declare at a meeting organised in his village to receive him and other three comrades on their discharge from hospital:

"When they started torturing me, I had a moment's doubt whether I should retaliate. (If he had done it, a few of his torturers would have been maimed and incapacitated for life; so powerful is he in physique-E.M.S.N.) After a few moments' consideration, I decided, (rightly or wrongly, it is for you to decide now) that I should not resist but suffer the torture." After describing in detail how he was beaten up by two policemen standing on either side and kicked from the front by the Sub-Inspector of Police, "a boy young enough to be my son" and so on, he said:

"I suffered all this torture and, as becomes a true Communist, did not allow a drop of tear to fall out of my eyes. But, when a few days later in the hospital I read in the JANAYUGAM (the Right Communist daily, a report that I went to attack the police station, tears dropped out of my eyes. I remembered the days when, at the call of the then Secretary of the Communist Party, Sri Achutha Menon, I as the Local Committee secretary of the Party participated in the ONE-LAKH fund campaign for the JANAYUGAM. Our Local Committee could not fulfil the quota

through ordinary means and, therefore, organized a squad for collecting frogs which had good market in those days. Through this and other means we overfulfilled our quota and got a shield since our Committee had collected the maximum amount in the State. The very Achutha Menon who gave us the shield then is now the head of the Government whose police has tortured me like this. And the very JANAYUGAM for which we did this has put out such an atrociously false story against me. That was why the tears, which did not fall out of my eyes during the lock-up torture, did fall now."

Torture for Holding Red Flag

Comrade Vasu revealed that one of the questions with which he was tortured was, "Will you now stop holding the Red Flag with the hand?" Such a question for such tortures under a regime supposedly headed by a "Communist"!

Although one of the most brutal, the torture done to Comrade Vasu is not an isolated incident. Among the comrades from the same village, including the tea-shop owner referred to above, there was also Comrade Bhaskaran Vaidyar from the neighbouring village. His "Crime" was that he helped the agricultural labourers in his village in their struggles. One after another, representatives of mass organizations—coir workers, agricultural labourers, youth and students' organizations, women's organization and so on—went up the platform and garlanded the heroes who, through their ordeal, confirmed the eternal truth that real Communists may be beaten but will not bend.

Worst Lock-out Torture

On the following day, I had the same experience at Vaikkom in Kottayam district where a large crowd had collected to express their indignation against the brutal lathi-charges and lock up beatings indulged in by the police on December 1, the day fixed by the CPI(M) to protest against the continuance of a Ministry which does not enjoy the confidence of the Legislature, not to speak of the confidence of the people of the State. Here, too, as

Comrade K.K. Joseph revealed in his speech at the protest meeting, the police indulged in the worst form of lock-up torture. For hours together, the torture went on not only against those who picketed the Government offices on December 1, but also against those who went to see them in the police lock-up or in the hospital, those who sent them food and medicine, etc; among these latter are persons who are friends or relatives of the CPI (Marxist) comrades but themselves belong to such parties as the Congress, Kerala Congress and so on. Never in the history of Vaikom have people seen such bestial torture.

Rightists not to be Seen

The Right Communists who had played this despicable role in this tragic story have made themselves scarce. "They have gone underground" said one comrade, "and it will be a problem for us how to restrain our boys when these fellows come out. We would, however, do our best to educate our boys on the damage that will follow any provocative action."

As at Muthukulam, here, too, I found the comrades fully conscious that the only way to beat back the police and goonda attacks is to build up the organization. Show the class enemy that he cannot cow the common people down and, in the process, rouse the democratic consciousness of all good men and women. Strengthening the working people's struggles and drawing larger numbers of people into these struggles is the surest way of beating back the landlord-bourgeois regime masquerading under the cover of a "Communist"led Ministry.

Defeatism in Ranks of Ministerialists

Meanwhile, a sense of frustration and defeatism is gripping the ranks of the ministerialists. Gone are the days when the Right Communists were claiming that their Ministry do not require the support of the Congress, since they expected the support of the SSP as a party, and or a sizable number of defections from the CPI(M). Achutha Menon himself in his latest pronouncements does not claim the support of the SSP as a party. He concedes that this party is opposed to his Government. His claim is only that he

can expect one or two SSP MLAs to defect from their party and support him. As for the CPI(M), he does not claim a single MLA from our Party. And yet he claims he can continue to rule, since "it is not likely that the Congress will oppose my Government which is carrying out popular measures". In other words, he bases his Ministry on the 'benevolent neutrality' of the Congress whenever there is a division in the Legislature, with the mini-front Kerala Congress on one side and the Opposition including the CPI(M) on the other.