

Peaceful Transition to Communism -The Agenda of the First Elected Communist Ministry

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ABSTRACT: The proposition of the ‘Theory of Peaceful Transition to Communism’ was accepted as valid for the State by the Communist Party in Kerala. Sri. E.M.S. Namboothiripad incorporated the theory in a leaflet, “Communist Partiyepatti Pradhana Chodyangal” (The main questions concerning the Communist Party) written in 1957, for the use of the Communist Party cadres. The Communist Party in Kerala was in a position to draw upon the immense wealth of practical experience which the Communist Parties of East Central Europe, China, Korea and Indo-China had accumulated when they placed their countries on the road to Communism after winning parliamentary majorities in various ways. The general course of the Communist Government in Kerala was also influenced by international considerations. The Communist Party of India thought that if the communist regime in Kerala managed to maintain itself in power and coexist with the Federal Government, the reactionary elements in India had reconciled themselves not only to the advance of Communism in the world but also at time.

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I. INTRODUCTION

When the Communist Party of India assumed power through ballot in Kerala on April 5, 1957, many communist and non-communist theoreticians considered the event as a beginning of the world communist movement acquiring a large base on the soil of Indian sub-continent. In spite of the fact that the Communist Party of India won the base in this southern State in India peacefully, it was compared to Chinese Yenan. “Although the base had won peacefully, functionally it was comparable to Chinese Yenan, because it represented a focus of communist power from which its influence could radiate until it engulfed the whole nation.”

But this much of optimism was proved insane. If the single spark of revolution in Yenan spread over the entire mainland of China, the communist rule in Kerala totally discredited the party within a short span of 28 months. When the mass upsurge against the communist Government in Kerala reached its zenith, the President of India dismissed the Government on July 31st 1959, as per the Article 356 of the Indian Constitution.

Although almost all the leaders of the Communist Party criticized this action of the President, many leaders of the party had expressed anxiety at its very inception whether the communist Government in Kerala would enhance the prestige of the party or not. In fact, many leaders of the Communist Party in Kerala thought it would prove to be a setback to the communist movement in the state and all over India, because the Communist Ministry in Kerala would never be able to execute genuine communist policies on account of the Union Government’s towering power over the State. Sri. A.K Gopalan had expressed this fear well in advance. ‘I have a genuine feeling whether our Government in Kerala would enhance the prestige of the party within the state and outside, due to the particular features of the Constitution of India.’

CONTRADICTORY OPINIONS

Besides this anxiety, statements of many leaders on same events ran contradictory to each other. Sri. R. Sugathan, one of the founding fathers of the CPI in Kerala has cited an example of such kind of contradiction, when the Communist Ministry afforded pardon to many of the political prisoners in the State and the same decision was criticized by the media and the opposition parties. Sri. V.R Krishna Iyer the Minister of Law declared that prisoners in Kerala were given pardon as assign of joy felt by the rulers on account of the installation of the first people’s ministry in Kerala. In the same statement, the Law Minister denied the criticism that the prisoners were given pardon on behalf of the assumption of power of the Communist Party. But Sri A.K. Gopalan, one of the prominent leaders of the Communist Party in Kerala, declared in his statement on the same issue that if there was nothing contemptuous on congress Government’s policy of giving pardon to those political prisoners who were condemned for imprisonment on account of their terrorist activities in connection with the 1942 upsurge in India, the same rule applied to the action of the communist Government in Kerala and hence, there was nothing to be condemned in what the communist Government had done.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE OF THE UNION GOVERNMENT

However, the establishment of the communist rule in Kerala had its own significance. On October 14, 1957, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, speaking at a public meeting in Thiruvananthapuram described the establishment of the communist rule in Kerala as a great experiment. "I am happy that this great experiment, which is being made in your state, but to the country as a whole as an example of co-existence, of living and working together in spite of differences for the good of" The President's observation discloses that in the beginning, the Union Government had no enmity towards the Communist Government in Kerala. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was also sympathetic towards the communists. However, the Congress President Mr. U.N Debar and other Congress leaders did not relish the idea of a communist Government in any state of the country. It was Nehru's insistence that the CPI should be allowed to freely govern the state of Kerala that favoured the Communist Government in Kerala. The real motivations of Nehru for permitting the communists to form their government in Kerala are very clear. Of all the leaders of modern India, Sri.Jawaharlal Nehru alone was responsible for Indianising the communists to a great extent.It was his notion that if Communism engulfed the country the genius of the Indian people for the assimilation and modification of foreign ideologies and cults would assert itself and the process would mould the ideology of communism into an indigenous one. It was this sympathetic attitude of Nehru towards the Indian communists that made the CPI to announce relentless support to Nehru by 1956. However, in the 1957 General Election, the CPI changed its attitude towards Nehru and the same was the reason for the victory of the Communist Party in Kerala.

While pressing his colleagues in the Government and Congress Party to allow the Communist Party to assume power in Kerala, Nehru hoped that formidable responsibilities and burdens placed into the Communist Party and its leaders would discipline the Party and make it realize the difficulties which his own Government is facing at the all India level. But it is doubtful whether the communists had studied the lessons which Nehru wanted them to study.

PUBLIC OPINION AND MEDIA TURN AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT

The communist rule in Kerala was severely criticized by the media and general public of India that it associated to a unique case of systematic adaptation, conversion and exploitation of the institutions of Parliamentary Democracy for the purpose of its transformation into a special form of dictatorship of the proletariat, a "peoples' regime"

Commenting on the Communist Party's unwarranted intrusion into the administration of justice, 'Prabhatham' the Malayalam daily wrote in its editorial:

"The complaint that Government officials in Kerala have been systematically brought under the control of the Communist Party ever since the Party formed its Government in Kerala, is very popular. The unhealthy practice of the Communist Ministers and petty comrades who work with the inspiration of the ministers themselves have been open to wide criticism. Those who intrude into the day to day administration of the State and make it difficult for the public officials to administer justice evenly and without bias strangle democracy to death and pollute the public life in the country. The minimum expectation of the peoples of a democratic country is good government. To establish good administration, public officials must be permitted to discharge their duties impartially and without bias. Unnecessary interference in administration on the part of political parties and groups must be prevented. The Communist Government in Kerala has made no attempt to safeguard this fundamental principle. On the contrary, the Communist Government in Kerala has been deliberately pursuing a biased policy in the State by which a pattern of justice is applicable to the Communists, while another is applicable to non-Communists; to materialize this task, public officials have always been brought under the control of the Party. When a Government deliberately attempts to employ its authority to foster the interests of those in power, there may be many a public official incapable of systematically resisting such attempts. 'Come what may be; Let us abide by the orders whatever it may be', many a public official may be tempted to think in these lines. But, at the same time, here may be a few public officials who will not be prepared to dance in tune with the Party in power and its Government when they pursue injustice at the worst form. The Government of Kerala has been unusually transferring and demoting those public officials who belong to the category with a special animosity towards them. Even magistrates have been victimized. Many in Kerala have raised their fingers against such discriminatory actions on the part of the Government. Even the Prime Minister, Nehru has passed his comments on some instances of such discriminations. However, in spite of the criticism of many people ranging from the responsible Prime Minister of India to the layman in Kerala, the Government of E.M.S has not done anything to justify its mistakes. His Government has neither rectified the mistake nor come forward to preserve the precepts of democracy. The disciplinary actions and other discriminatory measures resorted to by the Communist Government against some public officials show that the Government has no respect for democracy and justice. The Government undertook everything to victimize those public officials who did not support the Communist Party during the organized terrorism of the Party in Munnar

tea Gardens in October 1958. The Government deputed the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Krishna Menon to reform the Police code, following the Munnar incidents.”

The remarks of another popular Malayalam Daily the ‘Deenabandhu’ on the Industrial Relations Bill introduced in the Assembly by the treasury bench also throws light on the systematic measures undertaken by the Party to convert the State into a red base in India. The Communist Government even made an organized attempt to adapt such cultural bodies as the Kerala Sahithya Academy into a partisan one for winning its political purposes. Such an attempt on the part of the Government and the party raised a lot of criticism.

“No one would be tempted to believe that such an august personality, Sri. K. P. Kesava Menon resigned the presidentship of the Kerala Sahithya Academy simply on account of the tussle regarding the issue of the appointment of an officer. The Minister for Education spoke in the Assembly explaining the resignation of Sri. K.P. Kesava Menon in such a way to make the impression that Mr.Kesava Menon does not know that the power of appointing, transferring or even dismissing an executive officer of the Academy rested with the govt. The Minister for Education has knack to evade the interest of the public in any issue by himself not mentioning the crucial issue while bluffing a lot on related matters; here too he has exhibited his tendency. In India, the democratic traditions endeavor to encourage library associations, cultural bodies and so on without being tied down to official rules and official frame work, yet with all the indirect inspiration to be afforded by the government. The communists have a peculiar notion that leadership everywhere must be vested with them. Democracy does not and must not envisage a Government octopus stretching its tentacles into as much length as they would and to seize every living being which can be seized It is only under the Communist regime that one can find utter contempt being showered on such an august personality as Sri.K. P Kesava Menon. Will the Minister for Education consider the appointments of an executive officer in an autonomous body without the consent of its President and Secretary an instance of respecting such an institution’s autonomy?”

GOVERNMENT GRATIFIES AUTONOMOUS BODIES

Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai, the author of ‘The Communist Rule in Kerala’ cites many other instances of the Communist Party and its Government grafting itself to autonomous bodies like the university, the library association, the ‘Kerala Sangeeta Nataka Academy’ and so on. According to him, the Kerala University Act of the Government was the first attempt to convert an autonomous body into one under the control of the Department of Education, thereby strangling to death the autonomous body, the ‘Grandasala Sangham’. Similarly, the ‘Sahithya Academy’ and the ‘Kerala Kala Mandalam’ were also brought under the control of the Government.

ESTABLISHMENT OF PARALLEL JUDICIARY

The worst feature of the communist rule in Kerala was, “establishment throughout Kerala, of a parallel peoples’ judiciary called ‘The Cell Courts’ under the sovereign authority of the Communist Party

The establishment of the ‘Cell Courts’ was interpreted as a calculated attempt on the part of the Communist Party to spread its tentacles over all walks of life of the peoples of Kerala. “The function of the Cell Courts was to watch and regulate all the programmes executed by the communist Government in different walks of life, challenging the bourgeois laws which had been existence in the state. In other words, the Cell Courts were set up for administering the communist laws and justice in the state against the conventional laws and justice administered by the state itself..... The peoples of Kerala who were terrorized by the Communist Party began its task of establishing its State within the State.”

“The manner in which the communist regime in Kerala began functioning immediately after its installation represented the attempts at implementing the third proposition of the ‘Theory of Peaceful Transition to Communism.’ The third proposition maintained that if the Communist Party, after securing a firm parliamentary majority organized a mass movement and led this into open class struggles, it would be possible to break the power of the opposition parties and then transform the entire governmental machinery into an instrument of people’s rule. The transformation would enable the party to introduce profound political, economic and social changes which, ultimately, would result in the establishment of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and secure the Party’s perpetual monopoly of power.”

THEORY OF PEACEFUL TRANSITION TO COMMUNISM

The proposition of the ‘Theory of Peaceful Transition to Communism’ was accepted as valid for the State by the Communist Party in Kerala. Sri. E.M.S. Namboothiripad incorporated the theory in a leaflet, “Communist Partiyepatti Pradhana Chodyangal” (The main questions concerning the Communist Party) written in 1957, for the use of the Communist Party cadres. The Communist Party in Kerala was in a position to draw upon the immense wealth of practical experience which the Communist Parties of East Central Europe, China, Korea and Indo-China had accumulated when they placed their countries on the road to Communism after winning parliamentary majorities in various ways.

The general course of the Communist Government in Kerala was also influenced by international considerations. The Communist Party of India thought that if the communist regime in Kerala managed to maintain itself in power and coexist with the Federal Government, the reactionary elements in India had reconciled themselves not only to the advance of Communism in the world but also at time.

The theoretical foundations of the techniques, which was described as 'The Kerala Pattern of Peaceful Transition to Communism' had been laid down long before their Party assumed power. Its main architect E.M.S Nambuthiripad started to reflect upon the model through which his party could initiate such a process after his return from Peking in the fall of 1956, where he attended the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of China. Nambuthiripad was captivated by the enormous wealth of concepts and practical experience which the Chinese had developed during their efforts at peaceful transition to Communism after the conquest of power. He summarized his impressions in three articles, which hinted that the hardcore of Chinese experience would be applicable in India in spite of the vastly different conditions obtaining in the two countries.

The central theme of the three articles of Sri. Nambuthiripad was the realization that the first stage of the process of peaceful transition takes place through the building up of State capitalism and private enterprise. During this stage no attempt is to be made at large scale nationalization. The second lesson was the awareness of the fact that in the second stage, the government itself, depending merely upon the adoption of legislation, would be hardly able to overcome the resistance of the classes to be dispossessed. Hence, the Communist Party has the necessity of organizing the working class and the peasantry into militant groups. Such groups would lead direct mass actions to materialize the legislative acts. During the open class struggle, the highly disciplined mass organisation of the Party would function as the main driving force materializing the programme of the Government.

Sri.E.M.S.Nambuthiripad's text book used in the Party School also developed the theory behind the Kerala Pattern of Peaceful Transition to Communism. In the text book, answering question No: 17 on the applicability of the Theory of Peaceful Transition in India, Sri. Nambuthiripad stated that although the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union had not specified in which ever countries the Peaceful Transition to Communism could be attained, the Indian communists could make an effort at implementing it. Sri.Nambuthiripad listed the main factors which would make the transition possible in India in the following manner.

1. The Congress Party in power in the majority of the States and at the centre must reduce the political power and economic privileges of the exploiting classes through the full use of existing parliamentary and other democratic means.
2. However, the legislative activities of the Government in order to destroy the exploiting classes would not be enough. Hence, masses must be mobilized and their organisations employed as effective instruments through which the legislative acts could be turned into reality.
3. The enactment of legislative measures relating to the transformation in the industrial and agricultural spheres is not enough. Therefore, such legislative measures must be implemented by committees of workers and farmers through direct action. In other words, the bureaucratic apparatus of the Government alone could not be permitted to carry out the transformation.
4. Yet another aspect of peaceful transition emphasized by Sri.Nambuthiripad was its insistence that the entire implementation of reforms by the organisations of workers and peasants must be followed by the effective participation of these organisations of the toiling masses in the work of public administration. He argued that such a step would bring about the thorough democratization of the entire administrative structure of the state.
5. The organisations of workers and peasants, Sri. Nambuthiripad declared, must be created at all levels within the municipal and state structures, ranging from the panchayats upto highest organs of state power i.e., the Parliament and Cabinet. The people's organisation must be given elaborate administrative and executive powers so that they could influence the working of the entire administration.

Sri.Nambuthiripad argued that the implementation of these measures would clear the way for Peaceful Transition to Communism in India even under the Congress Party's rule.

To allay the fear that their Government would be a regime of blood and terror, they emphasized that it would work within the framework of the Federal Constitution. On the other hand, they warned that under the mandate of that Constitution, profound social transformation would be initiated.

If the pronouncements of the Communist leaders of Kerala are analysed carefully, certain inferences about the theoretical foundations and tactical moves of the communist rule in Kerala can be made. Sri. M. N. Govindan Nair, the Secretary of the Communist Party in Kerala during the period of the communist rule in the State was the first prominent leader of the Party to draw the attention of the people towards the unfounded fear that the Communist Govt. in Kerala would be a regime of blood and terror. ".....We as the majority Party, expect to be called to form a government and we are confident of giving the people of Kerala a stable Government. Once we form a government we are not going to stage an upheaval the next day. What we mean to do is to function in the service of the people within the four corners of the present Constitution. There would be nothing in the nature of

the red revolution. The bogey of revolution, violently upsetting everything is not of our making, but of our opponents”

Further, Mr. Govindan Nair said that the Communist Party had contested the elections by popularizing its own programme which did not suggest that the Party would go against the Constitution. Citing a specimen of propaganda encountered by the Communist Party during the election campaign, Sri.Govindan Nair emphasized that the party would get rid of such fears generated amongst the people by the anti Communist agencies in the State.

Mr. Nair added that even the programme of land legislation proposed in the election manifesto would not go beyond the limits set on the agrarian reforms by the Planning Commission of the Union Government. When the newspaper correspondents asked Mr. Nair whether the Communist Government would start with the nationalization of the tea, rubber and other foreign owned plantation in the State, he declared that such a step would require consultations with the Union Government, and hence they would be implemented only after the consultations clearing the way. Commenting upon the relationship between the Congress Government at the centre and the communist regime in the State, Mr. GovindanNair said: ‘I once again repeat that in our views there is no insurmountable difficulty in having a Communist led Government in one state and a Congress Government at the centre’, and concluded the interview by pronouncing that the Communist Government would do nothing drastic.

In the editorial of the ‘New Age’ on March 21, 1957, the Communist Party of India made another emphatic assurance that the Communist Ministry in Kerala would work within the four corners of the Indian Constitution.

The resolution of the political bureau of the Communist Party of India also assured the people that the Communist Government in Kerala would function within the Indian Constitution.

In his article, ‘Challenge of Kerala’ Sri. M.N. Govindan Nair has made some observations on the theoretical foundations of the Kerala Pattern of Communism. Mr. Nair declared that the Communist Ministry in Kerala would make a sincere attempt at applying the theory of ‘Peaceful Transition to Communism’. It would be a new experiment and the party in Kerala was well prepared and theoretically armed to face all issues which would emerge after its practical application. The Communist Party of India had already adopted the theory of Peaceful Transition to Communism in India, “as a matter of principle, as the new general line in the new conditions” in the 4th Congress of the Party, in April 1956. In his article, Mr. Nair stated that the working of the Communist Ministry would have a profound effect upon the rest of India. By mobilizing forces struggling for Socialism and enabling them to realize the potency of Socialism and by creating conditions throughout India for a peaceful transition to socialism, Mr. Nair found the Communist Ministry in Kerala influencing the rest of India. At the same time, Mr. Govindan Nair emphasized that the Communist Ministry in Kerala would not mount a programme of a very radical social change. The election manifesto of the Party had clearly said that what it wanted was the alleviation of the misery of the working class and to implement such agrarian reforms as would be in accord with the constitution and adopt measures to democratize public administration. However, such a limited programme did not mean that the Party would make no attempt at initiating the process of peaceful transition.

“...the more important and basic problem will, however, be the advance towards Socialism. To this problem there can be no readymade or stereotype answers. This is a new problem, a new experiment, not for the Communist Movement in India but for the entire world.... But what is important is that the realization should grow that such a problem exists and that its solution is as important, if not more, as running an efficient administration. Indeed the two things cannot be separated from each other in a mechanical fashion.

Sri. Nair in the same article, attacked the critics of the Communist Party by appraising them of the fact that the Party had adopted the theory of Peaceful Transition as the general policy long before the Party assumed power in Kerala.

However, he declared that the adoption of this policy line did not mean that the communists abandoned their ultimate objective of establishing Communism in India through revolution. He emphasized that the Communist Ministry in Kerala would merely work for the establishment of Socialism in the State. The ultimate aim of the Party would remain to be the establishment of Communism in India by a revolution. Mr. Nair made a clean exposition of the theory of Peaceful Transition for the grasp of the enemies of Communism.

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