

India

KERALA ELECTION SHOWS SHARP POLARIZATION OF FORCES

by HIMOO KALANI

So the die is cast. The dust and fury of the months preceding the election in Kerala have subsided, even if temporarily. The post-election party alignments in this problem state have now emerged clearly. To understand the political situation in Kerala today as well as to anticipate its possible future orientation, one must attempt an objective analysis of the election results, leaving aside one's political sympathies and antipathies for the time being.

One thing about the Kerala election that strikes us at the very outset is the normally high level of polling. About 80-90 percent voters participated in this poll.

Of the 126 seats of which the new Kerala Legislature will be composed, the CP has gained, together with its "independent" allies, only 29 seats, the United Democratic Front, comprising the Congress, Praja Socialist Party and the Muslim League, has obtained a crushing majority of 94 seats (Congress, 63; PSP, 20; Muslim League, 11). The other 3 seats were shared each by the Revolutionary Socialist Party, the Karnatic Samity and an unaffiliated independent. The following table shows the votes received by the major parties in the 1957 and in the 1960 elections:

TABLE I

Total votes polled (1960)						8,200,000
Total votes polled (1957)						5,900,000
	Congress	PSP	ML	Combined C-PSP-ML	% votes polled	C % votes polled
1960:	2,791,294	1,146,029	399,928	4,337,251	52.8	3,550,136 (43.3%)
1957:	2,209,251	528,261	205,698	3,043,210	51.5	2,308,408 (39 %)

It appears from the above table the CP and its UDF opponents got 96% of the total votes polled and 123 seats out of 126. The other parties were virtually wiped out. The whole population of Kerala seems to have divided into two camps, supporters of the CP on the one hand and their bitterest opponents on the other hand, thus showing a sharp polarization of forces.

In this election the CP and CP-supported Independents contested 125 seats, lost 96 of them and gained only 29. (In the old Assembly they commanded 65 seats) Even if we add to it the 11 seats which the CP lost by a margin of less than 1000 votes the number of CP controlled seats could not exceed 40; for an absolute majority they would still require 24 more seats in a House of 126. How can the CP explain the loss of so many seats by such a large margin (ie more than 1000 votes)? Besides their political prestige has slumped heavily due to the defeat of 7 ministers of the old ministry; only 4 Ministers, including Premier E M S Namboodiripad, could manage to get elected.

The Riddle of Increased CP votes

Political observers have already noticed an apparently paradoxical phenomena evident in this election. Although the CP's performance has been very poor so far as the gaining of seats is concerned, they have succeeded in getting not only 12 lakhs of more votes in this election (compared to 1957 election) but have actually improved their relative position vis-a-vis the UDF parties. An examination of Table I would clearly show this. While the Congress — PSP — ML votes recorded an increase of only 1.3%, the CP votes rose by 4.3%. How to explain these two apparently contradictory facts?

One explanation immediately offers itself. Compared to the 1957 election, there has been a sharp increase in the number of straight contests in this election, due to the UDF alliance. The CP lost much of the advantage it enjoyed last time due to the splitting of the non-CP votes. (See Table II)

The fact that the CP had to face straight contests in 42 more seats than the last time certainly contributed substantially to its defeat. Even so, the assumption of some of the Newspaper Correspondents, visiting Kerala during the election, that the CP's defeat has been mainly due to this factor, appears to provide an oversimplified explanation of a much more complicated situation.

The above assumption may be contested on two very important grounds: First, it may be held that the increase in CP votes is partly explainable by the fact that the CP contested 125 seats in 1960, compared to 100 seats in 1957. Thus, the increased vote may very well indicate an actual recording of the potential CP sympathisers of 1957, and not a real increase of new adherents.

Secondly, if the CP has lost mainly because of the combination of all the opposition votes, then how to explain the loss of 18 seats (out of 34) which the CP won in 1957 by absolute majority. Another significant fact to be noted in this connection is the drastic reduction in the margin of votes, even where the CP candidates have won, except certain isolated areas like Palghat and Calicut. Some notable examples will illustrate this point. Five of the defeated CP ministers lost their seats which they held last time by absolute majority, while the Revenue Minister Mrs K R Gouri, although returned, had her margin of votes reduced by half in 1960. All the above facts testify to a serious loss of CP's influence among a substantial section of the Kerala people, even in areas that were once CP strongholds, such as Quilon, Alleppey and Trichur. The last two columns in Table III amply bear this out. They show the increase in the total votes and increase in CP votes, only for those seats which the CP contested both in the 1957 and the 1960 elections. It clearly demonstrates that the increased polling benefited everywhere the anti-CP forces; only in Palghat and Calicut the majority of the increased votes went to the CP.

The following table, which shows district-wise election results, gives a deeper insight into the situation, indicating how the CP lost and the PDF reaction gained in the different districts.

TABLE II

	Number of Contestants for a single seat		
	2	3	More than 3
1960:	63	34	9
1957:	21	58	35

One significant feature of this election is the universal defeat of the CP candidates in all the urban centres ie in all the district headquarter towns of the above 9 districts as well as in 4 other important towns — Changanacherry, Mattancherry, Fort Cochin and Tellicherry. The relatively higher level of political activity among the urban people which generally operates in favor of the leftists and against the Congress in other parts of India, is here found to operate against the CP. In Quilon where there are many cashew nut factories and mineral industries and in Alleppey which is an industrial area, possessing numerous coir factories, the CP has suffered major reverses. In Alleppey, they lost 3 seats, including one held by the labor minister T V Thomas. This reflects undoubtedly the popular verdict on the anti-labor policies of the CP ministry. Comparatively, they have gained greater votes in rural areas.

This is partly due to the selfish political thinking of the rural people and may be partly due to some of the progressive features of the Agrarian Bill and other land reforms enacted by them.

Brightest spot

The brightest spot in CP's election record is provided by that CP bastion — Palghat. Although even in this district, they have suffered a net loss of one seat (losing 2 old seats and gaining a new one) their percentage of votes has increased enormously from 45% of total votes to 54%, an absolute majority in the district as a whole. (See also Table III, last 2 columns.)

Thus, when we consider all the relevant facts, mentioned above, we come nearer to solving the riddle of CP's utter defeat in the election, matched by a higher percentage of votes. This is due mainly to two factors: contesting of more seats (25% more) and intensive working of certain areas, mostly rural, as in Palghat, side by side with a uniform activity maintained throughout the state, as reflected in higher CP votes almost everywhere within the State. The 1960 election has definitely proved CP to be, still, the strongest party in the State, taken singly. In the 1951-52 election, the Congress and the PSP got 35.5% and 14.3% votes respectively; in 1960, the votes are again 34.2% and 14%. In the meantime the CP votes have steadily increased from 23% to 43%. These figures sufficiently speak for themselves.

Why Reaction Triumphed?

The Kerala election came as a sequel to the so called "Liberation Struggle" unleashed last July by the reactionary leadership of Congress, the Communal Nair Service Society and the Muslim League, the Catholic Church and the opportunist PSP. During this election, this alliance became more consolidated. All the reactionary forces and

vested interest groups in Kerala and outside combined together in a determined move to rout out the CP from the soil of Kerala. Unlimited resources — financial, organisational and political — were mobilised to save "democracy" against "communism." Against such formidable odds, the CP's organisational performance is quite impressive.

But it could have been much better, had not the CP ministry antagonized the masses by its criminal pro-planter and anti-working class policy. Even in regard to the last July movement, they should have followed a dual policy, displaying an attitude of understanding and conciliation towards the masses engaged in the movement and a stern attitude towards the reactionary leaders of that movement. What the CP ministry did was exactly the reverse. Motivated by cowardice, they adopted the softest attitude towards their leaders for fear of incurring the displeasure of their mentor, the Nehru Government, while in relation to the masses themselves who responded to the call of these very leaders they gave a free hand to the trigger happy police, knowing fully well that the Nehru Government itself being a party to indiscriminate outrages against the people all over India, would not take any exception to it.

It is particularly noteworthy that the constituencies where the CP suffered worst defeats are precisely the places that witnessed the most brutal police atrocities against the people. (See Table III). Thus in Trivandrum where in last July, two CP ministers were defeated and the party could retain only 2 seats out of 8. Similar is the case with the labor dominated districts of Alleppey and Quilon. In Ernakulam a few persons died owing to firing during the July movement and look at the election result there. In Trichur which was once a CP-stronghold, 2 ministers were defeated and only 1 seat was retained out of 8. The lessons of all this are obvious for the CP ranks.

TABLE III

District	No. of seats	Congress		P S P		M L		C P		Increase in Votes	
		1957	1960	1957	1960	1957	1960	1957	1960	Total	C P votes
Trivandrum	12	1	2	3	7	x	x	8	2	189,589	91,663
Quilon	14	4	6	x	3	x	x	10	4	192,907	76,614
Alleppey	14	5	8	x	x	x	x	9	6	159,624	55,011
Kottayam	13	9	10	1	1	x	x	3	2	229,705	62,102
Ernakulam	14	9	13	x	x	x	x	5	1	180,238	73,039
Trichur	12	3	9	1	2	x	x	8	1	203,120	57,161
Palghat	15	3	2	x	x	1	3	11	10	256,350	161,838
Calicut	20	8	7	2	4	7	8	3	1	212,812	133,113
Cannanore	12	1	6	2	3	x	x	8	2	214,283	88,422

