

radicals in the other seats. The lone adventure by Marxists is likely to cost them a number of seats. From their original strength of nine in the dissolved Lok Sabha, it is sure to come down to five seats at best and one seat, namely Palghat, at worst.

The election scene was beclouded by the most massive-ever strike by government servants and teachers, numbering over three and a half lakhs. The strike was complete. The NGOs had no popular sympathy or support. No political party has succeeded in ridding the NGOs of arrogance and indifference to the public, which are the legacy of a colonial regime. If the strikers are confined to Marxist following it would come in handy for their political opponents to wean away considerable public sympathy and support from the Marxists.

Tripura ✓

## The Naxalite Challenge

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

AT a time when the ruling Congress in Tripura was going to settle itself comfortably in power after a major shake-up of the party, the emergence of the CPI(ML) on the scene has considerably damaged the prospect. It was all peaceful and the left political parties, the CPM being the major one, continued to wallow in the peace, waiting for some miracle overnight. The 'economic struggle' the Government employees launched from time to time with the avowed goal of transforming it into an intense 'political struggle' all flopped, in that it only served to alienate them from the extremely exploited peasantry who should have been their major partner in a State like Tripura where feudalism still dominates in its archetypal form. With the peasantry left in a state of frustration, the ruling Congress did not have to take much pains to deceive them into believing that their lot could have been changed radically but for the 'greedy' Government em-

ployees 'who are out to stomach the entire wealth of the State'. With a view to dividing and crushing the employees' unions, which happened to be the mainstay of the CPM, the ruling Congress at the same time also created a privileged section among them. And as the ruling Congress began to find the sailing somewhat smooth, the CPI(ML) appeared on the scene to disturb this apparent stability. Much to their discomfort, both the ruling Congress and the left political parties now find themselves on a common platform in their resolve to crush the Naxalites.

The CPI(ML)'s appearance nearly two years ago was greeted by the political pundits with derision, while some other anti-Naxalite forces pretended not to recognise it as a political force. And the 'progressive' section of the local press satisfied itself by calling it by various vulgar names. It did not occur to them at that time that however hard they might try to denigrate the Naxalites in the public eye, they would soon break the ice.

At the initial stage the ruling Congress thought it prudent to see the Naxalites through the eyes of the 'leftists' and rest content with their efforts to outcast them. But soon it appeared that the Naxalites were not harmless guys just out for an adventure on the fringe. They started to penetrate into the interior of the State in the face of heavy odds peculiar to Tripura and began to achieve considerable success in influencing the tribals within a relatively very short period. This was by all accounts a very difficult task, especially when the ruling Congress had driven a wedge between the tribal and non-tribal peasants with the heavy exodus of poor peasants from East Pakistan, leaving them at loggerheads with each other. Also the time soon came when it became almost impossible even for the CPM to rise above this divisive tactic, as it was the votes of the people that counted most. It must be said to the credit of the CPI(ML) cadres that when it was so difficult to activate both the tribal and non-tribal peasants on the basis of a common programme, they were able to

restore their confidence. The tribal peasants of Tripura, who were till the other day very much lacking in initiative and had always looked upon the non-tribals with suspicion for understandable reasons, have now found in the CPI (ML) cadres some friends who could be relied upon. The tribal peasants rose in revolt at Maharani, a village under Udaipur sub-division, in December 1969 and killed Elfus, the most notorious tribal jotedar of that locality. This action on the part of the peasant guerillas organised by the CPI (ML) was considered by it as a major breakthrough in the history of the peasant movement in Tripura since 1950.

Immediately after this incident the Government of Tripura sent police and CRP forces to Maharani with permission to go on a spree of killing and torturing the starving peasants. But the fact remains that the police and CRP forces have hardly been able to put down the movement and prevent the poor peasants from rising in revolt elsewhere in Tripura. The Maharani incident rather accelerated the process of activating the peasants against the new feudal lords and their lackeys. Today the peasants in Tripura are extremely restive and determined to shake off their age-old docility which the other political parties have so far exploited to serve their own self-perpetuating cliques.

The CPI (ML) has drawn most of its activists from among the students. With this the general trend of student activism can be said to have radically changed. Student activism which was so long confined to conducting and contesting college elections under different party banners in isolation from the masses has now been canalised into a positive direction. People who were used to seeing students indulging in certain acts in the name of politics without any serious political and organisational outlook today watch them doing hard work with a sense of dedication to the cause of the people, sacrificing their careers and risking their lives. As a matter of fact, they have today stepped into the political vacuum created by others on the so-called leftist front. They are growing in-

creasingly sophisticated and getting embedded in the masses, constituting the main force for spreading Naxalite politics. Despite severe police repression, they are trying to keep telling people of the rationale behind their every action. This new development on the student front has baffled the Government of Tripura. Two years ago nobody could have imagined the direction of student activism.

If there is now anything left for the Government of Tripura to bother about, it is the growing CPI (ML) activities in the State. So it has unleashed massive repression on the Naxalites. Many have already been arrested, tortured and maimed inside police lock-ups. They are rotting in jails with no near possibility of ever being brought to courts for 'trial'. The prominent among them are being slow-poisoned to death behind the bars. The search for Maoist literature is going on in full swing and almost every day scores of houses are being raided by the police. But very little of all that is happening comes to light because there is a conspiracy of silence on the part of the local press, a section of which claims itself to be progressive. The Government is very carefully seeing to it that every news about the Naxalites is suppressed.

What has been the role of the CPM in the face of the CPI (ML) activities in Tripura? As the Lok Sabha election is drawing nearer, the CPM has started a virulent campaign against the Naxalites calling them the 'hirelings' of the ruling Congress. Does it not know how these 'hirelings' are being treated by the ruling Congress? It was the CPM in Tripura which once paid warm tribute to the Naxalite cadres for their capacity to withstand the heavy odds against which one has to work among the peasants in the interior of Tripura. What has now prompted the CPM to be so unkind to them? Is it because the peasants have started losing their faith in the CPM and are coming to rely more on the CPI (ML)? Curiously enough, after Elfus, the tyrant jotedar of Maharani, was killed by the peasant guerillas, he came to be covertly publicised by the CPM as a good man. It is no longer a

secret that wherever the Naxalites have stepped up their activities among the peasants, the jotedars and mahajans are sneaking into the CPM fold because they do not feel secure under the Government protection alone.

In the meantime, Mr Sachindra Lal Singh, the Chief Minister, has been out on educating the masses in certain social truths. 'Langal jaar jami taar' (land belongs to the tiller), 'Jaal jaar machh taar' (fish belong to the fisherman), 'Shramik-i Jatiya Sampader Malik' (workers are the owners of national wealth) and so on are the slogans—whichever suits the occasion—he has started mouthing these days. Lest others misunderstand that he is advocating 'dictatorship of the proletariat' in the tradition of the communists, he is at the same time careful enough to remind people that it is only Mahatma Gandhi 'who has taught the world how to achieve these social objectives.' All these slogans are intended to distract the people's attention from the growing Naxalite activities in the State.

## Tamil Nadu

### Iconoclasm : Substance And Style

M S P

THERE is something pathetic as well as tragic about the persistence with which the old warhorse of Erode still goes about defying all established values. One cannot help admiring the doggedness with which he has carried on his fight against 'superstition' of every sort. The latest of his cultural revolutionary gestures: a procession of Hindu gods, with the cutout of Rama at the head, being 'beaten with chappals'. Could there be anything more outrageous to the orthodox Hindu mind?

Even though the South takes pride in distinguishing its Dravidian heritage from Aryanism, the people (particularly the upper castes) are by and large even more fanatically 'religious' than their counterparts in the heart-