

## E. M. S. Namboodiripad Answers The 'Washington Post'\*

Recently Bernard Nossiter of the *Washington Post* posed the following questions for reply to Kerala Chief Minister E. M. S. Namboodiripad:

1. What has the United Front accomplished in its nine months in office?

2. Can your Government, divided among different parties and confronting divisions within these parties, carry out a legislative programme?

3. What has happened to your policy of industrializing Kerala? Has it been inhibited by the divisions within your own Party and the differences between parties in the United Front?

4. How much importance do you attach to the ultra-left in the Communist Party (Marxist)? What is your reply to their insistence that United Front Ministers resign unless they can bring about "progressive" policies?

5. What is the purpose of your party's Volunteer Group? Why do you feel the need of a defence force that operates independently of the police?

E. M. S. in his reply first set out the limitations under which a State Government functions in Indian conditions—where, added to the formal provisions in the written Constitution, the Centre has in the last seventeen years taken far greater powers than given to it under the Constitution. All

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the seven parties in the Kerala United Front had recognized these limitations and specifically mentioned them in the Joint Policy Statement with which they went to the electorate. Obviously such a Government cannot do much to solve the vital problems affecting the lives of the people.

Yet, the United Front formed the Government, said E. M. S., because first, "being in office in a few States, we can effectively fight for changes in the policies pursued by the Central Government." Institutions like the periodical conferences of the Central and States Ministers dealing with different departments, Chief Ministers' Conferences for discussion of general problems, the National Development Council for dealing with the problems of planning, etc. can be used for placing before the nation alternate policies which can further help the process of nationwide discussion on the vital problems facing the country. These Governments, therefore, are effective instruments in the countrywide struggle against Congress policies and for alternate policies acceptable to the non-Congress opposition forces.

### **Limited Assistance**

Secondly, continued E. M. S., despite the limitations described above, the State Government can do small things by way of giving partial relief to the people. While this will not lead to any radical improvement in the life of the people, it can certainly give them limited assistance. At least the intensity of the attacks launched by the landlord-capitalist classes against working people can be minimized. "Even here, it should be emphasized, we come up against various obstacles arising out of those provisions of the Constitution, the rules and regulations framed by the Central Government and the interpretations of the law made by the Supreme and High Courts all of them heavily weighted against the working people and in favour of the landlord-capitalist classes. But at least some of these obstacles can be removed by an ever vigilant leadership of the coalition Ministry. To that extent, the emergence of this Ministry is a gain to the working people."

In assessing against this background the accomplishments or otherwise of the U.F. Government during the nearly ten months of its existence, the question, according to E. M. S., is not whether our people have made big gains after the Ministry was formed but whether it has succeeded in the two-fold objective of the United Front of seven parties.

Looked at from this point of view, E. M. S., said, he can record with satisfaction that "we have tried to solve our major problems of food, industrialization and general economic development. With regard to every one of these questions, we have tried to improve the working of the internal administration of the State while concentrating our minds to the improvement of the policies and practices of the Central Government.

"This is not to say that there has been any perceptible improvement in the living conditions of the people of the State. People today have, on the contrary, even less food (and that at higher cost) than ten months ago. The problem of unemployment and lack of all-round economic development has also become worse during the last ten months. But, despite all difficulties which they are facing, our people are still giving us their general support precisely because they find that we are doing our best and that it is the Centre's policies that are preventing any worth while measure of improving their living conditions.

The question of food, for instance. The machinery for internal procurement has been improved. For the first crop of this year the target was 50,000 tonnes and it was exceeded by 4,000 tonnes. This is about 25 per cent more than the procurement for the same crop last year. This is all the more creditable in view of the fact that while, during the last year every cultivator with more than one acre was asked to deliver to the Government, this year the cultivators below two acres were exempted from the levy. In other words, 25 per cent more is procured from a much smaller number of people than last year.

Despite this the Government is in a worse position than

last year both with regard to supplies as well as in the matter of prices. Rice ration, which had consistently stood at the level of six ounces per adult unit per day during the last year, had to be cut to three ounces during the last six months. This cut in supply has naturally raised the level of prices in the open market, which have during the last six months, remained two times and even more than last year.

### **Centre Dishonours Commitment**

The reason for such reduced supply at higher prices lies in the failure of the Central Government to honour its commitment to supply the State with 75,000 tonnes of rice every month. Supplies this year have been uniformly bad, the monthly average for the last six months being less than 40,000 tonnes. The very reduced ration of three ounces per adult unit per day could be maintained only because internal procurement was better and its result available during those very months in which external supplies reached the rockbottom of between 20,000 and 30,000 tonnes.

“It is out of this bitter experience” said E. M. S., “that we go to the Centre with the demand that they should honour their commitment to us, supply us with 75,000 tonnes of rice every month. We tell them that this is not an impossible task if only they see to it that every State raises the level of its internal procurement to what we have done. It is because the other State Governments, particularly those of surplus States, refuse to adopt the system of internal procurement that the Centre finds it in short supply. We, therefore, asked the Central Government to have a national food policy, based on procurement from the big landlords and rich peasants, both as a matter of assistance to this State as well as in the interests of the country as a whole. If the Centre fails in this task and consequently it is unable to honour its commitment of supply to us, we ask them to allow us directly to purchase from surplus States as well as to import from abroad even if it means paying higher prices. We can well afford to do so if only the Centre makes available to us what we ourselves

earn out of the cash crops that we raise here and sell outside.

“We are thus combining the improvement of the machinery of internal procurement with pressure on the Centre for necessary changes in its policies.”

The same applies to the other basic problem of employment and the programme of industrialization through which alone this problem can be solved. Industry being a Central subject—all the more so within the context of planning—a State like Kerala cannot tackle the problem of employment and industrial development on its own.

### **Kerala Denied Legitimate Share**

As a matter of fact, the people of Kerala are unanimous in holding that the Centre has failed in its duty to the people of this State. It is notorious that, in all the three Five-Year Plans which have been completed so far, Kerala did not receive its legitimate share of Central sector projects in industry and transport.

E. M. S., added : “This, however, does not mean that the State Government has no positive role to play in working for the industrialization of this State. It can certainly take the initiative in creating the proper climate for entrepreneurs either within Kerala or outside to embark on new industrial projects. We can give various incentives for those who are willing to expand existing or establish new industries. It was with this objective that our Government adopted a policy statement on industrialization.

“Since the adoption of that policy statement, some public discussion has taken place on that document. That is possibly what you have in mind when you put question number 3. Before answering that question, however, let me clarify the position with regard to question number 2.”

It is a fact that the Government is composed of seven different political parties. They are different parties precisely because they do not see eye to eye on many questions of national policy. None of these parties conceals its own viewpoint on any of these vital questions.

**Common Viewpoint—the Yardstick**

Despite these differences, however, they have a common viewpoint with regard to questions of current policy. This common viewpoint has found expression in the joint policy statement adopted by them in September 1966. That joint statement is the yardstick with which every concrete question that poses itself before the coalition Government is measured. The conflict of policies which undoubtedly expresses itself among the various constituents of the coalition Government is, therefore, resolved through mutual discussion animated by the spirit of further carrying forward the unity that was forged when the joint policy statement was adopted.

Such a conflict of policies and its resolution through mutual discussion in the spirit of the joint statement of policy have taken place on a number of issues. The most notable examples are the conflict over, and the subsequent resolution of, the question whether prohibition is to be scrapped or not; the same conflict over the need for restrictions on the movement of foodgrains within the State and allied questions of procurement prices, control over rice mills in relation to food policy, the advisability or otherwise of exempting all small holdings from land revenue and so on.

Everyone of these questions raised public controversies. Enemies of the United Front thought that the unity of the coalition would break on the rock of these controversies. They were, however, disappointed to find that, just as at the time of evolving the joint statement of policy before the election, so in relation to every question of policy that arose after the election, the partners of the coalition resolved their differences, maintained and further strengthened the unity of the coalition.

**Industrial Policy Statement**

The industrial policy statement is another example of this conflict of policies and resolution of conflicts among the various constituents of the United Front. E. M. S. then related the basic facts related to this controversy.

*“First,* the coalition partners are united in their desire to get the process of industrialization accelerated. They are unanimous that the State should take a positive stand with regard to giving encouragement and assistance to those who are desirous of starting new industries. This common desire of all the constituents of the United Front was the foundation on which the industrial policy statement was built.

*“Secondly,* after the statement of the industrial policy was adopted and published, it was subjected to scrutiny by different sections of public opinion both in Kerala and outside. Industrialists were unanimous in acclaiming it. On the other hand, the trade union movement was highly critical of some passages in the statement which may well go contrary to the right of the working class for collective bargaining and their freedom of organization and struggle. Communists and Socialists felt that the incentives offered without any discrimination to all capitalists might end up in helping the rapidly-growing monopoly capitalists (Indian and foreign) to allow them to strengthen themselves not only against the working people but also against the small and medium industrialists.

*“Thirdly,* the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) was the first to make a systematic critique of the policy statement and in suggesting that those parts of the statement which have anti-labour and pro-monopoly implications should be removed. It should be made clear that in making this critique, the Party was not criticizing any individual constituent of the United Front but the United Front as a whole. The leadership of the State unit of the Party generally, and the Ministers belonging to the Party in particular, were equally if not more responsible for the very serious mistake in approach that had crept in the policy statement. This would be incomplete if I do not mention the fact that my responsibility in this respect is particularly serious. Both as the Chief Minister of the State and as a member of the highest leading unit of the Party (Polit Bureau), I should take a greater share

of the blame than anybody else, either in the Ministry or in the Party leadership.

"*Fourthly*, this, however, was taken by the non-Communist papers and all other political parties as an attack by my Party against the other constituents of the United Front; also as an attack by the rest of the Polit Bureau against me. As a matter of fact, it was an effort at correcting obvious mistakes that had crept in. No attack on individual or any party was made. So, after a few weeks of bitter public controversy, everybody started cool thinking. Ultimately, therefore, it was possible to have a dispassionate exchange of views leading to clarity of ideas and a broadly common approach.

"*Fifthly*, even now there is a fundamental difference of approach to the objective and programme of industrialization. Our Party, for instance, is of the opinion that collaboration between Indian and foreign private monopolies will not help the process of rapid industrialization. Nor do we think that the incentives that are offered to industrialize should be extended to the big monopoly capitalists. There are, however, certain other constituents in the United Front who disagree and hold that industrialization is impossible without collaboration between Indian and foreign monopoly capitalists."

E. M. S. mentioned the Right Communists as inclined to this point of view and added that this basic conflict of approach undoubtedly continued.

But all are agreed that cooperation with and assistance from socialist countries will be a powerful instrument of industrializing our State. Not only will this be available on terms better than from the capitalist countries but it can be utilized to strengthen the public sector in the industrial field, regardless of the particular method of industrialization (on which we may have our reservations), we unanimously demand that our State should get a legitimate share of India's industrial development; the same thing applies to the big or monopolist Indian capital. Whatever our own views may be on the desirability of allowing these monopolists to grow

and strengthen themselves, we would demand that a share of the industries that are set up in the country should be located in Kerala; all are agreed that one paragraph in the industrial policy statement offends the right of the working class to organize and go on strike and have therefore, decided to delete it.

E. M. S. said: "This narration of the story of the conflict and its resolution over the industrial policy statement would answer your third question. Different points of view among the constituents of the United Front have not prevented us from taking a common stand, even while each one of us has his own individual viewpoint.

"Having explained what has happened to our policies and practice on two vital questions of policy—food and industrialization, I may now claim that one of the biggest achievements of our pre-election alliance and the post-election coalition Government is that we have shown that it is possible for the various non-Congress parties to come together and establish a relatively stable alliance on which a stable coalition Government can be built.

"I use the term 'relatively stable' advisedly. For, against the background of the indisputable differences among the constituents, the stability of the alliance and coalition has its weaknesses and limitations. Conflicts do arise and sometimes lead to temporary crises. It is, however, inherent in the situation that the conflicts can be and are resolved, crises are overcome.

### **Not Impossible**

"This is of tremendous significance for the country as a whole. For, the main feature of the political situation in India today is the rapid decline in the influence and the power of the Congress, accompanied by the absence of any single party which can replace it. Only a combination of parties can meet the situation. Such a combination of parties should necessarily include the Communists and Socialists and other secular democratic radical parties. The bringing

together of these parties is a difficult and time-consuming process. That, however, is not an impossible task. This I may claim, is the lesson taught by the nine-month-old coalition Government in Kerala."

Regarding the "ultra-Left" in the Party, E. M. S. said: "I want to make it perfectly clear that so far as the Polit Bureau and the Central Committee of our Party are concerned, we are all united both against the ultra-Right and against the ultra-Left trends which may sometimes appear within the Party."

He listed a number of issues on everyone of which "we take the stand of simultaneous struggle against revisionist Right opportunist trends on the one hand and dogmatic sectarian trends on the other.

"Coming to the question of the Party's attitude to the formation of non-Congress Ministries, the Central Committee's stand is clear and forthright. It has no illusion that these Governments can do a lot to improve the living and working conditions of the toiling people. . . . Our Party considers it to be its duty to continuously educate the people on the limitations of the non-Congress Ministries that are being formed and the need for a fundamental revolutionary change in the constitutional political set-up in the country.

### **Powerful Lever**

"This, however, does not mean that the formation and functioning of the non-Congress Ministries is futile. As has been explained in the first part of the above answers, the very existence of non-Congress Governments can act as a powerful lever for that very struggle against the anti people policies of the Central Congress Government through which alone the movement for fundamental revolutionary transformations in the constitutional political set-up of the country can be strengthened. Furthermore, the Ministries that are formed can provide limited reliefs to the working people in various fields. Not to use these opportunities for serving the people and for strengthening the countrywide movement against the

Congress Government and its policies is to have a very important strategic field of action clear for the reactionaries. We have, therefore, to utilize whatever seats of power we can occupy in order to further strengthen the unity and struggle of the entire working people.

“This is the strategy and tactic worked out by Lenin in his days. In his celebrated work directed against Left-sectarian tendencies within the international Communist movement, Lenin said that Left-sectarianism was a punishment for the sin of prolonged Right-opportunist policies and practices. It was because of the systematic work of Social Democracy by way of instilling into the working class the dangerous illusion of Socialism through the bourgeois parliamentary institutions and of the disillusionment which such practices caused among the working people that a section of the honest, militant revolutionaries took to the path of repudiating Parliament itself. Fully sharing the noble sentiments of these revolutionary workers, Lenin however told them that bourgeois parliamentary institutions are useful instruments in uniting, organizing and consolidating the forces of the working class and undermining the power of capital.

### **Lenin's Caution**

“In thus emphasizing the importance of work in Parliament, Lenin, however, gave the necessary caution that, even when working within these parliamentary institutions, Communists should function as the representatives of the working class. They should refuse to submit themselves to those conventions and practices which are intended to transform a representative of the working class into a pliable tool of the bourgeoisie. It is in this spirit that we are approaching the tasks which have unfolded themselves before us—the tasks arising out of a situation in which it has become possible for us not only to win a few seats in the legislatures and in Parliament, but in some cases also to win majorities to form Governments. That is why our Central Committee on the post-Fourth General Election situation has characterized the

Government in which our Party is participating as organs of struggle.”

E. M. S. continued: “The so-called ultra-Lefts obviously do not subscribe to these ideas evolved by the Party leadership. But I have no doubt in my mind that the overwhelming majority of Party members is solidly behind the Central Committee.

“Coming now to the last question regarding our volunteers, let me make it clear that we are not the only party that has its volunteer organization nor are we having the volunteer organization for the first time. The Congress has had, for the last four decades and more, its Seva Dal. The Jana Sangh, too, has its RSS. volunteers. As for the Communist Party, it, too, has been having its volunteers ever since its inception. There is hardly any political party which has not organized its own volunteer groups. The hubbub that is raised against our volunteers is therefore an instance of the attitude ‘what is good for others is bad for the Communists’. The question whether such a volunteer force is necessary since the police is there, it seems, does not arise in the case of other parties, but it should be raised in relation to us!”