



Research Paper

## The First Communist Ministry in Kerala State

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### ABSTRACT

After the fall of the John ministry, election to Kerala State was announced in 1956. The election took place in January 1957. The Communist Party issued 14 point Manifesto. Accepting the manifesto and the people voted to the Communist Party. In the 127 seats to the legislature the Communists won 60 seats. With the help of the independents, the Communists formed the first ministry in Kerala. The Christian and other communal organizations such as the S.N.D.P. Yogam and the N.S.S. opposed these bills and hence they started a Vimochana Samaran and the Government was forced to resign in 1960.

**KEY WORDS:** Communists, statuesque, Corruption, Nepotism, favoritism

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### I. INTRODUCTION

During the President's rule in Travancore-Cochin (after the fall of Panampalli Govinda Menon's ministry), the decision was taken to reorganize the states on linguistic basis. On this basis the State of Kerala formally came into existence on November 1, 1956, with a Governor as the head of the State. The last vestiges of princely rule in Kerala also disappeared. The institution of Raja Pramukh came to an end consequent upon the formation of the new state.<sup>i</sup>

In 1957 the first election to the Kerala State Legislature was held. There were 114 constituencies in the state and of these, 102 were single-member and 12 were double-member constituencies.<sup>ii</sup> Together they were to return 126 members to the Assembly.<sup>iii</sup> The Communist Party of India under the leadership of E.M.S. Namboothiripad faced the election very boldly. In a bid to attract the people it announced the Election Manifesto.

#### The Communist Manifesto 1957

1. Establish new industries and thus provide full employment.
2. Give an immediate wage-rise to workers – plantation labour and industrial labour – to the tune of 25 percent of the present (1957) total wages.
3. Increase the bonus of the workers to 12.5 percent of the actual wages.
4. Re-orientate police policy, so that the police may not interfere with workers, agricultural labourers and students. The aim being to prime 'unfettered freedom' to working class strugglers. To see that labour laws are strictly and rigorously enforced in the interest of workers and against employers.
5. To turn Kerala from a food deficit area to a food self-sufficient area doubling the present rate of food production (50%)
6. To provide sufficient houses and ample clothing for everyone.
7. To organize the educational system.
8. To make fundamental changes in agrarian relations, by introducing an Agrarian Relations Bill. The main aim being to safeguard a ceiling on land holdings redistribute the surplus land to landless labour and fix fair rents.
9. To bring an Anti-Eviction Bill immediately so that the statuesque may be maintained and tenants may not be evicted before the Agrarian Relation Bill passed.
10. To organize the administrative structure of the State, aiming at decentralization of power, increase in efficiency and elimination of red-tapism.
11. To nationalize the plantations.
12. To ask the Central Government for an increase in the State quota – from Rs. 87 crores to R. 200 crores – for Second Five Year Plan purpose.
13. To organize co-operatives in industries, e.g. ion coir and other small scale industries.

14. To put down 'Corruption, nepotism and favoritism' and clearly give a clean and different administration to the State.<sup>iv</sup>

### **The Results of the Election**

The 1957 election produced a surprise in Kerala, the tiny little state in the southern tip of the Indian peninsula, returned the Communists as the biggest party in the State Legislature.<sup>v</sup> In the House of 127, the Communist got 60 seats as against 43 Congress. The following table shows the results of the 1957 election.<sup>vi</sup>

Party	Seats Contested	Seats won	Seats un-contested	Deposit forfeited
Congress	124	43	0	5
Communist	100	60	0	4
P.S.P.	62	9	0	28
R.S.P.	28	0	0	22
Muslim League	19	8	0	0
Independents supported by CPI	19	5	0	0
Other Independents	37	0	1	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>90</b>

Communist Party unanimously elected E.M.S. Namboothiripad as the leader of the Legislative Group. Convener invited Namboothiripad, the leader of the biggest party in the legislature to form the ministry. The dawn of April 5, 1957 witnessed an event of epoch making importance. For the first time in the history of Parliamentary democracy a Communist government sworn in a pandal specially erected and decorated for the purpose on the lawns of the Raj Bhavan.<sup>vii</sup> E.M.S. Namboothiripad with his 10 colleagues took oath before the Governor.

After the formation of Kerala, the first ministry was formed in 1957 under the leadership of E.M.S. Namboothiripad. The Council of Ministers and their portfolio were as follows:

Shri E.M.S. Namboothiripad	: Chief Minister
Shri C. Achutha Menon	: Finance Minister
Shri T.V. Thomas	: Transport and Labour
Shri K.C. George	: Food and Forests
Shri K.P. Gopalan	: Industries
Shri T.A. Majeed	: Public Works
Shri P.K. Chathan	: Local Self Government
Shri Joseph Mundassery	: Education and Co-operation
Smt. K.R. Gouri	: Land Revenue
Shri V.R. Krishna Iyer	: Law
Dr. A.R. Menon	: Health

Unlike previous occasions, commoners were allowed to witness the memorable function. Thus Communist Party of Kerala under the able leadership of Namboothiripad formed the first Ministry of the party in Kerala and in India. Few were excited, many were shocked, but it was a "news" to all.<sup>viii</sup> As E.M.S. Namboothiripad observed, "This single development electrified the whole country, the Kerala government being the point of attraction not only for the left and Socialist forces, not only for the entire opposition but even for radical and progressive elements inside the Congress".<sup>ix</sup>

Before 1957, the affairs of Kerala did not attract much world attention. But all on a sudden in March-April 1957 Keralites got world attention. The "New York Times", "Times Magazine", "The Manchester Guardian", "The Tribune", "Pravada" and "The Peking Daily" to mention a few, began to evince interest in publishing Kerala news. In various Universities, particularly in the United States, the Kerala issues became a lively subject for discussion, seminar and symposium.<sup>x</sup>

## **II. CONCLUSION**

For the first time in the history of Kerala, the Communists came to power. They stood for the middle class, keeping it in mind; they brought many reforms like agrarian reforms, education reforms and many other

reforms. Because of the opposition of the Christians, political parties and communal forces the ministry was dismissed in 1959.

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**ENDNOTES**

- [1]. Sreedhara Menon, A., A Survey of Kerala History, p. 358.
- [2]. In the double-member constituency each voter has to vote one for the General seat and the other for the reserved seat.
- [3]. Total strength was 127 including one nominated Anglo-Indian member.
- [4]. New Age, Vol. IV, No.20, February 10, 1957, p. 9.
- [5]. Kainikara Padmanabhan Pillai, Red-Interlude in Kerala, p. 1.
- [6]. Ramakrishnan Nair, R., How Communists came to Power, p. 15.
- [7]. Kainikara Padmanabhan Pillai, op.cit. p. 1.
- [8]. Joseph, S.C., Kerala the Communist State, p. 1.
- [9]. Namboothiripad, E.M.S., Not for the Programme of the CPI, p. 18.
- [10]. Ramakrishnan Nair, R., op.cit. p. 9.