

Preface

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The present study is part of a larger effort to compare over time the importance of democratisation for renewal-oriented popular movements in three very different contexts, within Indonesia, the Philippines, and India. The focus here is on the Indian state of Kerala.

I am most thankful to all friends cum colleagues, political leaders and activists in Indonesia, Kerala, and the Philippines who in a spirit of mutual trust and interest in critical ideas, have spent a great deal of time in informative and exciting discussions with me.

In Kerala, much of the basic research is conducted via the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, and in close co-operation with P.K. Michael Tharakan, associate fellow (whose positive contribution cannot be overestimated) and with the valuable assistance of Shri. M.P. Philip, currently college lecturer, (abbreviated M.P.P. in my footnotes). The sole responsibility for the approach, data collection, analysis, and formulations remains, however, with me. Thanks also to Peter Mayers for cautious copy-editing.

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Most of the new information was collected in February-March 1993. More recent and further developments will be discussed in a re-study in 1995-1996.

During the second part of 1994, my main informants (including most of those interviewed) were provided with the final draft of the manuscript and encouraged to communicate comments and corrections before publication. Thank you very much for thus improving the analyses! A few critical comments, however, have been impossible for me to adjust to:p

two notes by Mr. E.M.S Namboodiripad and one by Mr. K. Vijayachandran. Hence I have instead, with their permission, quoted vital parts of their criticism (and my response to it) in an appendix.

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/this text may be of use when you introduce the essay/

The predominant political development Project within the third world Left generally is in shambles. Is a new one emerging? And what is the significance of democratisation?

The present study is part of a larger effort to compare renewal-oriented popular movements in three different contexts, within Indonesia, the Philippines, and India. The focus here is on the Indian state of Kerala – which stands out for one of the most impressive and exciting attempts in the world to further develop a leftist project.

Olle Törnquist, in co-operation with P.K. Michael Tharakan, has made a critical analysis of the efforts (until 1993) in a comparative perspective.

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Three instalments:

Part 1: upto "Towards a new radical political development project"

(plus relevant footnotes)

Part 2: upto "Conclusion" (plus relevant footnotes)

Part 3: Conclusion (with footnote)

THE NEXT LEFT?

Democratisation and Attempts to Renew the Radical Political Development Project – the Case of Kerala

Olle Törnquist

with

P.K. Michael Tharakan

INTRODUCTION*

The predominant political development Project¹ within the third world Left generally² is in shambles. Is a new one emerging? And what is the significance of democratisation?

The old Project – with left oriented nationalists and communists in the forefront – concerned political shortcuts to progress. The basic analyses held that development was being blocked because of the coexistence of imperialism and feudal-like structures. This called for efficient organisation to gain political power, to get rid of colonial or neo-colonial masters and their partners, and to conquer the state. The latter would then be used to implement grand development strategies. Equality, freedom and national independence were basic principles. The movements agreed on anti-feudalism, anti-imperialism, and anti-big business (or anti-oligarchism).

Why did it run aground? The causes and reasons are many, and most of them vary with the context and with different interpretations of the fundamental theses. But having dwelt at some length on the very different cases of communist-led radicalism in Indonesia, India and the Philippines,³ I think it is safe to say that, while the common Project initially proved fruitful, a general problem was the inability to take into account the importance of new social, economic, and political forces emerging and giving birth to post-colonial authoritarianism and the politically facilitated expansion of capitalism.

This then paved the way for such events as state-regulated new industrialisation, but also for crises and structural adjustment programmes. The basic assumption of blocked development was nullified. Even vital elements of radical politics and policies had unintentionally paved the way for the transformations. The old Project gradually lost momentum and became almost irrelevant. Many movements were severely repressed.⁴

Neither has, generally speaking, this old Left been in the forefront of recent struggles for political liberties and democratisation. Repression, isolation and general weakness were some factors. The already mentioned problem of understanding the rise and dynamics of authoritarianism and the expansion of capitalism was another. Besides, according to the conventional leftist theories, liberalisation and democratisation would not help much anyway to alter basic relations of power and inequality.⁵ The prominent more or less "democratic forces" at work have instead usually included middle class people and students, sections of the business community, some religious organisations, horse-trading politicians and military officers, various foreign agencies and powers, and a broad spectrum of labour and professional organisations, new social movements and NGOs.

A New Left out of struggles for democracy?

Are the seeds of a New Left – which rethink leftist ideas and actions in view of previous experiences and radical transformations – and a new radical political development Project being sown within this spectrum of, on the one hand, old leftist movements and, on the other, the more recent forces and interests converging behind demands for more freedom and democratisation?

On the one hand, the situation is uneven and open. In countries like Indonesia, even political liberalisation is still being suppressed. Elsewhere, as in the Philippines, most of the recent processes of democratisation lack a solid foundation in movements with genuine roots among the people, movements which stand up for various interests and ideas, and keep track of their political representatives. And where previously such a polity had seemed to evolve, like in India, the situation is deteriorating, and problems similar to those in the Philippines are becoming more and more serious. To put it squarely one could say that, since the rising middle and semi-private capitalist classes, and the established political elites as well (some traditional leftists included), are not

capable of handling and consolidating democratisation, space could be expected to be open for popular movements and a New Left instead.

On the other hand, however, it is one thing for movements to agree on opposing a more or less authoritarian regime, and another to constitute a powerful actor during the very transition to elementary democracy – not to mention the problems of combining continuous socio-economic struggles with the consolidation and further development of democracy.

Most observers stress that the vital preconditions are very different from those which allowed popular movements to play a principal role in the democratic breakthrough in Western Europe.

To begin with, more or less authoritarian development does not just bring new movements together for liberalisation and democratisation. It also causes them to stress self-defence and survival. Human rights campaigns, scattered cultural and self-help activities, and a low organisational profile are typical. These movements, therefore, often become a weak collective actor in critical moments of reform or transition.⁶

Probably even more important, however, is that somewhat liberalised political and economic development usually brings additional problems.

First, especially when outright dictatorships have been fought, the common enemy is gone.

Secondly, there is some dismantling of the state – but by certain factions which monopolised its resources already rather than by strong new capitalists and members of the middle class from "outside". (Normally the latter become partners instead.) While the fiscal and institutional base of the state is weakened, surviving rulers and executives re-organise their "fiefdoms" and networks and privatise them further. The separation between state and civil society – normally associated with the development of capitalism and with liberalisation and democratisation as well – remains comparatively blurred.

Thirdly, we are far from a classical protracted industrial and cultural transformation in general and the emergence of a large and comparatively homogeneous working class in particular. The division of labour, the subordination of people, and the appropriation of surplus are extremely complex and contradictory. One example is that formally publicly owned land and capital, plus control of a great many preconditions for getting production started and going which are not directly linked to a particular farm or company), continue to constitute independent sources of power as well as bases for the indirect appropriation of surplus. Another is that many people are involved in very different activities and ways of surviving simultaneously.

Also, large sections of the population – including many unemployed students, retrenched workers, and displaced peasants – are excluded from the dynamic parts of the system. And even where there is rapid economic growth and industrial labourers are becoming more important, a parallel tendency may be observed as well – in the direction of unevenly developed service societies with huge so-called informal sectors.

Hence, there seems to be a lack of broad classes of people with clear-cut material interests. This breeds individualistic strategies of survival, clientelism, group-specific organisation, and mobilisation on the basis of religious and cultural identities. Many new movements taking the fragmented interests and specific issues as points of departure – and often also preaching the "deepening" of civil society – may thus be caught in this logic. To avoid the latter, the traditional Left instead worships the "politicisation" of civil society – but often overlooks important conflicts and interests.⁷ The latter may even cut right through unions and peasant movements.

What is the importance of democratisation for popular movements?

More difficulties could be added. But while the situation is definitely very different from that which enabled radical popular movements to play a central role in West European democratisation, this does not exclude the possibility that something similar may come about for other causes and reasons.

Hence, the essential problem which should be looked into is whether the development of actually existing conditions and new movements' reading of basic trends nevertheless might (a) generate linkages between the various and often fragmented interests and ideas, and (b) possibly make the politics of democratisation instrumental to the movements concerned.⁸

Positive cases from below, to the left, and for development

This calls for studying conditions and reasoning on the level of the movements, rather than for studying possible unifying factors generated from outside.⁹

Similarly, one must start with the importance of politics of democratisation for the movements, rather than with the relative importance of the movements in the overall processes of liberalisation and democratisation in a country.

Furthermore, while it is beyond a reasonable doubt that social movements and popular demands in general (including special interests) are in some way

associated with democratisation, the critical question – in view of the West European experience and the urgent third world problems – is rather if and when democratisation makes sense for *developmental* purposes, among both old and new *leftist* movements. What is their ability to renew, converge, and work out another development Project?

Finally, in trying to challenge the predominant arguments about serious obstacles by pointing to "positive" tendencies that may emerge, it should be fruitful critically to analyse over time theoretically exciting movements which, at least initially, give some priority to politics of democratisation.

Situating and explaining politics of democratisation

In other words, we propose to analyse when and how movements find politics of democratisation instrumental. And we mean to explain this by looking at actual conditions and the movements' own reading of the basic forces at work – with possible linkages between the often fragmented interests and ideas of various actors seen as an intervening variable.

This should be possible to do if we enter on the latter, intermediate, level – by studying movements' implementation of their own special projects and actions, their mobilisation and organisation of popular support, and the way they handle friends, obstacles and foes, – and if we continually ask (a) what, if any, politics of democratisation makes sense¹⁰, and (b) how this is related to actual conditions and the movements' own reading of the basic forces at work.¹¹

Three different contexts

In order to have a fruitful spectrum, with different conditions and ways of reading them, I have selected movements from three distinct contexts. One is the Philippines, which may in a way represent the many cases where outright authoritarian development models ran aground, and were then followed by uneven processes of liberalisation and democratisation, dismantling of the state, further economic crisis, structural adjustment, and so on. The struggle for transition involved, among others, sections of the growing middle class, many NGOs and new movements – while the still significant traditional Left insisted on its old revolutionary track. The transition itself and the new institutions, however, were to a large extent captured by powerful political and economic actors.

The second context is Kerala – in the framework of the Indian union – representing the cases of centralised nation-state-led development in decay.

India's state-regulated mixed economy is deteriorating, and so is its comparatively democratic polity. Structural adjustment has finally been introduced. At the same time, and especially in Kerala, the traditional Left is still quite strong and tries to take alternative paths, some of which call for democratisation, and which partly involve co-operation with new movements.

Thirdly the context of Indonesia, with its highly authoritarian regime and development pattern, which shares certain characteristics with the NIC-models. It accommodates some deregulation and privatisation, but has eliminated the once very strong traditional Left, and resist demands for political liberalisation from, among others, some middle class people, NGOs, and social movements.

Philippine points of departure

We shall return to Indonesia in a forthcoming essay. But let us now, for comparative purposes, briefly summarise the main results from the first round of studies in the Philippines before turning to Kerala. I shall make six points.¹²

1. A New Left. Maoist oriented revolutionaries were quite strong, but missed out when the struggle for political liberties and democratisation came to the fore. Fundamental conditions changed as capitalism expanded and reduced the importance of landlordism, increased environmental destruction, and allowed for new forms of government. The old organisations were rarely capable of reading this and of renewing themselves. Dissidents did come forward with alternative analyses and propositions. They worked out concepts for how the already existing movements should be able to support at least efforts supplementing the old organisations. But even devoted, emphatic, and well-funded attempts to find a new *modus vivendi* often failed. Renewal-oriented sections of the Left have thus often been forced to start anew on their own.

2. Bargaining power by carrying out labour. These new movements usually begin by addressing people's immediate problems of survival and development on the local level. This is in contrast to previously dominating leftist ideas of first trying to get hold of political power, which could then be used to redistribute essential means of production such as land. Their reasoning implies that people can enhance their bargaining power by carrying out labour, in addition to their usually employed ability to block production. In the famous case of the co-operative efforts of former New People's Army commander

"Dante" Buscayno's, the productive interests ascribed to the farmers have even been stressed to such an extent that critics have spoken of "economism".

3. *A common focus on the use and control of material resources.* The attempts at promoting production seem to generate an interest in the availability, management, and control of necessary resources. Again, one example is "Dante" Buscayno's attempts to reorganise and improve the lives of small farmers in Tarlac, Central Luzon. Here clear-cut class struggles over land are no more. But the focus is on the efficient use and co-operative control of many other vital resources, such as inputs, credit, water, milling, transportation, etc. The same holds true where plantation workers no longer have strong capitalists to fight, but must try instead to save their jobs by taking over more or less abandoned companies. And community organising (as in my Bataan and Cebu City cases) is usually based on how people can make best use of their own minor resources, while also dealing with those who monopolise, e.g., the land where people have to live or the water they must drink.

Hence, while the renewal-oriented groups go beyond conventional class conceptions and acknowledge the importance of many different issues and movements – but cannot point out a clear-cut social basis or similar material interests – their activities nevertheless indicate a common focus on the use and control of material resources. And this, as we shall see, has a clear bearing on the importance of democratisation.

4. *Democratisation instrumental for improving people's capacity to use and control resources.* It is true, of course, that democratisation does not make much sense when groups need external funds and political protection to get new alternatives started. The traditional Left has rarely been a fruitful and sufficiently powerful alternative partner. Now it is falling apart as well. Hence, foreign and private domestic funding is widespread. Access to central as well as local state or private support usually involves clientelism (though several NGOs and popular movements act skilfully on the comparatively large and open "markets"). This patronage is one of the new movements' weakest points.

Once on their way, however, democratic organising, management and co-operation seem so far to be instrumental for directly promoting people's "empowerment" and living conditions, precisely by enhancing their own capacity to use and control vital resources.

Alternative projects have been set up mainly outside the framework of the state and the established political organisations – in "civil society". There are

two very different models for how to go about this. On the one hand, time-consuming education, "conscientisation", and small-scale projects with participatory democracy supplemented by coalition building. On the other hand, democratic guidance of large projects based on calculated interests and practical experiences (to prepare the ground rapidly for further politics of democratisation).

5. Democratic development work could not be transformed into votes. Again, the rigidity of the traditional Left and its political development Project has thus caused the innovative sections to try to build their own movements on the basis of rather scattered and rarely converging grass-roots projects. It is true that the increasing serious crisis of the still-dominant old Left may open up space for fresh alternatives. During the last few years, in fact, it has already contributed to more democratic forms of co-operation within the Left as a whole. But even in the face of the 1992 elections, a broad front was not possible. Only the renewal-oriented "soft" sections came together. They drew on people's trust in radical extra-parliamentary work while trying at the same time to mobilise votes for comparatively progressive political representatives. The results, however, indicated that the certified capacity of the new movements to carry out actions and conduct alternative and democratic development work could not be transformed into votes on the basis of temporary electoral alliances and so called political machines.

Either they will thus have to expand on the US model of pressure politics, lobbying, and temporary alliances behind the most progressive available candidates, or try to transform the system from within. But while the latter may be the most promising, compiling ideas and pooling resources has proved insufficient. Since the whole is more than the sum of its parts (but cannot be proclaimed from above), the problem is thus if general political questions can be combined with the daily work and the separate issues – so that people and movements place their special interests within a total perspective, (and can generate a political party) well ahead of elections.

6. Certain structural conditions call for extending the politics of democratisation. There are signs, actually, of another promising tendency that may open up for this. In carrying out their work in "civil society", the movements face critical structural conditions which, even according to their own reading of the basic forces at work, call for extending the politics of democratisation in various forms.

Firstly, democratisation may be taken beyond "civil society", to the state. Unions or movements working with specific development projects find it instrumental to combine forces to enter local politics seriously for two basic reasons:

- They are confronted with problems that must be dealt with on a general level beyond their individual projects, like environmental destruction, aggressive development plans, unemployment, bad housing, and the running of workers' co-operatives.

- A new local government code is now being implemented. Many resources and powers will be allocated to local politicians and bureaucrats. The local political arena will be crucial. The law stipulates NGO representation in development councils. And grassroots organisations will be better equipped to support and keep track of local political candidates than national ones.

Secondly, already existing attempts at linking development work and political intervention may be democratised. Why? A critical negative experience from local elections near Dante's co-operative was that most of the people involved had no clear-cut material interests (as farmers for instance), even in maintaining the development efforts. Interests which leaders could take for granted when offering an electoral alternative to threatening corrupt local politicians. Thus, one logical conclusion is that people must come to know about, and preferably experience, the effects of their own and others' actions within the co-operative, as well as understanding the consequences for the project of what their elected politicians are doing.

THE CASE OF KERALA

Kerala is different.

An example of this may be seen in the fact that the Philippines made a drastic shift from bankrupt authoritarian development to uncoordinated, unstable and uneven economic and political liberalisation, whereas Kerala's model of human-development-despite-slow-growth is "only" eroded and no longer valid, and India's democratic polity and state-regulated economy is "only" deteriorating and subject to structural adjustment.

Furthermore, the Philippine struggle for liberties and democracy was mainly carried out by sections of the middle class, NGOs and new movements – not

by the traditional Left that insisted on its old guerrilla track – whereas in Kerala it is instead left oriented people in general (including many of those associated with the quite strong reformist-communist movement) who consistently advocate further democratisation.

In the Philippines, finally, the very transition from authoritarianism, and the new institutions of power as well, were captured by the economic and political elite. The traditional Left became irrelevant and disintegrated. Renewal-oriented leftists had to continue the struggle for alternative development and democratisation on their own. But in Kerala, again, the opposite is true. Here, economic and political problems instead produced a fresh Left Front State Government in 1987, which introduced elements, at least, of a new democratic development Project in partial co-operation with popular movements (until, that is, it lost office in the 1991 elections on account of communal tactical voting and a minor sympathy wave for the Congress party following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi).

Yet, despite all these and many other important differences, popular movements have thus found democratisation to be instrumental in the Philippines and in Kerala. So what conditions and/or analyses of the basic forces at work do they nevertheless have in common, possibly explaining their general agreement on democratisation? What will change over time? And on a closer look, how do their special politics of democratisation vary (at present and over time) with the ways in which specific conditions and ways of reading the basic forces at work connect or separate various actors in different contexts?

Let us approach these questions by following how the movements in Kerala have, until recently, carried out their projects, mobilised and organised popular support, and handled friends, obstacles and foes.

The rise and fall of the old political development Project

The Indian state of Kerala lies along the south-western coast of the subcontinent, where Vasco da Gama first paved the way for European colonialism. Kerala is not just known as the "land of coconuts", with long beaches, picturesque fishing boats and backwaters, rich rice fields, fruit and vegetable gardens, and (on the slopes of the Western Ghat Mountains) teak forests, spices, and tea and coffee plantations. What is more important, the 29 million Keralites in this densely populated state (which has about 750 persons

per square kilometre¹³ and a gross national product per capita lower than the Indian average), have won an international reputation for having accomplished comparatively high levels of health, education and social welfare generally. The public distribution of food through ration or "fair price" shops has been unusually extensive and efficient. The same goes for the public and private systems in health and education. By far the most consistent land reform in India was carried out here. Most workers are organised, and important labour laws (including social security provisions) have been implemented. Various social and religious reforms have broken up much of the rigid caste system, paved the way for coexistence between the many communities, and strengthened the position of women.

Much of this is no doubt due to the consistent struggle of the Left in general, both in the form of popular actions and radical state government interventions. We shall return to this shortly. But the causes for and reasons why a large part of the traditional Left (and several new movements) in Kerala began to find further democratisation strategically important in the mid-1980's are related to the crisis of the Left's previous political development Project. And that crisis, in turn, is analysed best if we understand how the Left as a whole came to play such a major role in the first place.

Commerce and agribusiness, indigenous rule, and socio-religious reform movements

Actually, significant progress was achieved already during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A kind of gradual and limited bourgeois revolution began to unfold at that time, particularly in the southern princely states of Travancore and Cochin. This was an important basis for the remarkable advances made later.¹⁴

International trade and the expansion of commercial and export-oriented agricultural production required the development of land, commodity, credit and (restricted) labour markets.

Moreover, much of the institutional framework was provided by the princely states which administratively were rather efficient. The rulers even promoted growth by implementing partial land reforms and further liberalising commerce and trade. Hence, they broadened their own social, economic and political basis and reinforced their relative autonomy vis-à-vis the British.

In addition, the expansion of trade, services, agriculture and public administration (both indigenous and colonial) called for skilled employees, and created new career and income opportunities beyond those monopolised within the rigid caste structures. Education became important for all those involved,

as did health. Different religious communities adjusted, carried out internal reforms, and tried to strengthen the position of their members. Some progress could be brought about by the communities themselves, like starting schools for their affluent members (and sections of the poor) or setting up temples open to lower-caste Hindus. But more and more people wanted equal opportunities. Hence, their problems called for broader solutions – through collective action and government intervention.

The need for reform within religious communities, and state regulations and programmes as well, gave birth to several highly significant socio-religious reform movements. Movements among oppressed Hindus, for instance, took aim at the rigid caste system. And movements among the lower-upper *Nair* and lower-middle *Ezhava* castes, plus the Syrian Christians (who served as a kind of parallel middle class), began to join forces and to turn more political in their demands for government employment, public health, and education. Muslims finally made such attempts as well.

Furthermore, Kerala's "rurban" settlement pattern – with large villages interspersed by small towns – worked in favour of social institutions like schools and health centres, and made collective action easier.

However, those who benefited were mainly from the upper and middle sections of the population. The progressive bourgeois transformations were limited. Commerce and agribusiness, as we have seen, required comparatively free land, commodity and credit markets – but not an equally liberal labour market. Much of the caste system survived, as did feudal-like tenancy relations. And agricultural labourers were usually bonded. In the northern district of Malabar, direct British rule even strengthened the big landowners and chieftains as against the huge majority of tenants and workers. Socio-economic differences increased, and often cut right through communities. Community-based socio-religious reform movements could not help much. And initially and on its own, the low caste *Pulaya* community (which was predominantly comprised of agricultural workers) made little progress despite leadership and organising.

The restricted liberties for the weaker majority of the population, and the increasingly important class conflicts, paved the way instead for further politicisation and new popular movements, mainly among peasants, tenants, and workers. Their combination of radical socio-economic demands (including land-reforms) with anti-colonial struggles caused tensions within the nationalist movement. Hence, broadly based socialist and communist organisations emerged – and gave birth to the present state of Kerala.

The first radical political development Project

Actually, *any* progressive change presupposed political organisation and intervention. The expansion of commerce and agribusiness did not generate modern industrialisation, and did not give rise to further liberalisation to the benefit of peasants, tenants, and workers. The system rested rather on colonial hegemony, a somewhat reformed caste system, landlordism, semi-bonded labour, limited civil rights, and an absence of democracy.

Besides advocating political organisation and intervention, however, the Left in general or in other words, those in favour of progressive change based on the developmental capacity of the weak majority of the population had two things to say: firstly, that such a potential capacity could only be unleashed through land reform and better working conditions; and secondly, that land reform and improved working conditions required collective organisations, like peasant movements, trade unions, and political parties. The people themselves would have to push through this kind of development. The former princely and colonial apparatuses would be taken over and used to implement many of the popular movements' demands.

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The essence of the first radical political development Project¹⁵ was thus to extend the previously limited bourgeois liberalisation to the people as a whole, by way of popular politics. Politics was critical for the predominant economic logic was insufficient, and the people themselves lacked economic power. Broad popular mobilisation and organisation would give rise to radical state government, which in turn would be able to grant greater freedom to the popular organisations and some relief to the worst off, and most importantly of all, strengthen the position of labour and implement anti-feudal land reform. The latter was not mainly a question of redistributing the few acres available, but of "social transformation"¹⁶. It was the dynamic developmental effects of redistribution that would matter. Peasants, tenants, workers and their families would be freed from the bonds that prevented them from using their potential, their land, their capacity to work, their ability to co-operate, and so on. And this in turn would pave the way for further economic growth (within agriculture as well as industry), and for further democratisation among free and socially more equal citizens.

Popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation

When and why would democratisation make sense?

It is true that both socialists and non-socialists have usually considered non-democratic means necessary when fighting feudal-like landlords, as in China and in Taiwan. In the early to mid-1950's, however, even Stalin and his international communist movement approved of more pragmatic communist politics in newly independent countries. In India, comparatively strong elements of a democratic polity had been introduced at the central levels in the union and the states. And the critical thing in Kerala was that bourgeois transformations had (despite the fact that they were restricted) given birth to a strong civil society with socio-religious reform movements, unusually high and even educational standards, and new popular organisations with deep roots in the less-favored elements of the population. Moreover, most of the important socialist and communist leaders emerged from and were still based on these movements and organisations, rather than on avant-garde cadre groups.¹⁷

Hence, these leaders chose a pragmatic combination of "struggle and administration" within the framework of the established system. The first elections to the Kerala State Assembly in 1957 resulted, in fact, in the first democratically elected communist-led government in the world.

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What, more precisely, was the role and importance of politics of democratisation in the radical development Project that took off in the mid-1950's? What problems did it involve? Let us apply the previously outlined non-partisan conceptualisation of democratisation with popular sovereignty and political equality as the core element, and the preconditions, forms, scope and content of democratisation as associated and varying factors.¹⁸

A major element of the Project, of course, was that the struggle for and accomplishment of the anti-feudal land reform would generate fundamental *preconditions for democracy* among the popular majority. Political consciousness and organisation among the people plus de-monopolisation of land would undermine much of the extra-economic oppression from which peasants *cum* tenants, workers, and their dependants suffered. In addition, the new government would prevent the police from cracking down on popular action and organisation, and promote e.g. secular education and the improvement of workers' conditions.

In contrast to traditional revolutionary prescriptions, however, *the essence of democratisation, in terms of political equality and one-person-one-vote*, was

absolutely vital in Kerala. The entire Project rested on the assumption that a majority of the population would not only benefit from the Project when it was implemented, but would also work and vote for it within the limits of the existing system.

What *forms of democracy*, furthermore, made sense?

The Left, including the communists, adjusted to the legal and constitutional framework. This did not just call for fruitful co-operation and compromise. The usually Congress-led union governments in New Delhi were able to contain successful radical policies on the state level. In addition to financial restrictions, this caused delay. The Adversaries got plenty of time to take preventive measures, which in turn generated new conflicts and harsh methods on both parts.

Moreover, as we can see from this brief review of Kerala's history, various communities and interest groups backed special parties and factions. A lot of horse-trading was thus necessary to survive simple majority elections in single-member-constituencies and to keep a coalition government together. The result was to sustain communalism and political factionalism. Complicated agreements, lobbying, and such like nourished centralised forms of rule. The division of spoils bred still more factionalism, and the compartmentalisation of politics and administration. All this together produced problems of governance – which undermined democracy. And things grew worse when the Communists split in 1964. The minority stayed with the CPI (Communist Party of India). After that, the decimated CPI joined forces with the Congress-party for about a decade – in order to survive the fierce competition with the majority of the Left who had formed the CPI-M (Communist Party of India-Marxist).

As we have seen, moreover, the Left in general and the communists in particular developed a general principle of struggle and administration. On the one hand, popular extra-parliamentary pressure applied with such instruments as peasant movements and unions – guided by "democratically centralised" parties. On the other hand, state interventions – decided over by the same parties and their publicly elected leaders, and implemented by an inherited but now continuously expanding and ever more centralised and compartmentalised bureaucracy. Putting it bluntly: central-party-led popular pressure from below for central-party-led (and state-administered) societal transformation from above.¹⁹

This went for issues large and small, such as land reform and running a co-operative. The basic argument, once again, was that popular development called for political organisation and intervention. Otherwise, it would be very difficult for people to stand up against feudal-like patrons, religious leaders, and so on. Meanwhile, however, this prevented decentralisation and popular participation, and generated demands for government solutions and funds, rather than attempts among the people themselves to make innovative use of available resources.

The scope of democracy. The Left as a whole tried to extend democratic forms of government to additional spheres of society, but mainly in the form of state programmes, institutes, companies, and credit co-operatives, which were all controlled by politicians and bureaucrats. This was another breeding ground for centralism, politicised vested interests, factionalism and compartmentalisation, and for collective and individual clientelism as well. More and more institutions were being established meanwhile and ever greater public funds spent.

However, the problem of controlling and managing publicly or co-operatively owned resources was not a major subject. Conventional Marxism operated with a narrow definition of means of production and focused on those that were privately owned. The Communists particularly tried to fight such problems as corruption by way of centralised and disciplined organisation – which gave them the reputation of being less corrupt than other politicians, but maintained the basic problem of top-down democratic government as well. Moreover, anti-feudal, bourgeois land reform was the main issue. So while the Left as a whole was definitely against monopoly private ownership, and in that sense did not respect existing property rights, even the communists were actually in favour of spreading the right to private property. They even turned millions of tenants and agricultural workers into petty bourgeois landowners. (We shall return to the land reform in a moment.) And the subject of undemocratic family relations was largely taboo, aside from the issue of caste oppression.

Finally *the contents of democracy*, of which all leftists held strong views. Not that they considered the basic principles of popular sovereignty, political equality, and the forms of government unimportant. Nor did democracy just make sense to them when they were winning elections. But between elections – when Congress party-led fronts were in office – left parties in opposition

showed even greater concern about the minimum preconditions for meaningful democracy than they did during elections, or when they themselves held office. The essence of the standard Left argument in opposition was namely that, even if most government policies had been approved according to democratic principles, the content – the policies themselves – were so undemocratic that the fundamental prerequisites of democracy were undermined. Hence, the dissidents said, "formally" democratic decisions to destroy democracy had to be resisted by all reasonable legal means, and altered as soon as office was recovered.

It is true that most of this mess was actually started by the non-leftists, who overruled the first radical State Government in 1959 by undemocratic means. The leftists themselves could never take such drastic measures. (The more normal leftist as well as non-leftist pattern – while in opposition – was rather one of rejecting everything initiated by an "unfriendly" government, and – when back in office – replacing all the "hostile" programmes with alternative partisan ones.) But soon enough – and especially during the harsh intra-communist struggles between 1964 and 1979 – the various organised sections of the Left took part in inflating "the defence of democracy" to such an extent that serious problems of democratic governance developed.

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Even though the leftists' politics of democratisation was generally impressive and credible as a vital part of their general Project, we must thus conclude that the very same politics that were to promote democratisation and development also generated new problems for democracy and development. This contributed, of course, to the general crisis of the first radical political development Project. But so did the dynamics of the most important leftist *policies* – those concerning land reform and the position of labour. Hence we turn to each of these policies below.

Land reform

As with the politics of democratisation, land reform policies did away with many basic problems but paved the way for new ones as well.²⁰

After decades of intensive and widely based popular action, the most radical land reform act in India was passed by the Kerala State Assembly in 1969. It is true that the idea of a rice levy on the largest owners (to be redistributed through fair price shops) did not prove effective. Nor did the ceiling on the size of land-holdings generate much surplus land to be redistributed to the landless. In these respects Kerala followed the normal Indian pattern. But what is more

important, the basic concept of abolishing landlordism was fairly consistently implemented during the early seventies, again much thanks to continued popular pressure. Tenancy was abolished in land. The landlords were compensated and the tenants became the new owners. This did not directly benefit the agricultural workers. But tenancy in house-compound land (including gardens) was also done away with. This affected many more people in the rural areas. And unions and radical party factions saw to it that an agricultural workers act – including regulations of employment conditions and social security arrangements – was passed and its implementation began in the mid-seventies.

However, many former tenants were now comparatively well-off and became fairly substantial landowners employing agricultural workers. Even many new petty farmers hired labourers. Most family members had other business or jobs to attend to, and some tasks could only be handled by skilled workers from special castes. As soon as tenants and workers had done away with their common enemy (the landlords), they were thus at odds with each other over wages and other employment conditions, and mechanisation as well (which implied fewer jobs). The fundamental social basis of the Left was thus divided and began to deteriorate.

In addition, several factors contributed to making the dynamic developmental effects of the land reforms much weaker than expected. Most of the land were not given to the actual tillers with a clear-cut interest in increasing production; a majority of the new owners had other significant income opportunities besides farming. The extreme fragmentation of land undermined rational cultivation. Most landowners found labourers expensive, troublesome, and a major obstacle to mechanisation. Several inputs were costly, and output prices were not the best.

Many more people, therefore, had to seek opportunities outside agriculture. Others simply found it more profitable to enter business (were the Left was less strong). Many part-time farmers avoided further investment in intensive agriculture requiring many labourers. Farmers turned to cultivation practices that were easier, or left the land fallow, or leased it out illegally to poor tillers.²¹ They took supplementary jobs and put their money elsewhere. Agricultural production began, in vital parts, to stagnate. Employment problems grew worse.

Many of these difficulties could have been tackled, of course, with additional agrarian reforms for promoting joint farming, irrigation, new products, marketing, and so on. The ideas were there and some attempts were

made. All of them called, however, for collective popular initiatives on the local level, comprehensive policy packages, and efficient public administration – all of which, as we know, were undermined rather than favoured by the dynamics I have termed popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation. Credit co-operatives, for instance, turned into battlegrounds for various political parties. Large-scale irrigation programmes became white elephants. Many ministries, agencies and such like were faction-ridden and incapable co-ordination. Many of those directly involved in administration profited thereby. They linked up with outside vested interests, and no more than paid lip-service to the decentralisation of state power and public administration.

In conclusion, then, the important land reforms "in themselves" generated new problems, including contributing to the stagnation of production and to a kind of petty-embourgeoisement in the rural areas. But perhaps more critically: the radical politics of democratisation that had been designed to enforce the anti-feudal reforms prevented an efficient follow-up.

Strengthening the position of labour

In Kerala, as in other parts of the third world, modern manufacturing industries are rare.²² Most people are employed within agriculture, traditional agro-processing, public and private services, and the "informal sector". Despite this, however, the degree of unionisation is unusually high in Kerala²³, labour relations are relatively formalised and impersonal, and wages and other benefits are comparatively impressive. One important factor behind this, of course, was the early proletarianisation of large sections of the population. But as we have seen, agribusiness and commerce did not generate "free" labourers on a large scale. And though a degree of development in the productive forces, including partial mechanisation, "liberalised" certain labour relations, most of the remarkable achievements are rather due to, first, the socio-religious reform movements against social oppression, and, thereafter, the more class-based unions and political movements. The latter organised people on the plantations, the public sector, and in traditional industry. They pushed through land reforms, abolishing bonded labour relations. They even managed to unionise and improve the lot of many agricultural labourers and others within the "informal sector".

These far from classical capital-labour relations called for special methods. Many of them entailed politically enforced state interventions. In their efforts to bring wages and working conditions within traditional industries and the

"informal sector" into line with those in modern factories, unions depended on state-stipulated basic standards, such as minimum wages, fixed working-hours, and mandatory arbitration. To handle retrenchments and the closing of factories, unions often asked the state to take over or to assist in setting up labour co-operatives. To create better social security arrangements, unions pressed for state-initiated funds, and helped see to it that scattered members and employers paid their contributions. To help vulnerable labourers who could not enforce such solutions, unions fought hard for various public welfare schemes. And to help lower-class children to find better jobs, unions demanded better public education.

Moreover, even though most labourers' bargaining power was weak as compared to that of modern factory workers, unions made effective use of the existing special conditions. Established party and labour organisations backed initiatives among vulnerable labourers (in traditional agriculture, for instance). Closed-shop policies were adopted to limit the employment of cheap unorganised labour. Workers with attractive skills, such as the ability to climb coconut trees, were often brought together in order to increase their bargaining power on the market. The critical role some labourers played in their workplace was fully exploited, e.g. by those engaged in harvesting and sowing, and by those loading and unloading goods. And every effort to mechanise or otherwise rationalise production, trade, administration, etc. was fiercely rejected if it might result in entrenchments or in any other way cause harm to those already employed.

However, while better wages and working conditions posed no major problems in themselves, some of the methods used to achieve them *contributed* to undermining economic growth and employment levels.

For instance, closed shop policies and organisation according to special skill maintained some of the labour market segmentation along caste lines,²⁴ and created new divisions between "insiders" and "outsiders". Associated political and union factionalism generated additional labour conflicts (above and beyond those vis-à-vis employers). And this instability was another reason and probably a more important one than high wages for why businessmen, including farmers, tried to avoid employment generating investments in Kerala.

Furthermore, the capacity of unions to improve the position of workers by drawing on political support, unique skills and critical workplace roles were often unrestrained by the company's economic performance. The classical case is that of the headload workers, who combined most of these factors into an

extraordinarily strong bargaining position and thus managed to extort high wages from everyone having to hire them.²⁵

This is not to say that policies promoting equal wage levels necessarily cause problems for growth and employment. (And some of Kerala's problems are simply due to falling demand for its vital products.) When faced with an equal wage structure, employers may increase production or improve productivity (and hence the competitiveness of the units), and/or invest in profitable new ventures, thus adjusting the economic structure and creating new jobs.²⁶ Investments in Kerala, however, were mainly in agriculture, trade, and commerce. Owners of land and capital usually avoided risks, tried to invest outside Kerala, or went for fast bucks. Moreover, unions resisted most attempts to alter the economic structure and/or increase production and productivity, claiming this would be "at the expense of the workers". And unions in all sectors were more or less critical of other ways of promoting production (such as by improving local irrigation and farm operation, or by streamlining administration). A vicious circle developed, from which both parties would suffer in the long run.

Consequently, there was an urgent need for state intervention to provide the basis for social contracts – through a combination of strategic support of productive and employment generating investments inside Kerala *and* much better public social security systems for those badly affected. But besides being alien to unions' anti-capitalist rhetoric, politically engineered social contracts were also impeded by the negative dynamics of 'popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation'. This, as we know, bred such things as compartmentalisation, factionalism, vested interests, and locked political conflicts.

Even "innocent" rationalisations were thus undermined. Certain unions even defended much of the centralisation and specialisation within public administration, probably because some of their bargaining power built on it. Individual members, and politicians as well, often resisted attempts at reforming state government and administration – reforms which might have made it less easy to use various public positions for private ends. And most parties were eager not to lose contributions and votes from the unions and their members. The examples could be multiplied.

As in the case of the land reform policies, we may thus conclude that whereas the attempts to strengthen the position of labour generated problems "of its own", it was probably even more serious that the politics of democratisation prevented an efficient follow-up.

Fresh Gulf money unfolds but also covers-up the crisis

The potential crisis of the first political development Project was avoided for some time. India held on to its import-substitution policies. Higher costs could be compensated for in part by higher prices. Kerala's export, moreover, did reasonably well.

In the mid-seventies, however, things began to change, especially with the export of increasing numbers of skilled Keralites to the expanding Gulf countries, and with the inflow of their substantial remittances.²⁷

To begin with, Kerala lost a significant proportion of its most qualified workforce – almost ten per cent, or close to one million of the whole workforce.²⁸

Furthermore, and for obvious reasons, most migrant family-savings were not invested productively in Kerala. Some left the state or were used for speculation (through the official banking system or so-called "blade companies"). Some were used for building houses and for consumption. There were new jobs within construction and the tertiary sector. But the increase in demand did not generate domestic manufacturing and employment – only an increase in imports and new investment opportunities within trade and commerce (including real estate). And even more importantly, these alternative avenues attracted not only migrant money but also domestic savings – causing some transfer of capital out of farming and other productive ventures.

Consequently, production began to stagnate, as did productivity, while wages increased. State revenues did not increase, but demands for subsidies and welfare programmes did. Few new jobs were created, but more and more people demanded employment (especially the young and educated).

Perhaps worse: the same factors also served to cover up the crisis for nearly a decade. There were chances to get a job in the Gulf. Remittances increased. Construction spiralled. The tertiary sector expanded. Consumption went up. And new ideals of how one could and should make a fast buck without too much hard work and without engaging in tiring attempts at solving Kerala's socio-economic and political problems gained ground. So little was done to change the situation.

Stagnation of the Left

Meanwhile, the traditional Left had begun to stagnate. Nobody denied that its popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation had proved fruitful in getting parliamentary democracy settled, in implementing India's most

consistent land reform, and in strengthening the position of labour. But simultaneously, we may recall, the land reform policies had opened up for complicated new relations of exploitation and subordination (including conflicts between new farmers and agricultural labourers), and an increase in off-farm employment and business interests as well. The expected dynamic developmental effects failed to appear. The strengthening of labourers' position sustained some of the labour market segmentation, separated "insiders" from "outsiders", paved the way for a lot of stoppages, and impeded structural changes and more efficient production and administration. And worst of all, neither of these policies could be followed up with forceful approaches to the new problems. The very popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation had given birth to centralisation, compartmentalisation, factionalism, vested interests, and locked political conflicts. The promotion of agricultural development – through, e.g. collective local initiatives, comprehensive packages, and efficient administration – was obstructed. And socio-political engineering of a combination of productive dynamic investments and better public security systems was virtually out of the question.

In other words, while politics may have been necessary for progressive post-colonial change in general, and for democratisation and popular development in particular, its dynamics bred interests and institutional arrangements that worked against further development.

Moreover, after some time this started to undermine the propelling force of the radical Project: the broadly based popular organisations. What, more precisely, were the destructive processes at work? The more complicated relations of exploitation and subordination, the renewed segmentation of the labour market, and the problems of development generated a multiplicity of interests and conflicts. Furthermore, some of these interests and conflicts cut through, or were unimportant to, the existing organisations and alliances. As we know, former tenants and agricultural workers had been allies against landlordism but were now at odds with each other. Certain farmers were marginal, others not. Better as well as worse-off farmers were simultaneously subordinated to different employers (and some even worked in the Gulf countries). Many people had varying off-farm business interests in production or in speculative ventures. There was an obvious tendency to make money from trade, commerce, and privileged access to co-operative and public institutions. Yet indirect exploitation via the market, or through rent on administration and more or less public resources, never topped the leftist

agenda. The same was true of unemployment, which had become a major problem for the often comparatively well-educated young people outside the traditional leftist organisations. Environmental problems became important, and so did issues of gender.

So the traditional Left was no longer able to gain substantial ground in terms of votes, and even suffered losses (as, for instance, where conflicts between farmers and labourers were particularly important).²⁹ Most of its organisations became defensive in nature, and new visions and dynamics were lacking.³⁰

In addition, new and partly rival groups and movements emerged. On the one hand, communal identities, social networks, and rigid organising got a new lease on life. All of the factors that had previously forced narrow communalism into retreat were now losing ground – socio-religious reform efforts, public welfare measures, and fairly clear-cut class conflicts and class organisations.

On the other hand, new interest- and issue-based associations emerged as well. Several grew strong in the seventies (when the emergency furnished another reason for many radicals to stay out of compromising or rigid and vulnerable communist organisations). Maoists (*Naxalites*) favoured outright revolutionary action, though they were probably most active on the cultural front. Development-oriented action groups (NGOs) gained some importance in relation to neglected sections of the population (such as the traditional fisher-people).³¹ The People's Science Movement, KSSP³² (to which we shall return later on) expanded from a popular educational group to an activist-oriented mass movement – with slogans like "science for social revolution", and a successful campaign against the Silent Valley hydro electric project as a major rallying point.³³

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The traditional Left thus seemed caught in a dead end. Moreover, the temporary escape route of the other radical stronghold, West Bengal, was not applicable in Kerala. The Bengali Communists had not done away with landlordism, but had instead strengthened the position of the "middle peasants" in general, and the tenants in particular, by means of political and economic support and protection. This alternative patronage was critical to huge sections of the rural population, who thus voted Left Front. The Communists have even managed to strengthen their position and to sustain (ever since 1977) their firm grip on the Bengali rural electorate, by combining alternative patronage with far-reaching decentralisation measures. But this was not possible in Kerala. The more radical land reform in Kerala had abolished landlordism and turned

millions of tenants and workers into comparatively independent (but petty-bourgeois-oriented) actors. It was much easier for them than for most Bengalis to say thanks and goodbye to the Left whenever they wanted to.³⁴

For the traditional Kerala Left, therefore, it was almost inevitable to continue political horse trading in order to prevent further electoral losses. Centralism may even have seemed more necessary than before, since it was the normal way of dealing with increasing corruption, new and partly rival social and political movements, and more and more complex socio-economic divisions (including within the traditional Left itself). The traditional Left could not afford to challenge unions and peasant movements, whose leaders held powerful positions within the Left parties, and whose members might otherwise abandon ship. Top-down control of co-operatives had to be maintained for similar reasons. More generous welfare policies were necessary to please old sympathisers and hopefully attract new ones. And so on.

To put it bluntly: almost everything pointed in the direction of defensive leftist policies that did not alter the destructive dynamics but rather made them worse. One might even ask whether this was the end of the traditional Left. Was there any scope for rethinking and renewal within the established movements? Why should Communists of Kerala be any more capable of reforming themselves than, for instance, their East European or Philippine comrades? Was it not more likely that a fresh start – and eventually some other political development Project – would come out of still rather undefined new social movements, with their roots in the many equally new and complicated social, economic and other conflicts?

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Towards a new radical political development Project

Interestingly enough, however, the seemingly inevitable end of the strong Left was at least postponed. Civil society in Kerala is unusually deep-rooted and rich. New movements and organisations were added to the many old ones. The crisis of state-socialism in Eastern Europe generated much reflection (and not just frustration) among the many educated and internationally well oriented Keralites. And there was room for critical discussion in and around the established radical organisations. The temporary West Bengal escape route was not applicable, and Stalinist dogmatism and centralism were partly overruled by pragmatic day-to-day politics and electoral considerations. Moreover, while many radical dissidents associated independently – in the previously mentioned People's Science Movement, for instance – they usually abstained from neglecting the importance of previous radical changes and dismissing the political relevance of the established leftist organisations, which many other Indian NGOs tended to do. And in contrast to the Philippines, most renewal-oriented groups thus found it possible to relate to the old organisations, to try to renew or influence them, and to obtain support from them.

What was the immediate outcome? Three factors in particular made for critical revisions in the face of the 1987 state elections.³⁵

One was that those within the party who demanded a radical shift away from short-term tactical alliances with communal parties got the upper hand. This was bound to cause electoral losses, especially in the Muslim strongholds of Malabar in the North. But the negative aspects of horse trading in general were well-known. Communal conflicts, moreover, had for some time been fanned all around India by manipulative politicians in desperate need of votes (including Mrs Gandhi and her son Rajiv). There were worrisome tensions in Kerala as well. The electorate was sensitive about this. Effective leftist opposition demanded a reasonably clean record. Further Communist compromises would probably cause more losses than gains, at least in the long run. After heated debates, splits, and the exclusion of some leading members, the CPI-M (and its Left Front partners) finally took a much respected principled stand against communalism in politics – which indicated an ability to take self-critical and painful action on behalf of reform.

Another factor was that the Communists slowly toned down some of the revolutionary features they had earlier exhibited. They de-emphasised several

of their previous main issues (such as completing of all aspects of the land reform) and proposed instead – already during the brief Left Front administration in the early 1980's – a more efficient public distribution system via "Maveli-stores" (this method was devised by Chandrasekar Nair of the CPI for hitting at the middlemen). Subsequently, immediate action was to be taken against the increasingly urgent employment problem, not least among young voters. And since such efforts could not be conducted just by means of further struggles to redistribute the pie more radically, but required aggressive developmental measures as well, it was another sign of some capacity for renewal on the Left.

Thirdly, the conventional critique of rampant corruption and general abuse of power under the Congress-led state administration was now widely accepted. And what was more, while the mainstream Philippine Left failed to jump on the democratic bandwagon, important sections of the established Kerala Left declared that a clean government and administration required further democratisation, including decentralisation. Some even portrayed this as a prerequisite for anti-communalism and for employment generating developmental efforts as well.

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Much to everybody's surprise, the Left Front managed to win (by a tiny margin) the 1987 state elections. This was not because the old Project had suddenly become fruitful again. Interestingly enough, the election results indicated rather that the Communists had suffered losses in many of their old strongholds in the North – which could be explained only in part by the abandoned tactical agreements with the Muslims – while they gained new support in the centre and the South, and in urban and more commercialised areas where unemployment was most serious.³⁶

This is not to suggest that the advances were solely due to the three above mentioned attempts to revise previous radical politics and policies. There were divisions within its the Congress-political front, a lot of protest voting, and widespread dissatisfaction with Congress-led rule in the state. The Communist and Muslim divorce may also have attracted some new Hindu votes. The "bourgeois" media, furthermore, presented the respected Communist leader, Mrs. Gowri (who was of subordinate caste origin), as a possible new Chief Minister. This speculation, which was not denied by the Left Front, probably attracted additional support among the *Ezhava* community and among women. But besides these and other special circumstances, the attempts at rethinking and making a fresh start did play a significant role. What is more, the ability to

attract new voters "proved" that those who argued for reform (including dropping the communal alliances) had been heading in the "right" direction. Their position within the Left was strengthened after the elections. The next critical question in our discussion is therefore whether they were able to sustain the process of change and develop it further.

Development – but how?

The electoral triumph came as a surprise even for the Left Front. It was not prepared to take over. The division of spoils (including the formation of a new left oriented coalition government and administration) was complicated and took a long time. Many urgent questions had to be attended to. The formulation of more concrete, comprehensive, and long-term plans was even more difficult. The old Project had been bypassed, and more and more leaders were agreed on the primary need to attack unemployment and to put development efforts on top of the agenda. But what development and what priorities? What could be done and what should be?

The available resources were scarce. The views were many and diverse. Left-oriented leaders and experts were soon engaged in protracted and sometimes heated discussions and negotiations. Two major schools of thought emerged out of many ideas and positions.³⁷ These were thus not fully worked-out political programmes embraced by organised factions (or even clearly identified groups of people who consistently took the same view on most issues). According to my categorisation and modelling of these schools of thought – which fastens on their essential propositions in order to show the logic of their credo for analytical purposes – they were instead different approaches to the politics of development adopted by concerned scholars and (with Gramsci) "organic intellectuals" in the Left as a whole both within and outside its organised sectors. I shall label the one the *state-modernist* and the other the *popular-developmental* school. The first perspective will be identified only as a point of reference. The second, however, calls for more attention. It never did get the upper hand within the established Left, but it turned into a kind of intellectual platform for exciting attempts at using further democratisation to renew the political development Project.³⁸

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According to the *state-modernisers*, economic growth essentially occurred because capitalists had to promote the development of the forces of production in general, and the technical modernisation of production in particular, in order to profit and thus survive. Workers, on the other hand, neither commanded

production nor were responsible for its development. They could only press for as large share of the surplus as possible.

The capitalists of Kerala, however, had rarely "done their job" – i.e., reinvesting and modernising production. Again, this was not workers' responsibility. And the unions could hardly call off the class struggle in order to promote development. But while capitalists could turn to speculation or invest somewhere else, most people needed productive economic growth in Kerala to get more jobs and better wages. Consequently, *the state* had to intervene and promote growth.

The state should encourage a better work ethic among workers and more productive investment among capitalists. It should intervene to save jobs in "sick" industries and sometimes form co-operatives. It should promote the modernisation of production, infrastructure, and administration. Kerala had to measure up on the markets, go for the cheapest and most efficient methods of production, and make full use of its comparative advantages. This might imply some interference with nature, for instance to get cheap electricity. But infant third world industries would not be able to stand up against already powerful international corporations without (ab)using nature (though not necessarily to the same extent that their competitors did when they grew strong in the presently industrialised countries). Small-scale local and popular initiatives might seem beautiful, the state-modernisers said, but they were far from a powerful response to the present challenges. Efficient state intervention was necessary instead. Comprehensive programmes and packages should be developed and implemented by skilled and impartial administrators and technocrats. And this would not be possible without radically streamlining public administration and strong local governments to get rid of compartmentalisation, factionalism, vested interests, etc.

In other words, Nehru's state-modernisation should be reaffirmed and upgraded according to the experiences of rapid state-led industrialisation in East Asia (including in China). And when confronted with the fact that this model of development might destroy nature, marginalise some people, and require modernising hard state institutions rather than democratisation, the state-modernisers said they did not have answers to everything, but that there was no alternative under global capitalism, and that unions and Left parties should fight hard to give people their due share of the cake.

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The stagnation of production was an yet more important point of departure for the *popular-developmentalists* (or the "PDs" for short). They thought that the

Left as a whole (and not just certain parties) would only be attractive if people found laborious collective political action and social organisation necessary for developing their own capacity to increase production and improve their standard of living. Thus, the old radical political development Project had only been viable as long as it had really helped people to promote development in general and production in particular (through the redistribution of land, for instance). But that was not the case any longer. The stagnation of production made it difficult even to maintain wages, to say nothing of generating new jobs. Furthermore, the social and fiscal basis of the welfare state had been undermined. The result was not just hardship, but political alienation as well and the Left as a whole ran the risk of becoming irrelevant. It could no longer offer a convincing strategy for how ordinary men and women could create a better future for themselves through hard work and collective action. Many people turned instead to individual or family solutions and to communal patronage. Feudal-like landlordism had been abolished. Capitalism remained to be fought. But in relation to agriculture (and thus most people), this could not be done on the basis of conflicts between capital and labour. Instead, more and more conflicts in this area took place "among the people" (as between post-land reform farmers and agricultural labourers).³⁹ The established leftist mass movements and fronts lost momentum and even risked disintegration.

According to the PDs, therefore, the Left as a whole had to work out a credible new development Project for Kerala. And the established Left had to do so also in order to sustain its old forces *and* to attract new sympathisers, both within the swelling and job-seeking middle classes, and among the vulnerable sections of the population (where many people were subject to communal patronage).

Moreover, the PDs said, leftists must give more priority to production than before. Even though reddish Kerala was constrained by the much less radical changes in the Indian union as a whole, the possibilities of going ahead were not exhausted. Capitalists and possibly the state were responsible, certainly, for the improvement of production and administration in sectors where people were subordinated. But again, the division of labour within agriculture was now less clear-cut now than it had been before the land reform. Landlords were no more. Capitalists were weak. Many farmers employing agricultural labourers were also wage-earners themselves. People, therefore, could do something on their own – and then press for state support. And they could do it now, within the limits of the existing system.

Finally, even though many leading PDs were medical, natural and technical scientists, they did not explain stagnation primarily in terms of undeveloped forces of production, but as largely a result of social disorganisation. The latter, they said, had even led to ecological degradation and the development of destructive technologies. The retardation of agricultural growth was related to, firstly, the previously almost unknown summer droughts, which were caused mainly by deforestation in the mountains; secondly, the neglect of local land-water management and construction instead of ill-suited, badly functioning and extremely costly public dam-canal irrigation systems; thirdly, the absence of a regulated marketing system for agricultural products (in addition to the struggle for better prices); and fourthly, the lack of any consistent follow-up of the land reform by way of land consolidation and the promotion of co-operation among farmers.

All these factors, in the view of the PDs, called, for better management of natural and human resources, rather than for a one-sided emphasis on advanced productive forces. And this in turn, required social and institutional change, the reorientation of radical mass organisations, and the reappraisal of conventional state development policies.

But how would all this be possible? What concrete measures and actions, if any, did the PDs have in mind? Let us begin with their attempts at a new political development Project, and then take a closer look at the importance of democratisation.

Elements of a popular development programme

To begin with, some points that were fundamental for the PDs eventually won fairly wide acceptance within the Left as a whole (including among state modernisers).⁴⁰

First, the argument that a major effort to promote development required not less but rather more – and more efficient – welfare policies to be widely respected and generate enthusiasm among people. Society as a whole would benefit from increased production. The state and other public institutions, consequently, must stimulate a better work culture and voluntary initiatives, as well as take responsibility for those badly affected by such developments as retrenchments. The latter (and their unions and other organisations) would otherwise block development.

Secondly the idea that successful development efforts called for decisions and actions on the basis of collective productive interests rather than narrow union or party considerations. The Left parties should encourage mutual

understanding, abstain from trying to dominate development activities, and invite all parties and relevant movements to participate. Party-led unions should encourage the work ethic and co-operate with other unions within the public sector, companies and various economic branches.

Thirdly, the thesis that the state should resume potentially viable sick and closed industries, plus promote new public and private investment according to aggressive and conscious plans – hopefully with the support of the Central Government in New Delhi. This presupposed more efficient state administration (including promotional agencies) and public transportation. The diversified generation of electricity should be stepped up without destroying nature. And forest and marine resources should be protected.

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In addition to this, the PDs considered one special project in line with the three points above (and approved by the state modernisers as well), to be particularly important and potentially path-breaking: *group farming*.⁴¹

Group farming of rice⁴² was the first comprehensive effort to follow up the land reform. Farmers, on the one side, had resisted any change of ownership, including co-operatives, thus preventing efficient land, water, and pest management. Workers, on the other side, had resisted any rationalisation that might lead to retrenchments. The top-down introduction of modern technologies by the state had been of little use. Group farming was an attempt to increase productivity, reduce the cost of cultivation, and generate greater and profitable rice production without altering the structure of ownership and without causing harm to the labourers.

The state ministry of agriculture – under the dynamic leadership of Mr. V.V. Raghavan (CPI) – set up local extension offices, *Krishi Bhavans*, in almost all the roughly one thousand Kerala *panchayats*. The paddy farmers in each micro-watershed within the *panchayats* were then offered financial and technical assistance as well as subsidies if they took up joint farm operations, water management, plant protection, purchase of inputs, etc. under the leadership of the local agricultural extension officer and a convenor of their own. Next to the separate group committees was a local advisory body with politicians, various civil servants from concerned departments, representatives from farmers' organisations – and some from worker's organisations as well. Workers even agreed to mechanisation, given that they had some say, that some social security was available, and that remunerative rice cultivation implied more jobs and better pay than if the owners turned to other business.

Group farming started in the Autumn (*Virippu /Kharif*) season of 1989 among more than 160.000 farmers in more than 3.000 groups on more than 60.000 hectares (or 25 % of the paddy land). One year later the figures had doubled. And production and productivity seemed to increase substantially.⁴³

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Group farming was thus a good indication, the PDs claimed, of the need for better management of land, water and other resources if production was to be increased. The successful state introduction of modern technologies presupposed popular participation. And nothing of this kind would be possible without the mobilisation and organisation of the people.

Furthermore, better management of all the necessary resources – including the coordination of fragmented state agencies and efforts into comprehensive development schemes, and local popular participation in such schemes as well – presupposed the decentralisation of government powers and resources. And then to see to it that local governments were doing well, and had not turned into hotbeds for further corruption etc., there was a need for additional popular participation in local administration and for popular mobilisation and organisation as well (to keep track of various representatives, for instance).

But how would decentralisation and popular mobilisation for development purposes come about?

Decentralisation itself had to be carried out from above, after discussions and decisions in the parties and the state assembly, and in consultation with the civil servants and their organisations (even though local pressure was important). Some popular mobilisation could also be achieved through the parties and their mass organisations. But since their main priority was hardly popular mobilisation for non-partisan development work, most efforts had to be nourished outside the established political set-up (whether leftist or not), on the grass-roots level, and within the framework of the long tradition in Kerala of popular social, economic, and cultural action and organisation.

Many PDs, therefore, combined individual involvement in parties and mass organisations with collective non-party political development studies, research and action in various popular organisations, including in the previously mentioned KSSP (People's Science Movement), action groups, and NGOs. And some of the committed, experienced and often well educated activists could draw on good contacts and know-how – all the way from the *panchayat* offices to the ministries and agencies in New Delhi. All together this together endowed the organisationally rather weak PDs with a unique and powerful flexibility. They were present on many levels and developed extensive

networks based on mutual commitment instead of patron-clientelism. Many PDs were not only firmly based within political parties and various popular movements as well – without which they might have ended up as a well-intended but isolated vanguard – they were also able to lobby or directly influence powerful people on local and other levels, plus make their way as experts or act as skilled brokers-*cum*-pilots in uncharted waters (as when trying, for instance, to get various politicians, bureaucrats and others to support a particular project).⁴⁴

So what were the most important projects of the PDs themselves, beyond group farming?

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Despite various ideas of how to involve people in constructive development work (including one about voluntary "Development Brigades of Youth") and numerous pilot-projects for similar purposes, there were no signs of a dynamic social movement – not, that is, until a *massive literacy programme* gained momentum in early 1989.⁴⁵

As many as some eighty per cent of adult Keralites were literate.⁴⁶ But the fact that about twenty percent of adult population could not read and write was bad enough – especially according to the PDs, who argued in favour of development based on the hidden capacity of the majority of the population, including the most downtrodden. Illiteracy prevented many people from taking active part in development efforts, to say nothing of their difficulties in making full use of the formal civil and democratic rights they already possessed.

In addition to this, the PDs wanted to undermine the devastating political horse trading by empowering backward communities and oppressed illiterates, who were particularly sensitive to patronage and communalism. And the organised Left, of course, was attracted by the fact that this might also broaden its electoral base. Generally speaking, a mere three or four percent in additional votes – and in some places much less – would make a major difference, given the high level of organisation in Kerala politics and the tight margins between the two fronts in many of the single-member-constituencies.⁴⁷

The People's Science Movement (KSSP) had previously tried launching mass literacy drives on its own. In the late 1980's, however, the PDs concluded that they had underestimated the problems and been over-optimistic, and had neglected to launch a "total integration of government and people's efforts into one single fully planned programme".⁴⁸ While many NGOs preferred independent efforts, the PDs and the KSSP thus opted instead for broad co-operation and joint actions with almost all social and political organisations, as

well as with the government. This was facilitated, of course, by the fact that a friendly Left Front Government was now in power, but also by the positive role played by the National Literacy Mission – which enabled the KSSP itself to get moral and political support plus substantial funds from the Central Government – and by the ability of the science activists to design a feasible concrete pilot project in close co-operation with the chief administrator (or District Collector) of the Ernakulam-Cochin district, who was a former vice-president of the KSSP.⁴⁹

To ensure mass participation, the entire district was targeted at the same time. The whole population – including some 2.3 million literates and 235.000 illiterates⁵⁰ – was "saturated" with information, cultural performances etc., and offered various opportunities to contribute by studying or helping others to study.

To make the best possible use of both government administration and mass participation, the machine of project implementation was first de-linked from the regular bureaucracy. Thereafter it was backed up on each level by the government under the district collector, on the one hand, and popular committees (with the KSSP as the backbone) on the other.

So not to lose speed, and to be able to carry out a mass campaign without vested interests, the operation lasted for only a year. The actual teaching was even more intensive – and committed. The KSSP itself saw to it that suitable teaching and learning materials were prepared and produced. Some 50.000 trained volunteers a literacy survey covering all of the roughly 600.000 households in the district. Later on, the approximately 18.000 instructors looked up the illiterate and held classes at the latter's convenience, rather than (as usual) the other way around. There was only a maximum of just fifteen learners per class, as against the "normal" thirty. All illiterates between six and sixty years of age were included, as against the normal practice of excluding those over thirty-five. And to afford all this, and to promote real commitment, most instructors and others involved were volunteers. Moreover, those employed knew that they had to work virtually night and day, and accordingly they were usually taken on deputation, so that they would have a job to return to.

The first part of "the Ernakulam Total Literacy Programme" became a success story. The PDs' ideas gained a lot of influence. Then-Prime Minister V.P. Singh declared Ernakulam the first fully literate district in India on February 4, 1990.⁵¹ The approach served as a blueprint for the literacy

campaign then launched in Kerala as a whole, and was adopted in other parts of India as well.

According to the PDs, however, post-literacy activities were even more important. The plan was not only to sustain literacy through further education but also to extend the activities of the volunteers, and of the newly literate, into other development fields. One idea, for instance, was to initiate similar mass movements for the improvement of school education and primary health care; accordingly a UNICEF sponsored health programme for the total immunisation of all children was begun in January 1990.⁵²

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Another exciting project which gained some momentum was the *Panchayat Level People's Resource Mapping*. It was modelled on the literacy campaign, and aimed at supplementing group farming in the PD efforts towards more radical development in the rural areas.⁵³

The PDs, as we know, saw group farming as a potentially path-breaking post-land reform effort to increase production through more efficient management of land, water and other resources. To this end, the PDs argued, group farming itself had to be followed up. The predominant maximisation of short-term returns were not sustainable. "The basic life support system of land and water – the prime mover of socio-economic development – has already fallen into the ambit of the law of diminishing returns, with reduction of productivity vis-a-vis energy inputs, and physical degradation".⁵⁴ A radical overhaul of resource management was therefore necessary. This called for comprehensive watershed planning in the *panchayats* (rather than on the state and district levels) – which in turn presupposed massive mapping of *and* widespread knowledge about the local resources.

Said and (almost) done: from 1989 to 1991, some leading scholars of the Centre for Earth Science Studies and the KSSP managed to design and try out resource mapping with popular participation on the *panchayat* level, as well as to mobilise substantial Government funding in New Delhi and sufficient political patronage in Thiruvananthapuram.

In this kind of "land literacy programme"⁵⁵, the earth scientists would systematise all information, serve as project leaders, and map the land and water resources in each of the *panchayats* which agreed to participate in the programme. The mapping of land-use and local assets, however, would be carried out by volunteers from the various *panchayat* wards, in close contact with those who actually used the land and cared for it.

While the scientific experts would be responsible for technical training and guiding the volunteers, the KSSP would mobilise and organise them in co-operation with leaders and organisations in the *panchayats*. Scholars in the KSSP would also help the volunteers to carry out a supplementary socio-economic survey. Many of the capable retired persons, teachers and unemployed students who can be found in the often semi-urban villages of Kerala were engaged.

As soon as the data had been collected and processed, all the parties involved would take part in the formulation and implementation of local action plans – such as for land and water management, drinking water systems, flood control, and local infrastructure, as well as the generation of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, energy, fisheries, and small-scale and tiny industries.

Then, the PDs hoped, these knowledgeable and committed persons and their plans would become the foundation for locally based and integrated state planning – as against the centralised and compartmentalised practices prevailing. The same people would also be prepared – as soon as real decentralisation of powers came about – to run efficient local government with popular participation beyond unfruitful and affected political, caste and religious divisions. And the same people, finally, would be more eager than earlier to support development-oriented politicians – as well as to call for alternative party and state policies, to reform rigid traditional parties and organisations (including the leftist ones) and if that proved impossible to dispense with them.

Popular development and democratisation

On a closer look, then, what was the special importance of democratisation in the above 'elements of a popular development programme'? Let us again use the previously outlined non-partisan conceptualisation of democratisation with popular sovereignty and political equality as the core element, and its preconditions, forms, scope and content as associated and varying factors.⁵⁶

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Firstly, the *preconditions for meaningful democracy* to which the PDs gave priority. According to the previous political development Project, a basic prerequisite was to get rid of feudal-like extra-economic oppression. This task was now fulfilled, thanks to the land reform. But according to the PDs, many men (and even more women) still met with serious problems in actually making use of their civil and democratic rights. Besides authoritarian family

relations, a great deal of patronage, nepotism, communalism, etc. survived, although their previous feudal-like foundations had been eradicated.

Therefore, PDs argued (or some of them, at least), one should not underestimate the capacity of ideas and forms of rule to persist even when their original socio-economic foundations were no more. A further precondition for meaningful democracy was thus that authoritarian and communal ideas be tackled head on. So besides arguments for secularism and civil rights, and attempts to isolate communalist groups, some PDs were prepared even to work alongside religious people with an interest in structural change. They pointed to the importance of socio-religious and cultural reform efforts in line with those of such leaders as Gandhiji.⁵⁷

Most PDs emphasised, however, that such seemingly ancient phenomena as patronage and communalism now survived and developed due to the fact that they had been integrated into capitalist-dominated relations. These relations, moreover, were far from homogeneous. Commerce spiralled while production suffered, and the material interests of broad classes of people were less clear-cut than before. This nourished individualistic survival strategies, clientelism, group-specific organisation, and mobilisation on the basis of religious and cultural identities. The traditional Left could no longer offer a powerful alternative. And the welfare-state measures that had been intended to replace old-time patronage were not only insufficient, as well as under attack for economic and political reasons. Many of them had also been captured by new patrons and their associated clients.

Meaningful democracy, according to the PDs, therefore also required (in addition to ideological struggle) extended and improved welfare policies, decentralisation of government and administration, and popular development alternatives.

Extended and improved welfare policies, firstly – including basic social security, health and education – were necessary to ensure people sufficient autonomy to exercise their democratic rights in accordance with their own opinions and interests, without having to submit to the wishes of various resource-rich persons, communities, or organisations. A safety net for those badly affected by economic modernisation was necessary for promoting peaceful and fruitful ways of handling such contradictions as those between workers and employers. Consequently, the PDs gave priority to (for instance) a massive popular literacy campaign in co-operation with the government, so that also the most downtrodden would be capable of making actual use of their civil and democratic rights.

Decentralisation of government and public administration, secondly, was necessary for democratisation beyond Thiruvananthapuram – on the district and *panchayat* levels. And local government was necessary for meaningful popular participation and vigilance against the abuse of power. The PDs themselves could only press for decentralisation, but a primary aim of most of their projects (including their *panchayat* resource mapping programme) was to build dynamic local foundations for democracy.

Popular development alternatives, finally, were necessary to prove that it was worthwhile for people to try to promote their own future through collective organisation and action based on common interests and ideas instead of relying on individual solutions, patronage or communal loyalties. And as we have seen, popular development initiatives were basic to the PDs.

However, while much of the PDs' provisional programme thus aimed at developing additional preconditions for meaningful democracy, *popular sovereignty according to the principle of political equality* did not have to wait, in their view, until all of these preconditions had been fulfilled. Instead, the PDs were faithful to one of the major assumptions of the previous political development Project – that a majority of the population would not only benefit from radical reforms once they were implemented, but would also work and vote for them within the limits of the existing system.

Actually, the PDs took an even more consistent position by launching their literacy campaign, and thereby giving priority to the integration of the weakest sections of the society (as against incorporation based on patronage). Furthermore, the attempts to generate the local foundations for democracy, by means of such measures as the mapping of village resources, involved practising democratic relations both among the people themselves and vis-à-vis various authorities. And even though the PDs stressed the importance of the people's own initiatives, they were also eager to co-operate with the government. They accepted the rules of the game, including the corollary that the very fate of decentralisation rested with elected politicians and administrators who usually benefited from centralism.

Within the development field, however, the PDs often sought a change from the conventional interpretation of the principle of political equality (one-man-one-vote). They suggested replacing majority decisions among universally elected politicians with consensual agreements among the people directly involved. Many PDs felt that development efforts had suffered from party-politicisation and associated majority decisions. Narrow union or party

considerations should thus be purged and replaced by decisions and actions based on relevant scholarly knowledge and joint productive interests among those actually using the resources.

Much of what we have said so far relates to *the forms and scope of democracy* as well. While the traditional Left relied on the general principle of struggle and administration, and tried to extend democratic forms of governance to additional spheres of society by way of state intervention, the PDs added more independent popular initiatives and participation, as well as further democratisation of local government and resource management. An essential argument was that, just as land reform had been necessary to make peasants into masters of land – and thus able to improve production by working for themselves rather than the landlords – joint farm management and popular participation in agricultural extension schemes were now necessary to also make them into masters of all the other resources (such as water, inputs and know-how), and thereby able to increase *sustainable* production further. Group farming and *panchayat* resource mapping were only the beginning. And all this called for additional democratisation beyond the previous politics of popular pressure and top-down democratisation.

Decentralising government and public administration was thus necessary – but insufficient. Many PDs wanted to go beyond more or less party- and local government-led efforts, such as those in West Bengal.⁵⁸ As already hinted at, the emphasis in Kerala was rather on more independent popular mobilisation, organisation and participation, based on productive interests and joint development plans. This was not only to provide for more direct control of the state and politics (in addition to traditional representation), and thereby to minimise compartmentalisation, vested interests, outright corruption, etc. It was also to generate collective awareness and management of the resources themselves, whether collectively or privately owned.

An important principle was that all the parties involved and concerned by the actual use to which resources were put should be enrolled. The forms, however, might vary. Co-operatives and group farming were some. Supportive voluntary organisations like the KSSP another. Joint project organisations a third. And in addition to this, the more or less independent popular action and organisation in "civil society" should try to link up with government efforts on various levels – while politicians and administrators should also adapt their way of functioning to a fruitful model for popular participation. The literacy-promoting efforts jointly conducted by various popular organisations,

volunteers, concerned experts, and government and administrators served as a preliminary blueprint to the PDs.

Finally, like all leftists using political action to strengthen the otherwise weak position of common people, the PDs viewed the outcome, *the content of democratically decided politics*, as critically important. They even argued, as we know, that meaningful democracy *presupposed* extended and improved welfare policies, decentralised of government and administration, and popular development alternatives. So the PDs would certainly have branded decisions running counter to these prerequisites as undemocratic, even if the decisions themselves had been made in accordance with democratic principles of popular sovereignty and political equality.

On the other hand, however, we also know that the PDs found the same principles, and the forms of democracy as well, extremely important in the very struggle for these additional democratic preconditions.

Moreover, the PDs were highly critical of the prevailing party-politicisation of development policies, arguing instead for popular participation and broad agreements based on scientific knowledge and joint productive interests. With this approach, it was hoped, the PDs might even be able to withstand the previous vicious circle, in which those in opposition (leftists or rightists) demanded more ambitious minimum prerequisites than they did when forming the government. This meant that, when out of office, both sides opposed (by all reasonable means) such decisions as they considered ran counter to these prerequisites, and proceeded to alter the decisions upon recovering office. Thus the circle began anew. The only major (and widely celebrated) exception, in the PD view, was the need to stand up forcefully against communalism in general and communal politics in particular, since it undermined the most basic prerequisites for democracy.

According to the PDs, this principled policy was also needed because horse-trading with communal groups was politically devastating to the broad Left itself. Moreover, opposing the vicious circle and recommending broad co-operation have always been easier for those who neither command the major instruments of political power nor form the main opposition to those who do. And, as a leading PD remarked off record, "at the end of the day, left-orientation is what's most important to me; so if decentralisation, for instance, means that the reactionaries might gain ground, then it's not so easy anymore..."⁵⁹ But while this may sound rather Machiavellian, it may also be the very reason for why such good things as democratic decentralisation ever come

about – and it testifies, at any rate, to the importance of following and analysing the PD politics of democratisation over time.

The new Project gains ground but fails to take root

In other words, the fundamental leftist idea of employing collective political action to make up for the shortage of economic and military power among common people, and thus to improve their lot, was not really dead. The old radical political development Project was bypassed, but in contrast to the conventional socialists in such places as Eastern Europe and the Philippines, the lot in Kerala did not lose out in the quest of the 1980's for more freedom and democracy. The Left Front was instead voted back into office. And the generally left-oriented PDs made an impressive attempt to work out elements of a new Project with further democratisation as a key element.

We must recall, of course, the PDs commanded neither the Kerala Left Front Government nor any particular party; indeed, they did not even play the first fiddle. Yet in a time of economic and political stagnation and of cynicism, they stood for renewal and expressed confidence in what people themselves could achieve in the future. And though they did not have an answer to all of the urgent problems, they managed nevertheless to draw up an alternative to free-market neo-liberalism as well as to authoritarian developmental-state-interventionism – an alternative that was based, moreover, on the idea of liberating the dynamic capacity of the people themselves to generate sustainable growth and equality in combination.

Critical aspects of their thinking eventually won fairly widespread acceptance within the Left Front. They were able to influence strategic elements of the government's development planning and programmes. Many competent radical experts were PDs, and their concepts were good for production as well as for government popularity.

Their own plans and activities were flexible, moreover, and were meant to take root through (and be improved by) popular participation, which in turn would generate widespread demands and collective action for further social, economic and political change. And even more: democratisation was an essential and integral part of the entire PD programme, not only because it was considered important as such, but also because the very implementation of the programme assumed it.

So what happened then – beyond the formulation and initiation of the programme? In the following sections, we shall examine how and why the politics of democratisation changed as the PDs implemented their plans, mobilised and organised popular support, and handled friends, obstacles, and foes. And while we shall find that most challenges called for additional democratisation, we shall also see that, to a certain extent, this was difficult to achieve because of the limitations of the PD approach itself. But let us take it from the beginning, starting with one particular PD project at a time when the Left Front was still in power. Finally we shall take a look at the consequences of the Front's electoral defeat in June 1991, before returning later on, we hope, with a re-study of further developments.

Limited democratic dynamism from the literacy campaign

The first part of the Ernakulam District Total Literacy Programme was, as we know, an unprecedented achievement in the history of India's literacy movement. It testified, moreover, to the potential of joint popular and government action. As soon as virtually all the illiterates of Ernakulam had been taught to read and write, a similar gigantic programme for all the other districts turned some 1.5 million persons into neo-literates in the space of another year. The programme thus proved capable of mobilising almost the entire state and society, and of making Kerala as a whole fully literate in record time. But besides the usual problem of maintaining literacy after the initial campaign, how did the fundamental long-term aim fare – of empowering people, by making the most downtrodden able actually to use their civil and democratic rights, and by creating a favourable milieu at the same time for everyone involved to extend their joint activities into other developmental fields?

The answer, unfortunately, is rather gloomy.⁶⁰

While it is obvious that the literacy campaign generated some of the fundamental prerequisites for democracy, and for popular development as well, these preconditions did not give rise to the further processes of democratisation that were regarded as necessary for the overall PD programme to take root.

The PDs themselves were engaged mainly in creating the preconditions for others to develop democracy further. The PDs were to be the catalysts who filled up old trenches, opened new doors, spread new ideas, took new initiatives, provided for more popular involvement, and brought people and organisations together. The PDs therefore gave priority to organisations like

the KSSP, and to efficient project machines. But in no way did they aim at "taking over" the role of the state or the various popular organisations (including the political parties). Based on its own critical evaluation of previous experiences,⁶¹ the KSSP tried to involve as many people as possible in the process of implementation during the Ernakulam literacy campaign (including voluntary organisations, political activists, the public administration, and so on). And the following state-wide campaign was led by a new literacy society headed by the chief minister, cabinet ministers, senior officials, eminent personalities, and representatives of political parties, mass organisations, and voluntary agencies. At the same time, the many local government officials, about 800.000 volunteers, and between 300.000 and 400.000 instructors were out in the field.⁶²

So the question is whether the others who were expected to be stimulated to carry out further democratisation also found it sensible to do so.

The state and government, to begin with, played an essential role in legitimising the campaigns, including the emphasis on popular participation in general and participatory management in particular. The Ernakulam district collector and his administration, with previous experiences from social welfare campaigns, played an exceptional role in implementing the pilot project. The results of the state-wide campaign in different districts seem, moreover, to vary with the commitment of the district collectors.⁶³ But the general impression is that the backbone of both campaigns was the people's committees and the sub-project offices.⁶⁴ It was difficult for activists to co-operate with the government even when the Left held power at the state level and a former KSSP leader was in command of the district.⁶⁵ And most importantly, the much-applauded participatory management was limited in time and space. It was neither institutionalised nor firmly linked with the delayed efforts to decentralise government and administration (to which we shall return in a few pages).⁶⁶

But did not people's organisations in general and political parties and movements in particular – the backbone of most processes of genuine democratisation – take the opportunity of participating and of influencing people?

Generally speaking: no.

It is true that party politics was excluded, in order to avoid previous trench warfare. The possibility, however, of actively supporting the long-term democratic and developmental aims of the project – and thus linking individual empowerment with collective aims and action – did not seem to make much sense to the politically organised Keralites.⁶⁷ While, interestingly enough, the

more dominant and patronising communists of West Bengal later on carried out a much more party-dependent literacy campaign, their Kerala comrades were fortunately unable to benefit from a similarly hegemonic position – but thus tended instead to ignore the campaign. The government as well as the top political leaders took a benevolent view of the ideas, but priority was hardly given to the matter locally. Reviews indicate that while more instructors were women than men, and conformed nicely to the cultural and religious background of the learners as well, the majority had no political affiliation whatsoever. Local programme success did not seem to vary with the strength of the supportive political parties. Apparently, parties and mass movements had access to – and were adapted to – less time-consuming ways of mobilising people behind their demands and electoral platforms.⁶⁸ So developing the potential of the literacy campaign was left largely to comparatively apolitical and uncoordinated voluntary organisations. And despite their many other qualities, the activists were predominantly young women, and "thus not always the most authoritative concientisers".⁶⁹

The much acclaimed second phase of the literacy campaigns, therefore, was neglected already before the new Congress-led government undermined the whole programme (something to which we shall return). The plan was to follow up the spectacular first campaign with further education and self-studies among the neo-literates, and the transformation of literacy centres into people's fora for wider developmental activities.⁷⁰ However, while everybody recognised the importance of the second phase, not even the KSSP seemed to have had a clear idea about it from the start.⁷¹ Instead, most PDs probably assumed it would grow naturally out of the dynamism expected during the first phase. But it did not. The first pilot project in Ernakulam had already lost much of its momentum before an attempt was made to begin the second phase. And when Kerala as a whole was declared (almost) literate in March 1991, the second phase was postponed (rather than launched and enhanced) in the face of the general elections.⁷²

In other words, not even the envisioned space for further democratisation opened up. The PDs had humbly restricted themselves to creating preconditions such as literacy, on the basis of which major social and political forces would then proceed with democratisation and development. The main problem, of course, was that the latter did not do so. Still worse, the PDs had abstained from dealing with why such problems might arise, and thereby from identifying which additional prerequisites for democracy and popular

development were needed for getting the process from individual empowerment to democratic development going.

So as time went by, the PDs themselves could mainly work in two directions. On the one hand, they could initiate special development projects, and thus attract some of the people mobilised during the literacy campaign. On the other, they could try to persuade politicians finally to move ahead with decentralisation, and thus to open up for widespread popular participation and local democracy. Hence, we turn first to the group farming and resource mapping projects, and then to the issue of decentralisation.

Mixed interests in halfway group farming

The post-land reform problems of agricultural production, as we have seen, called for more efficient land, water, and pest management. This presupposed, among other things, viable larger units and an understanding between farmers and workers.⁷³ Finance and market relations also had to be improved. And state support had to be well co-ordinated. In principle, of course, there were different ways of doing all those things. But since most Keralites agreed that relying on the emergence of forceful rich farmers was as out of the question as authoritarian state-run agriculture or abused producer co-operatives, the only option left seemed to be co-operation among the many small farmers themselves. And group farming seemed to be the only feasible way of realising it.

There were three additional assumptions. To begin with, the landowners, or the post-land reform farmers, were taken to be interested in improving agricultural production, and, hence to be prepared to co-operate with each other to that end – if it proved realistic and profitable. Agricultural workers, for their part, were taken to be interested in jobs and pay and therefore willing to accept the development of production – if, that is, they did not lose out in the process. And the Left Front and its Government, finally, were assumed to be capable of making all this possible, by showing the farmers that co-operation would be realistic and profitable, and by assuring the workers that they would not lose out.

Consequently, the ministry of agriculture set up local extension offices in almost all the panchayats. Local committees aimed at co-ordinating and streamlining all government activities. Representatives of various organisations, including those of farmers and labourers, were invited to participate and to work out a kind of corporatist social contract. And farmers were offered an attractive package of inputs, expertise, and subsidies – if they

took up joint farm operations and related activities under the leadership of an agricultural extension officer and a convenor of their own.

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So how did this interest based and state-initiated politics of democratic participation and co-operation for the promotion of agricultural development really work out?

Right from the Autumn (*Virippu*) crop of 1989, when group farming of rice was introduced, more and more farmers were eager to be included in the programme. Production and productivity increased, and there seems to have been a significant reduction in the cost of cultivation.⁷⁴ This signalled a major reversal of previous depressing trends and ineffectual extension schemes. However the *virippu* crop was good in non-group farming areas as well.⁷⁵ And while the difference may nevertheless have been significant,⁷⁶ much of the encouraging results seemed to be due to the increase in the use of high yielding seed varieties and to favourable weather conditions, rather than to co-operation for promoting more efficient and sustainable resource management.⁷⁷

What had happened?

The Minister of Agriculture, V.V. Raghavan in the Left Front Government, devoted himself to the idea of group farming, and to its implementation as well, with impressive skill and uncynical enthusiasm.⁷⁸ Group farming was his project. He even managed to convince much of his staff of the need to work in close contact with the farmers via new local extension offices (*Krishi Bhavan*).⁷⁹ And at least some co-ordination with other ministries and government agencies was accomplished, so that (for instance) pumps and electricity to make them work could come together. But as the desired decentralisation of state government as a whole was still a matter of good intentions, V.V. Raghavan, for his part, could mainly improve his ministry's capacity to implement policies from top-down via its own local offices and consultative committees (which were composed of representatives from other ministries, agencies, political organisations and interest groups).

Even though this was pregnant with the devastating logic of top-down politics, it could have been supplemented, of course, by the action of others from below. But as we shall see, the actual role of the state and its agricultural extension officers was not limited to proposing co-operation among farmers and then providing the basic preconditions thereof. The state's role also tended to include an attempt to set up and even run those co-operative efforts. So despite the good intentions to make way for more independent popular initiatives and participation, the group farming programmes failed to go

beyond the previous leftist habit of trying to spread democratic forms of governance to additional spheres of society by way of state intervention.

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To begin with, political organisations in general, and farmers' and agricultural workers' movements in particular, did not give priority to group farming.

It is true that V.V. Raghavan managed to get the approval of the Left Front parties and their affiliated farmers' and agricultural workers' movements. He even seemed capable of solving the painful conflict with the Left over the mechanisation of agriculture, since this was now taking place without much resistance.⁸⁰ But in reality he was rather isolated. The support of parties and mass movements was mainly "in principle" and, at best, on the central level. The rank-and-file and many leaders as well were lukewarm.⁸¹ And the attempt by the CPI-M youth movement to mobilise voluntary labour for local development purposes run into problems because of presumed party biases.⁸² Group farming had to be saved from conventional competition for party leadership and control. The Left Front in Kerala was not in the same hegemonic position as its counterpart in West Bengal. It was critical that all farmers be enrolled on the basis of fundamental productive interest rather than political affiliation and patronage. So even though the members of leftist parties and movements were instructed to attempt to build a social movement for popular development, most of them did not throw in their lot with group farming, (other than, presumably, on an individual basis).⁸³ There were even problems in getting the local party-politicised co-operative banks to provide farmers with venture capital for development purposes – which made further troublesome state-subsidies unavoidable.⁸⁴

Secondly, there seemed to be no unified interest in joint management among the producers themselves.

V.V. Raghavan, among others, was not only able to get group farming started from above. He was also full of ideas (not necessarily politically anchored) about how it would be possible for the farmers themselves, with state support, to develop group farming further. Besides land, water, and pest management, they could, for instance, come together against middlemen by purchasing inputs collectively, storing the harvest until prices were right, establishing consumer co-operatives and so on.⁸⁵ There were few signs, however, of a general interest in collective action. To begin with, good performance by individual farm groups was instead related to the special abilities of the group convenors and the *Krishi Bhavan* officers.⁸⁶

Moreover, agricultural workers were not included in the farm groups. They were only represented by two persons in the twenty-man-strong village advisory committee.⁸⁷ The previous tensions between farmers and workers, it was thought, should be avoided.⁸⁸

The dynamics of group farming were supposed to rest instead with the landowners, the post-land reform farmers, and their projected interest in boosting production (from which the workers would also benefit). But the farmers mainly engaged in joint land preparation – including mechanisation to reduce the cost of labour – and in selecting a uniform variety of seed. Collective and timely plant protection was not achieved in many places. Joint land development, water control, infrastructural improvements, mapping of specific problems, and mobilisation of manpower and other local resources were even more rare.⁸⁹ If the government had not added subsidies – including in cash – many farmers might not have participated at all, despite the other potential benefits to be had from the programme.⁹⁰ The many landowners who had other major income or investment opportunities besides farming were less prepared to engage in group activities than those who were primarily agriculturists.⁹¹ While subsidies, better seed varieties, mechanisation, and so on were fine, time-consuming joint management of land, pests and water, or the supervision of voluntary or publicly subsidised labour, were troublesome.⁹² Beyond group farming, moreover, any attempt to let unemployed agricultural workers (or even farm groups) make efficient use of fallow land (and thus to endanger property rights) was almost impossible. And while in other places illegal leasing arrangements have instead emerged, no progress has been made in weeding out the negative aspects by legalising and regulating acceptable forms of leasing – and to thus open up for increased production and more jobs.⁹³

As in the case of the Philippine peasants who did not relate as expected to Commander Dante's impressive co-operative effort,⁹⁴ something, in other words, was fundamentally wrong with the basic assumption about a universal interest among the farmers to improve production through viable joint action. Farmers differed from each other. Even the fully engaged agriculturist was usually part of a household with different income sources. Realism and profitability were measured in many ways. Landowners with other major employments found it difficult to engage themselves fully in group farming. Those with other investment opportunities – including trading, real estate, and

control of co-operatives or administration – may have found the substantial improvements through group farming insufficient to merit their full attention.

This is not to exclude the possibility of fairly widespread joint interest in improving production, including among farmers. But the analyses and assumptions behind group farming clearly failed to come to grips with the same complicated multiplicity of interests and conflicts that contributed to undermining the old political development Project in the wake of land reform.

Towards a refined PD approach?

How did the PDs read the problems of group farming? How did they try to move forward? And what was the importance of democratisation?

The focus was on the insufficient improvement of land and water management. This, the PDs said, was because there was "too much top-down bureaucratic intervention and too little mass movement".⁹⁵ Group farming had turned into "an over enthusiastic departmental programme" which lacked "adequate planning of all the essential elements involved", and which might repeat "the earlier mistake of recommending 'universal technology packages'" and adopting "a blind belief in chemicalised agriculture".⁹⁶

To alter this, leading PDs teamed up with agricultural experts, and in 1989 began working out a more developed Group Approach for Locally Adapted and Sustainable Agriculture, or "a blueprint for decentralised agriculture development".⁹⁷ In Kerala, they said, an increase of productivity within rice cultivation from the present 1.7 ton/ha to 6 ton/ha "should be within easy reach".⁹⁸ To get ahead within a period of three to five years, the team recommended "the development of local infrastructure, institutions and policies" and wanted to "mobilise the rural resources and manpower with the active collaboration of all rural development agencies". There should be "a shift from the over dependence on energy exhausting inputs to that of in situ input generation; a shift from the universality of technology application to that of contextual technology generation; a shift from the conventional pattern of technology dissemination through selected field demonstrations to that of taking the whole (...)micro-watershed as a single unit etc."⁹⁹

But how would all this be possible? Besides scientific methods, skill and education, there was a need for huge resources – in the range of 8 million Rs. per *panchayat*, 8 billion Rs. for Kerala as a whole, or 25.000 Rs. per ha.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, the PDs and the experts continued, it would only be possible to implement this with better organisation, new priorities, and the mobilisation of hidden or under-utilised resources. "The present practice of disbursing various

input subsidies (to the farmers) in cash long after the harvest is not performing any production function."¹⁰¹ Pooling the subsidies instead would take care of about ten per cent of what was needed. The integration of departments related to agriculture, new priorities ("including getting rid of contractors and bureaucrats appropriating and sharing money when building canals"¹⁰²) and the pooling of some of their revenues would correspond to about sixty per cent of the resources required. And voluntary or "'patriotic labour' by village youth, beneficiary farmers, school- college students and local labourers" would cover the remaining thirty per cent of the costs.¹⁰³

The cardinal question, of course, was how such a well-intentioned resource mobilisation might become a reality. And interestingly enough, the essence of the answer was: through extended democratisation and "societal will".

The propelling force would be "a strong patriotic movement"; "a big movement to organise, develop and utilise the land, water and manpower".¹⁰⁴ Such changes required, in turn, a shift from "the present compartmentalised departmentalism towards participatory involvement of the people right from the conception to the formulation and implementation of programmes specific to the contextual situation of each locality."¹⁰⁵ The many overlapping but uncoordinated committees and government institutions, which nourished vested interests and created more problems than they solved, should be brought together and provided with well defined functions and powers on all levels, especially in the *panchayats*.¹⁰⁶ The main focus, moreover, should be on "the organisation of the people to develop their own administrative and development capacity rather than to increase the number of bureaucrats 'to do things for people.'¹⁰⁷ And yes, besides popular mobilisation, this in fact presupposed "the backing of political will" and the "decentralisation of political power to democratic institutions on the *panchayat* level, where participation and the detection of misuse and corruption are easier".¹⁰⁸

But how would decentralisation come about? Who was against it? Who was for it? How to fight for it? Besides the unspecified "we bank on pressure from below", the PDs had precious little to say.¹⁰⁹

And what, then, about the previously discussed ambiguous assumptions about workers' and farmers' interests in group farming? While the PDs and experts counted on workers' contribution to the "patriotic" labour force, their blueprint only discussed the role of the workers from the point of view of what the farmers regarded as factors obstructing profitable rice cultivation.¹¹⁰ Moreover, the same report hardly touched on the problematic fundamental idea of a universal farmers' interest in improving production through viable joint

action. Material interests, which used to be the backbone of Marxist oriented analysis and praxis, were rather played down and supplemented by "the societal will".

"The ultimate success (...) will (...) depend largely on the strength of the societal will to generate enough non-material motivation supplementing the limited material reward and to evolve a consensus or at least a "common feeling" about the proper way of conducting affairs among the members of the society. In a multi-party political system like ours this can be a difficult task. But through education, leading to creative mass participation in the democratic institutions, this may be achieved."¹¹¹

So while the PDs limited themselves in the literacy campaign to the creation of some basic prerequisites for democracy, while abstaining from targeting the problems of how to get the process from individual empowerment to democratic development going, they now tried to improve group farming by calling for more democracy and "societal will" – without targeting the problems connected to such preconditions as decentralisation and interests in joint land and water management.

The experts involved envisioned a pilot project to try out the improved approach to group farming in the vicinity of Thrissur Agricultural University. Generally speaking, however, the PDs thus continued to depend heavily on the will and ability of politicians to implement decentralisation. And the PDs mainly devoted themselves to launching another mass campaign as a major instrument in local-level mobilisation towards a collective and radical overhaul of land and water management. This was the *Panchayat* Level People's Resource Mapping. And since this was also meant to enable people in the *panchayats* to make use of the expected decentralisation, and to expose politicians and administrators to some pressure really to carry it out, we shall discuss the mapping project before turning to the problems of decentralisation.

Activists' resource mapping

The "micro level resource survey with people's participation"¹¹² developed rapidly as a concept, but it was a latecomer in Kerala development politics, and remained invisible until a test case in Ulloor *panchayat* (nearby Thiruvananthapuram) was undertaken in late 1990.¹¹³ The subsequently following pilot project in twenty-five additional *panchayats* in various districts¹¹⁴ – with the Centre for Earth Science Studies, CESS, and the KSSP as

the principal initiators – could only be launched in March-April 1991.¹¹⁵ And the real push (including a state-wide campaign) was to follow the elections some three months later.¹¹⁶

The generally supportive Left Front Government, however, was voted out of office. So the late start, besides being a problem in itself, also makes it difficult to analyse how and why the politics of democratisation changed within the framework of the "original" project – before the elections rapidly and drastically altered the conditions. Instead, therefore, we must consult the post-election development of resource mapping to throw light on the brief initial period, but should only use information supplied by and/or discussed with the foremost leaders of the project (since the ultimate test of what difficulties can really be traced to the "original" project is that these devoted leaders cannot put the blame on the devastating policies of the new government) plus, of course, these leaders' own critical evaluations of the pre-election phase.¹¹⁷

Despite this, however, the main features are obvious enough. On the one hand, the PDs made an impressive attempt at substituting complicated popular and democratic development efforts for the previous more straightforward literacy campaign (thus also contributing a special project to the latter's problematic second phase). They even tried to mobilise much of the broad popular support themselves, as well as the prerequisites for local planning (including appropriate data, local expertise and widespread knowledge about local resources¹¹⁸) which they had earlier regarded as necessary if group farming was to advance towards sustainable agricultural development. But on the other hand, those important PD achievements were in any case insufficient when, as in the case of group farming, there was lukewarm interest among both landowners and powerful popular organisations and public institutions engaged in democratic work to promote agricultural development. So while group farming tended to depend on the devoted state intervention of the Ministry of Agriculture and its local *Krishi Bahvans*, resource mapping rested mainly on a kind of dynamic action group work (including lobbying and brokerage) by CESS scholars committed to the programme, and by enlightened KSSP activists. These problems thus call for a somewhat more detailed discussion: firstly, about hesitant farmers, and secondly, about indifferent popular organisations and public institutions.

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All the leading PDs point to problems of engaging people in general and producers in particular in collective and long-term development work.¹¹⁹ One example is that voluntary mapping mainly attracted young students and

educated middle-class people.¹²⁰ It is true that unusually many Keralites are not just well-educated and part of a broadly defined middle class, but are also residents of the villages. But the actual landowners and producers were also to be involved, and to learn about the problems and possibilities. And even though the KSSP is a popular movement (with more than two thousand one hundred units and about sixtyfive thousand committed members and many more followers all over Kerala)¹²¹ rather than an entrepreneurial middle-class NGO trying to serve "the people", one may still doubt that the experienced activists managed really to anchor the young volunteers in their neighbourhoods (wards) via committees and respected personalities.¹²²

Moreover, when the PD's managed carefully to move ahead towards the democratic formulation and implementation of a local action plan in their showcase Kannur *panchayat* of Kalliasseri¹²³ – politically dominated by the CPI-M (9 seats) and the CPI (1 seat) – land owners were, for instance, still reluctant either to intensify their own cultivation or to let unemployed youth and women temporarily grow vegetables on fallow land.¹²⁴ In addition, most of the farmers who were offered qualified assistance to team up and convert the swampy parts of their land into a promising prawn cultivation, wished rather to persist with various other engagements, and to collect rent from outsiders who might be prepared to take the risk and do the job.¹²⁵ [The process continues, however, and it will be most interesting to see what comes out of them in the next few years. In late 1993, for instance, a separate Kalliasseri Development Society was registered with the provision of a *Panchayat* assembly – including 180 directly elected members (in ward-level meetings) and 20 ex-officio members – for implementing the local action plan.¹²⁶]

Leading PD's often say that people in general do not become engaged because "our ideas are not felt directly", whereas "the previous land struggles were at a higher level and part of their daily existence".¹²⁷ This may be true if we compare with the daily resistance and the struggles over wages and rents. But at the same time, the resource mapping and its envisioned action plans offered more opportunities for the producers to engage directly in profitable work than did the essentially political land struggles. And while it is true that the PD concept presupposes time-consuming joint planning and collective resource management before people are able to reap any substantial benefits, one should not forget that people struggles over land for many years before they got some land and could really improve their lives. Years of devoted collective action among people with certain basic interests and an ideological orientation in common.

However, such cornerstones – including a clearly identified common ground for popular action – are, as far as I can see, conspicuously absent from the PD framework. While the showcase plan in Kalliasseri contains important concrete information, and provides for some immediate action to (for instance) improve the availability of fresh water for everyone and to reduce unemployment, the universally problematic issues of different interests, economic priorities, and actual control of resources are not shown much attention.¹²⁸ Nor does the socio-economic survey (which was intended to supplement the basic mapping of physical resources) reveal the classical parameters of power – including such as the ownership and control of vital resources.¹²⁹ One reason given for this is that additional information was "not necessary for the purpose" (presumably meaning the action plan) and that figures on ownership were already available from the authorities. Another and more interesting argument is that, even if it were possible to produce more interesting data about actual control and power (which people would learn a lot from simply by collecting them), nothing fruitful would result, since issues like these have been "so hot" ever since the struggles over land.¹³⁰

Very few would dispute, of course, the importance of avoiding narrow party politics and an ideological language serving no other purpose than to scare people away. But one may still ask whether there is a bottom PD line for developing ordinary people's capacity to promote production – and if so, if it does not call for the identification of certain common interests, views, aims, and enemies *in relation to production*. Or is it rather the case that a principled stand against everything preventing the productive and sustainable use of land (including side-activities and attempts to collect unofficial land rents), together with radical arrangements (including leasing) to help those who would like to make productive use of land if they had access to any, would cause even more problematic divisions among already established leftist supporters?

Anyway, discussions with the leaders, and the mapping and planning in showcase Kalliasseri, indicate that the PDs were more inclined to try education: to convince landowners of the need to give priority to production; to present as attractive opportunities as possible; and to let some unemployed youth and women temporarily grow vegetables on others' fallow land in order to demonstrate to the owners that they themselves could make good profits (and then perhaps employ some of those now unemployed).¹³¹ And the agricultural workers are still not integrated. For instance, they are not allowed to invest their labour in the envisioned prawn cultivation project along the same lines as the farmers (who, at best, will put in their swampy land).¹³²

Moreover, there is much talk of promoting self-reliance in villages like Kalliasseri, but little mention of the fact that many families depend on remittances from migrant labourers in the Gulf (or how their savings can be put to use).¹³³ Much is said about more efficient use of public resources, but there is no mapping and analysis of the various vested interests (including within contracting) which are likely to impede any plan or project.¹³⁴ PDs tell me that since some time people are against co-operatives¹³⁵, yet little is done to analyse the situation, the various interests involved, or the possibilities of improving it.¹³⁶ As almost everywhere, the Left is not showing much interest in management, and the PDs, unfortunately, are no exception.¹³⁷ And while all the leaders I spoke with agreed with the saying that "if you control the co-operative movement you control people"¹³⁸, nobody was prepared really to discuss how and why, often preferring a chastened smile or remark instead.

Leading PD scholars often claim the larger part post-land reform exploitation in rural Kerala (excluding the plantations) is indirect, and related to the exchange of resources and products.¹³⁹ They are probably right and I agree,¹⁴⁰ but I have neither come across a comprehensive analysis of this set of problems nor a discussion of its bearing on popular development. The typical picture is rather that no serious rural class contradictions remain in agriculture, now that landlordism has been done away with – only conflicts "within the people". In principle, therefore, a majority of the people, including both farmers and agricultural workers, can still unite – although this time not to get their own land from the landlords, but rather to improve production and develop their own local communities. And to ignite this, it should suffice with the following: education, practical demonstrations of what can be done, and the mobilisation of the "societal will".¹⁴¹

One may speculate about the reasons for these contradictory messages about new forms of exploitation on the one hand, and the absence of serious divisions and contradictions, on the other. I have already mentioned that a consistent focus on productive measures might cause disagreements among established leftist supporters. We may also add the ambition to "avoid party politics", and to reach as many people as possible without "competing" with the established leftist parties. But let us not lose sight of the main implication – that the PD approach itself was ambiguous about who would benefit from collective and democratic work as compared to various individual solutions, such as land speculation and patronage. It is to be hoped that the haziness will disappear as the efforts to map, survey, and try out concrete local plans proceed (something we shall return to in the forthcoming re-study). So far, however, the social

basis thus seems to have been the PD activists themselves, and the modus operandi seems to have been their very activism. There is little sign of a new social and democratic movement.

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"Resource mapping? What's that?" Mrs Gowri, the legendary and widely respected communist leader, was more puzzled than cynical when I asked her about the importance of resource mapping to the organised Left.¹⁴² And according to one of the initiators, M.P Parameshwaran, a senior PD personality and communist party member, "the Left Front Government did at least not obstruct the project, which is more than one can say of the present administration, but the leftist support was mainly oral, not active. Democracy is not fully accepted. There is constant struggle. The (traditional) Left want centralism in everything. We had to serve resource mapping on a silver plate."¹⁴³

It is true that leftist sympathisers and organisational representatives were involved in the local mapping and discussions about action plans. But much of this seems to have been because of the KSSP's persuasiveness in getting as many organisations and important people involved as possible.¹⁴⁴ And it is important to remember that it was the Left Front Government, not the CPI-M (the main party) that lent its official support.¹⁴⁵

The resource mapping, with its emphasis on collective development efforts, was not accepted, in other words, as part of the permanent political struggle of the established Left – only as part of its government policies while in office.¹⁴⁶ And this particular government intention, moreover, was not necessarily obeyed by the various state organs, including on the local level.¹⁴⁷

The CESS scholars and KSSP activists tried to involve the local representatives of various ministries, but even the *Krishi Bhavan* people in showcase Kalliasseri (those in charge of group farming) "showed limited interest".¹⁴⁸ What was more: the Left Front Government's decision to grant executive powers to the elected *panchayat* presidents was never really implemented. And those with the right to call the *panchayat* leaders to account were the officials of the state government rather than the people who elected them.¹⁴⁹ So the *panchayat* president and his council members could do very little without the approval of the district collector (via his/her local executive officer), the local "line department" officers, and often even the ministries in Thiruvananthapuram – except when drawing on important informal connections and powers¹⁵⁰ (including within the business community where there might be money enough to get things moving).¹⁵¹ And if we then add the

various vested interests on all levels, it is not hard to see that it was very difficult for any politician to alter existing priorities and, for instance, follow advice from local action-planners to substitute popular management for bureaucracy, or "patriotic labour" for a contractor. Furthermore, local politicians hardly had time and remuneration enough to get more involved and really to oversee government work in the *panchayats*. And why should anyone bet on a project that would not show spectacular results before the next election campaign?¹⁵²

So the PDs tried, in other words, to set out an imaginative programme on how people would be able themselves to contribute to local planning and development – in a local setting where even the most basic legal, administrative, and political prerequisites were still missing. Prerequisites – such as democratic decentralisation – which the PDs tended to avoid (as they did not want to interfere in politics) and instead expected the politicians to implement from above. But these politicians were dragging their feet, so the PDs could do nought but set aside much of their comprehensive democratic model once again, and rely instead on their own activism in general, and their lobbying and political brokerage in particular, in order to save at least part of their resource mapping project.¹⁵³

This, we may add, differs entirely from the situation in the other radical stronghold of West Bengal, where, generally speaking, the party (the CPI-M) has actively carried out decentralisation (or at least delegation) of various development efforts through the government and local organs of the state. Hence, one argument is that "resource mapping can only work via a strong party and its cadres".¹⁵⁴ But we should not forget that this may be at the expense of the original PD concept of independent popular participation based on productive interests on the village level. In West Bengal, it is the party and local administration who dominate, who set the pace at the block level (rather than among the actual producers in the villages), and who link up with vested interests.¹⁵⁵ And anyway, the key question is why the leftist Kerala politicians did not live up to the PDs' expectations of really moving ahead with some measure of decentralisation. Was it, perhaps, because they would not be able to play the same dominant role on the local level as their comrades in West Bengal? What happened, in fact, to the much acclaimed but constantly delayed decentralisation of democratic government in Kerala?

Democratic decentralisation without solid backing

The decentralisation of political power, as we know, was not a precondition for initiating various PD campaigns – but it certainly was a precondition for the new general development Project that was supposed to grow out of the PDs' actions.

So how would this decentralisation come about? The PD campaigns themselves were aimed at generating development processes at the grassroots level, which in turn would call for decentralisation. However, the actual struggle for, and implementation of, decentralisation was relegated to the explicitly political sphere, with its movements, parties, elected politicians, bureaucrats, and so on.

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The first problem, however, was that the PD campaigns, as we may recall, did not generate dynamic social movements for democratic development. Remarkable achievements were made under the various PD programmes, but the literacy campaign was not transformed as expected into mass-based democratic development work. Group farming met with lukewarm interest among both landowners and powerful popular organisations and public institutions, and relied instead on state intervention. The refined PD approach presupposed decentralisation and massive popular mobilisation. And as the attempt to pave the way for local popular planning and development through resource mapping faced almost the same problems – it tended to depend on dynamic activism instead of on a new social and democratic movement. Consequently, there were no signs of real popular pressure from below for democratic decentralisation from above¹⁵⁶ – only of convincing PD advocacy.

The latter gained special importance thanks to the support by the CPI-M's widely respected leader, the former party General Secretary and Kerala Chief Minister, E.M.S Namboodiripad. Namboodiripad, who is still very vital intellectually, is one of the very few top Indian politicians with a long and clean personal record on democratic decentralisation. Furthermore, the state-modernists argued at least in favour of efficient local administration. But the actual bargaining power of the PDs themselves, of course, depended heavily on the possibilities for political activists to transform the PDs' development work into votes for politicians who showed at least some interest in decentralisation. And this proved as difficult in Kerala as in the Philippines.¹⁵⁷

Elections were held for fourteen new district councils in January 1991. The Left Front gained control in all but one. This sweeping victory may, of course, be interpreted as a clear mandate for decentralisation. But in much it was due to the fact that the opposition was divided, and to the fact that the Left Front

was associated with the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in New Delhi in favour of weak sections of the population – a major issue at the time. The Left was also favored by the prevalent harsh criticism of US intervention in the Gulf (which was a threat to the many Kerala migrants in the area). The swing in favour of the Left Front (as compared to the 1987 State Assembly elections when the Left Front was voted into power) was actually only 2.7 percent.¹⁵⁸ And even though the defeat of the Left Front in the combined national and state elections five months later was not due to a lower percentage of the votes than in 1987, but was rather due to a tactical understanding among the opposition, the Left Front had expected to do much better in this contest – not least by drawing on new votes from those who had benefited from its government programmes (such as the literacy campaign). The latter did not materialise. Much could be blamed, moreover, on a minor sympathy wave in favour of the Congress party of the assassinated Rajiv Gandhi.¹⁵⁹ But at any rate, there was obviously very little popular interest in demanding and defending decentralisation by means of electing politicians who were (somewhat) committed to the cause.¹⁶⁰ And those PDs who were associated with the Left Front lost some credence, of course, from not being able to deliver solid new votes.¹⁶¹

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A second and major problem was that, while democratic decentralisation was essential to the PD visions of a new radical political development Project, even generally left oriented politicians and civil servants did not find it necessary for tackling problems of the utmost importance. And hardly anyone seemed capable of, or interested in, seriously analysing how and why this happened.

It is true that the Left Front, in its election manifesto of 1987, promised to carry out the long overdue elections to the *panchayats*, municipalities and city-corporations; to re-organise and democratise co-operative societies which had "become synonymous with corruption"; and to decentralise power by implementing the 1979 District Administration Act.¹⁶² Moreover, the *panchayat* elections were already held in January 1988, with results that roughly resembled the close race in the previous Assembly elections.¹⁶³ The restructuring of the co-operative sector began simultaneously.¹⁶⁴ And in April 1988, the existing but never implemented decentralisation Act of 1979 was at any rate referred to a senior civil servant for certain improvements.¹⁶⁵

Despite some good intentions in regard to the co-operatives, however, there were few signs of a major break with problematic government interventions and party-politicisation. One may also doubt whether the predominant credit

societies really shifted their attention to loans for productive purposes rather than consumption. Producer co-operatives remained rare.¹⁶⁶ And the good performance and clean record of the leftist flagship, the joint Kerala Dinesh Beedi workers' co-operative in Cannanore, continued to depend on professional management and communist hegemony (which in fact turned the regular elections into a formality), as against the more normal picture of close political competition and state involvement.¹⁶⁷

The *panchayats*, moreover, remained short of resources and executive powers, making them almost entirely dependent on the executive bureaucrats in the districts, the compartmentalised centralised administration, and politicians in Thiruvananthapuram. They were sensitive to various business interests as well. And state departments especially made skilful use of various regulations to gain the upper hand when the planning board, under then-vice chairman prof. Gulati, tried in 1989 to involve the panchayats in the formulation of plan proposals, and entrusted them with certain funds and powers to carry out a few projects of their own.¹⁶⁸

Finally, the speedy improvement and implementation of the decentralisation act were, apparently, not a major concern of the politicians and the administration. It took the Left Front Government a year to appoint an adviser to look into the original legislation. Even though the report was delivered within three months,¹⁶⁹ the government then took more than two years before carrying out elections to new district councils.¹⁷⁰ One might even say, with M.A. Oommen, that "the fact that almost all politicians claimed to be in favour of decentralisation suggests that nobody was serious about it."¹⁷¹ So this calls for a more detailed discussion.

To begin with, many officeholders at the state level were at odds with the Central Government, and resisted any decentralisation of their power that might make it possible for New Delhi to bypass them, to turn directly to local bodies, and to divide and rule (and hence in fact to pave the way for more autocratic centralism).¹⁷²

In addition to this, leading leftist politicians claim that, once in office, they simply had to attend to a number of urgent issues, which drew their attention away from more strategic questions like decentralisation, and which simply could not wait until delegation was possible. While this may always be the case, a more interesting comment is that not even handling such major problems as unemployment (which really called for long-term measures) presupposed democratic decentralisation.¹⁷³

There were different opinions, of course, within the Left Front as well as within the dominant CPI-M.¹⁷⁴ All the parties, including the minor ones, had to get influential positions and access to some ministries and state agencies. Many ministers and politicians in the state assembly would have to give up much of their power if real decentralisation was to be implemented. Privileged bureaucrats and most public servants and their unions (including those under the leftist umbrella) – and especially those within technically or otherwise advanced services such as electricity, banking or transportation – were all afraid of losing out. Moreover, the unions and political organisations in general, and the leftist ones in particular, were centralised themselves. And besides the fact that the careers of many people depended on them, there were also strong traditional leftist arguments in favour of central leadership (to guide the many downtrodden people as well as to uphold discipline and thus prevent corruption, etc.) This in turn took place at the expense of internal democracy. Off-record, some leading members even said that "there has to be changes and perhaps a new party is unavoidable", while others, like radical Bishop Paulose Mar Paulose tended rather to play it down – "the party is not much better than the Church, but at least it does something for the people."¹⁷⁵ And in the final analysis, even certain leading PDs would question decentralisation if the rightists proved more capable of taking advantage of it.¹⁷⁶

There was, consequently, a lot of foot dragging, and many and long and complicated discussions – but little mobilisation of popular support for democratic decentralisation. And naturally there had to be compromises in respect to every regulation and part of the act. For instance, many of the duties entrusted to the district councils were to be carried out "under the control and guidance" of various state departments.¹⁷⁷ And "(i)t would not be unfair to say that practically every recommendation to involve statutorily the district councils in the planning process was overlooked".¹⁷⁸

Hence, it took some three and a half years of missed opportunities – and an uncomfortable result in the November 1989 election to the all-India parliament¹⁷⁹ – before the Act on decentralisation was finally passed, and the previously mentioned district elections were carried out in January 1991. And despite all this time, the economic powers and funding of the district councils (and the *panchayats* under them) was still very much an open question.¹⁸⁰ Beyond certain recommendations from the special adviser to the government, little if anything was done to prepare the actual establishment and running of the councils, and to adjust and reduce the central administration in Thiruvananthapuram.¹⁸¹ The Left Front district election manifesto, moreover,

included almost nothing concrete about what its local politicians would do if voted into power;¹⁸² rather it mainly consisted of a historical review of Congress party-led resistance to decentralisation, a long formal list of delegated subjects, and great many pages on other general political issues.¹⁸³

The PDs, however, were still optimistic. "Judging by the post-election writings of Namboodiripad", one analyst concluded his report on the district elections, "a massive participative development drive built around the District Councils, *panchayats* and the co-operatives seems to be the major plank of the strategy to run down the Chinese Walls that have compartmentalised the two-front politics of Kerala for around two decades".¹⁸⁴ Namboodiripad also called for more consistent decentralisation. He stated that "there should be no authority for the state government to intervene in the powers handed over to the District Councils". And he added that many state departments in Thiruvananthapuram should be virtually closed down, and their tasks assigned to the councils.¹⁸⁵ But in reality, according to the dynamic Palakkad district council president A.K Balam, "it was not quite clear how we should start after the elections (...) it was an experiment (...) we had to get the support of the district collector and his men (...) everybody was against us (...) we knew it would happen and it could have been better prepared. So during the following three months, before the Left lost the Assembly election, we were mainly studying the functions of the district. The councillors had to work out how to divide powers and functions. And we did not have time to formulate our own identity and show results (...) No, there were no clear ideas and preparations for this in the party [the CPI-M] or the Left Front."¹⁸⁶ A council member in Thiruvananthapuram added that "we did not have the time to do much, since after the district council elections we had to concentrate on the *Lok Sabha* (national parliament) and Assembly elections in May".¹⁸⁷ And interestingly enough, democratic decentralisation (which had just been started), and all that could come out of it, were neither a major issue nor an organic part of the Left Front electoral manifesto of 1991, aside from some remarks in regard to agriculture and local planning.¹⁸⁸

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The real puzzle, however, is the lack of systematic analytical discussions and studies of these key problems. Besides some straightforward articles about the onslaught on the district councils by the Congress I-led government that took over following the mid-1991 elections¹⁸⁹ (to which we shall return in the next section), the main preoccupation still seems to be outlining what local planning and government *should* look like (in terms of the best possible techniques and

constitutional arrangements, for instance), rather than explaining why this optimal state of affairs does not obtain, and what social forces that could alter the picture.¹⁹⁰ The various interests involved remain unclear, and the political economy of democratic decentralisation uncharted. A parallel would be if the scholars who had helped pave the way for land reform (by pointing to socio-economic conflicts and relations of power) had taken it for granted that enlightened landlords would give away their land to the tillers, and had restricted their analysis to the best possible administrative and technical arrangements for increasing production.

There are, of course, partial exceptions that point in another direction, including some of Namboodiripad's writings,¹⁹¹ intriguing insights by scholars like M.A. Oommen,¹⁹² "random reflections" by hardened civil servants (who usually wish to remain anonymous)¹⁹³ and attempts at comparing with the more exciting studies that have been done of the problems of decentralisation in West Bengal.¹⁹⁴ And yes, from those and others we learn that there is a "lack of political will", as well as well-nigh general resistance from politicians, influential bureaucrats, and civil servants. But what if it is a matter not just of will but also of capacity? And since when did scholars with a well-reputed understanding of historical materialism begin to treat politicians, bureaucrats, and civil servants as distinct categories with dominant special interests of their own? This is not to say, of course, that traditional Marxist class analysis would be sufficient – but it could be improved to meet the need. Are there no differences among politicians, bureaucrats, and civil servants? What are their various interests and bases of power? What is the importance of the institutional rules and logics they have to comply with? What societal forces do they draw on, or link up with – and how do those relations relate to (for instance) the mixed interests in going in for agricultural production? What is the basis of contemporary forms of patronage and clientelism? And perhaps most importantly, what are the social forces that might enforce democratic decentralisation instead of resisting it? How does this affect the (far from neutral) local planning? What are the social forces that might constitute the basis for different models of development (just as the different interests and developmental capacities of the tillers and the landlords formed the basis for the previously contending paths of development in Kerala)? To whom, then, would democratic decentralisation make sense?

So why was all this set aside? The political science is weak. The dominant economists may have found it impossible to carry out scientific studies of fundamental political problems with their traditional tools. The politicians and

administrators themselves may have tried to play down most of the issues in order to avoid infighting and serious divisions. And worse, not even the PDs' basic theoretical premises called for a close study of the political economy of democratic decentralisation, despite the fact that their own attempt to renew the radical political development Project presupposed this very decentralisation.

The PD cornerstone, as we know, was "that the traditional Marxian agrarian class concepts lose much of their analytical meaning in the Kerala countryside" now that land reform has been carried out. Many of the conflicts (except, of course, between big capital and labour) were taken to be "within the people". So instead of working out better analytical concepts for coming to grips with the complicated new multiplicity of interests and conflicts, the PDs acted on the assumption that there was virtually a kind of universal productive interest shared by landowners and their workers, and hence tried to promote "unity among the people", and to mobilise the "societal will" in favour of development.¹⁹⁵

This, as we have seen, proved too optimistic. And despite the innovative emphasis on resources rather than just land, the basic issues of who controlled the various resources was conspicuously avoided. But the main point here is rather that, since the PDs maintained that most conflicts in post-land reform rural Kerala were "among the people", the logical conclusion – at least from a conventional reductionist Marxian point of view – was that this lack of serious conflicts in a substantial part of the society would be reflected in the political superstructure in general, and the left-oriented parties and state employees in particular. And why should the PDs probe into politically related conflicts and interests that might impair democratisation if such conflicts and interests were not likely to be serious?

So the PDs not only referred outright political issues – such as the greater part of the struggle for democratic decentralisation, and its implementation – to the politicians and their administrators (while giving priority instead to less political development action from below). They also abstained from probing into the related vested interests – interests which, together with the lukewarm attitudes towards joint attempts at promoting production, were the main factors serving to undermine their otherwise so dynamic attempt to renew the radical political development Project.

Attempts at new Project unsustainable without government support?

The Left Front Government's record was clean, its performance was comparatively good, the results from the district elections looked promising,

and there were clear signs of divisions within the opposition. So the leaders decided almost unanimously to call for early Assembly elections – in conjunction with the union elections – almost a year before the term was over.¹⁹⁶ The opposition, however, came to an understanding, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated, and the new popular projects did not generate as many new votes as expected. And though the victory of the Congress-led front was unexpected, it was less surprising that the new administration thereafter took immediate measures to undermine the potential threat posed by popular action on the basis of the PD campaigns, in combination with the recently elected (and left-dominated) district councils.

The KSSP and their partners were still in control of the pilot resource mapping project in some twenty-five *panchayats*. And the state-wide resource mapping programme remained, as did the group farming scheme. But generally speaking, both were incorporated into the decaying state administration (at the expense of local popular participation) and were cleansed of dynamic leftist experts and activists.¹⁹⁷

Moreover, the new government brought the literacy campaign to a standstill, by withdrawing funds that were to be channelled through the district councils; by asking officials on deputation to return home; by excluding leading persons associated with the Left Front; and by ridiculing the activists, accusing them of corruption, and taking away the few benefits they had received for their devoted work. These measures were drastic enough to generate some scepticism within the central government-funding agency, the National Literacy Mission, and some hesitation within the Congress-led State Government. So the second phase of the campaign was finally launched in October 1991. But while the Left Front Government had postponed the follow-up of the campaign from the end of the initial phase in March until after the elections, the new government not only caused another four-month delay; the new campaign was also short of committed and dynamic activists and administrators.¹⁹⁸

Finally – to cite V. Ramachandran, special adviser for decentralisation under the Left Front Government (but also vice chairman of the planning board under the new regime): "the present government, of course, did not accept decentralisation since the Left Front was in power locally".¹⁹⁹

While the district councils – which were constituted in February 1991 – consisted of directly elected members, and the Left Front was in clear majority, the new government immediately altered the picture by amending the Act and including members of parliament and the state assembly.²⁰⁰ Thus the Left Front

lost control in at least five of the thirteen councils (out of a total of fourteen) in which it had held a majority. Furthermore, the previously dominant state administrators in each district, the collectors, whom the Left Front Government had made subordinate to the elected district councils, were no longer to serve as secretaries and executives of the councils. The councils lost control of their staff. Some fourteen of the nineteen policy areas which had been entrusted to the district councils were returned to the state. According to the amended Act, the government could decide what should and should not be referred to the district councils. Finally, the government gained full control of the funding of the councils, while the envisioned finance commission was never appointed, and the monthly instalments to the councils were postponed.²⁰¹

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Despite everything, however, the main problem was not that the new government did its best to undermine the previous advances (which was only to be expected in view of the devastating cyclical pattern of Kerala politics).²⁰² Rather, the question was whether or not it was possible to sustain the new popular initiatives when the Left Front was out of office. The propelling power of the old Project resided in the fact that popular pressure for land reform and a better position for labourers continued irrespective of government. So the question is if the PD attempts to renew the radical Political development Project, with democratisation as the backbone, at least made sense to people *and* to the established Left to such an extent that there was some effective resistance, and some attempts as well to move ahead outside the government offices on the basis of the PD campaigns, and in combination with the district councils. And, generally speaking, the answer is no. The various PD projects and attempts at decentralisation were not really sustainable, and they did not form the basis for vibrant opposition or for attempts to move forward.

To begin with, apparently, no powerful social movement had emerged. The activists were largely left on their own. And the PDs themselves found it difficult to go on.

According to one argument, they could not continue because of the political change. The outright leftists within the campaigns were discouraged and disillusioned.²⁰³

Others add, however, that the PDs themselves retreated, since they were not capable of adjusting to the less favourable situation.²⁰⁴

Major KSSP leaders respond to this by explaining that they "cannot participate [in the reformulated programmes under the new government] when

not having the upper hand in planning". Moreover, they "do not want to get involved in and suffer from the ideological war between the Congress-led government and the Left Front". Hence they try to carry on independently.²⁰⁵ But at the same time, many seem to agree that the campaigns themselves were not solid enough to survive without the Left Front in power. One explanation offered is that the campaigns started too late (around 1989-90). Another is that literacy or sustainable agricultural development were basically long-term efforts, and provided little from which people could benefit directly.²⁰⁶

Furthermore, while the established Left did not adhere fully to the PD ideas, it adopted them nevertheless as part of its *government policies*. However, this dualism gave way, upon the loss of government power, to an almost complete retreat into the old logic of demands, pressure, and rejectionist politics (without a complementary concentration on popular developmental action as well). The leftist politicians even found some harassment of their own assembly members, and therefore a brief boycott of the Assembly, more important than being present and vigorously protesting when the disastrous amendment to the local government Act was passed.²⁰⁷ So why was this?

It is often explained, to begin with, in terms of disillusionment. The activists involved in the new efforts were young and inexperienced. Many thought that there was no use in carrying on developmental activities "with such a government". Further frustration was caused by the crisis in Eastern Europe. And the lack of massive protests against the clampdown on decentralisation should be seen in the light of the fact that "we are not even capable of organising against increased prices".²⁰⁸

Another argument is that people within the major left party, the CPI-M, simply had no time to be engaged. They were fully taken up with preparing themselves for their 14th party congress,²⁰⁹ and were, moreover, involved in serious disputes.²¹⁰

According to a third line of thinking, the traditional Left lost interest. It was no longer in office. The PD projects were not sufficiently rooted within the established organisations to survive political defeat. Some leaders and the rank-and-file did not understand the potential of developmental activism. They pointed out that it had not yielded many new votes. And they had access to many other ways of mobilising people.²¹¹

A fourth argument is that too few vested interests had developed in relation to the new projects and district councils to generate firm resistance, whereas

attempts to limit the influence of the established Left within the co-operative sector had caused fierce and even violent reactions.²¹²

It is interesting to note, finally, that so far the foremost CPI-M leaders do not even seem prepared to use the period in opposition to carry out the sensitive discussion within the Left Front over future government action in general, and decentralisation in particular (including cutting back ministries and agencies) that appears necessary to avoid another long and devastating initial period of indecisiveness if and when they return to office. While one of them claimed that "there is no reason to plan like that since we are so strong that we can handle it anyway", the other at least conceded that "we cannot do it since it would annoy the other members who must also get something in return if the Left Front wins".²¹³

It is true that E.K. Nayanar stated (after quite some time) that leftists should contribute to the second phase of the literacy campaign, even though it is under the new government and "often defunct".²¹⁴ Similarly, it is true that leading Left Front politicians – including E.M.S Namboodiripad, such outstanding intellectuals as K.N. Raj and I.S. Gulati, *Panchayat* leaders (including the president of their association), and Congress-I dissidents with noted state Assembly member V.M. Sudheeran in the forefront – came together in an attempt to alter the recent Kerala government amendments of the local government Act (in view of the 1993 constitutional amendment on *Panchayati Raj*). This may even pave the way, potentially, for bridging similar progressive efforts on both sides of the Kerala political frontline – in order really to implement decentralisation and support development initiatives from below once new local elections are finally held.²¹⁵ Something which, of course, would be of vital importance for the PD perspective. Furthermore, it is quite clear that the CPI-M has openly committed itself to resuming of the PD projects and the decentralisation measures once back in office.²¹⁶ And an important line of action among the PDs seems to be to employ advocacy and public debate (including in journals and various seminars and conferences) to make those and other concessions apparent to everyone (and thus impossible for the leaders to retreat from). The recent International Kerala Studies Congress, for instance, which brought together some 600 papers and about 1.500 scholars and knowledgeable activists, was a powerful demonstration of vitality, interest in open discussion, willingness to renew policies and politics, and organisational ability. But so far I fail to see any signs of a fresh attempt to start anew at the level of popular movements.

In addition to this, the urgent and dominating political issues since 1991 – of structural adjustment and communal conflicts-cum-politics – tend to displace the previous popular development initiatives on the grass-root level.

To begin with, a new economic policy has been initiated on the central government level along the lines of the IMF-World Bank structural adjustment schemes. This will have serious consequences for the poorly developed economy of Kerala. It may gain from somewhat higher remittances from migrant labourers, but it will suffer greatly from more open foreign and domestic inter-state trade, and from further reductions in its capacity to initiate dynamic economic development by way of state intervention.²¹⁷ Moreover, the very concept of the new economic policy is a major threat, of course, to the legacy of the nationalist struggles, and to the Nehruvian and traditional Left nation-state development project. Consequently, there is a widespread and deeply felt need to defend what has, despite everything, been achieved against the onslaught of neo-liberal solutions to the problems of development. At best this onslaught could be held as a major reason for why the Left as a whole should instead give full priority to development of the productive forces in general and industrialisation in particular.²¹⁸ But on the other hand this may also, to begin with, obscure the fact that many of the problems were there well before the new economic policies,²¹⁹ secondly, marginalise popular development alternatives from below, and, thirdly, give the established and centralist nationalists and leftists a new lease on life.²²⁰

Furthermore, the need to counter serious communal conflicts, and to thwart the fascist-like politicians who nourish and exploit Hindu fundamentalism (and who might even may gain the upper hand at the central level) also meant that attempts at renewing the radical political development project were set aside.

On the one hand, the widely felt need for a broad anti-fascist and secular front tends to conceal that the secularists' own politics and policies in much are part of the problem, and that radical reformation rather than attempts at restoration are needed. Secular politicians in general, and Congress leaders in particular, have made increasing use of communal groups and sentiments – and undermined people's own capacity to improve their situation thereby – in order to sustain their position and continue mobilising broad support despite the crisis of the nation-state project, the commercial (though not entirely capitalist) undermining of previous forms of clientelistic domination and mobilisation, the deterioration of political institutions, and the inability of public security systems to match people's increased vulnerability on the market. Even E.M.S Namboodripad has recently opened up for renewed political understandings

with certain communal parties, though the central CPI-M leadership has at least distanced itself from his way of arguing.²²¹

On the other hand, there are exciting attempts to revive and further develop attempts at social, cultural, and religious reform on the basis of such ideas as those of Gandhi, and by linking up with new aspirations among *dalits* and so-called backward castes.²²² The purpose is to counter the Hindu chauvinists as well as those secularists who employ paternalistic attitudes vis-à-vis the downtrodden and emphasise pure economic factors at the expense of more indirect forms of exploitation and social oppression. However, there is an obvious risk of being caught in the logic of the very communal and caste conflicts themselves, if one is not able effectively to challenge the ideological hegemony of the present communal leaders. I fail, moreover, to see any serious attempt in Kerala to link up with the democratic development activists who try to enhance people's own ability to change their lot. And even the most exciting leader involved, K.Venu, who in his post-Maoist writings has turned ultra-democrat, has apparently found it difficult to uphold his new ideal in the face of two developments: firstly, the recent victory in Uttar Pradesh of a subordinate caste based political alliance over the major Hindu chauvinist party (BJP); and, secondly, what seemed to be a golden tactical opportunity in Kerala to jump on the bandwagon of the recently expelled communist and charismatic leader Mrs. Gowri (who is of subordinate *Ezhava* caste origin) and her essentially populist new party, *Janadipathya Samrakshana Samity*. (The fate of which, however, is most uncertain).

(in EPW, part 3)

CONCLUSION

When and how, then, did radical popular movements find democratisation instrumental for developmental purposes in the context of Kerala? And finally, what was general and what was specific, as compared to the Philippine experience?

The case of Kerala

Important progress was already achieved in Kerala during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The expansion of commerce and agribusiness, however, did not generate modern industrialisation, and did not engender further liberalisation to the benefit of peasants, tenants, and workers (despite vibrant socio-religious reform movements). The system rested instead on colonial hegemony, a somewhat reformed caste system, landlordism, semi-bonded labour, limited civil rights and an absence of democracy. Accordingly, since the economic dynamic was insufficient, and was upheld by political monopolies, *any* substantial improvement presupposed political intervention.

Organised pressure from below, and politics of democratisation from above

Moreover, those who favoured progressive change based on the developmental capacity of the weak majority of the population therefore argued, firstly, that this capacity would only be unleashed through land reform and better working conditions, and, secondly, that such structural reforms called for collective organisation, popular enforcement, and supportive state policies. However, while non-democratic means have usually been thought necessary to fight feudal-like landlords, the Kerala socialists and communists instead tried a combination of extra-parliamentary popular pressure and top-down parliamentary politics of democratisation. Moscow had approved of more pragmatic politics. Comparatively solid elements of a democratic polity had been introduced in India, at least on the central union and state levels. And the limited bourgeois changes in Kerala had given birth to a strong civil society, which featured, firstly, socio-religious reform movements and unusually high

and even educational standards, and, thereafter, new popular political organisations and leaders with deep roots in the weak sections of the population.

The essence of the first radical political Project in Kerala was thus to extend the previously limited bourgeois liberalisation to the people as a whole. The struggle for and implementation of an anti-feudal land reform, together with better conditions for the workers, would generate the fundamental prerequisites for democracy. A basic assumption was that a majority of the population would not only benefit from all this when implemented but would also work and vote for it within the limits of the existing system. The Left adjusted to the legal and constitutional framework (including horse-trading) to survive simple-majority elections in single-member constituencies, and to keep a coalition government together. However, extra-parliamentary pressure through such means as peasant movements and unions was added. So the formula was rather central party-led popular pressure from below for central party-led and state-administered societal transformation from above – to help people against feudal-like patrons, religious leaders, and so on. Furthermore, the Left tried to extend democratic forms of government to additional spheres of society mainly by means of state programmes, institutes, companies, and credit co-operatives, which were all governed by politicians and bureaucrats. And while democracy not only made sense to the Left when it was winning elections, the gist of its standard argument (as well as that of its adversaries) while in opposition was that, even if most "hostile" government policies had been chosen in accordance with democratic principles, the content of these policies was so undemocratic that the fundamental prerequisites of democracy were undermined. Hence, such policies had to be resisted by all reasonable legal means.

Successful politics prevents further development

Popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation proved fruitful in getting parliamentary democracy settled. As compared to the case in other parts of India, moreover, the basic concept of abolishing landlordism was fairly consistently implemented. And the position of labour was substantially improved.

However, land reform also opened up for complicated new relations of exploitation and subordination (including conflicts between new farmers and agricultural labourers) and for off-farm employment and business interests as well. The expected dynamic developmental effects failed to appear. Strengthening the position of labourers sustained some of the labour market

segmentation, separated "insiders" from "outsiders", paved the way for a lot of stoppages, and impeded more efficient production and administration. The substantial remittances from the increasing numbers of Keralites working abroad spurred consumption and speculation rather than production.

And worst of all, neither policy could be followed up with forceful approaches to the new problems. The very 'popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation' had given birth to centralisation, compartmentalisation, factionalism, vested interests, and locked political conflicts. Consequently, the promotion of agricultural development – e.g. through collective local initiatives, comprehensive packages, and efficient administration – was obstructed. And the socio-political engineering of productive dynamic investments in combination with better public security systems was almost out of the question.

While this leftist politics may have been necessary for progressive post-colonial change in general, and democratisation and popular development in particular, its dynamics thus bred interests and institutional arrangements which worked against further development, and which began to undermine the hitherto propelling force: the broadly based popular organisations. Production stagnated. Interests and conflicts multiplied, and some cut through or were unimportant to the existing organisations and alliances. The leftist West Bengali escape route of linking alternative patronage to "middle peasants" and tenants with far-reaching decentralisation measures was not possible in Kerala, where the more consistent land reform had turned millions of tenants into comparatively independent but petty-bourgeois-oriented actors. Communal identities, social networks and rigid organising got a new lease of life. The traditional Left seemed caught in a dead end.

The political economy of stagnation calls for new radical politics

However, the seemingly inevitable end of the Left in general was, at least, postponed. New interests and issue-based associations emerged, including the People's Science Movement (KSSP), which often abstained from the otherwise "normal" NGO pattern of neglecting the importance of previous radical politics and the relevance of established leftist organisations. The crisis of state-socialism in Eastern Europe generated much reflection (and not just frustration). There was room for critical discussion and some dissidence in and around the traditional Left. A radical shift away from short-term tactical alliances with communal parties indicated an ability to take self-critical and painful action in favour of fresh reforms. And Stalinist dogmatism and

centralism were partly overruled by pragmatic day-to-day politics and electoral considerations. The urgent employment problems were thus put on top of the agenda, which called for aggressive developmental measures above and beyond further redistribution of the pie. This in turn presupposed a clean government and administration, and possibly some democratisation. So when favourable short-term tactics combined with these revisions and (much to everybody's surprise) brought the Left Front brought back to power in the 1987 Assembly elections, the old Project was bypassed and a new one had to be formed.

By now, increasing numbers of leftists agreed on the primary need to attack unemployment through developmental efforts. Moreover, many leftists said, the economic dynamic was insufficient, and was intertwined with much of the established politics. So just as after independence, *any* progressive change presupposed alternative political intervention. But what politics, what development, and what priorities?

State-modernists vs. popular developmentalists

Two major schools of thought emerged. These were not fully worked out political programmes or organised factions but rather, according to my categorisation for analytical purposes, different approaches to the politics of development within the Left as a whole. One may be labelled *state-modernist*, since it essentially called for reaffirming and upgrading Nehru's model according to the experiences of rapid state-led industrialisation in East Asia (including in China). This would be done, however, within the framework of Kerala's strong unions and left-oriented parties, which would give people their due share of the cake.

The other approach – which turned into a kind of intellectual platform for exciting attempts at renewing the radical political development Project – may be named *popular developmentalist* (PD), since it emphasised people's own capacity to reorganise and thus improve production. According to the PDs, class conflicts of course persisted, but economic and political liberalisation in general, and land reform and the improvement of labourers' bargaining position in particular, had done away with the main contradiction vis-à-vis landlords, and made possible broad popular development co-operation beyond party-political loyalties, especially on the grass roots level, for the purpose of following up the previous reforms and thus improving production. The producers themselves would be able to make the best possible sustainable use of local resources, put the many underemployed people to work, and – almost

as during the struggle for land reform – form a broad social movement that would demand and pave the way for necessary political changes (including renewed leftist politics and policies for efficient bottom-up planning as well as decentralised state intervention) in support of their own efforts. And, most interestingly, almost all this called for further democratisation.

Popular development requires democratisation

Firstly, feudal-like extra-economic oppression had been abolished, but a lot of patronage, nepotism, communalism, etc. remained. Meaningful democracy required, therefore, besides ideological struggle, extended and improved welfare policies, decentralisation of government and administration, and popular development alternatives – to make people sufficiently autonomous to be able really to exercise their democratic rights, to make way for meaningful popular participation and vigilance against the abuse of power, and to prove that it was worthwhile for people to promote their own future through collective organisation and action based on common interests and ideas, instead of relying on individual solutions, patronage or communal loyalties.

Secondly, while the PDs remained faithful to the old assumption that a majority of the population would not only benefit from such reforms once they were implemented, but would also work and vote for them within the limits of the existing system, they also emphasised alternative forms of democracy and ways of extending it. To counter excessive party-politicisation within the development field, the PDs recommended consensual agreements among those directly involved. To previous top-down state intervention, the PDs added more independent popular initiatives and participation, and the further democratisation of local government and resource management. This was not only to provide for more direct control of the state and politics (above and beyond that provided by traditional representation) – in the hope of minimising compartmentalisation, vested interests, outright corruption etc. – but also to generate collective awareness and management of the resources themselves (whether collectively or privately owned).

To implement these ideas, the PDs initiated a series of campaigns in accordance with the long tradition of popular action and organisation in Kerala (and especially through the People's Science Movement) instead of through any particular party – which did not, however, exclude co-operation with several such parties and their associated popular movements, or with the Left Front government and the public administration. A massive literacy campaign would make it possible to include the most downtrodden in democratic and

possibly radical development processes. Group farming would follow up the previous land reform by stimulating joint land and water management among the scattered producers and thus promoting sustainable production. *Panchayat*-level people's resource mapping would generalise and improve the group farming ideas by paving the way for radical local planning and joint development action. And these efforts, together with advocacy, would generate preconditions and demands for the decentralisation of government powers and resources.

Mixed economic interests and old politics obstruct further democratisation

Remarkable achievements were made on several fronts, as the PDs tried to implement their plans. Most challenges called for additional democratisation, but the mere limitations in the very PD approach made this difficult to achieve.

While *the literacy campaign* generated some fundamental prerequisites for democracy and for popular development as well, this did not give rise to further dynamic processes of democratisation. It was difficult for the activists to co-operate with the government even when friendly leaders were in command. Participatory management was neither institutionalised nor firmly linked with efforts at political and administrative decentralisation. And rarely did powerful political popular organisations take the opportunity to influence people by avoiding party-politics even while actively supporting the long term aims of the project. The predominantly young female activists were largely left on their own. The second phase of the campaign was already neglected before a new Congress-led government undermined the whole programme. So while the PDs humbly restricted themselves to creating preconditions for major social and political forces to move forward, the latter rarely did so. And worse, the PDs had abstained from analysing why such problems might occur, and thereby from identifying what additional prerequisites for democracy and popular development had to be fought for to get the process from individual empowerment to democratic development moving.

Group farming appeared to be a success story. But non-group farming areas also did rather well. And most of the encouraging results in respect to production, productivity, and the costs of cultivation seemed to be due to the increased use of high-yielding seed varieties, chemical inputs, and favourable weather conditions, rather than to co-operation for promoting efficient and sustainable resource management. Despite good intentions to make way for more independent popular initiatives and participation, the ministry of agriculture and the PDs failed to go beyond the previous leftist habit of top-

down state intervention. To begin with, non-party-political development activities like group farming did not receive the full attention of the powerful political popular organisations. Moreover, there seemed to be little unified interest in joint management among the producers themselves. Agricultural workers were not fully included. And the landowners (the post-land reform farmers) did not always live up to their presumed interest in boosting production. The assumptions and analyses behind group farming clearly failed to come to grips with the same complicated multiplicity of interests and conflicts that contributed to undermining the old political development Project.

Moreover, *the refined PD approach* to decentralised and sustainable agricultural development was based on the mobilisation of huge local resources. And while this required (according to the PDs themselves) extended democratisation and "societal will", they did not target the problems related to such preconditions as decentralisation and interests in joint land and water management.

Meanwhile the PDs were engaged in launching *a panchayat-level people's resource mapping campaign* to pave the way for a radical and collective overhaul of land and water management. But the impressive achievements were once again insufficient in the face of lukewarm interest in democratic practices for promoting development among both the landowners and the powerful popular organisations and public institutions. So while group farming tended to depend on the devoted state intervention of the Ministry of Agriculture, resource mapping rested mainly on dynamic action-group-work.

Finally, the PDs expected the various development campaigns to generate widespread demands that the radical politicians *decentralise political power*. However, as we know, these actions did not generate dynamic social movements and forceful pressure from below for democratic decentralisation from above. Furthermore, while decentralisation was essential to the PD vision of a new development Project, even left-oriented politicians and civil servants did not find it necessary for tackling problems of the utmost importance, instead they dragged their feet behind. And worst of all, hardly anyone seemed capable of, or interested in, seriously analysing how or why this was so.

There may be several reasons for this, such as weak political scientists, strong economists, Marxist reductionism, and political interests (including among the PDs) in playing down the issues to avoid infighting. But it remains a puzzle anyway that, just as the PDs focused on "unity among the people" and the "societal will", and failed in (or abstained from) coming to grips with the complicated multiplicity of interests and conflicts pertaining to post-land

reform agriculture (despite an innovative emphasis on resources rather than just land), they also refrained from probing into vested interests in connection with politics in general and decentralisation in particular.

Insufficient social and political roots

At any rate, all this left the PDs with a half-way decentralisation programme and a government-sponsored – but politically loosely anchored – development activism which had not generated a new social movement based on joint interest in promoting production. So when the Left Front Government was voted out of office in mid-1991, it was very difficult to sustain attempts at renewing the radical political development Project through popular action. This thus differed from the previous struggle for land reform, which went on and on whether a leftist government held power or not. The PD activists and their projects lost momentum. The technocrats of the poor lost their positions. The established popular movements and parties clung to their traditional rejectionist machines. And it remains to be studied (a few years from now) whether the seeds of popular developmentalism – with democratisation as a strategic component – are nevertheless surviving and growing despite the gloomy surface.

Comparative perspectives

Finally, what was specific and what was general, as compared to the Philippine experience?

In both cases, the Left as a whole initially argued in favour of radical political intervention in general, and politically enforced land reform in particular, to overcome the insufficient dynamics of a semi-colonial economy upheld by political monopolies.

However, while the Maoist Philippine Left saw no other option than armed revolutionary struggle, their Kerala comrades (who were closer to Moscow) instead tried a combination of popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation within the framework of a comparatively open polity and strong civil society.

On the other hand, both kinds of comparatively successful politics tended over the years to obstruct further advances. In Kerala, centralisation,

compartmentalisation, factionalism, vested interests, and locked political conflicts prevented the promotion of post-land reform development. And in the Philippines, most leftists argued that imperialists, compradors, and landlords had to be fought head-on before democratic liberties would make sense.

However, while the traditional Philippine Left thus insisted on its old revolutionary track, and lost out as other actors and movements succeeded – despite the absence of radical socio-economic changes – in getting rid of Marcos and paving the way for additional transformation, the established Kerala Left (which, again, was active within a more open polity and vibrant civil society) showed some capacity for renewal (for pragmatic reasons among others), and was voted back into office.

Accordingly, renewal-oriented leftists and new movements in the Philippines had to continue the struggle for alternative development largely on their own, whereas their counterparts in Kerala found it possible to relate to, try to renew or to influence, and to get support from the old organisations, and from the new Left Front Government as well.

There were also important similarities, however. The reformists often tried to come to grips with associated processes from related points of view; and taken together, this accounts for their contemporary interest in democratisation.

According to the Philippine activists, basic conditions changed as capitalism expanded and reduced the importance of landlordism, increased environmental destruction, and allowed for more liberal forms of government (without, however, generating widespread industrialisation). This in turn gave rise to many new issues and movements, as well as to new possibilities for improving people's position, such as by way of joint development work on the local level (which can be pursued without necessarily having to gain political power first). While clear-cut class conflicts were not so easy to identify anymore, there was often a common focus on the use and control of a whole range of material resources. And interestingly enough, democratisation was often considered necessary in order to improve people's own capacity to use and control these resources.

Something similar may be said of Kerala, where the popular developmentalists emphasised that the growing importance of commercialism and of diffuse forms of exploitation – in combination with land reform and the improvement of labourers' bargaining power – had paved the way for broad popular development co-operation on the grass roots level through joint and

sustainable resource management. Again, this called for further democratisation (in terms of promoting people's ability to make effective use of their rights) for various forms of local popular co-operation, and decentralisation of (and participation in) local government.

In other words, economic and political liberalisation, and a somewhat stronger position for the actual producers, enabled the latter to improve their standard of living to a certain extent by means of action taken on the local level. This way, they did not need to at first hand grab political power, thereafter to rely on extensive state interventions. Furthermore, the often politically engineered expansion of blurred capitalist relations (without rapid industrialisation) generated an equally blurred separation between state and civil society, did away with clear-cut class interests among a majority of the population, and gave rise to a multiplicity of interests, conflicts and movements. This fragmentation and symbiosis between politics and economy – as well as the need to focus on the use and control of the many different resources involved – called for various forms of co-operation to bring scattered small producers and labourers together. And thus democratisation became instrumental.

The politics of democratisation itself, however, varied. Most of the Philippine reformists who had to start anew often emphasised a kind of "pure" development activism, and a "deepening" rather than politicisation of civil society. They then tried to add lobbying and pressure politics to this. The popular developmentalists in Kerala, by contrast, usually found it both possible and tactical to restrict themselves to non-party political development actions in co-operation with the Government, and to refer outright political tasks to the established Left parties and movements.

The problems or limits of democratisation, on the other hand, were often of the same kind in the Philippines and Kerala.

Firstly, in a social setting marked by the expansion of blurred capitalist relations there did not seem to be widespread interest among the many dispersed producers in joint democratic control and management to improve their own production. No powerful new social movement came forward.

Secondly, most non-party-political development activities did not make much sense within the logic of the institutional and political-cum-economic interests of the public administration and the established leftist movements and parties. (Aside from when, for instance, such activities formed part of their top-

down development policies when in power.) The activists were therefore isolated and left without such necessary measures as – in Kerala – a consistent democratic decentralisation, and – in the Philippines – a unified democratic and electoral political project.

Thirdly, the reformists themselves did not find it possible to really politicise (by which is not necessarily meant party-politicise) their development actions. Or perhaps they were incapable of, or uninterested in, so doing. Democratic development work in relation to special issues and interests in the Philippines opened some room for progressive lobbying and pressure politics within the elitist political system, but could not be placed within a general alternative perspective – a political development Project – and transformed into votes. For their part, the popular developmentalists in Kerala (besides first linking up with, and then suffering from the fall of, the leftist government) humbly restricted themselves to creating preconditions for major social and political forces to move forward – which the latter did not do.

And fourthly, analytical reductionism and/or political considerations prevented the reformists in both settings from dealing with the origins of such problems, including the multiplicity of socio-economic interests and conflicts, *plus* their links with vested interests within the obstructive logic of established politics, conservative as well as leftist.

These problems do not necessarily imply, however, that the dynamic association between new radical popular development efforts and democratisation has come to a standstill. It is true that the democratic politicisation of grass-roots development activism – within the framework of many new and varied interests, conflicts and movements – is lagging behind. It does not make full sense to the radical political institutions, movements, and processes which took shape during the earlier struggles for national independence and state-led development. And it seems very difficult for the new movements themselves to come to grips with. But the loss of momentum with the elections of 1991 and 1992, in Kerala and the Philippines respectively, is currently followed by at least some further decentralisation of government and authority. And although contradictory and carried out for other purposes than those of the leftists, this may serve to widen the space for local popular development movements – which may then have to emphasise democratic politicisation simply in order not to lose out.

However, what will actually emerge from these and other tendencies remains, of course, to be examined in re-studies a few years from now, and to be compared with other movements in the very different case of Indonesia.²²³

December 1994

Footnotes

Footnotes for EPW's part 1:

* The present study is part of a larger effort to compare over time the importance of democratisation for renewal-oriented popular movements in three very different contexts, within Indonesia, the Philippines, and India. The focus here is on the Indian state of Kerala.

I am most thankful to all friends cum colleagues, political leaders and activists in Indonesia, Kerala, and the Philippines who in a spirit of mutual trust and interest in critical ideas, have spent a great deal of time in informative and exciting discussions with me.

In Kerala, much of the basic research is conducted via the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, and in close co-operation with P.K. Michael Tharakan, associate fellow (whose positive contribution cannot be overestimated) and with the valuable assistance of Shri. M.P. Philip, currently college lecturer, (abbreviated M.P.P. in my footnotes). The sole responsibility for the approach, data collection, analysis, and formulations remains, however, with me. Thanks also to Peter Mayers for cautious copy-editing.

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Most of the new information was collected in February-March 1993. More recent and further developments will be discussed in a re-study in 1995-1996.

During the second part of 1994, my main informants (including most of those interviewed) were provided with the final draft of the manuscript and encouraged to communicate comments and corrections before publication. Thank you very much for thus improving the analyses! Two critical notes, however, have been impossible for me to adjust to, one by Mr. E.M.S Namboodiripad and one by Mr. K. Vijayachandran. Hence I have instead, with their permission, reproduced the notes (and my response to them) in a final footnote.

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¹I shall use upper-case P to denote the overall Project and lower-case p to denote sub-projects.

²Where nothing else is indicated, "the Left" refers to the Left in general, including left oriented nationalists and communists, as well as new radical popular movements which, firstly, take the aspirations, well-being, and developmental capacity of the weak majority of the population as their fundamental point of departure, and, secondly, claim that this require collective social organisation and political action.

³See Törnquist, Olle, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The destruction of the PKI in Indonesia*, Zed Books, London, 1984 (Swedish edition 1982) and *What's Wrong With Marxism? Volume I: On capitalists and State in India and Indonesia; Volume II: On Peasants and Workers in India and Indonesia*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1989 and 1991 respectively, and "Democracy and the Philippine Left" in *Kasarinlan* (University of the Philippines), Vol., 6, No 1-2, 1990 (also with the title "Communists and Democracy" in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay) Vol. XXVI, No 27-29, 1991).

⁴In all three cases, despite different contexts and varying political strategies, a rather clear cut pattern may be discerned:

(1) By subscribing to the traditional Marxist thesis that power and exploitation in an "ideal" capitalist economy only grows out of productive labour in private production processes, the radical Left disregarded the possibility that the emergence and growth of capitalism may differ over time and in various countries. Consequently, they often ignored the control of publicly owned land and capital, as well as the importance of a great many preconditions for getting production started and going which are not directly linked to any particular farm or company.

(2) This in turn meant one did not consider that the control and the government of such assets and preconditions for production constituted an independent source of power, which was a way of indirectly appropriating a portion of the surplus produced, and which had a very important bearing on the extent to which production could be further developed, and in what way.

(3) Finally, the control and regulation of these assets and preconditions for production were often (but of course not only) carried out via the organs of the state and other "collective institutions" (such as co-operatives) with substantial resources but weak institutions. Consequently, a good part of the basis for (and the importance of) the exercise of powers by administrators and politicians was also neglected – as was the more or less undemocratic forms of government prevailing within the state and "civil society organisations".

⁵One basic assumption is that politicians, administrators and so-called "bureaucratic capitalists" have no real basis of power of their own which can be attacked by way of political democratisation. Instead they rely on more powerful imperialists, compradors, and landlords with private sources of power – who must be tackled head on by other means. Cf. Törnquist, Olle, "Democracy and the Philippine Left", *op.cit.*

⁶This was perhaps most obvious in the Latin American context. (For a stimulating recent general perspective, see Manuel Antonio Garretón's paper *Social Movements and the Politics of Democratisation* to the Nordic Conference on Social Movements in the Third World, University of Lund, August 18-21, 1993.) Probably the best Asian example would be from Manila, February 1986, when Marcos' at-the-very-last-minute-turned-moderately-dissident cardinal (Sin), just-expelled minister of defence (Enrile), and head of the constabulary (Ramos) in a few days managed almost

entirely to capture the unique "people power revolution", and thereafter struck a deal with Corazon Aquino and some other traditional actors. (South Africa seems to be an exception, so far.)

⁷The difference between "deepening" and "politicising" civil society may be very briefly described in terms of the difference between stressing the empowerment of individual citizens versus giving priority to common ideas and collective organisation and action. For an exciting analysis of "the recent career" of the concept of civil society, see Peter Gibbon's paper '*Civil Society' and Political Change, with Special Reference to 'Developmentalist' States*, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, Sweden, Revised version Spring 1994.

⁸The focus is thus on when politics *to promote* democracy make sense, not only when democratic forms of rule as such are instrumental. "Instrumental" does not rule out, of course, the possibility that a movement may stress the importance of democratic values rather than, for instance, material ends – only that we concentrate on when they really find the politics of democratisation to be instrumental for reaching their aims, material or non-material.

⁹Naturally, one could go still further and begin by close anthropological observation of why it is that individuals form movements in the first place. But since our inquiry concerns the politics of democratisation, and since it is reasonable to assume that politics and democratisation only become major issues as movements and other types of collective action take shape, the important initial part of the story will not be the subject of close attention in this project.

¹⁰When analysing movements' politics (including their policies) of democratisation, their statements and activities need to be filtered through a non-partisan conceptualisation of such processes which goes beyond the conventional and usually static definitions of (e.g. liberal) democratic forms of rule. And even though such a concept should be limited, it is not enough to ask to what extent and in what way the work carried out by the movements and organisations studied is characterised by the essence of democracy that most of them agree upon; *the essence in terms of the sovereignty of the people in accordance with the principle of constitutionally guaranteed political equality among citizens or members, who are independent enough to express their own will.* (Or, if we put it in operational and minimum-procedural terms, government at various levels according to rule on the basis of majority decisions among adult citizens or members with one vote each and freedom of expression and organisation.) We also know that this principal point is closely associated with many other factors, which in turn relate to the actual politics of democratisation.

A wide classification into four groups of such factors will be indicated below. While the essence of democracy is universal, the importance and composition of these factors may vary from one society or context to another. And scholars as well as actors (such as our movements and organisations), of course, have different opinions about them. Hence, I find it scientifically unfruitful and politically dubious to start off with wide or culturally relativist definitions of democracy which tend to include explanatory factors and are wide open to partisan characteristics – Western or Asian, bourgeois or popular; wide or culturally relativist definitions which make it easy to first mix analytical

distinctions with perceptions of democracy (that have to be interpreted before being analysed), then mix analytical definitions with the democratic packages (or concepts) that are widely 'traded' on the development aid market or more or less benevolently proposed within international politics, and finally not compare like with like. (See Olle Törnquist, *Whither Studies of Asian Democratisation? Basis for opening address at International Workshop on Democracy in Asia*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Copenhagen, October 26-29, 1995.) (To set things straight, let me declare that just like many contemporary students of social movements, I am, thus, less interested in a structural approach than one which focuses on the actors and their perceptions – though *I* am still concentrating on their reading of the structural conditions rather than their identity formation etc. And in terms of choosing between analytical and hermeneutical principles for conducting such studies it is true that I often begin with interpretations – but primarily to arrive at a simultaneously 'fair' and critical analytical perspective.)

A first cluster of factors concerns the preconditions for meaningful democracy. Our next question is thus: *what conditions do the various movements really give priority to, try to promote, or set aside in their different contexts and over time?* The right to organise and express opinions, for instance? Human rights? Constitutionalism and the rule of law? Social and economic equality or autonomy – in order that people are able to come forward as candidates and especially to cast their votes in accordance with their opinions, without having to submit to the wishes of their leaders, employers or landlords, dominant propaganda, or intervening governments or armies? And if so, how much of this is regarded as necessary?

Secondly, *what forms of democracy do the movements support (or try to avoid)?* For instance, decentralisation of government, extensive participation (direct control), pressure politics, and co-operative efforts instead of, or in addition to representation (indirect control), parties, and participation in national and/or local elections? What (if any) constitutional arrangements are important? And what about the problem of "democratic centralism" within radical organisations?

Thirdly, *the scope or extension of democracy.* Where do the movements draw the line between state and "civil society"? Do the movements try to spread democratic forms of government to almost all resources which people have in common? What about democratisation within "civil society"? Within what parts of "civil society"? (Companies? co-operatives? NGOs?...) And who will have the right to vote? Moreover, how do they tackle the problem of monopoly and non-democratic governance of already publicly controlled and regulated resources? Do they resort to privatisation or some kind of democratic rule?

Finally, *the content.* *What democratically decided policies do the movements find undemocratic, arguing that they run counter to the prerequisites for democracy to be meaningful?* For instance, only policies that undermine basic civil rights – or do they also include measures giving rise to serious inequalities? And do their own ends justify undemocratic means?

¹¹The sources, for covering the politics and policies, will be comparatively undisputed standard literature and news reports on general developments, and scholarly studies and evaluations, as well as

documents and interviews with leading members of the movements; to document problematic and unintended developments, priority is given to "self-critical" evaluations by leaders who could be expected to do their best to defend the policies.

¹²For the full report, see: Törnquist, Olle "Democratic 'Empowerment' and Democratisation of Politics: Radical popular movements and the May 1992 Philippine elections" in *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 14:3, 1993. (Also in *Kasarinlan /University of the Philippines/* Vol. 8:3, First Quarter 1993 and Vol. 9:1, Third Quarter 1993, and in *Social Movements, State and Democracy* (Eds.) Manoranjan Mohanty and Partha Mukherji with Olle Törnquist, Forthcoming, Sage, New Delhi, 1995.)

¹³747 inhab./sq.km. in 1991 (according to *Census of India* 1991, Provisional Population Totals p.44) as compared with, for instance, Bangladesh – with about 770 inh./sq.km. (according to the *World Development Report* 1993, p.238)

¹⁴In this section I am basically drawing on P.K. Michael Tharakan's "Socio-Economic Factors in Educational Development; Case of Nineteenth Century Travancore, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XIV, No 45 and 46, November 10 and 17, 1984, "Socio-Religious Reform Movements and Demand for Indications of Development: Thiruvithamkoor 186-1930, in *Images of Rural India in the 20th Century*, Sterling, Delhi, 1992, with T.M. Thomas Isaac *Sree Narayana Movement in Travancore 1888-1939: A Study of Social Basis and Ideological Reproduction*, Working Paper 214, Centre For Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986, and, for a broader analysis of the historical roots of the "Kerala model", Tharakan's "Towards building the Kerala Model: The role of Social Movements, People's Action and Public Policy", in *Social Movements, State and Democracy* op.cit. (Cf. also the further references in the next footnote and Gita Sen's "Social Needs and Public Accountability: The case of Kerala" in Wuyts et.al. (Eds.) *Development Policy and Public Action*, Oxford University Press and The Open University, 1992.)

¹⁵In relation to the first radical political development Project and its crisis, in this and the following sections (until state-modernisers and popular developmentalists are analysed), I am drawing mainly, where nothing else is specified, on my previous findings, see *What's Wrong...Vol. I* and especially *Vol. II* op.cit., some of the relevant sections of which are also found in "Communists and Democracy: Two Indian Cases and One Debate", in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (23 (2)), 1991. For further references and general perspectives, see e.g. E.M.S Nambudiripad, *Kerala Society and Politics. An historical Survey*, National Book Centre, New Delhi 1984, (revised version of *Kerala Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, 1967), Centre for Development Studies, *Poverty, Unemployment and Development Policy. A case study of selected issues with reference to Kerala*, United Nations, New York, 1975, G.K. Lieten, *The first Communist Ministry in Kerala 1957-9*, K.P. Bagchi & Company, Calcutta and New Delhi, 1982, Nossiter, T.J., *Communism in Kerala. A Study in Political Adaptation*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1982, T.V. Sathyamurthy, *India Since Independence. Volume 1: Centre-state relations: the case of Kerala*, Ajanta publications, Delhi, 1985, Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-Being. How Kerala Became 'a model'*, Macmillan, 1992, Richard W. Franke *Life Is A*

Little Better: Redistribution as a Development Strategy in Nadur Village, Kerala., Boulder, Colorado. Westview Press, 1993, K.K. George, *Limits to Kerala Model of Development: An analysis of Fiscal Crisis and Its Implications*, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram , 1993, M.A. Oommen, *Essays in Kerala Economy*. Oxford & IBH publishing Co. New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta, 1993, and Dilip M. Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India. Malabar 1900-1948*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, plus Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin's *Kerala: Radical Reform as Development in an Indian State* Food First, San Francisco, 1989, and Michael Tharakan's "Towards Building the Kerala Model: The Role of Social Movements People's Action and Public Policy" op. cit.

¹⁶Interview with E.M.S Namboodiripad 14.03.1985

¹⁷The latter were more important in West Bengal.

¹⁸See footnote 10!

¹⁹During the fifteen years of harsh conflicts between the CPI-M and the CPI, moreover, there was a kind of de facto division of labour between the two: the former had to rely on struggles, while the latter had to hold on to administration with the Congress party. Cf. E.M.S Namboodiripad "The Left in India's Freedom Movement and in Free India", in *Social Scientist*, Vol.14, August-September, 1986, p.15.

²⁰See footnote 15 in general and in particular, Ronald Herring's *Land to the Tiller: The Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia*, Ch. 6, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983, "Economic Consequences of Local Power Configurations in Rural South Asia", in Desai, Rudolph and Rudra (Eds.) *Agrarian Power and Agricultural Productivity in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984, *Dilemmas of Agrarian Communism*, Association for Asian Studies meeting, San Francisco, March 1988, (Cf. "Dilemmas of Agrarian Communism: Peasant Differentiation, Sectoral and Village Politics", in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 1, January 1989, K.N. Raj and M. Tharakan's "Agrarian Reform in Kerala and its Impact on the Rural Economy – a Preliminary Assessment", in Ghose, A.K (Ed.) *Agrarian Reform in Contemporary Developing Countries*, Selectbook, New Delhi, 1984, and Krishnaji, N. "Agrarian Relations and the Left Movement in Kerala", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 3, 1979.

²¹K.K. Easwaran's "Re-emergence of Land Leasing in Kerala. The Case of Kuttanad", in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 18, No.11-12, November-December, 1990.

²²For a general reference in relation to what follows in this section, see A.V. Jose, *Agricultural Labour Force in Kerala. An Historical-cum-Statistical Analysis*. Ph.D. thesis submitted to the University of Kerala, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram , 1980 and K.P. Kannan's *Of Rural Proletarian Struggles: Mobilisation and Organisation of Rural Workers in South-West India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988 and "Labour Institutions and the Development Process in Kerala", in T.S. Papola and G. Rodgers (Eds.) *Labour Institutions and Economic Development in India*, International Institute for Labour Studies, Research Series No 97, Geneva, 1992.

²³Most scholars agree on this, but no reliable general figure is available. The problems include uncertain, usually inflated and not always comparable figures from the unions themselves; moreover, one should consider the number of actual followers. Discussions with Dr. Mridul Eapen and Dr. K.P Kannan, 30.08.1994.

²⁴For example: toddy-tapping-jobs for traditional toddy tappers only.

²⁵See P.S. Vijayasankar *The Urbran Casual Labour Market in Kerala: A study of the Headload Workers of Trichur*. M.Phil. thesis Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram , 1986.

²⁶The post-second world war Swedish experience up until the early seventies is a good case in point.

²⁷For some relevant general perspectives of the economic problems, see the series of papers in *Economic and Political Weekly* September 1-8 and 15, 1990, introduced, in the Sept. 1-8 issue, by K.P Kannan's "Kerala Economy at the Crossroads?" (cf. also his "Kerala's Development Dilemma", in *People & Development* Costford, September-October 1991); further, K.N. Raj's Mathai Manjooran Memorial Speech "Kerala's Pattern of Development", in *People & Development* Costford, January-February 1991, E.M.S Namboodiripad's response in the following memorial speech, "Kerala's Economic Planning and its Politics, in *Desabhimani*, February 26, 27, and 28, K.K. George's *Limits to Kerala Model of Development*, op. cit., M.A. Oommen *Essays on Kerala Economy*, op. cit. and *Kerala's Economy. Performance, Problems, Prospects* (Ed.) B.A. Prakash, Sage, New Delhi, 1994. See also, B.A. Prakash, "Private Financing Firms in Kerala. A study", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XIX, No. 50, December 15, 1984, and in relation to the recent Gulf crisis, Ashwani Saith's "Absorbing External Shocks: The Gulf Crisis, International Migration Linkages and the Indian Economy, 1990 (with special reference to the impact on Kerala) in *Development and Change*, Vol. 23, No 1, January 1992, and T.M. Thomas Isaac's *Economic Consequences of the Gulf Crisis: A Study of India with Special Reference to Kerala*, ILO-UNDP, New Delhi, 1992.)

²⁸Saith op.cit.

²⁹See e.g.. Herring (1989) op.cit. pp. 96 ff. Actually, the latter losses continued in the 1987 election though they were compensated for by new gains in Travancore. See the computer analysis in *Frontline*, April 18-May 1, 1987, e.g.. pp 11 and 122 f.

³⁰Including, in my judgement, among leaders like N.E. Balaram (then state secretary of the CPI), Nayanar (state secretary of the CPI-M) and Rama Krishna (CPI-M leader in charge of the peasant movement) (interviews in February 2, 4 and 5, 1985 respectively).

³¹I am particularly thankful for several discussions on these issues with Michael Tharakan, Nalini Nayak (senior leader of the Programme for Community Organisation, Thiruvananthapuram) and Vinod Krishnan (preparing research on the Naxalite cultural actions in Kerala).

³²*Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat* (KSSP)

³³ For the KSSP see T.M. Thomas Isaac and B. Ekbal, *Science for Social Revolution: The Experience of Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat*, KSSP, Trichur, 1988, *Science as Social Activism:*

Reports and papers on The People's Science Movements in India, KSSP, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984, M.P. Parameswaran, *Sastra Sahitya Parishad: Thirty Years in Retrospect*, Manuscript, no date (early 90s), and, most recent, Mathew Zacharia and R. Sooryamoorthy, *Science in Participatory Development. The Achievements and Dilemmas of a Development Movement: The Case of Kerala*. Zed Books, London, 1994.

³⁴See Herring e.g. (1986) and (1989) op.cit and Törnquist *What's Wrong ...Vol. II* and "Communists and Democracy: Two Indian Cases and One Debate" op.cit.

Footnotes for EPW's part 2:

³⁵In addition to footnote 15, cf. T.M. Thomas Isaac and S. Mohana Kumar, "Kerala Elections, 1991: Lessons and Non-Lessons", in *Economic and Political Weekly* November 23, 1991, pp. 2693 ff., and T.M. Thomas Isaac, "Muslim League: The inevitable end", in, March 2-15, 1991, *For Bringing Up A Prosperous Kerala - Support the LDF* (Transl. by M.P.P) The CPI-M election manifesto of 1987, P.K. Michael Tharakan, "Behaviour of Communal Votes in Kerala Assembly Elections 198", in *Religion and Society*, Vol. XXXV, No. 4, December, 1988, plus continuous discussions (1985-1987-January and November-December 1990-1993) with, among others, scholars cum activists, including Michael Tharakan, Govinda Pillai, Thomas Isaac, Johan Kurien, and various leading CPI and CPI-M politicians.

³⁶See the analyses of the election figures in *Frontline*, 27 Feb. 1988, and particularly the computer analysis in *Frontline*, 18 Apr.-1 May.

³⁷ I have only included the two major schools of thought that are relevant in this connection.

³⁸What follows in this and the following section is a benevolent reading of the main features of the core arguments, which I have tried to put together in a systematic way and to compress, using my own words. I have tried to avoid quotations from not always related contexts, and to base myself on, in the first instance, interviews and discussions with analysts and leading scholars, including, again (and continually) P.K. Michael Tharakan, Thomas Isaac, (and the articles Isaac and Kumar (1991) op.cit. and "Kerala's verdict", in *Frontline*, February 16-March 1, 1991, plus "Muslim League..." op.cit.) Govinda Pillai, and Johan Kurien, plus C.P Narayanan, editor *Chinta* weekly and in charge of CPI-M's Marxist education (10.02 and 16.03.1993) Madhavan Kutty, leading journalist and analyst (15.02.1993), A.D. Damodaran, Regional Research Laboratory, senior critic of the KSSP approach (18.02.1993), K.V. Surendranath, leading scholar and activist within the CPI (18.02.1993), prof.- I.S. Gulati, vice chairman of the Kerala state planning board 1987-91 (05.12.90, 19.02.1993), prof. K.N. Raj (07.12.1990), Jacob Eapen, scholar and communist leader with assignments in the union and finance sectors (12.04.1990, 19.02.1993), M.P. Parameswaran (communist leader and pioneer KSSP activist (08.12.1990, 21.02.1993), K. Vijayachandran, communist scholar and union and industrial researcher (23.02.1993), Subrata Sinha, director of Centre for Earth Science Studies, till 1991, and

KSSSP activist (06.12.1990, 24-25.02.1993), Prof. M.K Prasad, leading KSSSP activist (05.03.1993), E.M Sreedaran, leading scholar and activist within the CPI-M (10.03.1993), Dr. K.P. Kannan, senior scholar and KSSSP activist (11.03.1993), M.M. Lawrence, co-ordinator of the Left Front (LDF) (12.03.1993), E.K. Nayanar, state secretary of the CPI-M (12.03.1993) and V.S. Achutanandan, leader of the (LDF) opposition in the Assembly (16.03.1993) and various documents referred to by those interviewed in support of their statements, including, of course, *Towards an Approach to Kerala's Eight Five Year Plan*, State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram, March, 1989, plus election manifestos and papers on the various KSSSP campaigns to which I shall return below.

³⁹Cf. the way this was put by Isaac and Kumar op cit. pp. 2694 f. and T.M. Thomas Isaac and E.M. Sreedharan in *Marxist Samvadam*, October-December 1992, in their section on why agriculture stagnates, (pp. 28 ff. in transl. by M.P.P.) and in the end of their comment on a seminar discussion (on that paper) published in *Marxist Samvadam*, January-March, 1993, (pp. 88 ff. in transl. by M.P.P.). I am also drawing on interview with Isaac op.cit. 29.11.1990.

⁴⁰In addition to footnote 38, cf. *Desabhimani*, May 3, 1991, p. 1 on "four years of satisfactory achievements".

⁴¹For a general presentation of the group farming approach, see *Group Farming for Rice Development in Kerala* brochure, Ministry of Agriculture, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990 *Farm Guide*, Ministry of Agriculture, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, pp. 99 ff., and Sunny Jose, *Group Farming in Kerala An illustrative Study*, M.Phil. thesis Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1991; I am also drawing on interviews, including with V.V. Raghavan, Minister of Agriculture 1987-91, (05.12.1990 and 22.02.1993), Thomas Isaac (29-30.01.1990), and Gulati, op.cit. and T. Gangadharan, leading KSSSP scholar and activist (21.02.1993 and 03.03.1993).

⁴²There was also separate group management of coconuts, pepper, etc.

⁴³Though it is difficult to determine how much (and how much of the increase) was due to group farming. The figures are from Sunny Jose op.cit. p. 56.

⁴⁴Interviews with, in the first instance, Tharakan, Isaac, Parameswaran and Gangadharan op.cit.

⁴⁵Interviews with Tharakan, Isaac and Gulati, op.cit. Cf. the analysis in the 1991 LDF election manifesto under the heading "Employment Opportunities", (pp. 16f in translation by M.P.P..).

⁴⁶As against some forty-three percent of all adult Indians.

⁴⁷"Everybody is out for the few lakhs of votes that make a difference." Surendranath, interview, op.cit.

⁴⁸*Lead Kindly Light (Operation Illiteracy Eradication), A report on the Intensive Campaign for Eradication of Illiteracy in Ernakulam District*, KSSSP, Calicut, 1991, p. 10.

⁴⁹For a general review and evaluation of the campaign, see P.K. Michael Tharakan, *The Ernakulam Total Literacy Programme*, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990. I am also drawing on discussions with Tharakan and interviews with C.P. Narayanan op.cit. and C.G. Santhakumar, KSSSP activist and project officer in the Ernakulam campaign (12.02.1993).

⁵⁰Ibid. p 87, (The figure 2.3 mill was an estimate based on the 1981 census; according to a local survey, the total was 234 463. Cf. *Lead Kindly Light* op.cit. pp. 28-29.

⁵¹According to the KSSP itself, the actual figure was 98.34% of those between 5 and 60 years of age. Ibid. p. 29.

⁵²Ibid. ch 6

⁵³For a presentation and discussion of the ideas, see Subrata Sinha, *Panchayat Level Resource Mapping For Decentralised Planning and Development*, brief paper with maps from the Ulloor test-case. 1990, *Panchayat Level Resource Mapping, an Approach Paper*, Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) et al. Thiruvananthapuram , 1991, Srikumar Chattopadhyay, *Sustainable Development: Concept and Application* CESS, 1993., and *Integrated Rural Technology Centre: Annual Report 1991-92* , Section on Development Planning. I am also drawing on interviews with Sinha op.cit, Srikumar Chattopadhyay, senior scholar involved in the Resource Mapping Project (16.02.1993 and 09.03.1993), and T. Gangadharan op.cit.

⁵⁴*Panchayat Level ... an Approach Paper* op.cit. p.1

⁵⁵Ibid. p. 2

⁵⁶See footnote 10!

⁵⁷According to Michael Tharakan, however, the latter argument only gained importance after some years.

⁵⁸On West Bengal, see footnotes 34 and 155!

⁵⁹Interview 12.03.1993.

⁶⁰When nothing else is specified, see footnotes 48 and 49!

⁶¹See footnote 48!

⁶²Ibid. and S.Mohana Kumar, "Literacy Movement in Kerala. One Step Forward, Two Step Backwards" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 9, 1993.

⁶³Anonymous, *Panchayat-Level Planning in Kerala, Random Reflections of a Civil Servant*, Paper to Seminar on *Panchayat Raj/Palika Bill*, Centre for Development Studies, October 2-3, 1993, Thiruvananthapuram . pp. 3f.

⁶⁴Michael Tharakan, personal communication and *The Ernakulam Total Literacy Programme...*op.cit. and Kumar, "Literacy Movement in Kerala..." op.cit.

⁶⁵Tharakan *The Ernakulam Total Literacy Programme...*op.cit. ch. 5 and personal communication.

⁶⁶Interview Tharakan op.cit. (o.t.'s notes 17 ff.)

⁶⁷Interviews with Tharakan, Narayanan, C.G. Santhakumar, and Isaac, op.cit. I am also thankful for a fruitful discussion with Father (and legendary anti-communist but radical social activist) Joseph Vadakkan (22.02.1993).

⁶⁸Interviews with Tharakan (o.t.'s notes 17 ff.) and Santhakumar op.cit.

⁶⁹C.P. Narayanan, discussion 30.08.1994.

⁷⁰Kumar, "Literacy Movement in Kerala..." op.cit. p. 2190.

⁷¹Interviews with Tharakan (o.t note 17 ff.) and Nayak op.cit.

⁷²Kumar, "Literacy Movement in Kerala..." op.cit. p. 2190.

⁷³Where nothing else is specified in relation to what follows on group farming, see footnote 41!

⁷⁴Interview with V.V. Raghavan op.cit., *Group Approach for Locally Adapted and Sustainable Agriculture (GALASA): Blue Print for Decentralised Agriculture Development*, Integrated Rural Technology Centre, KSSP, Mandur, (No date.) (Estimated date of publication 1992-93, o.t.), p.8. Sunny Jose op.cit. pp. 56 ff.. and 148. (According to the government, the aggregate figures for 1989/90 showed a 14 % increase in production and a 13% increase in productivity.)

⁷⁵GALASA op.cit. p. 8.

⁷⁶Mr V.V. Raghavan states that "productivity enhanced from 1.5 tons to 2 tons per hectare in Group Farming areas while in other areas the increase was upto 1.7 tons per hectare. (Letter to the author dated October 17, 1994.)

⁷⁷A major result in Sunny Jose op.cit, see p. 149 – and, incidentally, almost the same as what a few farmers hanging around one of the local extension offices in the major rice producing area of Kuttanad were eager to make me understand, having watched me taking notes on the local extension officer's evaluation (o.t note 143f).

⁷⁸Besides being the unanimous view of all scholars and politicians interviewed, it is also my own impression, including from discussions 05.12.1990 and 22.02.1993 with VV. Raghavan.

⁷⁹However, my first meeting (in December 1990) with a relocated expert, for the purpose of learning what really happened, was with a charming and beautifully dressed female agricultural officer near Thiruvananthapuram. Before sharing a lot of relevant information and insights, she somewhat suspiciously examined my more rustic clothing (meant for what I though would be a discussion while walking along the paddy fields), seemed more interested in Ingmar Bergman's films than group farming, and told me she had little time for anything – including the farmers – because of administrative office work.

⁸⁰All leading politicians I have talked to agree on this, and V.V. Raghavan himself is proud of it, of course. Interviews with him op.cit.

⁸¹Spelt out in interviews Binoy Viswam, CPI youth leader and member of the CPI national council (15.02.1993), E. Gopalakrishna Menon, senior and veteran CPI-peasant leader (22.02.1992), and Gulati 1993 op.cit.

⁸²Interview Tharakan (o.t.'s notes 18)

⁸³Interviews with Viswam, E.G. Menon, V.V. Raghavan (1993) and Lawrence op.cit

⁸⁴Interviews with V.V. Raghavan and Gulati (both 1993) op.cit. Co-operative credit societies often preferred to give loans for other purposes, such as a marriage. (Interview with P.A. Vasudevan, leading concerned economist and activist 24.02.1993; also discussion with P.G. Padmanabhan, District council member and ex. president of local co-operative bank in the Kuttanad area (27.02.1993).

⁸⁵Interviews with V.V. Raghavan 1990 and 1993, op.cit. Some of these ideas in general, and the need to fight exploitation through the market in particular, seem to have taken shape with the CPI minister Chandrasekar Nair during the brief LDF administration of the early 80's. Tharakan, personal communication (o.t.'s notes 94).

⁸⁶Sunny Jose op.cit. pp. 85 ff.

⁸⁷Together with an equally weak position in committees on higher levels. See *Farm Guide* op.cit. pp. 101f.

⁸⁸Interviews with Thomas Isaac and V.V. Raghavan (1990 and 1993) op.cit.

⁸⁹*GALASA* op.cit. p. 8; cf. Sunny Jose op.cit.

⁹⁰An almost exact quotation of what farmers and extension workers hanging around outside a local *Krishi Bahvan* in Kuttanad told me (27.02.1993), as well as the straightforward opinion of Mrs. Gowri, legendary and widely respected communist leader, in comparison with her earlier attempts (as minister) to promote agricultural production; interview (06.03.1993).

⁹¹Socio-economic differences like those between landowners proved to be a major factor explaining the weak performance of group farming in the case study by Sunny Jose, op.cit. pp. 86 and 151. I also draw on continual discussions with Tharakan and Isaac; and cf. Easwaran op.cit.

⁹²Interviews with Gulati (1993) and Gangadharan op.cit

⁹³Easwaran op.cit. (with regard to illegal leasing) plus interviews with Gangadharan, Isaac and Tharakan, Gulati (1993) and Kannan op.cit. Cf. also the discussion in *Marxist Samvadham* Oct-Dec 1992 op.cit. (M.P.P. transl. pp. 62 ff..)

⁹⁴See the section on "Philippine Points of departure" above, points 2, 3 and 6!

⁹⁵Interview Isaac (1990.11.29) op.cit.

⁹⁶*GALASA* op.cit. p.9

⁹⁷The work on GALASA began with a field study of Group farming in 1989. A preliminary report was discussed in December 1989.(See appendix 1A) The final report, however, came later. I am also drawing on interviews with Dr. Pathiyoor Gopinathan, Trichur Agricultural University and one of the main expert-authors of GALASA (21.02.1993), P.V. Unnikrishnan, leading KSSP activist and scholar with IRTC (24.02.1993), and Prasad and Parameswaran (1993) op.cit.

⁹⁸*GALASA* op.cit. p.2.

⁹⁹Ibid p 9

¹⁰⁰Ibid. pp. 84 ff.; also drawing on the interviews with Gopinathan and Parameswaran (1993) op.cit.

¹⁰¹*GALASA* op.cit. p. 90

¹⁰²Interview Gopinathan op.cit.

¹⁰³*GALASA* op.cit. pp. 87 ff.

¹⁰⁴Ibid. pp. 89 and 3.

¹⁰⁵Ibid. pp. 3 f

¹⁰⁶E.g. *ibid.* pp. 91 ff.; also drawing on the interviews with Gopinathan and Parameswaran (1993) *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁷*GALASA op. cit.* p. 91

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.* 3 and interview Gopinathan *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁹One example, interview Parameswaran (1993) *op.cit.*

¹¹⁰*GALASA op. cit.* Ch. 7, pp. 64 ff.

¹¹¹*Ibid.* p. 13; and according to M.P. Parameswaran (draft paper entitled *The Predicament Towards an Approach*), "self reliance, people's initiative and a united front of scientists, administration and people's activists could be the watchwords in the new strategy." (p.5).

¹¹²See *Panchayat Level ... an Approach Paper op.cit.*

¹¹³Interview with Sinha, 1990, *op.cit.* and Sinha, *Panchayat Level...1990 op.cit.*

¹¹⁴A few more *panchayats* were included later on; see *Integrated Rural...Annual Report. op.cit.* pp. 23ff.

¹¹⁵Officially the project started on April 18, but the first training camp was in March 15-25; see *ibid.* pp. 17 and 21.

¹¹⁶Isaac and Kumar *op.cit.* p. 2697

¹¹⁷Hence I am particularly thankful for time-consuming and frank discussions with Sinha, Parameswaran (1993), Prasad, Isaac, Gangadharan, and Chattopadhyay *op.cit.* plus additional discussions with other scholars and activists with the Integrated Rural Technology Centre, Mundur, Palakkad, (24-25.02.1993) activists (including Dr. K.K. Ramachandran of CESS and P.P. Raveendran of KSSP in Cannanore), and residents (including *panchayat* officials) involved in the resource mapping in Vellor and Kallyasseri (27.02.1993.02.27 and 03.03.1993 respectively).

¹¹⁸See e.g. *Panchayat Level ... an Approach Paper op.cit.*, *Integrated Rural...Annual Report. op.cit.* and Isaac and Kumar *op.cit.* p.2697, and the *Parishad Bulletin* Vol. 17, No. 18, January 16-31 (transl. by M.P.P.) on the plans and achievements in Kallyasseri. Also drawing on interviews with Sinha *op.cit.*

¹¹⁹Especially relying on interviews with Sinha, Parameswaran and Gangadharan *op.cit.*

¹²⁰Discussion with activists and *panchayat* officials in Vellor (24.02.1993). The minimum age was 15 years.

¹²¹The number of KSSP units and members has increased rapidly since the late 70s. In 1978-79 there were, according to its own figures, 139 units with 3313 members. In 1991-92 there were 2190 units with 66 093 members. In 1992-93 the figures had come down to 2125 and 63 313 respectively. *The Thirty Years of Parishad*, Kerala Sasthra Sahity Parishad, February 1993, p. 52. (Transl. M.P.P.)

¹²²Mainly drawing on the interviews with Gangadharan *op.cit.* and the discussions in Vellor, *op.cit.*

¹²³Kallyasseri was developed as a test case and model for the other *panchayats* in the project. See *Parishad Bulletin op. cit.* and *Kallyasseri Panchayat: A leap in the Development of a Village*

(translation by M.P.P. of local socio-economic survey); see also *Integrated Rural...Annual Report*. op.cit.

¹²⁴Interviews with Gangadharan op.cit. plus discussions with residents involved (03.03.1993).

¹²⁵Interviews with Gangadharan op.cit. and Isaac (1993) op.cit.; also drawing on discussion, on the spot (03.03.1993), with one of the main officers in charge, A.K. Vasudevan, regional executive of ADAK, the government aqua development agency.

¹²⁶See T.Gangadharan, *Decentralised Planning - The Kalliasseri Experiment*, paper to the International Congress on Kerala Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 27-29 August, 1994, and interview with the author, 29.08.1994.

¹²⁷E.g. interviews with Parameswaran (1993), Sreedaran op.cit. and discussion with activists in Vellor op.cit.

¹²⁸*Parishad Bulletin* op.cit.

¹²⁹Centre for Earth Science Studies, Kerala State Land Utilisation Board and the KSSP, *Village Resource Mapping. Handbook for the Workers* (no date), (transl. by M.-P.P) and *Kallyasseri Panchayat...* (transl. by M.P.P. of local socio-economic survey).

¹³⁰Discussions with, among others, Isaac, Gangadharan, Chattopadhyay, Tharakan, and Prasad op.cit. (One bad experience was the conflicts over the land tribunals proposed by the communists during the struggle for land reform.)

¹³¹Interviews with Gangadharan and discussions with people involved in Kallyasseri and Vellor op.cit. plus with Parameswaran (1993) and Prasad op.cit.

¹³²Interviews with Gangadharan and A.K. Vasudevan op.cit. Also drawing on an interview with Unnikrishnan, who stated that "if the workers get jobs they are (anyway) strong enough to demand good wages on their own".

¹³³According to P.P. Raveendran op.cit, 3-400 people from Kallyasseri were working in the Gulf countries (possibly also including those who had worked there). Also drawing on discussion with Prasad op.cit.

¹³⁴ See *Parishad Bulletin... Village Resource Mapping. Handbook for the Workers...and Kallyasseri Panchayat...* (socio-economic survey)...op.cit. Also drawing on discussions with M.A. Oommen 11.03.1993 (on the issue in general) and with John Kurien op.cit. (1993) (in relation to the fishing sector). Cf. the discussion some sections ahead on the lack of analysis of the local relations of power in relation to the problems of carrying out decentralisation.

¹³⁵For instance: "People say that co-operatives are deteriorating and suffer from too much of party politics and too little individual responsibility" Interview with Gangadharan op.cit. 21.02.1993.

¹³⁶See *Parishad Bulletin...* and *Kallyasseri Panchayat...* (socio-economic survey)...op.cit. Also drawing on interviews with P.A. Vasudevan, J. Kurien (1993), M. Kutty, and M.A. Oommen op.cit. Unnikrishnan op.cit. adds that the KSSP itself is not involved in setting up co-operatives and K.P. Kannan writes in *Panchayat Raj/Nagar Palika Acts and their Implications for Decentralised*

Development and Local Self-Government in Kerala Paper to seminar on *Panchayat Raj/Nagar Palika Bill* and its Implications.. October 2-3, 1993, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram , p. 7, that the existing co-operatives (mainly credit, service and marketing co-operatives) have often ignored the village panchayats.

¹³⁷Interviews with Gangadharan and Sreedaran op.cit. plus with N.P. Gopalakrishnan, joint director of industries and secretary Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers Central Co-operative Society, Kannur, 03.03.1993.

¹³⁸Interview E. Gopalakrishna Menon op.cit.

¹³⁹Interview with Tharakan and Isaac op.cit.

¹⁴⁰One of the main thesis in my *What's Wrong...Vol. II* op.cit.

¹⁴¹See footnote 39!

¹⁴²Interview with Mrs. Gowri op.cit. Mrs. Gowri was, among other things, one of the foremost Kerala ministers in charge of the land reform; in the last LDF government she was minister of Industries and Excise; as a result of serious conflicts within the CPI-M, she has recently been expelled from the party.

¹⁴³Interview Parameswaran op.cit.(1993).

¹⁴⁴Interviews with Gangadharan and Unnikrishnan op.cit.

¹⁴⁵For the fact, e.g. E.M. Sreedaran and E.K. Nayanar, interviews op.cit.

¹⁴⁶According to e.g.. Unnikrishnan op.cit., however, the idea is that, once the resource mapping gains momentum in a village, the party organisation will face so much social pressure that it will not be able to refuse to go along; i.e., change from below.

¹⁴⁷We shall soon return to this when discussing the problems of decentralisation.

¹⁴⁸Interview Gangadharan op.cit. 21.02.1993.

¹⁴⁹I am drawing on a similar formulation by R. Ramalingom and I.S. Gulati in *Recent Experience in Plan Decentralisation in Kerala*, Paper to seminar on *Panchayat Raj/Nagar Palika Bill* and its Implications.. October 2-3, 1993, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram , p. 7.

¹⁵⁰According to Kannan *Panchayat..* op.cit. p.7, until 1988 the *panchayat* president could not spend more than Rs. 250 without approval from the *Panchayat* Department. 27.02.1993 the *panchayat* leaders in Vellor told me that they could spend Rs. 50 and sometimes Rs. 500 "on their own"; then they had to ask permission from the District Collector, and for sums above Rs. 5000 they had to ask permission from the ministry.

¹⁵¹Cf. one of the experiences in Anonymous, *Panchayat-Level Planning in Kerala*, op.cit. p.2: "A *Panchayat* President from one of the rural *panchayats* of Thiruvananthapuram district narrated his experience of having spent more than a decade running after officials and politicians including ministers to get approval for a much needed link road, without avail, when finally a contractor promised to get the approval of work on condition that it would be entrusted to him. This was agreed to gladly by the President and the work began in 3 months!"

¹⁵²Hence, I am told, the many local roads in Kerala, which, moreover are often unusually profitable for both politicians and contractors.

¹⁵³Partly drawing on discussions with Gangadharan op.cit.

¹⁵⁴M.A. Oommen, interview, op.cit.

¹⁵⁵(Plus linking up with central funds.) Cf. e.g.. (besides my own "Communists and Democracy: Two Indian Cases and One Debate" op.cit.) Neil Webster's "Agrarian Relations in Burdwan District, West Bengal: From Economics of Green Revolution to the Politics of *Panchayati Raj*", in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 20:2, 1990, and *Panchayati Raj and the Decentralisation of Development Planning in West Bengal. A case study*. Centre for Development Research, Copenhagen, Project Paper 90.7, 1990, plus D. Bandyopadhyay and Nirmal Mukarji, *New Horizons for West Bengal's Panchayats A report for the Government of West Bengal*, February 1993, D. Bandyopadhyay, "Fourth General Elections of *Panchayats* in West Bengal (May 1993)," in *Mainstream* June 26, 1993, and Poromesh Acharya "*Panchayats* and Left Politics in West Bengal", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 29, 1993.

¹⁵⁶None that I have talked to, including the most optimistic and voluntaristic PD leaders, claimed otherwise.

¹⁵⁷Cf. the section "Philippine Points of Departure" above!

¹⁵⁸See "Kerala: Mandal Factor", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 23, 1991, and Isaac "Kerala's verdict"...op.cit.

¹⁵⁹Ibid. According to a well informed leading activist who must remain anonymous (o.t.'s notes 202), local cadres claimed people favoured the Left in "literacy areas" in seven districts before the assassination, but only in three after.

¹⁶⁰Cf. the electoral analysis in Isaac and Kumar op.cit.

¹⁶¹E.g.. interviews P.V. Unnikrishnan and Binoy Viswam op.cit.

¹⁶²*For Bringing up a Prosperous Kerala...*(CPI-M's election manifesto) op.cit. under the sections "corruption" and "black marketing and hoarding" (M.P.P's transl. pp. 20 ff.).

¹⁶³The Left Front won in the cities, and gained a majority in more *panchayats* but fewer municipalities than the Congress-led front. Figures in *People's Democracy* February 7, 1988.

¹⁶⁴Interview with Tharakan, 03.12.1990.

¹⁶⁵V. Ramachandran, currently vice chairman of the Planning Board under the Congress-led State Government. See his *Report on the Measures to be Taken for Democratic Decentralisation at the District and Lower Levels, Volume 1*, Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram, July 1988.

¹⁶⁶I am mainly drawing on discussions with E.M. Sreedaran, C.P Narayanan (16.03.1993), John Kurien (1993), P.A. Vasudevan, P.G. Padmanabhan, and N.P Gopalakrishnan op.cit.

¹⁶⁷I am mainly drawing on an interview with Gopalakrishnan op.cit. For the background, see Pyaralal Raghavan, *Organisation of Production in Beedi Industry. A Study of Cannanore District: 1920-1985*. M.Phil. thesis, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986.

¹⁶⁸Interviews with Gulati op.cit. plus Ramalingom and Gulati op.cit.

¹⁶⁹The adviser, V. Ramachandran, was appointed on April 28, was on duty May 6 and reported his results on July 20 1988 (the second volume, to which I shall soon return, was delivered in October 1988)

¹⁷⁰ Cf. I.S. Gulati, "Debasement of District Councils in Kerala", in *Economic and Political Weekly*,

December 7, 1991, p. 2793.

¹⁷¹Interview with M.A. Oommen, op.cit.

¹⁷²Cf. M.P. Parameswaran *Local Self Government and Decentralisation*, p.1 and E.K. Nayanar, *Towards Panchayati Raj Legislation in Kerala: A Note*, pp. 1 ff., Papers to seminar on *Panchayat Raj/Nagar Palika Bill and its Implications*. October 2-3, 1993, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram .

¹⁷³Interviews with E.K. Nayanar, M.M. Lawrence, and V.S. Achutanandan op.cit.

¹⁷⁴Where nothing else is specified during this and the following two paragraphs I am mainly relying on interviews with V.S Achutanandan, E.K. Nayanar, M.M Lawrence, E.M. Sreedaran, C.P. Narayanan (16.03.1993), and to a lesser degree with Jacob Eapen, op.cit.; plus with A.K Balam, dynamic CPI-M leader and elected District Council President in Palakkad (26.02.1993), K.Anirudhan, senior CPI-M leader and elected District Council President in Thiruvananthapuram (04.03.1993), Antony Raju, Advocate and elected Congress(S) District Councillor Thiruvananthapuram (02.03.1993), Veliyam Bhargavan, assistant CPI Kerala state secretary and National Council Member (18.02.1993), Vasudevan Nair, CPI Kerala state secretary (02.03.1993), and to a lesser degree with S. Radhakrishnan, elected Congress(S) District Councillor Thiruvananthapuram (04.03.1993). I am also drawing on interviews with V. Ramachandran, I.A.S, former special adviser to the Left Front government on decentralisation, currently vice chairman of the State Planning Board (02.03.1993) and with M.A. Oommen, leading scholar in the field.

¹⁷⁵Interview 26.02.1993.

¹⁷⁶O.t.'s notes 219.

¹⁷⁷Interviews with V. Ramachandran and M.M. Lawrence, op.cit. plus with V.M. Sudheeran, member of Congress(I), who consistently favoured of decentralisation (11.03.1993). See also V. Ramachandran's *Report on the Measures to be Taken for Democratic Decentralisation at the District and Lower Levels Volume II*, October 1988, and *District Councils in Kerala: A paper Written on the Eve of the First Elections to District Councils in January 1991* (Mimeo) (also in *People & Development*, April-May, 1991.); plus *Government of Kerala: Local Administration (Dist.Admn.Spl.Cell) Department. Notification* Thiruvananthapuram, 26th December, 1990, Published as Gazette Extraordinary No.1253 dated 26th December, 1990.

¹⁷⁸Gulati, "Debasement..."op.cit. p. 2793.; see also V. Ramachandran's own reaction in his *District Councils in Kerala...*op.cit.

¹⁷⁹With no improvement in the share of votes as compared to the 1987 assembly elections and a more united opposition causing bad results for the Left. See Thomas Isaac, "The Kerala Shock. Factors that reversed the trend", in *Frontline*, July 20- August 2, 1991, p. 93

¹⁸⁰"The most important constraint on district councils is the fact that they will have no independent sources of revenue other than the collection of fees, which will be negligible in amount. They will have to depend entirely on government grants and loans". V Ramachandran *District Councils in Kerala...* op.cit. p. 19, see also pp. 25 ff.

¹⁸¹V. Ramachandran's second report concerning administrative arrangements on state and district level was presented in Oct. 1988. According to V. Ramachandran, interview op.cit., the report was almost hidden away. Moreover, according to *Mathrubhoomi Daily*, October 3. 1993 (M.P.P. transl.) V. Ramachandran stated at the Centre for Development Studies Seminar on *Panchayat Raj* that the bureaucracy would go against decentralisation since e.g. 25% of the secretariat staff would be dismissed. (Cf. V. Ramachandran *State Legislation on Panchayati Raj: Issues for Discussion*, Paper to seminar on *Panchayat Raj/Nagar Palika Bill* and its Implications. October 2-3, 1993, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram .)

¹⁸²I cannot abstain from mentioning that the occupational background of 44.5 % of the District Council members was that of full-time party worker; teachers were the second largest category – 15,8%. George Mathew, *Social Background of District Council Members in Kerala 1991*, Institute of Social Sciences, Occasional paper Series 8, New Delhi, (No date) p. 7.

¹⁸³*District Council Election – A Milestone on the Way to Decentralisation of Power. Policy Proclamation by the LDF State Committee.*

¹⁸⁴Isaac "Kerala's Verdict..." op.cit. p. 38.

¹⁸⁵E.M.S Namboodiripad in *Deshabhmani*, March 1, 1991, (M.P.P.. transl.)

¹⁸⁶Interview with Balam op.cit.

¹⁸⁷Interview with Radhakrishnan, op.cit.

¹⁸⁸Not to talk of the CPI-M's manifesto. See *LDF Election Manifesto* Published by the LDF Kerala State Committee, 1991, and *Indian Communist Party (Marxist): Election Manifesto, 1991*, Published by the Kerala State Committee, CPI-M.

¹⁸⁹See in the first instance Thomas Isaac "The Kerala Coup: Targeting the district councils" in *Frontline*, December 20, 1991, and Gulati "Debasement..." op.cit.

¹⁹⁰See, for instance, the papers to the workshop on decentralised planning arranged by Costford and Institute of Management in Government, Thiruvananthapuram , October 4-5, 1991, in the supplement "Decentralised Planning with People's Participation" to *People & Development*, October 1991, the papers to the seminar on democratic decentralisation in Kerala organised by the Institute for the Study of Developing Areas, Thiruvananthapuram , 13 July 1992, in *ISDA journal* Vol. 2, No. 4, 1992, the papers to seminar the on *Panchayat Raj/Nagar Palika Bill* and its Implications. October 2-3, 1993, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram , and, in a wider framework, the papers in

the thematic issue of *the Administrator*, July-September, 1991, plus, of course – partly because of the character of his mission – the writings of V. Ramachandran.

¹⁹¹See footnote 185 for a good example!

¹⁹²Interview op.cit. See also his contribution to the discussion in *Marxist Samvadam* January-March, 1993. (Transl. M.P.P.)

¹⁹³Including those by V. Ramachandran in interview (op.cit.), and more between than in the lines in his writings. And see, e.g., the exciting anonymous paper to the October 1993 Centre for Development Studies seminar, *Panchayat-Level Planning in Kerala*, op.cit.

¹⁹⁴D. Bandyopadhyay and Nirmal Mukarji's, *New Horizons for West Bengal's Panchayats...*op.cit. was brought in at the Centre for Development Studies seminar.

¹⁹⁵See footnote 39!

¹⁹⁶See Isaac "Kerala's verdict"...op.cit. and e.g. Ramesh Menon's report in *India Today*, April 30, 1991, p. 31. Only a few, including Chief Minister Nayanar, opposed early elections. Interview with M.Kutty op.cit. and leading party member (anonymous, o.t.'s notes x).

¹⁹⁷General conclusion on the basis of press clippings and discussions with journalists and scholars in the field, including experts within CESS (some of whom should remain anonymous).

¹⁹⁸Cf. Kumar, "Literacy Movement in Kerala..." op.cit. And besides press clippings and interviews with Tharakan op.cit. and leading left oriented literacy activists, including C.P. Santhakumar op.cit., I am also drawing on interviews with e.g. K.R.D. Warriar, retired director of communication and still active in the campaign (12.02.1993), P.N. Panicker, secretary of KANFED, affiliated with the new campaign and often critical of the KSSP (16.02.1993), and, to broaden the perspective, with Bhaskara Panicker, also with a background in KANFED plus the library movement (18.02.1993).

¹⁹⁹Interview V. Ramachandran (02.03.1993).

²⁰⁰And enabled those who were ministers to appoint their own deputies. All this together also reduced the prescribed share of women as well as of members of scheduled castes and tribes.

²⁰¹See Gulati, "Debasement..."op.cit. and Isaac "The Kerala Coup..." op.cit.

²⁰²See the paragraph on "the content of democracy" in the previous section on "Popular pressure and top-down politics of democratisation"!

²⁰³Interviews with e.g. Santhakumar and Isaac (1993) op.cit.

²⁰⁴E.g. interview with Nalini Nayak (1993) op.cit.

²⁰⁵Interview with N. Jagajeevan, Kerala state general secretary of the KSSP (16.02.1993).

²⁰⁶Interviews with e.g. Santhakumar, E.M. Sreedaran, and Subrata Sinha op.cit.

²⁰⁷As put forward by A.K. Balam and Antony Raju, interviews op.cit.

²⁰⁸Interviews with Binoy Viswan, Veliyam Bhargavan and P.K. Vasudevan Nair (the quotation) op.cit.

²⁰⁹Interview with Isaac (1993) op.cit; see also his "The Kerala coup..." p. 47.

²¹⁰Press clippings and interviews, anonymous (politicians and journalists) e.g. o.t.'s notes 85, 155, 42, 70, and 71

²¹¹Interviews with C.G. Santhakumar, Veliyam Bhargavan and Binoy Viswan op.cit.

²¹²(Like over the co-operative hospital in Cannanore.) Interviews with, among others, M Kutty and Antony Raju op.cit.

²¹³Interviews with E.K. Nayanar and V.S Achuthanandan respectively, op.cit.

²¹⁴*Deshabhimani* 05.03.1993 and 09.03.1993.

²¹⁵Discussion with V.M. Sudheeran, 02.09.1994 (The present Congress-led state government, which is not doing too well, to put it mildly, seems to be avoiding elections.)

²¹⁶Also stated in interview, E.K. Nayanar op.cit.

²¹⁷Cf. T.M. Thomas Isaac, *The Structural Adjustment Programme and the Regional Economy of Kerala*, Paper to seminar on "Central Budget and Problems Facing Kerala Economy", Thiruvananthapuram, March 8, 1993.

²¹⁸As was done by E.M.S Namboodiripad in his talk at the concluding session of the International Conference on Kerala Studies, Thiruvananthapuram 29.08.1994.

²¹⁹Cf. Madhavan Kutty's contribution to the discussion in *Marxist Samvadam*, January-February, 1993.

²²⁰Though one should also note that, in his talk at the concluding session of the International Conference on Kerala Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 29.08.1994, the CPI-M spokesperson and politburo member Prakash Karat spoke very favourably of programs like resource mapping as a way of resisting and of offering alternatives to structural adjustment.

²²¹See his columns in *Frontline* July 15 and 29 and August 26, plus Harkishan Singh Surjeet's comment in *Frontline*, August 12, 1994.

²²²In regard to this paragraph, I am particularly thankful for exciting discussions with, besides Michael Tharakan and Govina Pillai (continually) and Thomas Isaac (1993) op.cit, some of the scholars and activists involved, including T.T. Sreekumar (17.02.1993), Mathreyan (03.04.1993), Baswandra Babu (05.03.1993), B. Rajeevan (05.03.1993) and K. Venu (07.03.1993).

Footnote for EPW's part 3

²²³As mentioned in the initial footnote, I am most thankful to all friends cum colleagues, political leaders and activists in Indonesia, Kerala, and the Philippines who in a spirit of mutual trust and interest in critical ideas, have spent a great deal of time in informative and exciting discussions with me.

During the second part of 1994, my main informants (including most of those interviewed) were provided with the final draft of the manuscript and

encouraged to communicate comments and corrections before publication. Thank you very much for thus improving the analyses!

A few critical comments, however, have been impossible for me to adjust to: two notes by Mr. E.M.S Namboodiripad and one by Mr. K. Vijayachandran. Hence I have instead, with their permission, quoted vital parts of their criticism (and my response to it) in this footnote.

1. The salient points in Mr. K. Vijayachandran's extensive comments dated October 25, 1994 may be summarised by the following quotations:

"Törnquist firmly believes that the traditional left, the organised left or the political and mass organisations that use democratic centralism as a basic organising tool are, by their very nature, incapable of practising and developing democracy".

"For the author the failure of the traditional or the organised left is an already accomplished fact of history, be it that of Indonesia, India, Kerala or even that of West Bengal."

"Unfortunately he [Törnquist] has relied too much or even almost exclusively on PD literature and dialogues with PD activists for understanding and interpreting Kerala's polity."

"[T]he political project for democratisation in the non-imperialist countries as envisaged by the author appears to have a singular objective: To replace the traditional left by the so called PD initiatives. The PDs asserting their autonomy within the traditional left, hijacking and dismantling it from within or joining hands with the non-left after breaking away from the left in order to carry forward the project for democracy are, perhaps, seen as definite possibilities. And recent history has witnessed several such successful projects – in the USSR and in the East European countries. The monsters they have created out of the socialist societies of those countries with all their proverbial shortcomings are a far cry from any sort of democratic model that even the Next Left can ever imagine."

"The paper makes some casual remarks on the success of the democratic decentralisation project implemented by another left ruled Indian state, the West Bengal, and draws comparisons with the Kerala experience. This has some relevance, but Törnquist's main framework is global: he looks at Kerala's experience after fixing it on a wider canvass alongside that of the Philippines and Indonesia. The author explains the rationale for choosing these diverse contexts for his project, but that is not much by way of explanation. As a matter of fact such explanations are hardly necessary. It is a very common pastime of Western academics and their Indian counterparts to pursue comparative studies on Kerala economy and Kerala polity with reference to those of independent nation states (...). Comparative studies across the Indian states (...) are likely to be much more meaningful (...). Even after five decades of Indian independence it appears that there is some sort of scholarly inhibition on the part of the West to accept the reality of Indian unity (...)."

2. Mr. E.M.S Namboodiripad first sent a critical note via Mr. K. Vijayachandran (letter dated November 12). I responded and suggested publication of our different views. In another letter (dated December 24, 1994), however, Mr. E.M.S Namboodiripad said he had only given his "preliminary comments in the earlier note". "I am therefore setting below my view in such a form as you can publish".

In Mr. Namboodiripad's second note some of his earlier points are reformulated and some are excluded. The latter is done without further explanation – but I shall interpret it positively to mean that he does not want to pursue them anymore, and, hence, set *them* aside.

The final note reads as follows:

1. The term "The Next Left" indicates that the earlier "Left" has ceased to exist or failed. I do not think that idea conforms to reality. On the other hand, I am of the view that the earlier (or as you call it the "traditional Left", i.e. the Communist Party in Kerala), is very much in existence and is playing its role in the development of society and politics in Kerala. Not only is it the leader of the major combination of political parties, the LDF, but has behind it almost ten million people organised in class and mass organisations of the working people. The major opposition to the Left, i.e. the United Democratic Front, headed by the Congress Party, is in shambles. This is the result of over half a century of sustained work.
2. Efforts were in fact made by several groups to replace this "traditional Left", all of which however have completely failed. The Naxalites of the 60s and 70s, for all practical purposes, exist no more. Another group which you thought would replace the "traditional Left", the environmentalists, have, as you yourself have noted, thoroughly failed. Recent efforts to knock together a combination of caste forces has also failed. The very idea of trying to "discover" new forces which prove to be the "Next Left" is, according to me, futile.

3. While I appreciate criticism, Mr. Namboodiripad's and Mr. Vijayachandran's questioning of the basic scientific consistency, and even of my concern and integrity, seem to be based on a misreading of vital sections of my manuscript. In an unfortunate way, this may render discussions difficult about what I am sure my critics also find much more important, namely what one can learn from earlier successes as well as problems in trying to further improve popular political development project(s). Hence, let me do my best to clear away the misunderstandings:

The comparative perspective

I am not comparing Kerala as a state with the Philippines as a country. In both cases I am, on the contrary, mainly comparing impressive local attempts to further improve radical popular movements by way of democratisation from below. Moreover, while I share Mr. Vijayachandran's wish for comparative studies across the Indian states, I find it equally important to compare similar attempts under quite different conditions.

The sources

Mr. Vijayachandran is right in saying that I am making extensive use of PD literature and PD activists as my sources – but he is wrong when stating that this is "for understanding and interpreting Kerala's polity". On the contrary, it is because I really focus on the PDs. Consequently, I need to analyse *their* own understanding and interpretation of Kerala. In doing so, I want to give them the best possible chance to state their aims and means before carrying out a critical analysis. Otherwise my analyses might be questioned. And to be on scientifically even safer ground I give priority to 'self-critical' evaluations by PD leaders – who could be expected to do their best to defend the policies – even when trying to document problematic and unintended developments (see footnote 11!).

Points of departure

Both my critics say I take it for granted that the traditional Left has failed. Mr. Vijayachandran adds I "firmly believe" that the traditional Left "by [its] very nature is incapable of practising and developing democracy". Mr. Namboodiripad concludes by calling "the very idea" to look for something that might turn into the Next Left "futile". In accordance with the familiar jargon in these circles, the author has thus, as Mr. Namboodiripad's put it in his early critical note, "no basic class standpoint from which to analyse socio-cultural and political factors" and "a by no means unconcealed prejudice against the independent class movements and party of the working class".

However, I have, of course, never written that the traditional Left in Kerala "by [its] very nature is incapable of practising and developing democracy". Rather I have repeatedly stressed (including in the present essay) that it is primarily the Left in general which has promoted democracy. And my points of departure in terms of certain serious problems are no ideological statements that simply can be rejected but based on extensive and usually well-intentioned research (including my own) – which, thus, any serious critic must examine and invalidate before rejecting.

On the other hand it is true that I have no *political* "class standpoint" in my academic writing. That would be scientifically unfruitful. (Hence, I am only selecting my topics by distinguishing between politics based on the few endowed with private resources, and politics based on the many whose ability to co-operate and carry out labour is usually prevented – whereafter I focus upon the latter.) I am also happy to confess not only making use of Marxist class analysis but also other analytical tools when appropriate. And as already indicated, I think it is essential to refer benevolently and generously the essence of the arguments put forward by the actors under review before evaluating

them critically – to be as fair and effective as possible. So if my critics mean to say that I should instead have evaluated the PD-approach from some kind of "correct" class standpoint, then I strongly disagree.

Replacing vs. further developing the Left

My critics claim that I envision and aim at studying the replacement of the traditional Left by, as Mr. Namboodiripad puts it, "the environmentalists". Thereafter they even try using my study to prove that "the environmentalists" have "thoroughly failed" in taking over, just like the Naxalites.

To begin with, however, I do not talk of Mr. Namboodiripad's undefined "environmentalists" but of popular developmentalists or PDs, as defined in the essay. Furthermore, the PDs do not constitute a full-scale alternative to the traditional Left. I do not study them as such. And hence one cannot conclude from my writings that they "failed" in "replacing" the traditional Left. On the contrary, I try to analyse and discuss the PD attempts to contribute to and further develop – not replace or destroy – a leftist project. I do not even talk of any kind of faction but of "schools of thought". And as repeatedly stated in the essay, the main reason for why I am studying the Left in general in Kerala is that I think it stood out for – and might continue to stand out for – one of the most impressive attempts in the entire world to further develop a leftist project. (Critical analysis, however, and I am sure we all agree, is absolutely vital to such attempts.)