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CHAPTER TWO

STRUCTURE OF THE OPPOSITION

Opposition in the Territorial Assemblies:

The first Territorial Assembly of Tripura was a bi-party Assembly at the beginning with the Congress Party in the Treasury benches and the C.P.I. as the opposition. The party position in the Assembly was: the Congress-20 (18 elected and 2 nominated), and the C.P.I.-12. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly were Upendra Kumar Roy and Ershad Ali Choudhury respectively. The members of the council of Ministers were : Sachindra Lal Singh (Chief Minister), Sukhamoy Sengupta (Development Minister), and the three Deputy Ministers, Manindra Lal Bhowmik, Raj Prasad Chaudhury and Benode Behari Das. The Communist M.L.As were Nripen Chakraborty (Leader of the opposition), Bir Chandra Deb Barma (Deputy Leader), Promode Ranjan Dasgupta, Sudhanwa Deb Barma, Hemanta Deb Barma, Atiqul Islam, Dinesh Deb Barma, Aghore Deb Barma, Hlura Aung Mog, Sunil Kumar Chaudhury, Ramcharan Deb Barma and Bulu Kuki<sup>2</sup>. The Assembly was formally inaugurated by the Administrator Shri Santi Priya Mukherjee on the first day of July, 1963 and since then it started functioning under the provisions of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963. After the split in the All India C P I and formation of the CPI(M) in Tripura in March, 1965, 8 M.L.As of the CPI joined the CPI(M). The opposition M.L.As who continued to remain in the C.P.I. were Birendra Chandra

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1. Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings, dated 7.10.63. p.i. of the preface. (In all subsequent footnotes, Tripura Legislative Assembly Proceedings will be referred to in its abbreviated form T.L.A.P.).
  2. Ibid., p.ii of the preface.

Deb Barma, Promode Ranjan Dasgupta (who defected to Congress in the first part of 1966), Aghore Deb Barma and Atiqul Islam<sup>1</sup>. This split, however did not lead to any disunity among the opposition MLAs inside the Assembly. On the other hand, they stood unitedly as before against all the measures of the Government which they considered as anti- people.

In the election of 1967, the Congress bagged 27 out of 30 seats while the Communist parties together got 3 seats only ( the C.P.I.(M)-2 and the C.P.I.-1)<sup>2</sup>. The Communist parties alleged that the election was a rigged one. That the allegation had some substance ~~in~~ it was proved by the verdict of the Gauhati High court upholding the election case of Shri Biren Dutta, the C.P.I.(M) candidate of Tripura West parliamentary constituency<sup>3</sup>. The Supreme court, however, absolved the ruling party of the charge of rigging and declared the election of Shri J.K. Chaudhury, the Congress M.P. from the constituency as valid<sup>4</sup>. The Second Territorial Assembly of Tripura was formed in March, 1967. It functioned upto June, 1971 and was dissolved in October, 1971, when President's Rule was imposed on the Territory. The Speaker and the Deputy Speaker of the Assembly were Manindra Lal Bhowmik and Usha Ranjan Sen respectively. The council of Ministers

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1. Chakraborty, Bires, Op. cit., dated 7.4.1965, p.1.
  2. Results of Election, Tripura (1967), Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Government of Tripura, Agartala.
  3. The 'Tripura', Agartala, 14.6.1968, p.1.
  4. Ibid., 9.1.1969, p.1.

this time consisted of Sachindra Lal Singh (Chief Minister), Krishna Das Bhattacharjee (Finance Minister), Tarit Mohan Dasgupta (Labour Minister), and three Deputy Ministers, Raj Prasad Choudhury, Prafulla Ranjan Das and Mansur Ali<sup>1</sup>. The then Communist MLAs were Bidyachandra Deb Barma and Abhiram Deb Barma of the C.P.I.(M) and Aghore Deb Barma of the C.P.I. Though much reduced in strength this time, the communist opposition took a united stand against all the steps of the Government which, in its opinion, went against popular interests.

Attainment of statehood.

On 15th December, 1971, the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Bill, 1971 was passed in the Parliament and the bill received the assent of the President on 30th December 1971. Section 4 of the Act stated that "on and from the appointed day there shall be established a new State, to be known as the State of Tripura, comprising the territories which immediately before that day were comprised in the Union Territory of Tripura." The day of fulfilment of the hopes and aspirations of the people of Tripura came on January 21, 1972 when Tripura became a State of the Indian Union alongwith Manipur and Meghalaya by North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971. Under the provisions of the said Act, the number of Assembly seats of each of these new-born States was doubled from 30 to 60.

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1. T.L.A.P., 14.3.1967, p.1 of the Preface.

The Assembly Election of 1972 and the performance of the  
Opposition in the Election.

Shortly after Tripura attained statehood, the Election Commission announced its decision that election would be held in Tripura on 11th March, 1972 in order to constitute the State Assembly<sup>1</sup>. The State committee of the CPI(M) congratulated the decision and declared its resolve that it would take part in the ensuing election and would try to form a united front of all the democratic and progressive parties and forces in order to defeat the Congress and form an alternative Government in Tripura. But the CPI did not respond to the call and it posted its own candidates separately. The congress party contested in all the 60 seats in the election. The CPI(M) put up its candidates in 50 seats and gave 10 seats to the independents supported by it. The C.P.I. put forward candidates for 11 seats in the election.

In the Election, the CPI(M)- led front won 18 seats (the CPI(M)-16 and Independents with its support- 2) and the CPI got 1 seat. Out of a total of 5,00,988 valid votes, the CPI(M) and its allies polled 2,05,524 votes, Congress got 2,24,882 votes and other parties and Independents together polled 74,582 votes<sup>2</sup>.

The Congress party was thus voted to power again, but its majority was reduced considerably. Its representation fell from 27 (in 30-member Assembly) in 1967 to 41 (in 60-member Assembly)

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1. Desher Katha, Weekly in Bengali, ed. Biren Dutta, dt. 17.12.71 & 24.12.1972.
  2. Results of Election, Tripura(1972), Election Department, Government of Tripura, Agartala.

in 1972 and the percentage of votes fell from 60.84 % in 1967 to 45.60 % in 1972. The CPI(M), on the contrary, increased its representation from 2 in 1967 to 18 (including 2 Independents supported by it) in 1972 and the percentage of votes from 21.97 % in 1967 to 41.03 % (inclusive of votes polled by Independent candidates with its support) in 1972<sup>1</sup>. Thus, by securing only 4.57 percent more votes, the Congress got 23 more seats than the CPI(M)- led front in 1972.

This time, the CPI(M) won 12 out of 19 seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes whereas it got only 2 out of 9 S.T. reserved seats in the election of 1967. In the 12 S.T. reserved seats it won, the party got a total of 52,288 votes as against 31,042 votes polled by the Congress. The Congress party secured 31,678 votes in the 7 S.T. reserved seats it won as against 21,666 votes polled by the CPI(M). Thus the CPI(M) got a total of 74,894 Tribal votes in the Election whereas Congress share of Tribal votes was 67,720<sup>2</sup>. The CPI(M) won its Tribal votes by an average margin of 1766 votes. It won by highest margin in Kalyanpur seat (7267 votes) and by lowest margin in Chellagong seat. (43 votes). The Congress won by highest margin in Kulaihaor constituency (1722 votes) and by lowest margin in Pabiacherra constituency (644 votes).<sup>3</sup>

The performance of the CPI(M) in the constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes and in the open constituencies was, however, very poor where it and its allies together got only 6 (4 in its

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1. Calculated from Results of Election, Tripura, 1967 and 1972.

2. ~~Ibid~~. Calculated from Results of Election, Tripura, 1972.

3. Ibid.

own ticket, 2 independents with its support) out of a total of 41 seats. The alliance got only 1 out of 6 Scheduled Caste reserved seats and 5 out of 35 open seats. It is, however, worthy of note in this context that the party could not win a single seat from either of these categories in the election of 1967 and also that, this time, it lost 9 open seats to the Congress by a narrow margin ranging from 21 to 500 votes<sup>1</sup>. Out of the remaining 21 open seats, the Congress won 5 seats by a margin of 501 to 1000 votes, 6 seats by 1001 to 1500 votes, 4 seats by 1501 to 2000 votes, 5 seats by 2001 to 3000 votes and 1 seat by 3301 votes. In the 6 Scheduled Caste reserved constituencies, the distribution of the total votes polled was : Congress-24,850 and the CPI(M) led front - 21,759<sup>2</sup>.

The results of the Election show that the CPI(M) remarkably improved its strength at the expense of the Congress party. It regained its grip on the Tribal votes and improved its position remarkably in the plains. The Congress party, of course, improved its position than that in 1962, but its strength was much reduced in comparison with its performance in 1967. The C.P.I. was reduced to ~~ignominy~~ <sup>ignominy</sup> compared to its performance as undivided party in 1962. It, however, retained the position it held in 1967. On the other hand, the CPI(M) remarkably increased its strength by capturing 18 seats as against only 2 seats in 1967. Its voting strength also increased from 92,239 in 1967 to 2,05,524 in 1972.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Calculated from Election Results, Tripura (1972).

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

Opposition in the State Assembly.

The first State Assembly of Tripura first met in the Assembly Building, Agartala on Wednesday, the 29th March, 1972 at 11 A.M. and on that day Manindra Lal Bhowmik and Usha Ranjan Sen were un-animously elected as Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. Governor Shri B.K. Nehru addressed before the members of the Assembly on 31.3.1972, but before he started his speech, all the opposition M.L.As excepting the CPI member left the House protesting against the alleged attack on Parliamentary democracy all over India by the ruling Congress party<sup>1</sup>. The party position in the Assembly was : Congress-41, CPI(M)-16, Independents (supported by the CPI(M)-2), and CPI-1. The members of the council of Ministers were : Sukhamoy Sengupta (Chief Minister), Monoranjan Nath, Haricharan Chowdhury, Debendra Kishore Chaudhury, Káshitish Chandra Das and three Deputy Ministers, Mansur Ali, Basana Chakraborty and Sailesh Chandra Shome<sup>2</sup>. In April, 1971, Krishna Das Bhattacharjee and Tarit Mohan Dasgupta were inducted in the council of Ministers. The CPI(M) MLAs in the Assembly were: Nripen Chakraborty (Leader of the opposition), Anil Sarkar (Deputy Leader), Sudhanwa Deb Barma (Chief whip),/Bulu Kuki, Gunapada Jamatia, Kalidas Deb Barma, Manindra Deb Barma, Nirranjan Bidyachandra Deb Barma, Abhiram Deb Barma, Deb,/Pakhi Tripura, Samar Chaudhury, Radha Raman Debnath, Purna Mohan Tripura and Bhadramani Deb Barma. The independent members with the support of the CPI(M) were : Ajoy Biswas and Amarendra Sharma. The only CPI member was Jitendra Lal Das<sup>3</sup>.

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1. T.L.A.P., 31.3.1972, p.1.

2. Ibid., 29.3.1972, p.1.

3. Ibid., p.2.

At the beginning, the CPI member joined hands with the CPI(M) MLAs in opposing all the measures of the party in power which the opposition considered undemocratic and contrary to public interest. This understanding was noticed at the time of the biennial election of a member from Tripura to Rajya Sabha in 1974 also in which the CPI candidate Bir Chandra Deb Barma was supported by the CPI(M) and the Independent members and was elected to Rajya Sabha taking advantage of the factional infighting of the party in power. On 21st May, 1975, 8 MLAs of the Opposition including its leader were arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971 and the CPI MLA, in his short speech, strongly condemned the Government action and walked out from the House as a mark of protest against the arrest. But as soon as the 'Emergency' was declared, the CPI MLA changed his policy and began to give conditional support to the ruling party in the Assembly in pursuance of the policy of his all India party. This policy continued during the period of 'Emergency' and a few months after that.

The Assembly functioned ~~w~~ upto March, 1977 with the Congress party in power and in April, the Congress Government fell as most of the Congress MLAs defected to the newly formed CFD\* party and then, the first coalition Government of Tripura was formed with the CFD and the CPI(M) and it lasted for 4 months. Then most of the CFD MLAs defected to the Janata Party and the Janata-CPI(M) Coalition/~~Government~~ <sup>Government</sup> came about and it lasted upto November, 1977

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\* The full name of the Party was the Centre ~~f~~ For Democracy and it was formed by Jagjivan Ram in the wake of the Emergency (1975).

and then the Government fell and the Assembly was dissolved and President's Rule was imposed on the State and that marked the end of the first State Assembly of Tripura.

The legislative means applied by the Opposition in the Territorial Assemblies and the State Assembly.

During 8 years' duration of the two Territorial Assemblies (1963-71), the Assembly met in 22 sessions covering 254 days, The yearwise break-up of the number of the sessions were : 1963-1, 1963-3, 1965-3, 1966-2, 1967-3, 1968-2, 1969-3, 1970-3 and 1971-2. The total period of time utilised in deliberations of the Territorial Assemblies was 1,270 hours approximately and the opposition properly utilised this time through the various legislative media available, e.g., amendments on motions of thanks to Administrator's and Lieutenant Governor's addresses, budget discussions and cut motions against demands for grants, questions, call attentions, adjournment motions and private members' bills, resolutions and motions. Though Sub-section ii of section 9 of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 provided that the Administrator "may address the Legislative Assembly and may for that purpose require the attendance of members",<sup>1</sup> the Administrator of the Territory started addressing the House from the year 1967 and in 1970 he was replaced by a ~~xx~~ Lieutenant Governor and the latter delivered Addresses before the House in the year 1970 and 1971. The opposition members took part in the discussions on the motions of thanks to

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1. Section 9 of the Union Territories Act, 1963.

the Addresses and moved a number of amendments to the motions. Again, they actively took part in each budget discussion and moved a number of cut motions on the demands for grants. Information regarding the numbers of questions, motions and resolutions admitted during 1963-66 and 1967-70 may be had from the following table<sup>1</sup>.

TABLE

	<u>1963-66</u>	<u>1967-70</u>
Questions given notices of -	1838	3,620
Questions admitted -	1534	3,267
Motions given notices of -	11	20
Motions admitted -	10	17
Resolutions given notices of-	62	231
Resolutions admitted -	55	171

In 1971, another 1227 questions and 4 resolutions were admitted. Besides, 121 call attentions and 22 private members' Bills<sup>(a)</sup> and motions were initiated by the Opposition during this period. Side by side, it regularly took part in the debates on Government bills, resolutions and motions. Through the main legislative means like amendments on motions of thanks to Administrator's and Lieutenant Governor's addresses, budget discussions and cut motions against demands for grants, private members' bills, resolutions and motions, the Opposition raised and fought a number of issues on the floor of the House. Through the questions and call attentions,

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1. T.L.A.P., 13.4.1971, p.67 (From the statement of the Speaker Shri M.L.Bhowmik which he made in order to refute the charges brought against him by the Opposition in course of discussion on a motion for his removal from the Speakership).

the Opposition ventilated public grievances in the Assembly and secured discussions on such questions as agitated public minds and tried to ~~impress~~ impress on the Government to solve them.

During the period 1972-76, the House assembled in 15 sessions covering 144 days. The year-wise break-up of the period was : 1972-25 days, 1973-31 days, 1974-30 days, 1975-33 days and 1976-25 days<sup>1</sup>. A total of approximately 720 hours' time was utilised in the deliberations of the Assembly and the Opposition was given a good share of that time. The Opposition fully and effectively utilised that time through different legislative means at its disposal, e.g. amendments on motions of thanks to Governor's addresses, budget discussions and cut motions against demands for grants, questions, short discussions, motions against demands for grants and private members bills, resolutions and motions. The opposition members took part in the discussions on the motions of thanks to the Governor's addresses and moved a number of amendments to the notions. They also actively participated in each budget discussion and moved a number of cut motions against the demands for grants. The total number of resolutions and motions as raised and fought by the Opposition during the period was 22 and 6 respectively. Further, 6 short discussions, 90 call attentions and 5 adjournment motions were raised by the Opposition members<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, they actively participated in the discussions on Government bills, resolutions and motions. Through these legislative media, they raised and fought a good number of issues in the Assembly.

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1. Calculated from the Proceedings of the Tripura Assembly.

2. Ibid.

The issues and problems as highlighted by the opposition during the period 1963 -76 may be brought under three broad categories : Political, social and economic. A detailed estimate of how the opposition members dealt with those social, economic and political issues through the various legislative means during the period under review will now be given in Chapters Three, <sup>Four</sup> and Five. In so doing, special attention will be given to the issues receiving priorities from the Opposition members and the way they handled them in order to see whether these issues and the pattern of their treatment at the hands of Opposition at the legislative level have given a unique character to the legislative opposition in Tripura.

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