

THE RISE AND GROWTH OF THE COMMUNIST  
PARTY IN MALABAR 1934-1947

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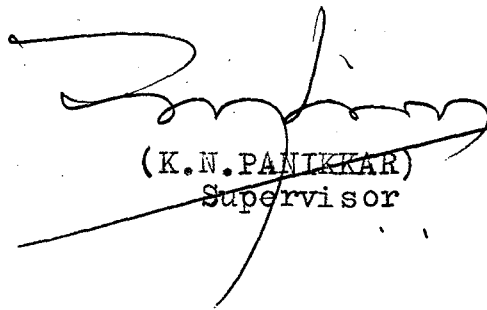
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Chairman

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## PREFACE

The present work is an effort to deal with one aspect of the national movement i.e. the growth of the C.P.I. in Malabar District in Madras Presidency during the period 1934 to 1947. Though the Communist Movement in Kerala has aroused considerable interest, no detailed research work has been undertaken to highlight how the Communists were able to secure a firm mooring in the region. In Overstreet and Windmiller's Communism in India, the problem has not been discussed in detail as the authors were concerned about the developments in the all India level. From this macro-level attempt, Victor M. Fic has come down to the study of the micro-phenomenon in his Kerala Yenan of India. But his main focus is on the Communists in power and so their gaining of foothold among the masses before independence has been dealt with in a cursory manner in one chapter. In vernacular also there has not been any studies in a research oriented way. Apart from direct references in autobiographies and memoirs of those who had participated in the movement, only one book - N.E. Balaram's Kēralathile Communist Prasthānam - has so far been published. But this is also basically a work by one of the participants in the movement. Secondly, the book deals with the Communist Movement in Kerala and not with the rise and growth of the Communist Party as such. Moreover, only the first part which deals with the activities upto 1940 has been published. Hence this attempt. At the same time it is admitted that the



present study is not an exhaustive one as it has been executed in part fulfilment of the M.Phil course.

The study is based on the Government records available in the National Archives of India, the Tamil Nad Archives, on Contemporary Newspapers, Pamphlets, Interviews and other published works. Among the Archival material the Judicial Department, the Education Department and Home Department files are most informative about the movement.

Contemporary newspapers and weeklies form another important source of information. Among these only Mathrubhumi (Malayalam) is available from 1934 to 1947. Only one file of Prabhatam (Malayalam) and two files of Desabhimani (Malayalam), the organs of the K.C.S.P. and the C.P.I. respectively, could be consulted. In addition, Congress Socialist from 1935 to 1937 and National Front from 1938 to 1940 could be consulted. Not many pamphlets, though they were widely distributed, are available at present and I could consult only five of them.

Autobiographies by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan and P. Narayanan Nair, the leaders of the C.P.I. contain a mine of information about the movement. I have also been able to interview G. Sankaran Nair, the pioneer of the Tenancy Agitation during the 1920's and some of the leaders and party workers like E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, P. Sekharan, K.A. Keraleeyan, T.K. Raman and

V. Narayanan Nair who had acted in many of the political skits written by K. Damodaran.

Secondary sources which have been consulted are listed in the bibliography. Among these, special mention should be made of P.C. Joshi's Congress and Communists, Communists Reply to Congress Working Committee Charges, N.E. Balaram's Keralathile Communist Prasthanam and V.V. Kunhambu's Kayyur Samara Charitram (Malayalam).

In order to understand the conditions under which the K.C.S.P. grew up and also the worker's and peasant's movements, it is necessary to briefly analyse the society of Malabar in the 20th century. This has been done in the first chapter. As the struggle for a tenancy legislation was an important event during the 1920's and as amendments to the Act of 1929 was an important demand raised during the peasant movements of the late 30's, a short narrative of the British policy with regard to the tenurial agricultural structure and a brief history of the tenancy agitation is also provided.

Prior to the formation of the C.P.I. unit in Malabar, the later Communist leaders were active members of the Congress. Working inside the Congress, they were able to bring it under their control and to transform it into a militant anti-imperialist organisation. This is discussed in the second chapter. In the first part of the chapter as political background, the events up to the formation of the K.C.S.P. are traced. In the second part,

the formation of the K.C.S.P., the early efforts of the Socialists to propagate Socialist ideas, their organisation of different sections like the workers, peasants and teachers are discussed. In the third part, the Socialist's work inside the Congress, their assumption of its leadership, the formation of the C.P.I. unit in Malabar and the eventual transformation of the C.S.P. into the C.P.I. is discussed. Such a detailed study of the K.C.S.P. is essential as it was only in Malabar that the entire C.S.P. was transformed en block into the C.P.I. in 1939, when the C.S.P. units in other parts of the country split due to the differences in the attitude and the course to be pursued with regard to the world war. Secondly, the C.P.I. leaders as well as a large number of active workers ~~xxxx~~ had entered the national movement as Congressmen and they had created the mass base which the C.P.I. enjoyed at the time of its formation while working as Congressmen and Congress Socialists.

Chapter III deals with the formation of the C.P.I. unit in Malabar and its development up to 1947. The chapter has been divided into two sections; the first part deals with the first two years after the inception of the Party when it worked covertly and the second part deals with the overt activities of the Party from 1942 to 1947.

Some observations are made in conclusion in the fourth chapter.

The area of study confines to British Malabar consisting of 8 taluks. But in discussing about the peasant movement of 1938 - 39, Kasargod taluk has also been taken into consideration. Administratively belonging to the South Canara District, the taluk had close affinity to North Malabar with identical customs and manners - the tenurial pattern, however, was slightly different - which led to the inclusion of the region in the Kerala state in 1956. Many of the K.C.S.P. and C.P.I. workers were involved in the political activities of Kasargod which developed on the same lines as the movements in Malabar and it was felt that for an overall perspective, Kasargod should be included in the study about the political activities in Malabar.

In the prosecution of this work many people have extended their helping hand which I recall with gratitude. I am deeply indebted to Dr. K.N. Panikkar for his valuable supervisory guidances under which the work has be<sup>en</sup> done. Among others I must specially mention Prof. M.G.S. Narayanan, Dr. M.P. Sreekumaran Nair, M. Gangadhara Menon, Sashi Joshie, Bhagwan Singh Josh, Eswara Prasad and Satyanarayana for valuable advice and discussions; Ms. Parukutty Amma and Mr. Babu of the Mathrubhumi; Calicut; Mr. M.N. Kurup and Mr. Sidharthan Parithikkadu of Desabhimani; V. Narayanan Nair, P. Sekharan, T.K. Raman, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K.A. Keraleeyan for granting interviews and <sup>the</sup> late K. Damodaran with whom I had  
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many hours of informative discussions. Thanks are also due to the archivists and library staffs of the National Archives of India, the Tamil Nad Archives, J.N.U., Sapru House and Nehru Memorial Museum and library.

I am grateful to the Centre for Historical Studies, J.N.U., for granting me a scholarship without which the work would not have been possible.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.I.C.C.	:	All India Congress Committee
A.I.C.S.P.	:	All India Congress Socialist Party
C.P.I.	:	Communist Party of India
C.W.C.	:	Congress Working Committee
K.C.S.P.	:	Kerala Congress Socialist Party
K.P.C.C.	:	Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee
M.A.S.T.U.	:	Malabar Aided School Teacher's Union.
M.D.C.C.	:	Malabar District Congress Committee.
M.S.P.	:	Malabar Special Police
M.T.A.	:	Malabar Tenancy Act
M.T.C.	:	Malabar Tenancy Committee
N.A.I.	:	National Archives of India
N.M.M.L.	:	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
T.N.A.	:	Tamil Nad Archives

## CHAPTER I

### SOCIETY OF MALABAR IN THE 20TH CENTURY

According to the treaty of Seringapatam concluded in 1792 by Tipu Sultan, Malabar was ceded to the English East India Company. Initially it was under the administrative control of Bombay Presidency, but in 1800, it became a district of Madras Presidency. Covering an area of 5795 square miles, Malabar was made up of 9 taluks, namely, Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad, Calicut, Wynad, Erand, Valluwanad, Ponnani and Palghat.<sup>1</sup>

In 1931, the population of Malabar was 3,533,944 with a density ranging between 600 and 650, which was the highest in the Presidency.<sup>2</sup> From 1891 to 1931, there was an increase of 8,85,772 in population, which was also the highest in the Presidency.<sup>3</sup> Out of the 3,533,944, the Hindus constituted 2,303,754 or 65.18%, the Muslims 1,163,453 or 32.92% and the Christians 65,898 or 1.80%.<sup>4</sup>

The literacy was comparatively high in Malabar and there were 5,09,051 (14.4%) literate persons in 1931 out of which 51,821 were literate in English. The number of literate among the Hindus, the Muslims and the Christians were as follows:

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1. C.A. Innes, (F.B. Evans ed.) Malabar and Anjengo. (Madras, 1908)p.2. The present day Palghat, Malappuram, Calicut and Cannanore districts roughly comprise the former Malabar district.
  2. Census of India - 1931, Vo. XIV, Part II, Madras, p.4 & 21.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid., p. 84.

Hindus - 3,94,297 out of 2,303,754 or 17.11%, Muslims 87,694 out of 1,163,453 or 7.53%, Christians 26,720 out of 65,895 or 40.54%.<sup>5</sup>

The cultivation of rice and cash crops like pepper, ginger, coconut and arecanut formed the mainstay of the population. According to the Census of 1931, there were 431263 whose principal occupation was agriculture.<sup>6</sup> The cultivation of paddy was carried through a tenurial hierarchial system the break up of which was as follows:<sup>7</sup>

Non cultivating proprietors taking rent either in kind or in cash	-	22,399
Cultivating owners	-	39,441
Non cultivating tenants	-	18,553
Tenant cultivators	-	165,940
Agricultural labourers	-	184,717

The ownership of land was held in high esteem and a social group's relationship to land was an important expression of its differential rank in the caste hierarchy. This co-relation of class and caste was a noticeable feature in Malabar<sup>8</sup>. Namboodiris - a caste peculiar to Malabar - occupying

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5. Ibid., p. 148.

6. Ibid., p. 116. This includes Estate Agents, Managers etc. numbering 117 and Rent Collectors, clerks etc. numbering 96.

7. Ibid., pp. 120 - 123.

8. This class - caste identity continued to the early fifties and was noticed by those research scholars who undertook fieldwork in the area. See Adrian C. Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar (Bombay, 1952)p.96, Eric J. Miller, "Village Structure in North Kerala", Economic Weekly, Vol. IV, No.6, February 9, 1952, pp.159-164, Thomas W. Shea, The Land Tenure Structure of Malabar and its Influence upon Capital Formation in Agriculture (Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the University of Pennsylvania, 1959) Xeroxed. pp: 75.80.



the highest position in the caste hierarchy were also owners of vast areas of land, especially in South Malabar. They numbered only 26,333 in 1931<sup>9</sup>. The Nairs, next in hierarchy numbered 494,881.<sup>10</sup> They constituted most of the tenant class, though some were also jennies especially in North Malabar. The Cherumas and Parayas, who constituted the agricultural labour force was in the lower levels of the caste hierarchy. They numbered in 1931, 207,816 and 11,730 respectively<sup>11</sup>.

The cultivation of cash crops was an important agricultural activity. The number of cultivators of special crops, fruits etc. including planters, managers, clerks and labourers were as follows:<sup>12</sup>

Coconut	-	2,145
Coffee	-	2,581
Rubber	-	2,722
Tea	-	6,551

Market gardeners, flower and fruit growers numbered 6,379.<sup>13</sup>

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9. Census of India, N.2, p. 308.

10. Ibid., p. 98.

11. Ibid. P. 308. This, however, is a broad classification. Not all Namboodiris were landlords. The Nairs were mostly tenants but among them there were many sub-castes. Generally the higher Nairs owned vast areas of land or were non-cultivating substantial tenants. The lower Nairs were mostly sub-tenants. In North Malabar, there were some Thiyya-lower than the Nair in caste - sub-tenants.

12. Ibid., p. 124.

13. Ibid., p. 134.

In 1926 the distribution of industries was as follows: 6 in textiles, 63 engineering firms (Locomotive workshops included) 2 dealing with chemical dyes etc., 22 in tobacco and food and drink, 20 processing related to stone and glass, 6 in rope works, 3 local and Government fund factories. In 1933 there were 79 factories employing 11,907 persons.<sup>14</sup> 20,773 people were engaged in cotton spinning, sizing and weaving.<sup>15</sup> In other occupations connected with the wood industry, 43,225 people were engaged in as sawyers, turners, carpenters etc.<sup>16</sup> There were 36,178 engaged in rope, twine and string making<sup>17</sup>. Trade was the chief occupation for 196,901 people.<sup>18</sup> The long coastal belt favoured fishing in which 19,790, the highest in the Presidency, were engaged.<sup>19</sup>

#### Tenurial Structure and Agrarian Relations.

The traditional structure of the agrarian society of Malabar was based on a hierarchy of landlords, tenant protectors and peasants among whom the produce was equally divided on the basis of mutual dependence and traditionally evolved customs<sup>20</sup>. Hydar Ali, after his conquest of Malabar in 1766 was the first to introduce a system of land tax.<sup>21</sup>

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14. Prakash Karat, "Agrarian Relations in Malabar" 1925-1947" Part II in Social Scientist (October, 1973) p. 37.

15. See N2, p. 146.

16. Ibid., p. 152.

17. Ibid., p. 148.

18. Ibid., p. 188 - 189.

19. Ibid., p. 134.

20. William Logan, Malabar, Vol. I, Part II (Madras, 1887) p. 475.

21. Ibid., Logan states that the Nairs held the lands free

The tax was based on the actual produce and accounts were settled in favour of the tenant.<sup>22</sup> This policy was revised by the British soon after Malabar came into their possession. Though the British policy was based on the Mysorean assessment, the East India Company, instead of settling directly with the tenants, leased out the lands to the local chieftains for revenue collection.<sup>23</sup> It resulted in oppressive exactions and corruption and therefore the collection of revenue was taken over by the East India Company, the Rajas getting 20% of the land revenue as malikkana.<sup>24</sup> It was during the time of Thomas Warden, who was the Collector of Malabar from 1804 to 1816, that a further change took place. A scheme was agreed upon after a Conference of the important jenmies in 1805.<sup>25</sup> By this, if the crop was ten fold of the seed used in wet lands, 20% would be set aside as cultivation expenditure and the remaining net produce would be shared

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Contd. 21

by ancient customs and paid no land revenue. Buchanan also states that there was no regular or settled revenue collection prior to the Mysorean invasions. See Francis Buchanan, A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, Malabar (Madras, 1870) p. 65.

22. If one para of seed is sown which will produce 10 paras of paddy, 5  $\frac{1}{2}$  will go to the tenant and the remaining 4  $\frac{1}{2}$  is to be divided between the landlord and the Government. See Reports of Joint Commission Bengal and Bombay. Appointed to Inspect into the State and Conditions of the Province of Malabar in the year 1792 and 1795, (Madras, 1882), para - 15.
23. William Logan, N. 20, See pp. 476 - 484 for settlements reached with various Chieftains.
24. C.A. Aitchison, A Collection of Treaties, cited in T.C. Varghese, Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences, (Bombay, 1970), p. 20.
25. Innes, N.1, p. 316.

by the cultivator, the jenmi and the State at the rate of 33.30%, 26.70% and 40% respectively.<sup>26</sup> Along with this the British also recognised the jenmies as the absolute owners of the whole landed properties in Malabar. Warden advocated the intervention of the courts and executive machinery on the side of the jenmies. So jenmies were regarded as the absolute owners of land with the right to evict a tenant from his possession. The British policy was motivated by the political expediency of securing the support of a strong landed gentry. To an extent, the fear of the Mappilas, some of the whom had been benefited by the revenue scheme of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan, also acted as a motivating actor.<sup>27</sup>

The ryotwari settlement was introduced in Malabar in 1818. But it was essentially different from the pattern introduced in other parts of the Presidency. The settlement was not made with the ideal ryot but with the intermediary and a share was granted to him which gave only a third of the net produce, after deducting an insufficient amount as expenditure on cultivation to the actual ryot.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the British conquest of Malabar introduced alien notions about land and property which very soon strained the relations between landlords and tenants.

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26. T.C. Varghese, N. 24, p. 25.

27. Francis Buchanan observed that many Nairs had lost their position due to land tax system introduced by Haider and Tipu. The Nairs were replaced by Mappilas. See A Journey from Madras, N. 21, p. 53.

28. T.C. Varghese, N. 24, p. 28.

Most crucial in this context was the Government's recognition of the absolute proprietorship of the jenmies and their right to terminate kānom lease at the end of every 12 years. In the wake of an unprecedented price rise during the middle of the 19th century and the development of a land market, at least at the kānom level, the jenmies used this new found power to extract as much rent as possible by various methods.

Equally important was the steep rise in prices by the middle of the 19th century. The average price of paddy per garce for 5 years ending 1851 - 1852 was Rs.78/-. It rose to Rs.197/- by 1859 - 60. Similarly, the average price for Gingelly per garce for five years ending 1851 - 52 was Rs.226/-. It rose to Rs.407/- by 1858 - 59. There was such an increase in the prices of pepper and coffee, the price rising from Rs.51 and 75 per candy (500 lbs.), respectively in 1851 - 52 to Rs.95/- and Rs.121/- in 1858 - 59.<sup>29</sup> This resulted in an increase in the demand for land and consequently its price also increased. As all the land was completely under the ownership of the jenmies, this forced those who wanted to bring more land under cultivation to seek the favour of the jenmies. By this time, however, the jenmies had realised the significance of the enormous power given to them by British judicial codes and executive machinery. The recognition by the courts, of kānom as a mortgage which had to be renewed every 12 years, forced the kānakkāran to be dependent on the

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29. William Logan, Malabar, N. 20, (London, 1883), p. 772.

mercy of the jenri. He, in turn, utilised this power to raise rent and demand presents during marriage and other such ceremonies. During 1862-66 there were 10,196 suits regarding land registered in the various courts in the District.<sup>30</sup> The landlords had kāryasthans or managers under them who collected rent, etc. from the tenants. Receipts were not given or the kāryasthan had to be bribed for a receipt. Failure to produce receipts was taken as a proof of non-payment of rent and the rent arrears were set off against the kānom amount. The increase in population also was conducive to the jenmi. Since the demand for land was high, he could give leases on competitive prices. The small kānakkār and verumpāttakkār were forced to approach the money lender. In 1881, of 7,994 cultivators interviewed by ~~the~~ Logan, 4,401 were in debt. The total amount of debt was about 10 lakhs at an interest ranging from 12 to 36% per annum. It is often alleged that the people spent lavishly on marriage and ceremonies and this was the main cause of debt. The reasons for debt as given by those who were interviewed, give a different picture.<sup>31</sup> In addition to arbitrary evictions, the jenmies tended to overlook the customs of paying adequate compensation to the improvements carried out by the tenant. In most cases, the compensation paid was very minimal and meagre. The Namboodiri jenmies, who claimed superior caste status could excommunicate those below them in caste status, especially the

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30. K.N. Panikkar, "Peasant Revolts in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", in A.R. Desai (edt.) Rural Revolts in India.

31. Ibid.

Nairs.<sup>32</sup> These tendencies became marked during the last three decades of the 19th century.

These oppressions of the tenants and under tenants manifested itself in the revolts that raged through South Malabar during the course of the 19th century. There were as many as 45 uprisings.<sup>33</sup> The Special Commissioner, T.C. Strange, who was appointed to examine the causes, attributed these "outrages" to Mappila fanaticism. The remedial measures suggested by him were repressive in nature.<sup>34</sup> There was no suggestion for bettering the strained relations between the jenmi, the kānakkāran and the peasants by a tenancy legislation.

In October, 1880, McWatters, the then acting District Magistrate of Malabar, reported that the murder of a Hindu by a Mappila was due to agrarian discontent and not due to fanaticism. In the same month, the Government received an anonymous petition that a "terrible outbreak was going to

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32. Malabar Special Commission, Vol. III, (Madras, 1882) gives some special examples. In one case, it was found after enquiry that the kāryasthan practised forgery on petition and improvements were under valued. A sum of Rs. 150/- was paid when Rs. 310/- was due (Appendix-XII). In another case, the average gross produce of land according to jenmi, village officer and tenant, was 53-10-6, 84-3-6 and 85-11-11 respectively. Tenant rent was 61-3-5. Taking village officers estimate as correct, one can see that the rent amounted to 72% of the produce. In another case, a Namboodiri jenmi demanded Rs. 500/- as presents at the time of renewal. As the tenant, a Nair, could not pay this he was excommunicated, though rent was regularly paid. The Tali ceremony was asked to be boycotted. Only a few dared to attend, who were also excommunicated (p.208).

33. K.N. Panikkar, N. 30.

34. Ibid. "The Mappilah Outrages Act" and "Moplah War Knives Act" were passed.

occur" because of the injustice done by landlords.<sup>35</sup> These prompted the Government to appoint a Special Commission to enquire into and report on the general question of land tenures and Logan, the then Collector of Malabar, was entrusted with this duty. After an elaborate investigation into the origin and nature of the land tenure, Logan, in his report emphasised the need for a comprehensive land legislation. His suggestions, in the main, were to give complete occupancy right to the actual cultivator, to curtail landlord's power of ouster and to give the tenants on eviction the full value of improvements effected by him. He submitted that the landlord was entitled to competitive rent when he was dealing with capitalist tenants.<sup>36</sup>

Logan's proposals were criticised as radical and the Government appointed a Committee to consider these proposals. The Committee advocated the drafting of four Acts, namely, The Malabar Marriage and Succession Act, Places of Public Worship Act, Malabar Stay of Eviction Act and Malabar Tenancy Act.<sup>37</sup> Logan's theory of the evolution of proprietary rights in Malabar and how the British courts had disregarded the customary laws, were unanimously accepted by the Committee. But the Committee defined the kudiyāns i.e. tenants, as those who directly contracted with the jenmi

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35. See. K.K.N. Kurup, Aspects of Kerala History and Culture (Trivandrum, 1977) p. 76. The petition is given as appendix in this book.

36. Cited in Rajah Sir Vasudeva Rajah, A Note on the History of Malabar Tenancy Legislation and the Malabar Tenancy Bill of 1924., Part I, (Madras, 1925), pp. 10 - 11.

37. Ibid., pp. 16 - 17.



thereby excluding sub-tenants and verumpāttakkār. Logan tried to introduce the claims of the actual cultivators and drew up an alternate scheme. But the strongest condemnation of the proposal came from Charles Turner, Judge of the Madras High Court, to whom the report was sent for opinion. The Government then, proposed yet another Committee for a revaluation of the proposals. This Committee reported that there should be provision to give the tenant on eviction, the full value of the improvements effected by him. The demand for permanent occupancy was rejected. Consequently, the Bill was passed as Act I of 1887. The jennies and the kānakkār emphasised their own particular interests and in the tussle between them, the actual cultivator was relegated to the background. The Act did not give additional security to the ~~background~~ tenants and failed to check the growing number of evictions. The compensation paid was very inadequate and the method by which the value of the improvement was calculated was also defective. The clerks and Amins of the Courts were appointed as Commissioners for evaluation and they made use of this position to swell their pockets. The Madras Government thought that the main defect of the act was its obscure description of terms. In 1900, an Act which sought to clarify the ambiguous terms was passed.<sup>38</sup> It, however, did not recognise the payment of compensation to the extent of full market value of the improvements.

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38. K.N. Panikkar, "Agrarian Legislation and Social Classes in Malabar", Economic and Political Weekly (Forthcoming).

Stating that the value of the soil on which the tree planted by the tenant had grown up should also be considered, the Government decided to give 25% of the surplus over the cost of improvements to the landlords.<sup>39</sup> Here ends the initial attempts to solve the contradictions inherent in agricultural sector, through a legislation. It was only after 20 years, that too after much pressure, that a tenancy legislation was passed in Malabar.

Changes in the First Three Decades of the 20th Century:

A noticeable feature during the last two decades of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th was the rise into prominence of a section of the kānakkār.<sup>40</sup> This is linked with the nature of landlordship and the appropriation of rent by various interests in land. These kānakkār had large areas of kānom land under them, which they sub-leased to verumpāttakkār and were in reality, rent paying, rent receiving intermediaries. Mostly belonging to Nair caste, especially in South Malabar, they were the first to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by English education. They got into the bureaucracy thereby strengthening their economic position and enhancing their social prestige. They naturally sought to remove the obstacles in their full development. Their aspirations manifested itself in their attempt to restrict the powers of the jenmi, especially the power of eviction and in their

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39. K.N. Panikkar, N.30, p. 19.

40. This is brought out well in K.N. Panikkar, N. 38.

contempt of the practice of sambandham.<sup>41</sup>

In the tussle between the rich kānakkārs and the jenmies, many tactics were used by both the parties to safeguard (its own) interests. The Acts granting compensation for tenants improvements were made use of by the well-to-do kānakkār who embarked on extravagant improvements and claimed excessive compensation which the smaller jenmies could not pay.<sup>42</sup> They refused to apply for renewal and dragged the jenmies to courts to sue for eviction. Since court expenditure was high and the process cumbersome, the smaller jenmies were put in a helpless position. Thus the substantial kānakkāran was almost like a jenmi in his power and stature. The richer jenmi class as not affected by the Acts passed, as they used dubious methods to counteract the provisions of the act. They enhanced rent and renewal fees and resorted to mēlchārths, thus leaving to the tenants to fight it out among themselves.<sup>43</sup> The question of land legislation came up only in 1924 after the Mappila Rebellion of 1921.

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41. Only the eldest member in a Namboodiri family, was, by custom, permitted to marry within the caste. Others entered to a loose and temporary marriage alliance with Nair women known as sambandham. The Namboodiri did not undertake the maintenance of his Nair wife and children and they stayed in their tarawāds.

42. K.N. Panikkar, N. 38; p. 23.

43. Ibid. Mēlchārth is an overlease given by a landlord to a person at a higher rent than the existing one. The mēlchārth holder could legally proceed against the kānakkāran for redemption.

There was, however, no substantial changes in the structure of the agrarian society of Malabar during the first two decades of the 20th century. The attempts to control the power of the jenmies during the last decades of the 19th century, as we have seen, did not make much headway. The jenmies continued to hold sway over the whole of Malabar. Though the three tier tenurial structure - jenmi, kānakkāran, verumpāttakkāran was predominant in Malabar, in South Malabar the kānakkāran was a mere intermediary whereas in North Malabar most of the kānakkār were cultivators, the kānom being more often an ordinary mortgage.<sup>44</sup> Gradually, kānom as a tenancy form declined in North Malabar as jenmies found verumpāttom lease as more profitable.<sup>45</sup> Kulikkānam or lease on garden plots were more prevalent in North Malabar than in the South. But both in North Malabar and South Malabar the main characteristic feature of land ownership - the concentration of land in the hands of a few jenmies - was present. Out of a total cultivated area of 1,229,216.88 acres, 628,921.30 acres were held by 32 jenmies.<sup>46</sup> In a village in Eranad about 250 jenmies held 1300 acres of land. At first sight there appears to be a diffusion which is falsified at a closer look. Out of this 250 jenmies, 2 held over 250 acres each, 5 over 40 acres each and 150 about 3 acres

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44. Innes, N.I.; p. 238. See also Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, Vol. II (Madras, 1940) p. 9.

45. T.C. Varghese, N. 24; p. 58.

46. K.N. Panikkar, N. 38.

each. In a dēsom in Kurumbranad, there were 300 jennies holding 1750 acres out of which two held 170 acres each, 9 held 40 acres each and 200, 2 acres each.<sup>47</sup> This concentration of land is illustrated in the following figure. It can be seen that some of the jennies holdings spread over to two or more taluks.<sup>48</sup>

TABLE I

Name of the <u>jenni</u>	Total extent of <u>jennies</u> land in acres	Total assessment		
		Rs.	A.	P.
1. Vēngāyil Chathukutty Nayanar.	Roughtly over 2 lakhs. (unoccupied dry included)	10,000	0	0
2. Kalliat Tālat Veettil Chathukuty Nambiar.	36,679	6200	0	0
3. Kollathur Mooppil Varier	about 6000	13,000	0	0
4. Chirakkal Kovilagath Rama Varma Valia Raja.	about 30,000	46,716	7	5
	(Spread over Chirakkal, Kottayam, Calicut, Kurumbranad Taluks. Also in Kasargod and Mahe.)			
5. Manniledathil Ramanunni Valia Nair	72,294	6000	0	0
6. Varayil Nair	3594.27	5804	4	6
7. Punnathur Goda Sankara Valia Raja.	6500	13,452	3	0
8. Poomulli Manakkal Narayanan Namboodiri	18,000	35,000	0	0
	(Over Palghat, Valluvanad, Eranad and Calicut).			

47. Opinions on the Bill, cited in Raja Sir Vasudeva Raja, N. 36; pp. 64 - 65.

48. Prepared from the statistics given in Legislative Dept.; F. No. 139, II of 1929, pp. 207, 210 (N.A.I.). It should be noted that Vengayil Nayanar, Chirakkal Raja and Kalliat Nambiar took a militant stand against the peasant movements during 1936 - 39.

1	2	3
9. Valia Thampuran Kilakkekōvilagam.	34,872	50,000 - 0 - 0
	(Cess not included in assessment)	
10. Kannambra Nair	8142.72	7379 - 5 - 0
11. Kanadappen Manakkal Narayanan Namboodiri.	2700	3700 - 0 - 0
12. Vengat Manakkal Thappan Namboodiri.	2371.61	4210 - 7 - 0
13. Varikkamcheri Narayanan Namboodiri.	8644.46	11,592 - 0 - 0
14. Puliyakot Moothu Nair.	3117-8-3	6894 -12 -11
15. Kavalappara Mooppil Nair	15,542.41	24,201 - 3 -11
16. Manjeri Karanamalpad	3348.31	8283 - 5 - 0
17. Kutiravattath Nair	10,788	about 21,587-0- 0
18. Zamorin (Kurumbranad, Calicut, Eranad, Ponnani, Palght and Valluvanad).	45,103	112,311 - 0 - 0
19. Nilambur Kovilagath Manavedan Tirumalpad. (Eranad, Valluvanad, Calicut, Wyanad and Gudulur).	100,780.84	46,666 - 9 - 1

These jennies did not undertake direct cultivation. The land was leased out mostly to kānakār and to verumpāttakār. Among these kānakār there was a large number who sub-leased the verumpāttakār. The rent they received was larger than the rent they paid as is clear from the

following figure:<sup>49</sup>

TABLE II

Name of the <u>jenmi</u>	Rent received by <u>jenmi</u>	Rent received by <u>kānakkāran</u>
1. Zamorin	394 <u>paras</u> of paddy	5786 <u>paras</u> of paddy
2. Kavalappara Nair	200 -do -	1000 -do-
3. Kilakkekōvilagam	Rs. 16,946	Rs. 29,754
4. Cherukunnam Dēvaswam	Rs. 1450	Rs. 9707
5. Truvāliyōd Dēvaswam	Rs. 230	Rs. 2410

Detailed statistics for the whole of Malabar is not available. But it can be assumed that such kānakkār were relatively few and that most of the kānakkār and verumpāttakkār were completely at the mercy of the jenmi.

Evictions and Mēlchārths.

It has been observed before that the compensation Acts did not succeed in checking arbitrary eviction and mēlchārths which were on the increase during the first two decades of the 20th century. The total number of mēlchārths in 1906 was 2816 which went up to 3407 by 1911.<sup>50</sup> Mēlchārths,

49. Prepared from statistics available in Rajah Sir Vasudeva Rajah, N. 36, p. 68.

50. K.N Panikkar, N. 38, p. 24.

as the following table illustrates, number more than 3000 a year and it amounted to 40,015 in a period of 10 years from 1916 to 1926.<sup>51</sup>

TABLE III

Year	Total number of <u>mēlchārths</u>	Total No. of <u>kārārs</u> to lease a form of <u>mēlchārth</u> executed
1916	3248	38
1917	3366	53
1918	3405	41
1919	3789	45
1920	3520	23
1921	3419	13
1922	3424	99
1923	3496	184
1924	3634	269
1925	3731	285
1926	3653	280

Eviction suits filed by jennies averaged 2932 per year during the same period. An abstract of the eviction suits field in the various civil courts of Malabar is given in table IV.<sup>52</sup>

51. Legislative Department, N. 48; p. 106.

52. Ibid.



T A B L E IV

Year	Number of Eviction suits filed by:				Number of suits				Disposed of				Number of degrees actually Executed												
	Decided for Plaintiff				For Defendant				Exparte				Withdrawn or compromised												
	Jennies under Jennies	Melcha- thamdars	Others	Total	Jennies under Jennies	Melcha- thamdars	Others	Total	Jennies under Jennies	Melcha- thama- dars under Jennies	Others	Total	Jennies under Jennies	Melcha- thamdars under Jennies	Others	Total									
1916	2431	711	937	4079	1639	551	573	2768	243	63	103	409	1380	13	76	227	431	72	181	684	1186	408	457	2051	
1917	2365	623	839	3827	1485	467	460	2412	210	31	83	324	171	11	98	280	456	89	95	640	1195	346	343	1884	
1918	2558	611	655	3824	1446	431	334	2211	203	55	104	362	279	22	59	360	390	71	115	576	1141	313	251	1705	
1919	3339	872	863	5074	1914	539	493	2946	321	79	91	491	215	5	84	324	557	126	148	831	1406	352	368	2126	
1920	3046	1019	1077	5142	2437	713	559	3709	227	94	126	447	74	42	141	457	513	117	238	868	1353	369	277	1999	
1921	2657	1038	795	4490	1497	730	397	2624	204	68	83	355	300	42	80	422	493	147	182	816	1121	470	327	1918	
1922	3112	908	896	4916	1766	558	479	2803	190	70	82	342	388	49	97	534	488	133	163	784	1426	470	349	2235	
1923	3048	1012	935	4995	1968	783	529	3280	202	53	95	350	321	38	135	494	510	105	156	771	1467	564	449	2480	
1924	3137	870	1037	5044	1932	597	604	3133	168	89	102	359	371	30	131	432	475	100	146	721	1387	399	409	2195	
1925	3339	844	955	5228	2140	571	670	3381	207	63	65	335	329	53	90	472	550	130	193	873	1528	414	436	2378	
1926	3174	789	1148	5111	1757	454	630	2841	96	49	49	194	350	37	131	518	481	77	201	759	978	195	314	1487	
				Total	51730			Total	32108			Total	3968			Total	4520			Total	8323			Total	22458
				Average	4703			Average	2919			Average	361			Average	411			Average	757			Average	2041

Records for 1916 to 1921 in District Muncif Courts in Manjeri, Tirur, Valluvanad, Parappanangadi were destroyed by Nappila rebels.

It can be seen that out of the 51,730 suits filed, 32,103 were decided in favour of the plaintiff. Only 3968 were decided in favour of the defendant. The actual number of the suits must have been very high since this does not include figures from 4 courts for a period of 6 years. One of the reasons for the increase in coercive process must have been the efforts of the kānakkār to obtain fixity of tenure and the consequent Acts which must have alarmed the jenmies. The other possible factor was the increase in land revenue. Towards the end of the 19th century Malabar was surveyed and a new settlement was introduced between 1900 and 1904 which was very heavy. The area of assessed land increased only by 30% but the land revenue went up by 40%.<sup>53</sup> This assessment was made with the jenmi. (the cultivator was not left with much to extract something out of it). In difference to the practise in other parts of the Presidency, revenue was not as a share of the 'net produce' from cultivation. Rather, the rate of assessment was fixed as a share of the jennipāttom or jenmi's share.<sup>54</sup>

Circumstances Leading to the Act of 1929.

In 1911, the Government decided to evaluate the working of the Act I of 1900. Innes, the then Collector of Malabar, submitted that the Acts afforded no protection to the tenants and, and therefore a comprehensive Tenancy Bill

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Marghese, N. 24; p. 83. The increase in assessed area was because of the provision to assess "occupied" land also in addition to "cultivated" areas.

was required. The Board of Revenue asked Innes to submit a report as Tenancy Legislation required a thorough enquiry.<sup>55</sup> Innes submitted his report in 1915. He found that: (1) rack-renting; (2) arbitrary eviction; (3) inadequate compensation; (4) insecurity to tenure; (5) levy of exorbitant renewal fees and (6) social tyranny by jenmies were prevalent which could be rectified only through a tenancy legislation. He also felt that agricultural backwardness and indebtedness were done to the defective tenurial system.<sup>56</sup> But Evans, who succeeded Innes as the Collector, emphatically denied the need for a tenancy legislation. The Board of Revenue, after reviewing Evans' Note came to the conclusion that there was neither any political necessity nor any economic justification for a legislation.<sup>57</sup>

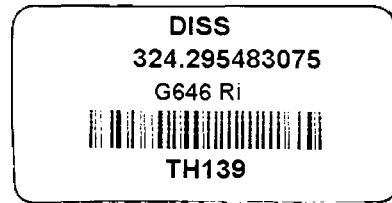
If the Government could ignore the economic justification it could not do so with regard to the political necessity for a tenancy legislation. The Fifth Malabar District Political Conference held at Manjeri in 1920 had called for agrarian reforms in Malabar. In the next year, there was an open revolt by the Mappila peasants paralysing

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55. Rajah Sir Vasudeva Rajah, N. 36; p. 32.

56. Legislative Dept., N. 48; p. 53.

57. Raja Sir Vasudeva Rajah, N. 36; p. 36.



administration for months in some taluks of South Malabar.<sup>58</sup>

Thousands of people perished in this rebellion which was put down with an iron hand. Even after this uprising, the initiative for reforms was not taken up by the Government as the revolt was dubbed as a communal uprising. In 1922, however, a bill was drafted by Krishnan Nair, a copy of which he submitted to the Government in June, 1922. In December, it was revised and presented as the Malabar Tenancy Bill.<sup>59</sup> In 1923 Krishnan Nair was elected to the

Legislative Council and he introduced the Bill in 1924.

It provided for permanent occupancy rights to all Kānakkār, irrespective of their period of possession and to all

verumpāttakkār, who had been in possession of land for

6 years. The Bill was passed in September, 1926; but was vetoed by the Governor.<sup>60</sup> This resulted in an agitation

and many meetings were organised by the Tenants Association.

As a sequel to this, a Round Table Conference was convened.<sup>61</sup>

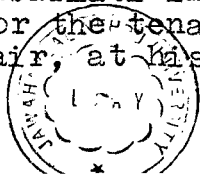
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58. For an analysis of the nature and causes of the rebellion, see K.N. Panikkar, N. 30; D.N. Dhanagare, "Agrarian Conflict, Religion and Politics: The Moplah Rebellions in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" in Past and Present, N. 74 (February, 1977) pp. 113 - 141; Robert, L. Hardgrave Jr., "The Mappila Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar" in Modern Asian Studies, II, 1, (Feb., 1977) pp. 57-99. See also E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala, (Bombay, 1943), pp. 7 - 15.

59. Rajah Sir Vasudeva Rajah, N. 36; p. 37.

60. K.N. Panikkar, N. 38; p. 33.

61. While the Government tried to effect a compromise the Tenant Association stepped up its agitation. G. Sankaran Nair, as the representative of the tenants, went to Sabarmati in 1928 and obtained Gandhi's moral support for the tenancy agitation. Interview with G. Sankaran Nair, at his residence in Ottappalam on 22.1.1976.



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By now the Government was also in a conciliatory mood. It was found that "the Kānomdār form a very large section of the middle class, Government servants and people of like status and it seems to be desirable to give them some sort of fixity in the interests of general social well being".<sup>62</sup> Subsequently, a Tenancy Committee was appointed to submit a report and as per its recommendations, the Malabar Tenancy Act was passed in 1929.<sup>63</sup>

The Act though confirmed jenmi's absolute ownership of land, did not at the same time give him the power of arbitrary eviction. He could, however, evict his tenant on denial of title, wilful waste, failure to obtain renewal on expiry of lease, and if the land was required by the landlord for his own cultivation. With regard to verumpāttakkār, the jenmi was given the right of redemption for agricultural purposes at the end of every year.<sup>64</sup> So the fixity of tenure conferred on him was practically of no use and he remained as a tenant-at-will.

#### Revenue Resettlement and Economic Depression.

Two other changes were to occur in Malabar by 1929: one was due to the resettlement and the other due to the economic depression. In the new settlement introduced between 1900 and 1904, the whole land of the district

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62. See N. 48.

63. Ibid.

64. The Tenancy Act of 1929, Clauses 12, 13 and 20(N.A.I.).

was considered the private property of the jenmies and the rate of assessment was fixed as a share of the jenmi pāttom. In the Resettlement of 1929, the revenue rates were increase by 18 3/4% for wet lands and gardens. The following table illustrates the financial results of Mac Ewen's resettlement proposals.<sup>65</sup>

TABLE V

Nature of holding	Present Demand Rs.	Resulting Increase Rs.	Final Assessment Rs.
Occupied Dry	144,977	18,122	163,099
Wet	1,822,248	341,672	2,163,920
Garden	142,058	266,823	1,689,881
Total	3,390,283	626,617	4,016,900

The reasons given by Mac Ewen for the increase in assessment were that the previous settlement was very lenient, that the price of paddy had increased by 100% during this period and that the total area under cultivation had also increased since the last settlement.

65. Mac Ewen, Resettlement Scheme Report for the Eight Plain Taluks of the Malabar District, p. 64 (Tamil Nad Archives-T.N.A.).

The following figure gives the increase in prices as well as a comparison with the price during the ryots selling month for paddy.<sup>66</sup>

TABLE VI

Year	Average Annual price per garce			Price during Ryots Selling Month per garce		
	Ist sort Rs.	2nd sort Rs.	Average Rs.	Rs.	Rs.	Rs.
1908-9	291	275	283	289	273	281
1915-16	298	280	289	291	282	287
1927-28	402	385	394	393	373	384
Total for 20 years	7228	6834	7034	7104	6711	6914
Average	361	342	352	355	336	345

Mac Ewen considered the previous settlement as lenient and hence increased the rate of revenue. Stating that the area previously termed as 'unoccupied dry' had decreased considerably between 1903 and 1925, he proceeded to reclassify the types of lands. So the increase in the revenue settlement was also due to the reclassification of lands. Secondly, the reclassification of plots termed previously as "dry" into "garden" lands increased 10 fold the rates of garden plots in North Malabar. This particularly hit the

66. Ibid., Appendix I.A.

the small peasants as they were engaged in converting dry lands and in the cultivation of fruit bearing trees. Moreover, the increase was justified by Mac Ewen stating that the prices of commodities had gone up during the 1920's. But this increase was followed by the economic depression when prices of commodities plummeted down. So in actuality, the revenue enhancement led to an increasing impoverisation of the peasantry.

Mac Ewen's Resettlement Report brings out some special features of the mode of agricultural production in Malabar. The conservative methods employed, the poor techniques used and the utter lack of any scope for improvement - these are discernible from the Report. Malabar, with its torrential rain and lush green landscapes gave an illusion of prosperity. The reality, unfortunately, was the very opposite.

The poverty of the masses is illustrated in the prevalence of rural indebtedness. From the 921 documents processed during 1923 - 28, it was found that the total amount borrowed was Rs. 438,699. It was Rs. 229,059 during 1903 - 8.<sup>67</sup> So the debts were on the increase over the years. Detailed enquires were conducted in 45 amśoms (139 dēsoms) throughout Malabar and 825 ryots were examined to ascertain their financial position. It was found that 489 ryots were in debt and the debt among them represented 25% of their landed property.<sup>68</sup> Consequent to the increase in population the

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67. Ibid., p. 34.

68. Ibid., p. 36.



pressure on land also increased. The area of private jenmam unoccupied dry decreased by 112,091 acres between 1903 and 1925.<sup>69</sup> The hitherto unoccupied area was occupied by ryots and this clearly indicates the demand for land. As a result of the rise in prices, the value of land almost doubled. Out of the total amount of sum borrowed, two thirds were required for clearing old debts. This is illustrated in the following.<sup>70</sup>

TABLE VII

Simple and <u>usufructury</u> mortgages	Purpose of Mortgages (percentage)								
Year	Agricultural improvements	Trade and Business	Marriage and other ceremonies	Discharges of old debts	Purchase of New land	Litigation	Family expenses	Construction of home	Misce.
1903-8	1	2	1	64	11	1	10	..	10
1923-28	1	1	..	70	4	..	9	1	13

There was no scheme for providing easy credit on low interest to the agriculturists. The Land Improvements and Agricultural Loans Scheme introduced some years later was not of much benefit to the debtors. Firstly, a security to the extent of 2 1/2 times the amount of the loans applied for was necessary and secondly the scheme did not apply to debts

69. Ibid., p. 29.

70. Ibid.; p. 35.

above Rs. 2000 and below Rs.100/- incurred after 1931.<sup>71</sup>

So the debts incurred due to the depression was out of the purview of this act.

The other cause of poverty was the conservative agricultural practices. The method of cultivation was heavily dependent on the timely availability of the Monsoon rains. Unlike Tanjore, where irrigation covered an area of 10 lakhs acres out of a total area of 13 lakhs, there were no major irrigational work in Malabar.<sup>72</sup> It was only during the late 30's that a proposal for the construction of a dam across Malampuzha in Palghat came up. But due to financial stringency it was indefinitely postponed. The only expenditure incurred on repairs since 1902 regarding Vandhithode Anicut in East Palghat Taluk was an outlay of Rs.3152 between 1925-27.<sup>73</sup> Mac Ewen noted that agriculture production was very conservative and that even properly draining paddy flats was not carried out. Artificial manures were not used and as cattle was usually let off to graze in hilly tracts, the cow-dung manure was also lost. Speaking about an improved plough recommended by his department, the Deputy Director (Agricultural Report, 1926-27) remark that "Even this small iron plough cannot become an implement in use for wet ploughing unless the general condition of the cattle is

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71. Department of Revenue, G.O. No. 1761; Dtd. 28.8.37(T.N.A.)

72. Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, N. 44; p. 14.

73. Mac Ewen, N. 65, p. 9.

improved".<sup>74</sup> The average out turn of paddy per acre was 535 Madras measures out of 901 crop experiments conducted in Malabar whereas in North Arcot, it was 1346 Madras measures per acre.<sup>75</sup> It was no wonder that the total output of paddy remained more or less stagnant over the years. The following figure brings out this point.<sup>76</sup>

TABLE VIII

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Year	Estimated production of rice (in tons)
1924 - 5	490,000
1927 - 8	523,000
1930 - 31	539,000
1933 - 34	526,000
1936 - 37	496,000
1939 - 40	464,000
1942 - 43	464,000
1944 - 45	450,000

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By this time, more factors, social and economic in nature, became noticeable in the society of Malabar. The first was the break up of joint families. The English education and the employment in firms usually out of ones own native place, tended towards a change over to the elementary family units from joint families among members of

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74. Quoted in Ibid, p. 9.

75. C.A. Innes, N. 1 ; p. 219.

76. S.Y. Krishna Swamy, Rural Problems in Malabar, Monograph. (Madras, 1947); p. 467.

'superior' caste, like the Nairs. The Madras Marumakkathāyam Act of 1932 and the Madras Namboodiri Act of 1932 paved the way for partition and separation among the 'superior' castes. Among the lower castes, the change was easier since the great majority did not own any land. Individual members were forced to take up jobs other than the traditional family occupation.<sup>77</sup>

The other noticeable phenomena was the commercialisation of agriculture. The high price level enjoyed by commercial crops tempted many to switch over to the production of cash crops. Mac Ewen had noted that plantains were on extremely profitable variation to the usual paddy crop.<sup>78</sup> Between 1920 and 1940, there was an increase of 3% in area under cash crops and a proportionate decrease in the area under food crops.<sup>79</sup> The commercialisation brought forth imbalances in export and import. Between 1911 - 14 and 1923 - 26 export commodities like coconut, coir, pepper, ginger, tea etc. expanded by 156% whereas imports of grain, pulses and flour increased by 165%.<sup>80</sup>

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77. T.C. Varghese, N. 24, pp. 98 - 99.

78. Mac Ewen, N. 65, p. 10.

79. In 1920 - 21, the total cropped area was 1,678,000 acres. The percentage under cash crops was 34 and that under food crops, 66. In 1946-47, the total cropped area increased to 1,817,000 acres out of which 40% was under cash crops and 60% under food crops production. See T.C. Varghese, N. 24, pp. 108 - 109.

80. Prakash Karat, N. 14 ; p. 37.

T A B L E IX

Year	Pepper per Bharam in			Cocunut per 1000 in			Aeracanut		Paddy		Ginger	Topioca
	Kodur Rs.	Puduvi- layi Rs.	Kilallur Rs.	Kodur Rs.	Puduvi- layi Rs.	Kila- llur Rs.	Kodur per 3 tulams, per 1000 Rs.	Kila- llur per 1000 Rs.	Kodur for Rs.1 Rs.	Kila- llur per 100 seers Rs.	per Bha- ram K o d u r Rs.	per tulam Rs. a. p.
1928	300	-	500	35	40	35-40	9	4-3	1 1/2 <u>Paras</u>	14-13	150	0 - 8 - 0
1929	200	400	400-425	35	35	35-40	9	3-4	1 1/2 <u>Paras</u>	12-11	125	0 - 7 - 0
1930	160	350	400-350	30	35	35-40	8	3-4	2 1/2 <u>Paras</u>	10-9	125	0 - 5 - 0
1931	160	280	280-235	30	30	30-35	6	3-4	2 1/2 <u>Paras</u>	9-8	100	0 - 6 - 0
1932	150	150	175-150	25	30	30-35	6	3-3/2	3 <u>Paras</u>	8-7	100	0 - 6 - 0
1933	140	125	130-125	12	25	25-30	6	3-3/2	3 <u>Paras</u>	7-7/2	100	0 - 6 - 0
1934	130	90	100-90	12	20	20-25	8	4-4	3 <u>Paras</u>	6-7	75	0 - 6 - 0

The economic depression greatly added to the miseries of the people. The years preceding depression being 'boom period' when there was a big spurt in prices, people tended to be extravagant in their spending. Money was spent to construct houses, to reclaim waste lands and for purchase of landed property. For this money was borrowed at high rates and sometime without discharging prior debts. The depression pauperised them. The land revenue which was enhanced during this time added to the miseries of the people. The prices continued to decline steadily for five or six years resulting in a tremendous increase in indebtedness. Table IX gives the fall in prices in 3 amsoms.<sup>81</sup> Along with this rural indebtedness also increased. In Kilallur in Kottayam taluk of a total indebtedness of Rs. 136,300, more than 25000 rupess debt was incurred during the five years from 1931 to 1936.<sup>82</sup> Such figures are not available for the whole of the District but this figure is indicative of the mangnitude of the increase in indebtedness due to depression.

As noted before, Malabar gave a false picture of a prosper<sup>s</sup> land. The land tenurial structure which prevented any significant improvements in agriculture being carried out,

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81. Department of Revenue, N. 71.

82. Ibid.

was responsible for the stagnant growth in agricultural production. The jennies and rich kānakkār, who alone could afford to use mechanised techniques, improved varieties of seed, artificial manure etc., were contended to be rent receivers. Cheap credit facilities were not provided for by the Government and the smaller agriculturists had no other choice other than continuing the old methods. As there was no security of tenure, the verumpāttakkāran was not interested in trying any costly modifications in the techniques of production. So there was stagnancy in agricultural production. Moreover, Malabar lagged behind in industrial growth. It was to such a society that Marxist principles were introduced, first by the Kerala Congress Socialist Party and later by the Communist Party, which combined the fight against feudal exploitation with the struggle against imperialism.

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## CHAPTER II

### FROM CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY TO COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA.

In this chapter, which is divided into three parts, we shall first trace the beginning of the national movement in Malabar upto the withdrawal of the Second Civil Disobedience Movement in India. The second part deals with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in Malabar and the development of the worker's and peasant's movements upto 1939. The Socialist's work inside the Kerala Congress, their participation in the national movement and the developments leading to the formation of the Malabar unit of the C.P.I. form the themes of the third part.

#### The Political Background.

Though individual Congressmen from Malabar attended the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress<sup>1</sup>, it was only after 25 years of its formation that a provincial Congress Committee was set up in Malabar. It was formed in Calicut in 1910, with C. Kunhirama Menon as its first Secretary<sup>2</sup>. The formation of a unit, however, did not usher

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1. Sir C. Sankaran Nair, who presided over the Amaravati Congress Session in 1897, G.P. Pillai, Mannath Krishnan Nair, Dr. T.M. Nair and others. See V.R. Menon, Mathrubhumiyyude Charitram, Vol. I, Malayalam, (Calicut, 1973) p. 32.

2. Ibid.



in regular political activity which began only with the Home Rule Movement. In 1915, a branch of the Home Rule League was formed in Calicut with Manjeri Rama Aiyar as President and K.P. Kesava Menon as the Secretary.<sup>3</sup>

From this time onwards, until the out break of the Malabar Rebellion in 1921, three political movements, often merging with each other, developed in Malabar. They were the Tenancy Movement, the Congress Movement and the Khilafat Movement leading to the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Malabar Rebellion in 1921.

The Tenancy Movement was spear headed by an affluent section of the Nair caste. Having had the benefit of English education and being lawyers, journalists and bureaucrats, they championed the cause of the well-to-do intermediary kānakkāran and tried to put an end to exorbitant rent and arbitrary evictions which continued unabated. They first sought to make use of the political platform provided by District Conferences which were organised every year from 1916 onwards<sup>4</sup>. Simultaneously, they increased their strength inside the Congress in Malabar.

The early District political Conferences were held under the patronage and control of local chieftains

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3. Ibid, He was also the Secretary of the Pradesh Congress Committee.

4. K. Madhavan Nair, Malabar Kalapan, Malayalam, (Calicut, 1971), p. 87.

like the Raja of Chirakkal and the Kadathanad Raja and participated by jenmies like the Kavalappara Nair. They forbade any discussion on the tenancy problem in these conferences. However, in the 1917 conference, a resolution which urged the Madras Government to give representation to small jenmies and kudiyāns in the legislative assembly was presented, though the Agenda Committee had earlier decided not to discuss the tenurial issue.<sup>5</sup>

The Fifth Annual Conference held at Manjeri marked a change in the composition of the delegates as well as in the nature of the Congress deliberations. The country was then seething with discontent due to the Punjab massacre and the disappointment over Montague Chemsford Reforms. In Malabar a section of the Congress were for the implementation of the Reforms. Dr. Annie Basant, who was attending the Conference also subscribed to this view. Held in April 1920, the conference was attended by more than 1300 delegates among whom were a large number of Muslims<sup>6</sup>. The first resolution taken up for discussion requested the British to take a decision favourable to the Muslims with regard to the Khilafat issue and urged all Hindus and Muslims to start 'a non-violent non-cooperation'

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5. V.R. Menon, N.I., p. 34.

6. P.K.K. Menon, The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol. II, (Trivandrum, 1970), p. 79.

if the British failed to do so. While agreeing with that part of the resolution dealing with Khilafat, Annie Besant said that it was not desirable to start a non-violent non-cooperation movement. But the resolution was passed with an overwhelming majority.<sup>7</sup> Another resolution, which described the reforms of Montague as 'unsatisfactory and disappointing' was also opposed by Annie Besant. This resolution too<sup>was</sup> passed amidst loud cheers. Annie Besant, Rama Aiyar and others left the conference pandal.<sup>8</sup> The third resolution demanding legislation to protect the interest of the tenants of Malabar was also passed despite opposition by jennies like Mannarghat Mooppil Nair, Udaya Varma Raja and others.<sup>9</sup>

The Manjeri Conference, thus, marked the emergence into prominence of the radical section of the Congress. The feudal elements and those who opposed the non-cooperation movement were pushed out of leadership. This paved the way for further development of the Congress, the Khilafat and the Tenancy movements.

Sometime after the Manjeri Conference, Khilafat Committees were formed in Calicut and Kundotti, mainly at the initiative of the local Muslims. The Khilafat Movement

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7. K. Madhavan Nair, N. 4, p. 59.

8. V.R. Menon, N.I.; p. 36.

9. P.K.K. Menon, N. 6; p. 80.

was an outcome of the Muslim community's resentment over the British policy towards Turkey. As Muslims regarded the Turkish Sultan as the Caliph, successor to Muhammad the Prophet, the Khilafat movement sought to preserve the integrity of the Ottoman Empire which the British were trying to dismember. Gandhi, in effecting an alliance with the Khilafat, brought the Khilafat and the Congress for a joint campaign.<sup>10</sup>

In August, 1920, Gandhi and Shaukhat Ali visited Malabar and addressed a gathering of about 20,000 in Calicut.<sup>11</sup> A sum of Rs.2500/- was donated to the Khilafat Fund in this meeting. Within the next few months, Khilafat meetings were organised in Tanur, Vengera, Tirur, Kottakkal, Ponnani and other places in South Malabar. The Muslims formed the bulk of the audience in these meetings.<sup>12</sup> For the first time, Muslims were getting politicised. Two more incidents which gave further impetus to the movement took place in the first half of 1921. They were the arrest of Yakkub Hassan and the Ottappalam Conference.

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10. See D.N. Dhanagare, "Agrarian Conflict, Religion and Politics: The Moplah Rebellions in Malabar in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", in Past and Present, February, 1977, p. 135.

11. K. Madhavan Nair, N. 4; p. 64.

12. Ibid.

By this time, responding to Gandhi's call for Non-Cooperation, K. Madhavan Nair and T.R. Krishnaswamy Aiyar, Congress leaders in Malabar, had decided to stop practise as advocates and to devote all time to Congress activities. The Congress was re-organised and committees were formed in Eranad and Valluvanad taluks. Alarmed by these developments, the Collector of Malabar had served notices, prohibiting meetings in Valluvanad Taluk. Later, he prohibited meetings in Calicut, Tamur and other places where Yakkub Hassan, the national leader, was to speak. Though the earlier orders were not defied, it was decided that Yakkub Hassan should defy the prohibitory order in Calicut and speak in a meeting at the Calicut Beach on February 16, 1921<sup>13</sup>. But before the meeting could be convened, Yakkub Hassan, P. Moideen Koya, a prominent Khilafat worker, K. Madhavan Nair and U. Gopala Menon, the President of the Pradesh Congress Committee were arrested.<sup>14</sup>

The repressive measures of the Government drew more people into the movement. Students like K. Kelappan, A.K. Pillai and K.P. Raman Menon left their studies to become full time Congress workers<sup>15</sup>. Orders were passed in Calicut, Eranad, Ponnani and Valluvanad taluks prohibiting Congress and Khilafat meetings. The police stepped up its repression

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13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 76.

15. Ibid., p. 77.

resorting to indiscriminate beatings, pulling down Congress and Khilafat Committee name boards and trampling Khilafat flags.<sup>16</sup>

The Ottappalam Conference held in April 1921 aroused considerable enthusiasm among the people. Presided over by T. Prakasham, it was attended by more than 5000 people. There were separate Khilafat, Tenant's and Student's conferences. The resolution which generated heated debates was the one demanding a tenancy legislation to save the kudiyān from the oppression of the jenny.<sup>17</sup> As the landed interests had been, by this time, ousted from the leadership of the Congress there was no difficulty in getting it passed in the conference. Economic grievances motivated the tenants to look towards the Congress for championing their cause and effect redress.

"After the Ottappalam conference" as Madhavan Nair writes, "there was a resurgence of Khilafat and Congress activities".<sup>18</sup> Khilafat flags began to appear again in South Malabar. Now, of the triple movement that had been gathering momentum in Malabar, that of Khilafat forged ahead. Primarily appealing to Muslim sentiments, the Muslims of South Malabar not only redily responded to

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16. Ibid., p. 78.

17. P.K.K. Menon, N. 6, p. 87.

18. K. Madhavan Nair, N. 4, p. 80.

it but also saw it as an instrument to voice their grievances. The Khilafat Committees and the Khilafat volunteers taught them the elementary basic of cadre and organisation. Khilafat volunteers in certain places in Valluvanad and Eranad taluks began to carry around swords and such other weapons and there was growing militancy in them.<sup>19</sup> This militancy was to culminate in the Rebellion of 1921.

#### The Malabar Rebellion.

The Muslim peasantry in South Malabar, already groaning under the burden of heavy rent and arbitrary evictions, was further impoverished by the economic distress caused by the I World War.<sup>20</sup> The Khilafat Movement politicised them as never before and aroused the Muslim peasantry concentrated in Eranad and Valluvanad taluks into action against the British and the jenmies. Further, the high handed action of E.F. Thomas, the Collector of Malabar, who, angered by the increase of the Khilafat and the Congress sought to curb the movement with large scale arrests and show of force, acted as the spark which set off the rebellion. At the same time, the prevalent illiteracy among the Muslim resulted in the rumours being believed to be true. One such rumour was that the British army was crippled by the I World War and were not strong enough for any further action- a belief reinforced by

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19. D.N. Dhanagare, N. 10. p. 137. See also K. Madhavan Nair N. 4, p. 81.

20. See the First Chapter for a discussion on the concentration of land in the hands of a few jenmies, their resorting to arbitrary eviction etc.

the transfer of British regiment from Malappuram. Another rumour, which sparked off the rebellion was that the ancient Mambram mosque was destroyed by the British. Actually, the police had gone their to arrest Ali Musaliar, a prominent leader of the Khilafat Movement. There were clashes between the police and the group of Muslims coming from neighbouring parts hearing about the alleged destruction of the mosque. Clashes occurred in a place about a mile from Tirurangadi and then in Tirurangadi itself. In these, police men including British and several Muslims were killed.<sup>21</sup>

The Rebellion soon spread to other parts of Malabar. Telephone wires were cut and railway lines and bridges demolished. The most important battle was fought on August 26 at Pukkottur, when an army contingent was attacked by Muslims armed with guns, knives, swords and sticks. In the four hour battle that followed, four hundred Muslims lost their lives.<sup>22</sup> Martial law was proclaimed in Eranad, Valluvanad, Ponnani and parts of Calicut taluks, Muslims were arrested in large numbers, their shops were looted and their houses pulled down. These actions forced the rebels to withdraw to the forests and they began using guerilla tactics from September, 1921 onwards. The police excesses and military atrocities also increased along with this. But by February, 1922, the Rebellion was subdued.<sup>23</sup>

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21. K. Madhavan Nair, N. 4, pp. 112 - 113.

22. Ibid, pp. 177 - 178.

23. Ibid. For an account of the atrocities committed by the army see pp.206-288. See also the reference given in Chapter I, N. 58.



The Rebellion produced far reaching results. Firstly, it produced a cleavage between the Muslims and Hindus preventing joint action for decades. Muslims never again participated in the national movement on such a large scale. Secondly, it completely paralysed nationalist activity for years to come in the whole of Malabar and especially in the Rebellion affected areas. This led to uneven development of the National Movement, later in Malabar. The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 - 34 did not grow in South Malabar as much as in the North. Thirdly, Congress began to be blamed for the Rebellion. Many leaders, disillusioned, decided to retire from politics. Leaders like Madhavan Nair were not for any kind of political activities which would arouse people and lead them into similar upheavels. These apprehensions were displaced by them during the inception of the Salt Satyagraha in 1930.

Two developments also emanated from the Rebellion. They were the birth of political journalism and resurgence of the tenancy agitation. The blaming of the Congress for the Rebellion forced Congress leaders to think of alternate methods to regain lost popularity. At the same time, opinion came up among the Congress men that the Rebellion was caused by illiteracy and also due to lack of propaganda of the concept of non-violence. The birth of political journalism, in the nature of a tri-weekly called The Mathurbhumi (Malayalam), the first issue of which was

released on March 18, 1923,<sup>24</sup> was a result of these factors. The paper was an effort of the Congress to reach out to the masses and to propagate nationalist ideals.

The tenancy movement, gained momentum after the Rebellion. Stating that the Rebellion was an out burst against outdated land tenurial system, the Tenancy Association pressed for a comprehensive land legislation. They also sought to utilise the legislative Assembly, where in 1924, their representative M. Krishnan Nair presented a Bill.<sup>25</sup> A Tenancy Act, however, was passed only in 1929, which gave the intermediary kānakkāran protection from arbitrary eviction.<sup>26</sup>

#### The Civil Disobedience Movement:

It was the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 which again drew Malabar into the vortex of the national movement. Older leaders, however, expressed scepticism regarding the Civil Disobedience Movement, fearing that it might lead to a bloody rebellion like that of 1921. K. Madhavan Nair, the veteran of the Malabar Congress resigned from the K.P.C.C. as he was not prepared to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement. It was Kelappan, who by giving a constructive form to the emotions of the youth wing in the Congress

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24. V.R. Menon, N. 1, p. 54.

25. K.N. Panikkar, "Agrarian Legislation and Social Classes in Malabar" in Economic and Political Weekly (forthcoming).

26. Ibid.

by organising the volunteers, brought enough pressure on the Congress leadership to start a Salt <sup>a</sup>Styagraha in Malabar.<sup>27</sup> It was in this Satyagraha that many of the leaders of the later Congress Socialist Party first entered the National Movement.

The programme of the struggle in Malabar was in conformity with the Gandhian struggle at the national level. Accordingly, a jātha of 30 selected volunteers set out from Calicut to Payyannur (from one end of Malabar to another) on foot. Salt was manufactured on April 23, 1930, at Payyannur beach.<sup>28</sup> From May onwards, Calicut beach became the important place where salt law was violated frequently. From the second week of May onwards, stern police action, like trampling of the national flag, lathi charge and large scale arrests began. By July, the struggle was extended to other areas like picketing of liquor shops and shops selling foreign goods. There were Hartals on days observed as political suffer's day.<sup>29</sup> By November, women and students in large numbers, especially in Calicut, began participating in the movement. During this time, activities were conducted by 'Dictators' as the K.P.C.C. was declared illegal.<sup>30</sup> By the end of the year, however,

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27. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, How I become a Communist, (Trivandrum, 1976) p. 120.

28. For an account of the jātha See Moyyarath, Ente Jeevitakatha, Malayalam, (Calicut, 1965) pp. 233 - 248. Also P.K.K.Menon, N. 6, p. 227.

29. A.K. Pillai, Kēralavum Congressum, Malayalam, (Trichur, 1937), p. 528.

30. V.R. Menon, N. 1, p. 285.

the movement was slowly losing its initial vigour.

This was due to many reasons. Even though salt laws affected different sections of the society like the workers and peasants, there was no attempts/ to mobilise them. Confined to a band of selected volunteers, it was likely to become dull within a short period. So attention had to be directed to such other activities like picketing liquor shops. Here also the main aim was to put pressure to bring about a 'change of heart' among the individuals. When the pressure was comparatively higher at the initial stages, some of the merchants agreed not to sell foreign goods or liquor. But as soon as that pressure diminished due to sheer apathy on the part of the volunteers or due to police action, the liquor shops were opened and once again the merchants started selling foreign goods, at first secretly through the back door and later, through the front door itself.

The movement was not uniform throughout Malabar. It was most active in taluk headquarters, especially in Calicut. Valluvanad and Eranad taluks which had the experience of the Rebellion, were virtually unaffected. There was very little activity in Palghat taluk.

The First Civil Disobedience Movement was suspended as per the Gandhi-Irwin Pact signed on March 5, 1931. Margaratt Pavamani, the Seventh 'Dictator' in

Malabar, issued a call to observe the conditions of the Pact strictly.<sup>31</sup>

The conditions of the Pact as well as the suspension of the movement disappointed the youngsters in the Congress. By this time, the unity among the Congress members, prevalent during the Salt Satyagraha gave way to groupism and factionalism. However, these were not based on any differences in ideology or programme.<sup>32</sup> So a programme was necessary to keep the Congress united. As individual satyagraha for the boycott of foreign goods and for prohibition had become stale, Congress members turned their attention to a new sphere of activity namely, the emancipation of the Harijans. This led to the Guruvayur Temple Satyagraha. The K.P.C.C. had already conducted a Satyagraha in 1925 in Vaikkam, in the princely state of Travancore, as part of the programme decided in the Kakkinada session of the Congress to promote anti-untouchability. The general atmosphere in Malabar was also conducive for a campaign for temple entry. There was a spirit of reformism among the Nair and the Namboodiri communities, the youngsters revolting against outdated customs and beliefs including untouchability.

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31. Ibid., pp. 293 - 294.

32. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 27, pp. 121 - 122.

The Guruvayur Satyagraha.

In the Fifth State Conference held in May, 1931, a resolution was passed urging temple entry to all Hindus.<sup>33</sup> This was the prelude to the Guruvayur Satyagraha. The Satyagraha began on November 1, 1931 after propaganda meetings and processions in the neighbouring places throughout September<sup>34</sup>. The temple authorities put barbed wires around the temple to prevent the Satyagrahis from entering the temple premises. Conservative elements hired goondas who resorted to blows, the worst incident being the attack on A.K. Gopalan, the volunteer captain, on December 28.<sup>35</sup> The struggle in the form of picketing the gates, organising meetings and taking out processions to mobilise public opinion in favour of temple entry was carried on for months. But the pressure was not strong enough to force the issue in favour of temple entry.

Meanwhile, on September 22, 1932, Gandhi decided to fast until death, to protest against the Communal Award. In Malabar, Kelappan also decided to fast until the temple was reopened to untouchables. This was more in the nature of a desperate attempt to exert more pressure on the temple authorities to force a decision. However, on Gandhi's request, he ended the fast on the 10th day. By this time,

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33. V.R. Menon, N. 1, p. 406.

34. Ibid. pp. 412 - 419. See also A.K. Gopalan, In the Cause of the People (New Delhi, 1973, pp. 30 - 31).

35. Ibid., p. 432.

"the protest movement" in A.K. Gopalan's words "also reached its final on a low key".<sup>36</sup>

The Satyagraha though failed in its objective of getting the temple opened for Harijans, is nevertheless, important in the impact it made on the caste ridden society of Malabar. For the first time the Satyagraha aroused public opinion for Harijan uplift in a big way and generated a widespread movement for Harijan uplift in Kerala. It attracted youngsters who later became full time Harijan social workers.<sup>37</sup> A referendum was conducted on temple entry issue in which 77% of those who had participated voted in favour of granting temple entry to Harijans.<sup>38</sup>

#### The Second Civil Disobedience Movement.

In the meantime, Gandhi had returned from England after the Round Table Conference and had sent a telegram to the Viceroy expressing regret over police excesses in U.P. and in N.W.F.P. He sought an interview with him which was not granted.<sup>39</sup> On January 4, 1932, four new ordinances were issued<sup>40</sup>. In a nationwide sweep, Gandhi, Sardar Patel and others were put behind bars. In Malabar, the Working Committee of the K.P.C.C. held an urgent meeting on the evening of January 4 and passed a resolution dissolving the K.P.C.C. and appointing 'Dictators' to carry

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36. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 45.

37. Ibid, p. 47.

38. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 46.

39. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, History of the Indian National Congress, Vol. I, Second Reprint, (New Delhi, 1969), p. 518.

40. Ibid, p. 524.

on the struggle<sup>41</sup>.

Thus, the Second Civil Disobedience Movement formally began in Malabar on January 5 with hartals and protests at Gandhi's arrest.<sup>42</sup> On the 6th K.P.C.C., Volunteer Organisation, Yuvak Sangh, Ernad Taluk Congress Committee, South Malabar District Congress Committee and Kurumbranad Taluk Congress Committee were declared unlawful associations.<sup>43</sup> The movement was carried on more or less on the same lines as that of the First Civil Disobedience Movement. Shops selling foreign goods and liquor shops were picketed. In the initial phase picketing of liquor shops was successful, leading to the closure of many shops. By April, there was a drop of 41% from liquor revenue.<sup>44</sup> A special feature of the struggle was the observance of "special days", like the Gandhi Jayanti Day, Jalianwala Day etc. There were occasional picketing of courts and British Banks.<sup>45</sup> Pamphlets were in wide circulation, the Congress Bulletin being issued from Calicut thrice or four times a week.<sup>46</sup> New types of agitation were also tried, like the setting up of a parallel post office and the hoisting of the National Flag in the Sub-Collector's office.<sup>47</sup>

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41. A.I.C.C. Papers, F. No. 14, 1932 (N.H.M.L.)

42. Ibid, Report of Dictator, Dtd. 24.8.1932.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid. See for a specific eg. Moyyath, N. 28, pp.291-296.

47. V.R. Menon, N. 1, p. 348.



Broadly speaking, the two Civil Disobedience Movements remained as the movements led by the urban middle class. The leaders, most of whom belonged to affluent Nair landowning families did not try to organise the peasants and workers. Its appeal, therefore, was limited. Even the Salt Satyagraha did not catch the imagination of the common man. Secondly, salt was not produced on a large scale and its manufacture was limited to a handful of chosen volunteers. The government policy was not to make large scale arrests and we find the 'Dictator' from Kerala reporting that their "efforts to fill the jails have not met with any appreciable success".<sup>48</sup> The police brutality, however, drew spontaneous sympathy from people, and rallied them around the Congress. The activities like the picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops had limited success in mass mobilization. Those activities involving direct acts of usurpation of governmental functions like the setting up of parallel post office were the results of individual effort and could be put down easily. There was no programme for a 'positive' mode of action to carry the movement forward when the boycott movements had exhausted itself. As the Congress had not envisaged the movement as a consistent struggle against imperialism sooner or later it had to be withdrawn and shifted to dialogues or suffer the fate of being brutally

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48. A.I.C.C. Papers, N. 41.

repressed.<sup>49</sup>

The significance of the political activities during the Civil Disobedience period lay in the fact that it brought to the forefront a group of people experienced in the organisational work as well as actual political struggle but at the same time disillusioned by the compromising attitude of the Congress and having lost faith in the efficacy of the Gandhian methods and principles in winning independence from the British. It was this group which formed the Kerala unit of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 and later in 1940 transformed itself into the Malabar unit of the C.P.I.

## PART II

### THE K.C.S.P. AND THE FRONT ORGANISATIONS.

By 1934, the Civil Disobedience Movement had completely died out and there was large scale disillusionment among the rank and file of the Congress throughout the country. Among the Congress members, a feeling arose

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49. This tactic of pressure - compromise - pressure as the basic feature of the nationalist strategy has been brought out in Bipan Chandra's "Elements of Continuity and Change in the Early Nationalist Activity". (Indian History Congress session, Muzaffarpur, 1972). Sumit Sarkar has examined the working of this strategy in a specific context during the First Civil Disobedience Movement when the movement was temporarily suspended as a result of Gandhi-Irwin Pact. See Sumit Sarkar, "The logic of Gandhian Nationalism: Civil Disobedience Movement and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1930 - 31)" in The Indian Historical Review, Vol. III, No.1 (July, 1976) pp. 114 - 146.

that there was something fundamentally wrong with the Gandhian struggle and they doubted the efficacy of the non-violent, non-cooperation as a weapon in the struggle for independence. As a consequence of the Congress set back, two conflicting developments occurred. One was the attempt by the constitutionalists to revive the Swarajist Party to fight the elections and function in the legislatures.<sup>50</sup> The other was the rise into prominence of a group of socialist minded young people who proceeded to form the Congress Socialist Party in certain provinces.<sup>51</sup> This is important in that soon all these provincial organisations were brought together. In the Second All India Congress Socialist Conference attended by thirteen Provincial Congress Socialist Parties, the All India Congress Socialist Party was formed.<sup>52</sup>

Being active members of the Congress, and being ardent nationalists, the Socialists were against breaking away from the Congress. At the same time they were opposed to the Congress leadership, which in their opinion, was rightist and showed compromising tendencies. So during the period from 1930 to 1936, the C.S.P. leaders advocated the doctrine of "Alternative Leadership"<sup>53</sup>.

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50. See M.R. Masani, Bliss Was It In That Dawn ... (New Delhi, 1977), pp. 46 - 48.

51. Ibid. See pp. 42 - 46.

52. Ibid. pp. 51 - 53.

53. Thomas A. Rusch, Role of the Congress Socialist Party in the Indian National Congress, 1931 - 1942. Ph.D. Dissertation; (University of Chicago, 1955) Microfilm, N.M.M.L.

Formation of the K.C.S.P.

By 1934, the K.P.C.C. was in disarray with many of its leaders still in jail. But most of the young leaders like E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai and others were out of jail. In the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement they had become sceptical about the Gandhian principles and programme. It became clear to them that "freedom cannot be achieved merely through a programme of going to jail. Gandhism had proved a failure".<sup>54</sup> Secondly, they felt that one of the main reasons for the failure of the movement was that it was not broad based to include different sections of the society, like the workers and peasants.<sup>55</sup> The Congress did not have any programme to organise these sections of the society. Thirdly, their contacts with Bengali revolutionaries while in jail, instilled in them revolutionary fervour.<sup>56</sup> So they had come out of the jail with ideas, however, vague, which was different from Gandhian ideology. The fourth important factor in their orientation towards Socialism was certain developments in the international sphere, particularly the

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54. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 51.

55. Ibid, p. 53.

56. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 27, pp.133-135. The author writes "It will not be an exraggeration to say that the seeds of the left wing Congress - that was later **formed** in Kerala - and the Congress Socialist Movement, were laid in Cannanore jail and the one individual responsible for it was Tiwari". Also Interview with K.A. Keraleeyan on 18.1.1978 at his residence in Calicut.

rise of the Soviet Union. While the Western capitalist countries were in the grip of a deep economic crisis, Soviet Union, through centralised planning progressed towards consolidation. The model of Soviet Union helped to strengthen their belief in Socialism.<sup>57</sup>

Why Swaraj? written by E.M.S. Namboodiripad in 1934, throws some light on the understanding of the political ideology of the early Socialists in Malabar. E.M.S. Namboodiripad argued that economic exploitation was the sole aim of the British and that the grinding poverty in the countryside was a consequence of this. His conclusion was that "In order to change these conditions, a government should come which has no desire for economic exploitation. Swaraj means the formation of such a government ..... An incomplete model of this Swaraj was drawn in the Indian National Congress session at Karachi. That should be remodelled and completed in such a way as to ameliorate the condition of the poor".<sup>58</sup>

It was this perspective that led to the formation of the K.C.S.P. in Calicut, on 12th May, 1934, with C.K. Govindan Nair as President and P. Krishna Pillai as Secretary<sup>59</sup>. On the 13th, the Working Committee met at Guruvayur and the Manifesto and the Constitution of the

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57. Ibid. p. 157.

58. Translated from Malayalam by the present writer.  
See E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Swarajyam Enthinu?  
(Tirur, 1934) pp. 31 - 32.

59. The Mathrubhumi, 11.6.1934 (Malayalam, Calicut).

Party was adopted. The Manifesto enunciated the primary aim of the Party as the complete Independence of India. By this it was meant the freedom of every individual to work, enjoy the fruits of his labour and to acquire knowledge.<sup>60</sup> The organisation and programme of work were clearly defined.<sup>61</sup>

However, at the time of the formation of the K.C.S.P. their knowledge about Socialist ideologies was vague.<sup>62</sup> In this connection, the tour of Malabar, undertaken by Jayaprakash Narayan in July is significant. In a speech he made in Calicut, Jayaprakash stressed the need for the adoption of Socialism and the need for a separate organisation in the Congress for Socialists. He stated that the first requirement for the development of the Socialist Movement was the building up of class organisation to carry on the struggle against imperialism. These points were substantiated by Jayaprakash in a book called Why Socialism? which was translated into Malayalam and read with interest by the Socialists.<sup>63</sup>

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60. Under Secretary's Safe, No. 897, Dtd. 20-12-1937 (T.N.A.).

61. Ibid. The organisation and programme of work as adopted by the Secretary is given as Appendix I and Appendix II.

62. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 27, p. 157.

63. Ibid. p. 166. E.M.S. writes that the book became a guiding document in their day to day political activities for quite some time. See also P. Narayanan Nair, Aranūrrāntilūde, Malayalam (Kottayam, 1973) p. 155. For Jayaprakash Narayan's views on Socialism, See Why Socialism? (Benaras, 1936).

Efforts to spread Socialist ideas.

The initial efforts of the Socialists were to popularise and propagate the ideas of Socialism. Mention has already been made about Jayaprakash's book, Why Socialism? which was translated into Malayalam. In January 1935, Prabhatam Weekly, as the official organ of the K.C.S.P. started publication with E.M.S. Namboodiripad as the editor. The leading articles which appeared in the Congress Socialist were translated and published in Prabhatam. Articles encouraging workers and peasants movements and pointing out the defects of the Tenancy Act of 1929, were also published.<sup>64</sup> In this connection, two articles are particularly illustrative. Referring to the dubious tactics employed by some factory owners in Feroke and Kallayi to circumvent Factory Legislation, the paper stated that fundamental changes in the very structure of society were necessary before there could be an end to the grievances of labourers.<sup>65</sup> In another article, it was stated that there was a striking similarity between the conditions in India (then) and that of Russia before the revolution. The paper made it clear that it was not advocating that a "revolution of Russian type will or should come in India". But it warned that conservative elements rallying round to strengthen the foreign government would lead to it.<sup>66</sup> The K.C.S.P.,

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64. Ibid, pp. 175 - 176.

65. Prabhatam, 21.1.35. Cited in Newspaper Reports for 1935, Month of January (T.N.A.).

66. Newspaper Report for 1935. Month of March (T.N.A.).

however, could not propagate through Prabhatam for long as its publication had to be stopped in July, 1935, because the sum of Rs.2000 demanded as security for publishing an allegedly treasonable poem could not be paid.<sup>67</sup>

Prabhatam could be started again only after two years when in September 1937, the order passed on it was withdrawn.<sup>68</sup> As the mouth piece of the Party, it helped to spread Socialist ideas and played a seminal role in organising trade unions and peasant movements. The Socialists also sought to make use of the K.P.C.C. funds to translate political publications and leftist literature in '38 when the K.P.C.C. came under their control.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to this, Front Organisations like the Trade Unions and Karshaka Sanghams undertook the propagation of Socialist ideas through pamphlets, study classes and through plays and skits. These efforts, coupled with the Vāyanaśālas (Reading Rooms) which were opened in the villages, spread Socialist ideas among different sections of the society and paved the way for the gradual transformation of the K.C.S.P. into the C.P.I. in Malabar.

The K.C.S.Party Organisation.

Though the meeting convened to form the K.C.S.P. in '34 was presided by Kelappan, he disassociated with it

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67. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 27, p. 179.

68. Public (Genl.) Dept., Fortnightly Report For the First Half of September, 1937. (T.N.A.).

69. The Mathrubhumi, 8.2.38.



soon and wrote an editorial in the Mathrubhumi captioned "Beware of Them"<sup>70</sup>. Within months, Madhavanar and C.K. Govindan Nair also resigned from the Party.<sup>71</sup> This reflected the Gandhians' opposition to the Socialists in general. At the same time the K.C.S.P. was not functioning well as an organisation. In A.K. Gopalan's words, "there was no arrangement to train the new workers who emerged from each struggle .... The party had no well ordered office. There was no arrangement to give assignments to activities, to check their work, to point out mistakes and to help them to correct mistakes .... There was no system even of reporting on one's experiences. On the whole there was organisational chaos everywhere".<sup>72</sup> In addition there was factionalism within the party which resulted in the presentation of two panels for the executive committee. But this did not lead to a complete rift as the differences were patched up once the elections to the committees were over.<sup>73</sup> Differences again propped up after six or seven months, leading to the resignation from the Party by A.K. Gopalan and Chandroth, who was the Secretary of the Kottayam Taluk C.S.P. In a letter published in the Mathrubhumi, they stated that they were dubbed as pro-capitalists

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70. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 27, p. 161.

71. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "Tiriñjunōkkumbōl", Desabhimani Weekly, March 27, 1977, p. 7 (Second part of autobiography serialised in this Weekly. The details of the difference are not given).

72. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 77.

73. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 71.

because of their personal relationships with some of those who did not subscribe to Socialist principles. They also stated that malpractices were committed in the Kottayam Taluk elections.<sup>74</sup> However, this did not have serious repercussions since in the organisation of the unemployed, a movement started by A.K. Gopalan after resigning from K.C.S.P., the K.C.S.P. members had actively participated. This also led to the ironing out of differences and A.K. Gopalan and Chandroth rejoined the Party.<sup>75</sup>

During the next three years, the party unity was strengthened through coordinated work among the youth, the workers and the peasants. The Party convened Annual Conferences in which the Party programme was adopted and resolutions spelling out its policy, passed. The Working Committee met regularly.<sup>76</sup> By '37 there was regular activity directed from the Party office at Calicut. There was an office and Research Secretary, who issued press notes and communiques regarding the observation of special days, the venue and date of the party meetings etc.

It was in the Sixth Annual Conference of the K.C.S.P. which was also its last meeting, that detailed

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74. The Mathrubhumi, 2.4.'36. See also A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 79. A.K. Gopalan writes that they were angered and pained when their loyalty to the working class was questioned and their idealism, doubted by their co-workers.
75. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 71, p. 8. See also A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 79.
76. The Mathrubhumi, Issues 16.6.36, 22.12.37, 19.1.38, 26.6.38, 24.2.39 and 14.6.39. The exact frequency could not be ascertained. There must have been monthly meetings.

programmes for the reorganisation of the Party were formulated. Held in Tellicherry in June, 1939, it was attended by 170 members out of a total of 400.<sup>77</sup> These were presented on the political condition of India, the freedom struggle in the princely states, the worker's and peasant's movements, communal problems, volunteer corps and party organisation<sup>78</sup>. The conference laid down extensive guidelines for future action. The first task was to convene Divisional Conferences and Convenors were appointed for different divisions.<sup>79</sup> The second task was to re-organise the party by scrutinising the existing members and by forming new Executive and Taluk level Committees. Guidelines were also given on the activities to be undertaken by the Divisional committees.<sup>80</sup> An Executive Committee with E. Krishna Pillai as the Secretary and a Scrutiny Committee were formed. The Kisan and Worker's Sub-Committees, with Keraleeyan and Sekhar as convenors respectively, were also formed.<sup>81</sup>

This was the most important conference of the K.C.S.P. The formation of the Sub-Committees, the thesis on volunteers and the detailed instructions for Divisional

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77. Ibid. 14.6.1939.

78. Ibid. 21.6.39. See also Prabhatam, 26.6.1939.

79. Prabhatam, 26.6.39. The venue and the convenors of the Divisional Conferences were: (A) Chirakkal, Hosdurg Division. Convenor - Keraleeyan, meeting on July 2. (B) Kottayam, Kurumbranad - Wyanad Division. Convenor C.H. Kanaran, meeting on July 9. (C) Calicut Division, Convenor - N.C. Sekhar, meeting on July 2 (D) Eranad, Valluwanad - Palghat Division, Krishna Menon, meeting on July 12 (E) Ponnani Division, Convenor K. Damodaran, meeting on July 9.

80. Ibid. The resolution passed in this meeting is given as

81. Ibid. Appendix III.

Conferences indicate the preparation for a sustained struggle against imperialism. At the same time, the strengthening of the party organisation was good in that, when the C.P.I. was formed towards the end of 1939, all the components of a party were already in existence and there was no need to form a new party machinery.

It is not possible from the source consulted to determine the composition of the K.C.S.P. Most of the leaders were from the upper castes - Nairs, Namboodiris - such as E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, P. Narayanan Nair, P. Krishna Pillai, A.K. Gopalan and K.A. Keraleeyan. But members belonging to 'lower castes' - T.K. Raman, K.P. Gopalan, C.H. Kanaran and others - had come up in the course of the Socialist movement, who went on to become leaders of the C.P.I. during the '42 - 47 period. Rather than strengthening the K.C.S.P. and eventually break away from the Congress, what the Socialists tried to do was to make use of the political platform provided by the Congress, capture the parent organisation and simultaneously develop the movements of the workers and peasants. The faction-ridden, uninspiring picture of the early K.C.S.P. drawn by A.K. Gopalan had certainly changed by 1939. This was achieved in the dual process of participation in the anti imperialist, anti feudal movement and the necessary toning up of the organisation for the further development of these movements.

The K.C.S.P. members' adherence to Socialism led them to the organisation of masses into class organisations. We shall now discuss the Socialist's work among different sections of the society which won for them a strong base both in the urban and ~~xxx~~ rural areas.

The Trade Unions and the Working Class Movement.

It was with the leadership provided by the C.S.P. that the working class movement really began in Malabar. Here, the industrial labour was confined to a few tile factories and weaving mills. A large number of people, however, were employed in Beedi production.<sup>82</sup> The working conditions were generally poor and the wages low. The K.C.S.P. workers took up these issues and sought to organise the labour under their banner. From the demands put forward by the workers of Cannanore Commonwealth Tile Factory for fixing 9 hours of work a day for 6 days a week,<sup>83</sup> it can be assumed that the actual work hours were more than 9 hours a day. There was no security of work and workers were turned out at the will and pleasure of the management. Leave with pay was rare and women were not given wages during maternity leave.

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82. As many as 3,56,942 people were engaged in the preparation and supply of materials to the textile factories in 1931. 20,773 were engaged in cotton, spinning, sizing and weaving. See Census of India, 1931, Vol. XIV, Part II, Madras. For the first figure see p. 144 and see p. 146 for the second. See also the first chapter.

83. Prabhatam, 24.2.1939.

Efforts to ameliorate the working conditions through governmental action met with failure because of the dubious tactis adopted by the factory owners. They found out ways to circumvent Factory Legislation and laws passed by the Government. Thus, the Managers resorted to suspension of workers when the system of extracting fine from the workers were stopped by the Government.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, a Factory Legislation passed in 1935 was made ineffective by the managers who resorted to dubious tactis to outwit it. The Legislation restricted the hours of work in factories to 54 hours a week. The factory owners, to circumvent this, compelled the labourers to work for 10 hours a day for 5 days and for 4 hours on the 6th day. By this way it was possible to pay the wages only for half a day on the 6th day, which, ineffect was cutting away half a day's wages.<sup>85</sup> This tactis was opposed by the workers and led to many strikes and organisations.

Wages paid to the workers were low. The garden labourers got only 6 annas for males, 4 annas for females and 2 annas for boys.<sup>86</sup> The Beedi workers received, on an average, 5 annas for 1000 Beedies made. For weavers, the wages were 4 paise per yard. The low wage rate is evident from the demand raised by workers for a minimum wage for 8 annas.<sup>87</sup>

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84. The Mathrubhumi, 16.11.'37.

85. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 61. See also Newspaper Report for 1935, Month of January (T.N.A.).

86. Prabhatam, 17.4.1939.

87. N.E. Balaram, Keralathile Communist Prasthanam, Part I Malayalam, (Trivandrum, 1973) p. 62.

Organised strikes took place for better working conditions and for better wages. The immediate cause was the failure of the governmental reforms due to tactis employed by the management. In 1935, the workers of Tiruvannur and Feroke struck work protesting against the management's attempt to circumvent Factory Legislation restricting the hours of work in a week to 54. The initiative for this, however, came from the K.C.S.P. workers. A.K. Gopalan, in his autobiography, describes how unions were formed in these places. On 5 February, 1935, he went to Feroke but a meeting could not be convened as very few people turned up.<sup>88</sup> The workers viewed such attempts with distrust. But A.K. Gopalan and P. Krishna Pillai were not disheartened. Standing outside the gate of the factory, talking to the workers as they came out, Krishna Pillai succeeded in persuading the workers to attend a meeting. Slowly the attendance of the meeting began to increase and within a month a union was formed.<sup>89</sup> Likewise, the Soap Worker's Union, the Shop Worker's Union and the Press Worker's Union were formed under the initiative of P. Narayanan Nair.<sup>90</sup> K. Damodaran, living in a small room opposite the Mathurbhumi buildings, organised the Cartload Workers' Union, the Umbrella Workers' Union and the Fishermen's Union. He also played an important part in the formation of the Press Worker's Union.<sup>91</sup>

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88. See Public (Genl.) Dept., Fortnightly Reports for the First Half of February 1935 (N.A.I.).

89. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, pp. 61 - 63.

90. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 63, p. 168.

91. Interview with V. Narayanan Nair, on 20.8.76 at his residence in Calicut.

Throughout 1935, strikes were organised in Calicut, Feroke, Pappinisseri and Tiruvannur. Though the right to form unions - one of the demands raised - were not granted, unions were formed. In some of the strikes, the Management tried to crush the strikes by hiring goondas and getting the authorities to pass prohibitory orders on leaders like A.K. Gopalan and Krishna Pillai.

The K.C.S.P.'s concern for the worker's reflected in the observance of a 'Workers Day' during the celebration of the National Week. This, combined with the strikes and the trade unions, imparted a collective feeling among the workers. So when there was a strike at the Taj Mahal Weaving Factory in Chirakkal, the members of the Chirakkal Weaving Factory Worker's Union and the workers of the T.S. Brother's Factory organised a public meeting to protest against the wage cut which led to the strike.<sup>92</sup>

By 1937, the first wave of strikes had largely subsided. From now onwards, the workers began to participate in the anti imperialist struggle that was developing in the country. For this and also to withstand repression, we find the workers strengthening their organisation. Immediately after the formation of the C. Rajagopalachari Ministry in Madras, there was a spate of strikes and lockouts in Malabar.

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92. The Mathrubhumi, 15.4.1936.



These were mainly for wage increase and hence are not taken up for discussion. Instead, it is sought to highlight three things - the workers' first major show of strength, unification of trade unions and efforts to create a trained cadre among the workers - which were the features of the period between 1937 and 1939. The first major demonstration by the workers was organised in Calicut on September 19, 1937. September 19th was observed as Demands Declaration Day and workers from all the trade unions in Calicut went on a huge procession, holding red flags.<sup>93</sup> A mammoth meeting, presided over by P. Narayanan Nair was held at the beach in the evening. A resolution containing the following points were passed: 48 hours a week, recognition of unions, additional pay for working overtime, salary for women on maternity leave, one month holiday a year with full wages, free insurance against accidents while on duty and free medical facilities.<sup>94</sup> Another resolution was passed praising Russia's efforts towards maintaining peace and urging all the people to oppose every move leading towards war.<sup>95</sup> This demonstration vividly described by A.K. Gopalan and E.M.S. Namboodiripad as an unforgettable event, showed the organised strength of the working class. It was a "milestone in the history of working class movement in Malabar".<sup>96</sup>

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94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 70. Issue of 26.6.1977, p. 33. See also A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 95.

Past experience had taught K.C.S.P. leaders the necessity of a strong organisation. This reflected in the efforts towards unification of different trade unions. In November 1938, to bring the various trade unions under a collective head, the central Trade Union was formed.<sup>97</sup> In addition, united conferences of various unions were held. The Weaving Factory Workers in Cannanore decided to form a central committee in a meeting in April 16, 1939, attended by about 2000 workers. The All Malabar Beedi Worker's Conference was held on July 30, in Cannanore.<sup>98</sup> Along with this unification, efforts were made to develop a trained cadre of political workers among the industrial labourers. The first worker's volunteer corps was formed in Calicut, By August, 1938, a Taluk Committee was formed with members elected by other volunteer corps in the Taluk.<sup>99</sup> In the same month, a volunteer training camp for 15 days, which attended by 33 workers, was conducted.<sup>100</sup> By the first week a August, a volunteer corps unit was formed by the Cannanore Beedi Worker's Union with 70 members.<sup>101</sup> By December, there were strong organised worker's volunteer corps in Calicut, Tellicherry and Cannanore.<sup>102</sup>

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97. N.E. Balaram, N. 87, p. 103.

98. Ibid.

199. The Mathrubhumi, 11.8.1938.

100. Ibid. 16.8.1938.

101. Letter of C. Kannan, Secretary, Cannanore Beedi Workers Union to V. Narayanan Nair, N. 91.

102. The Mathrubhumi, 8.2.1938.

The first fact which stands out from the above review of the trade union movement in Malabar is the growth of the movement in such a short span of 4 years. It was mainly due to the work initiated and sustained by the K.C.S.P. that this could be achieved.

The nature of Tile Factories and Beedi Companies prevented concentration of large numbers of workers in a particular place. This made their position vulnerable. In case of a strike, the owners could run the factory with new recruits from the army of the unemployed in the countryside. Picketing could not be successfully carried out for long, since the police and State machinery acted in favour of the Management. At the same time, the workers stood united and there were no rival trade unions. Obviously, the management had failed to create internal schism and to form 'tame' labour unions.

The workers activities did not confine merely to meetings and strikes. Many of their demands were political in nature and were not confined to narrow economic demands. This is clear from resolutions demanding removal of the ban on C.P.I. expressing greetings to Russia, condemning war etc., which were passed in various meetings. The workers concern for other sections like peasants and teachers manifested in the resolutions passed extending support to these movements. This brings out their role in the Socialist Movement. To the K.C.S.P., they formed the base in taluk headquarters and towns.

The Karshaka Sanghams and the Peasant Movement.

The activities of the K.C.S.P. also extended to the politicalisation of the peasantry. Though Malabar had a strong tenancy movement during the second and third decades of the century, it had not brought within its purview the problems of the actual cultivator. Indiscriminate evictions, high rent, increase in land revenue as a result of resettlement, steep fall in prices due to depression and feudal exploitation like illegal exactions greatly impoverished the peasantry.

It was against this background that the K.C.S.P. members started work among the peasants forming Karshaka Sanghams in the village and organised the peasants to struggle against feudalism and British Imperialism.

As high rent, heavy land tax and debt was prevalent, the earlier demands centred around these issues. It was demanded that a system of collection of land tax and rent from those whose income exceeded a fixed amount be introduced.<sup>103</sup> The reduction of land tax by half, stoppage of all court proceedings for the realisation of debt and rent arrears for the next two years (i.e. upto 1938) were demanded.<sup>104</sup> These demands were requested to be incorporated in a Bill to be passed by the Government since it was difficult to pass a land legislation. Towards 1938, when the peasant movements

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103. Ibid, 20.8.1936.

104. Ibid.

developed well, the abolition of illegal exactions or feudal levies were demanded.<sup>105</sup> In Kasargod taluk the main demand raised by the Karshaka Sangham was the extension of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929 to Kasargod also.<sup>106</sup> Towards the end of 1938, amendments to the act of 1929 were demanded. They were in the main: the abolition of the payment by the verumpāttakkāran of an amount equivalent to one years rent as munpāttom, the fixation of rent at half the net produce instead of the full produce, the stoppage of evicting a tenant by the landlord for his own cultivation and the abolition of the practise of policceluthu.<sup>107</sup>

The above, in brief comprises, the main demands raised by the Karshaka Sangham in Malabar during 1935 - 1939. The means by which there were raised and redress sought was through propaganda and petitions to the Government.

#### Organisation and Method.

About the initial efforts in the formation of Karshaka Sangham, Valluvanad provides a clear picture. In February 1936, the Valluvanad Taluk Congress Committee resolved to organise peasants on their immediate demands. E.M.S. Namboodiripad was authorised to tour the taluk and form Karshaka Sangham units. The programme was to hold public meetings to educate peasants to organise and agitate for their immediate demands. This was to be followed by a Taluk

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105. Ibid. 30.10.1937 and 21.12. 1937.

106. Ibid. 13. 12. 1938.

107. Ibid. 21.12.1938.

Peasant Confernce.<sup>108</sup> By the third week of March, 15 meetings were held in many villages. Meetings were held on market days to attract crowds.<sup>109</sup>

After the initial task of forming Karshaka Sangham units in village, Taluk Conferences were held, the first being the Chirakkal Taluk Peasants Conference. It was held in November, 1936, and important resolutions dealing with rent, debt and land tax were passed in the conference.<sup>110</sup> Within months, such Taluk Conferences were held in Valluvanad, Ponnani and Kottayam. The resolutions passed in Chirakkal Conferences were passed in these meetings also.<sup>111</sup>

The methods of propaganda included pamphleteering, touring of the villages in small batches and holding meetings. In Valluvanad along with the meetings, a pamphlet entitled "Organise and Demand" was freely distributed.<sup>112</sup>

Towards the middle of 1937, new forms to augment propaganda

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108. The Congress Socialist, 7.3.1936. Microfilm (N.M.M.L.).

109. Ibid. 21.3.1936. The Secretary of the T.C.C. wrote that 50 to 100 people used to collect at meetings held in ordinary days. On market days, the attendance varied between 200 and 400.

110. The Mathrubhumi, 20.8.1936. The contents of the resolution are given below: (Translated from Malayalam)  
I. Since it is difficult to pass a land legislation with regard to rent, tax and debt, it is requested to pass a Bill incorporating the following: (A) (1) All court proceedings for the realisation of debt and rent arrears should be stopped for 2 years. (2) Land tax should be reduced by half for the next 2 years. (3) A Committee to enquire into the nature of land ownership, land tax and rural indebtedness should be set up. (B) These demands should be incorporated in the Congress Election Manifesto.  
II. This conference express its sympathy with the unemployed and extend all support to their movement.  
III. The bulk of the produce from the land should go to the actual cultivator. A system of collection of land tax and rent from those whose income is above a fixed amount should be introduced.

111. The Congress Socialist. N. 108.

112. Ibid. See issues, 11.5.1937 and 26.5.1937

through printed matter were tried like staging a skit . It was in the Ponnani Taluk Conference that K. Damodaran's Pāṭabākki (Arrears of Rent) was first staged. The skit, depicting the plight of the poor and extolling them to organise themselves into Karshaka Sanghams and fight against land lordism, was subsequently staged in many places and became an important vehicle of propaganda.<sup>113</sup> By 1939, peasant issues could be raised through the press as Prabhatam started publication as the official mouth piece of the K.C.S.P.

One of the important techniques of peasant mobilization was the jāthas to the houses of the jenmies for redress of grievances. For instance, the peasants of Kolacheri went in a jātha to the Raja of Chirakkal and requested him to stop the corrupt practises of his kāryasthans. Another jātha of peasants from Alavi was organised to the house of Chirakkal Raja. They demanded that the practise of using a para which could hold 11 edangalis and putting the figure at  $9\frac{3}{4}$  edangalis when rent was paid in kind, be stopped. They also demanded the abolition of demanding a higher rate than the prevailing usual rate when rent was paid in cash.<sup>114</sup> In 1938 many such jāthas were organised, the important ones being: jātha to Kottayam Kovilagam',

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113. The Mathrubhumi, 31.3.1937. Also V. Narayanan Nair, N.91. He acted as the heroine in the skit. See also K. Damodaran, Pāṭabākki, Seventh Edn. Malayalam (Kottayam, 1972):

114. Ibid. 30.10.1937.

jātha of peasants from 9 villages to the house of Vengayil Nayanar in October 1938,<sup>115</sup> jātha to Koodali Talathe Veettil in the same month, the jātha involving peasants from 8 villages to the house of Karuvathur Namboodiri and the jātha to the house of Karakkattidathil Nayanar in November.<sup>116</sup> In all these jāthas, the main demand was the abolition of illegal exactions like vaśi, nuri, poli etc.

Peasant Movements in Kasargod Taluk.

In the neighbouring Kasargod taluk also such peasant activities were espoused by the Kasargod taluk Karshaka Sangham. In October 1938, peasants from 10 villages marched to the local jenmi demanding abolition of illegal exactions. The jenmi granted most of the demands.<sup>117</sup> One of the main demands raised by the Karshaka Sangham was the extension of the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1929 to Kasargod. On December 8, 1938, the Karshaka Sangham organised a jātha consisting of delegates from 40 units of the Sangham to the Dist. Collector, South Kanara.<sup>118</sup>

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115. Ibid. 16.10.1938.

116. Prakash Karat, "Organised Struggle of Malabar Peasantry, 1934 - 1940", Social Scientist, (March, 1977), pp. 14 - 15.

117. The National Front, 13.11.1938. Microfilm (N.M.M.L.)

118. The Mathrubhumi, 13.12.1938. See also K.K.N. Kurup, "Peasant Movement in Kasargod Taluk", in Aspects of Kerala History and Culture, (Trivandrum, 1977) p. 93. Some of the grievances mentioned were the absence of fixity of tenure which made ejection easy, illegal exactions like vaśi, nuri etc. the customs of pollicceluthu, the practise of attaching standing crops raised by the tenant for the realization of land tax not paid by jenmi and the absence of any system of assessing rent.



Agitation to Amend the M.T.A. of 1929.

Along with the peasant movement demanding abolition of illegal exactions, the Karshaka Sangham organised movements to amend M.T.A. of 1929. In October 1938, in a meeting of the Karshaka Sangham it was resolved to send a deputation to the Dist, Magistrate, Malabar, in the second week of December, to demand amendments to the prevailing Tenancy Act. This deputation was to consist of 1000 delegates who were to come in two jāthas, one from North Malabar and the other from the South.<sup>119</sup>

The jātha from North Malabar started from Karivallur on 11 December, 1938. It was given reception enroute by Congress Committees, Karshaka Sanghams, students and youth organisations. The two jāthas converged at Chevayur where All Malabar Peasant Conference was in session.<sup>120</sup> After the meeting the jāthas resumed their march to Calicut where they were joined by red uniformed volunteers. The rallies converged at Calicut beach where a meeting was held under the presidency of P. Krishna Pillai. Resolutions demanding amendments to the M.T.A., requesting Madras Government to reduce land revenue and appealing peasants to strengthen Karshaka Sangham and the Congress were passed in this Conference.<sup>121</sup>

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119. The National Front, N. 117. The amendments demanded are given in Appendix - IV.

120. The Mathrubhumi, 21.12.1938. See Appendix IV for full <sup>e</sup>xt of resolution passed in this meeting.

121. The National Front, 15.1.1939. See also A.K. Gopalan, N. 34.

As a result of this pressure, the government appointed a Malabar Tenancy Committee which included E.M.S. Namboodiripad, E. Kannan and Abdur Rahiman - all belonging to the leftwing.<sup>122</sup> The majority decision fell short of the Karshaka Sangham demands. However, all the three leftists submitted dissenting minutes as they disagreed with the majority decision.<sup>123</sup>

The peasant movements though raged throughout Malabar developed unevenly. The Karshaka Sangham meetings were more frequent in North Malabar than in the South. Almost all the jāthas to the jenmies houses took place in North Malabar. There were more members and Karshaka Sangham units in the North. By 1939, Chirakkal Taluk had 83 units of Karshaka Sangham with 9901 members and Kottayam 68 units with 5901 members<sup>124</sup>. The Palghat Taluk had 400 members and Kurumbranad, 2320<sup>125</sup>. The Valluvanad Karshaka Sangham had 23 units with 515 members.<sup>126</sup> There were 5500 members in Kasargod Taluk Karshaka Sangham.<sup>127</sup>

As is clear from the statements given by the Karshaka Sangham workers before the Tenancy Committee, small cultivators, sub-tenants, kulikkānakkār, verumpāttakkār, and panayakkār formed the bulk of the members of the Karshaka

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122. See Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, 2 vols. (Madras, 1940).

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid., Vol. II See P. 8 and p. 96. See also Prabhatam 29.5.1939.

125. Ibid. See p. 188 and p. 225.

126. Ibid. p. 96.

127. Ibid. p. 323.

Sangham<sup>128</sup>. The emphasis on the actual cultivator, the demands for amending the prevailing Tenancy Act and for the abolition of illegal exactions - all catered to the interests of this class.

The achievements of the movement, more than the redress of some grievances or the appointment of the Tenancy Committee, lay in the fact that it had mobilised an inert mass and politicised the passive peasantry. From centuries of submissiveness, they began to rise up for their rights, imbued with the Socialist consciousness disseminated through propaganda work and study classes. The peasantry formed ~~the~~ the social base of the K.C.S.P. in the rural areas.

The Aided Primary School Teacher's Movement.

The primary school teachers played a seminal role in the organisation of peasants, the students and in the development of the Congress as a whole. Participating directly in the movement and providing leadership, they helped to spread the Socialist consciousness to the interior of Malabar. Their movement seeking security of tenure and better salaries also began in 1935, along with other movements initiated by members of the K.C.S.P.

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128. For statements of the Karshaka Sangham workers, see Ibid, pp. 96, 187, 223 and 250. Also K.K.A. Keraleeyan, Interview.

The aided primary schools in Malabar were run as business concerns by the Managers with the primary intention of making a profit. The schools did not have sufficient number of well-lit rooms, benches and black boards. The teacher's salary was very meagre, not exceeding Rs.10/- in most cases.<sup>129</sup> There was no security of tenure and the teachers were liable to be dismissed at the will and pleasure of the Manager. Even the meagre salary was not paid regularly. The government resorted to cutting of grants if any complaints were received about the non-receipt of salaries or about any irregularities in the payment.<sup>130</sup>

The earliest teacher's union to be formed in Malabar was in Chirakkal which later became the hot bed of peasant activity. It was formed in 1935 and soon unions were formed in other parts of the country. An annual conference, participated by delegates from all over Malabar was held in December.<sup>131</sup> The important demands raised by the Teacher's Union were raising of the Aided School Teacher's pay on par with that of the local Board Teachers', fixity of tenure to all those who had completed one year of service after training<sup>132</sup> and the take over of the primary education by the government.<sup>133</sup>

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129. A.K. Gopalan, who himself was a school teacher, describes about the miserable conditions of work of a teacher. See A.K. Gopalan, N.34, pp. 6 - 10.

130. A.K. Gopalan had such an experience. See Ibid., p. 92.

131. The Mathrubhumi, 12.12.1935.

132. Ibid. 7.4.1936.

133. Ibid. 17.2.1938.

In the beginning, the agitation in support of these demands was confined to organising jāthas, submitting memorandums to the Director of Education, convening annual conferences and observing 'special days'. It was in the Third Annual Conference of the Aided Primary Teacher's Union, that the possibility of a strike was contemplated. The meeting, held in Calicut in May, 1937, was presided over by Abdur Rahiman.<sup>134</sup> A resolution was passed authorising Taluk Committees of the Union to go on strike if it was found necessary.<sup>135</sup> As per the request of the Union, 'Untrained Teachers' Day' was observed in Malabar during the first week of August.<sup>136</sup>

The first direct action, launched by the Union was, however, provoked by a dismissal. On September 30, 1937, the Manager of Madathil Primary School Quilandy, dispensed with the services of K.P. Padmanabhan, who was also the secretary of the Kollam Branch of the A.P.S.T. Union.<sup>137</sup> 5 teachers resigned protesting against the Management's refusal to give an explanation regarding the expulsion. It was decided to start a parallel school. This decision was welcomed by the gardiens of the students and also by the public in a meeting convened on 13th October.<sup>138</sup>

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134. Ibid. 30.5.1937.

135. Ibid. 30.5.1937.

136. Ibid. 6.8.1937. Meetings were held in Chirakkal, Kallyasseri, Manjeri, Vallikkad, Mannur, Tripprayar, Talipparamb, Valanjeri, Ramanattukkara, Vallapula, Chombal, Chockli, Payyannur and Perinthalmanna.

137. Dept. of Education and Public Health, G.O. No. 952, Dated. 25.4.1938. (T.N.A.).

138. Ibid.

Another teacher, P.R. Nambiar, the Secretary of the Malabar A.S.T. Union, was dismissed in October. Meetings condemning such arbitrary actions were held throughout the province. October 31, was observed as 'Sympathetic Day' and meetings were held, attended by students and gardians in large numbers.<sup>139</sup>

The Director of Public Instruction, who made a direct enquiry into the dismissals of K.P. Padmanabhan, found no direct evidence to show that the teacher was not competent - the reason given by the Manager for dismissal.<sup>140</sup>

The M.A.S.T. Union Prepares for Strike.

In the various taluk conferences of the Union, during the first two months of 1938, resolutions were passed urging all members of the Union to prepare for a common strike.<sup>141</sup> A call for a general Hartal on October 31 was made and the teachers were asked to abstain from work on that day.<sup>142</sup> The Government, in a bid to control the situation, published proposals for the enactment of laws against arbitrary dismissal, introduction of service register system and arrangement for the monthly distribution of salary. The Working Committee of the M.A.S.T. Union, meeting in the K.P.C.C. office on September 30, expressed happiness over the proposals. Though the minimum salary was not fixed in

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139. Ibid. See also The Mathrubhumi, 6.11.1937.

140. Ibid. The Director recorded that K.P. Padmanabhan was wrongfully discharged.

141. The Mathrubhumi, See issues 11.1.1938 and 17.2.1938.

142. Ibid. 12.8.1938.

the proposals, it was decided to suspend the Hartal for the time being.<sup>143</sup> The decision to suspend action was also due to two other events, namely, the decisions of the Management which had dismissed P.R. Nambiar to take him back without break of service<sup>144</sup> and the action by the Education Department which gave recognition to the parallel school started by K.P. Padmanabhan, the dismissed teacher from Madathil school.<sup>145</sup>

Inspite of these conciliatory measures by the Government, the intimidation of the management continued unabated<sup>146</sup> and, therefore, by the middle of 1939, the Union was forced to go on a strike. In an emergency meeting on September 23, 1939, the Chirakkal Taluk A.S.T. Union advocated the observance of a complete Hartal on the 24th. There was peaceful picketing in 52 centres.<sup>147</sup> Action was taken against those who had participated in the Hartal and teachers were suspended leading to strikes.<sup>148</sup>

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143. Ibid. 2. 10. 1938.

144. Ibid. 20.5.1938.

145. Dept. of Education and Public Health, G.O. No. 1269. Dtd. 3.6.1939. (T.N.A.).

146. Prabhatam, 26.6.1939. One method of intimidation was to demand a resignation letter from the teachers without specifying the date in it. The salary of those who refused to write one was withheld.

147. The Mathrubhumi, 29.9.1939.

148. Ibid. See issues 11, 18, 19 and 25 of October, 1939.

This was followed by a decision, taken in the various joint taluk conferences held in December, to go on strike from January, 1940 onwards.<sup>149</sup> But owing to pressure from the Government, the Madras Teacher's Association and the public, the decision was suspended in the second week of January, 1940. However, large number of teachers were either suspended or put behind bars by that time.<sup>150</sup>

The teachers' movement, within a short span of time, succeeded in focussing the plight of the teachers and in getting public support for their cause. But even with this public support, the strike seems to have fizzled out. The general attitude outside Malabar was against such a move as teachers were not supposed to embark on strikes. The South Indian Teacher's Association did not extend its support to such 'unconstitutional' agitation. But if the Union was weakened because of the strike, the Socialist movement gained, as many Teacher's Union workers who were dismissed became active workers of the C.P.I. and went on to become its leaders.<sup>151</sup> To the K.C.S.P., they were not

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149. Ibid. 5.1.1940. The joint taluk conference of the Union in Kurumbranad, Chirakkal and Kottayam was held on December 23. Two days after, the joint meeting of unions in Palghat and Eranad and the joint meeting of Valluvanad, Ponnani and Calicut were held.

150. Home Dept., G.O. 1270, Dtd. 12.3.1940 (T.N.A.).

151. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 63, p. 184. They were: P.R. Nambiar, V. Ramunni, P.M. Kunhikrishnan Nambiar and T.C. Narayanan Nambiar.



only the main propagators of the party policy in the countryside but the initiators and organisers of peasant movements as well.<sup>152</sup> As the literate man in the village, the teacher was instrumental in spreading the Socialist principles in the countryside.

Organisation of the Unemployed.

In the initial phase, when the Socialist movement was gaining ground in Malabar, the unemployed, mainly comprising the rural youth, were organised by the K.C.S.P. But unlike other sections organised by the party, the organisation was not done under the auspicious of the 'official' K.C.S.P. in the beginning, though in the course of the movement it became so. A.K. Gopalan and Chandroth, who had some differences with the official K.C.S.P. had started the movement as a diversionary tactic.

The method and organisation was very much like the Karshaka Sangham organisation. A batch would tour villages, forming ad-hoc committees. After this initial work of propaganda, a joint meeting of the North Malabar units was convened in April, 1936. Two weeks after this, a Pattini Jātha (Hunger March) was organised to the Sub-Collector of Malabar. After this the Working Committee

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152. Niranjana's novel Chirasmarana illustrates how a primary school teacher in Kayyur organised the peasants who later carried on militant struggles against feudalism and imperialism. The author at the time of the struggles was a student. See Niranajana, Chirasmarana, Malayalam translation (Kottayam, 1974). Now an English translation is available. See Stars Shine Brightly (New Delhi, 1977).

met and decided to organise a Pattini Jātha to Madras towards the end of June.<sup>153</sup>

The jātha, with A.K. Gopalan as its director along with 28 volunteers, started on July 1. The local Congress Committees, Trade Unions, Karshaka Snaghams, Youth Forums and Student Federation units gave reception, donated money and provided food for the volunteers enroute.<sup>154</sup> The jātha reached Madras on the 26th and proceeded to the Legislative Assembly. But the volunteers were not allowed to enter the Assembly Hall. As there was no intention to break the law, an entry was not forced and the jātha was ~~xxx~~ disbanded. The volunteers had covered 250 miles on foot, held 50 meetings, sold 2500 pamphlets and collected Rs.500/-.<sup>155</sup> The jātha succeeded in focussing the plight of the unemployed.

After this historical march, there was not much activity and soon the ad-hoc committees were disbanded. The movement was confined to North Malabar and did not develop further mainly because of paucity of funds. Moreover, the leaders who had organised the unemployed were engaged in other activities and could not devote much time to the movement in order to sustain it. The movement was not strong enough to force the Government to grant some immediate of

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153. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, pp. 80 - 81. See also The Mathrubhumi, 2.7.1936.

154. Ibid.

155. Ibid. p. 84. See also Home Dept., Fortnightly Reports for Second Half of August, 1936. (T.N.A.).

relief which would have sustained it. But the importance of these jāthas lies in the fact that they were an effective method of political propaganda which by their very name depicted the misery of the people. The jāthas helped to politicise the rural poor and the unemployed youth and drew them to the Socialist movement.

The Students Organisation.

The Student Federation played a useful role in the dissemination of Socialist principles. Actively participating in the movements of the workers, the peasants and the teachers, assisting Congress and the K.C.S.P. in the observations of 'special weeks' and in the conduct of meetings and processions, they made their own contribution to the Socialist movement.

The All Kerala Students Federation was formed in June 1937 in Calicut. A working committee of the Federation was formed and it was decided to form units in schools.<sup>156</sup> The first political protest of the members of the Student Federation was made at the arrest of Meherally on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1937. Students in Chirakkal, Calicut, Palghat, Kuthuparamb and Putiyangadi protested against the arrest.<sup>157</sup>

By the time, the Second A.K.S.F. Conference was held, the organisation had taken a left oriented stand, as is clear from the resolution passed in the Conference. The

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156. The Mathrubhumi, 15.6.1937.

157. Ibid. 30.6.1937.

resolution warned about the possibility of a war was a consequence of capitalism reaching its highest stage in imperialism in which British would also be engaged and advocated the formation of anti war committees to oppose war. The second resolution, which was passed in the conference demanded the lifting of the ban on the C.P.I.<sup>158</sup>

The Students Federation members were engaged in educating the rural peasantry. According to the decision of the Students Federation, students of Tellicherry, Calicut and Palghat Colleges, went to chosen villages in batches of 50 to educate the peasants. The topics which were taught included Socialist principles, general knowledge about India and the the world<sup>159</sup>. In Chirakkal, a batch of students toured Irikkur, Blathur, Kallyat, Porkkulam, Payyannur and Chengalaya during the last week of December 1939, to propagate the political ideology of the Congress.<sup>160</sup>

The Students Federation, like the other mass organisation started under the initiative of the K.C.S.P. was thus, instrumental in drawing the students in to the Socialist movement that was developing in Malabar. The organisation acted as a training ground for the students, moulded them in Socialist thinking and many of them - Imbichi Bava, E.K. Nayanar, Umanatha Rao - became active members and later, the leaders of the C.P.I.

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158. Ibid. 15.6.1938 and 16.6.1938.

159. N.E. Balaram, N. 87, p. 143. See also Prabhatam, 17.4. 1939.

160. The Mathrubhumi, 11.1.1939.

Youth Organisations and Women's Associations.

The mobilization of the rural youth was also done through youth organisations started by the K.C.S.P. leaders. Among the youth organisations, the most active was the Abhinava Bharati Yuvak Sangham in Karivallur started by A.V. Kunhambu . Constructive work like repairing roads and cleaning canals were done by the Yuvak Sangh, in addition to weekly meetings and the discussion of political questions.<sup>161</sup> The Youth Organisations rendered their helping hand to workers and peasants during jāthas, conferences and strikes and also in propagating Socialist ideas in the villages.

In addition to these organisations, women folk were organised in Mahila Samājams. The Mahila Samājams were active in Calicut, Kottayam, Chirakkal and Kasargod taluks. Those of Kottayam, Kasargod and Chirakkal were started under the initiative of the local Karshaka Sanghams and were composed of peasant and lower middle class women.<sup>162</sup> The Samājams made women politically conscious and enabled them to shed traditionally inherited timidity and submissiveness. Vāyanasālas (Reading Rooms).

During 1934-37, many Vāyanasālas were opened at the initiative of the K.C.S.P. members in the villages. These Vāyanasālas became not only the centres for the disse-

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161. Prakash Karat, "The Peasant Movement in Malabar, 1934 - 40" in Social Scientist, (September, 1976) p. 38.

162. K.K.N. Kurup, N. 118. See also the Mathrubhumi, 1.4.1937.

mination of political knowledge but also the venue of the village unit of Karshaka Sangham, workers union and Students Federation meetings. They became centres for those involved in the Socialist movement to come together, share and discuss political experiences and organisational problems. Many illeteerate peasants learned to read and write and also to deliver speeches. The Vāyanaśālas also initiated the formation of other unions. In certain places, Bāla Sanghams (Boys Associations) were also formed under the auspices of Vāyanaśālas.<sup>163</sup>

Along with these organisational and ideological work the members of the K.C.S.P. were also very active within the Congress. However, their work among the peasants, workers, students and teachers had created a mass base, unlike the C.S.P. in other parts of the country and paved the way for the acceptance of a programme than that of the Congress. Their final rupture with the Congress and the formation of the C.P.I. unit in 1939 lay in the logic of this development.

### PART III

#### TRANSFORMATION OF THE K.C.S.P. INTO THE C.P.I.

When the young activists of the Congress like A.K. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai and others came out of jail during 1933 - 34, they found the Congress organisation in total disarray. Some of the Congress leaders were

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163. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 63.

still in jail while those who were out had professional and other interests to pursue.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, the young radicals had entered the national movement wholeheartedly and were full time political workers. So they took the initiative in reviving the Congress, collect money and enroll new members. On May 12, 1934, the Working Committee of the Congress appointed A.K. Gopalan as the Secretary of an ad-hoc Committee for resuming the political work.<sup>165</sup> The leadership of the Congress slowly slipped into the hands of the radicals. E.M.S. Namboodiripad and C.K. Govindan Nair were elected as the Secretaries and Chunangat Kunjikkavamma, a sympathiser of the K.C.S.P., was elected President of the K.P.C.C. The Socialists also constituted a majority among those elected for A.I.C.C. from the Congress in Kerala.<sup>166</sup> The Bombay session of the Congress in October, 1934 was attended by 40 members from Malabar, mostly Socialists.<sup>167</sup>

This left wing K.P.C.C., however, did not last long. By the end of 1934, Congress leaders like Aaron, M.P. Govinda Menon and others were released from jail. Finding the K.P.C.C. under the control of the Socialists, they convened a separate meeting of the Congress workers

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164. Interview with P. Sekharan on 4.9.1976 at his residence in Calicut. Interview with V. Narayanan Nair, N. 91. The Congress was then known as "Sunday Congress". Some of the leaders were advocates and Sunday was the only day in which they did any Congress work.

165. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 59.

166. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 27, pp. 172 - 174.

167. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 62; p. 142.

in Calicut. The friction between the two sections increased.<sup>168</sup> But this rift was patched up in April 1935 at the State Political Conference held in Calicut. S.A. Brelvi and T. Prakasham, who had attended the political Conference, took the initiative to patch up the differences between the two sections and some 'suggestions were made'. M.R. Masani, the then Jt. Secretary of the A.I.C.S.P. also advocated the acceptance of the compromise proposals and accordingly, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, stepped down from the post of K.P.C.C. Secretary in favour of Kongattil Raman Menon.<sup>169</sup>

Towards the end of 1935, according to the new constitution adopted in the Bombay session, a 10 member K.P.C.C. instead of the 100 member committee came into being. In this newly constituted committee, the "rightists" had a majority with 6 members.<sup>170</sup> So by the beginning of 1936, the Socialists had not only lost the leadership of the K.P.C.C. but had lost the majority in the K.P.C.C. as well.

It should be against this background that the efforts of the Socialists in strengthening the separate unit of the Congress, namely, the Malabar District Congress Committee

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168: Ibid, p. 145.

169. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 27, p. 173 - 174. The details of the suggestions are not given.

170. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 71, 10.4.1977, p. 6. The two clear cut divisions in the Congress can broadly be classified as the left and the right.



must be seen.<sup>171</sup> The first meeting of the M.D.C.C. was held at Calicut on February 22, 1936. K.A. Keraleeyan was elected as the Secretary and Manjunatha Rao as Treasurer.<sup>172</sup> But the rightists, now firmly entrenched in the K.P.C.C. tried to curb the activities of the M.D.C.C. by not granting the sum of Rs.200/- which was demanded. At a meeting of the M.D.C.C. in Cannanore on March 15, indignation over such obstructive tactics was expressed.<sup>173</sup> Later, the M.D.C.C. was disbanded by the K.P.C.C. on the plea that a separate committee for Malabar was not necessary. An appeal was made to the A.I.C.W.C. and this decision was suspended. The C.W.C. on the other hand asked the K.P.C.C. to stop the in-fighting and to enroll new members throughout September.<sup>174</sup>

The tussle between the two sections within the Congress in Malabar came to a temporary halt as the party was drawn into a new political situation after the decision to contest elections to the Legislative Assembly. Though the candidates were selected by the existing right wing leadership, the Socialists worked hard to secure the victory of the Congress candidates. Both the factions worked in unison for the realisation of the immediate object - to secure as many seats as possible.

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171. Not to be confused with the Malabar Pradesh Congress Committee which was in existence till 1920.

172. The Congress Socialist, 21.3.1936.

173. The Mathrubhumi, 19.3. 1936.

174. Ibid. 2.9.1936.

In working for the success of the Congress candidates, the Socialists were not able to project their ~~own~~ point of view or to make use of the election platform to propagate Socialist ideas as the election programme was designed by the rightists in the K.P.C.C. The rightists even went to the extent of omitting the Agrarian Programme formulated at Lucknow in the Congress Manifesto which was translated into Malayalam for distribution. This was in total disregard of the A.I.C.C. directive that it should be printed as Appendix to the Manifesto.<sup>175</sup>

The Socialists were, however, able to capture the K.P.C.C. in 1938. This was due to their work as sincere Congressmen which enhanced their prestige inside the Congress and the work among the workers and peasants which won them general support. Equally important was the support of the "Nationalist Muslims", who though were a minority were Congress workers. An event occurred towards the middle of 1937 which drew them closer to the Socialists. This was the visit of Meherally, a member of the National Executive of the C.S.P.<sup>176</sup> He had come to Malabar to preside over the Fourth K.C.S.P. conference held on 20th June and set on an extensive tour throughout Malabar after the conference. No other Socialist leader had undertaken such an extensive

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175. See E.M.S. Namboodiripad's article in Congress Socialist, 20.3.1937.

176. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 71, 22.5.1977, pp. 14 - 15.

tour before. He was arrested for defying the orders prohibiting him from speaking in "rebellion areas", in Eranad and Valluvanad Taluks.<sup>177</sup> The visit of Meherally led to a greater appreciation of the Socialists among the Nationalist Muslims, which paved the way for a better understanding and cooperation in the ensuing year.<sup>178</sup>

In the elections, Congress emerged victorious in Madras Presidency leading to the formation of the C. Rajagopalachari Ministry in which Kongattil Raman Menon was a minister. This raised high hopes among the people and there was a sense of awakening throughout the country.<sup>179</sup>

#### The Socialists Capture the K.P.C.C.

The year 1938 started with the Socialists assuming the leadership of the Congress. All the important posts went to the Socialists. Abdur Rahiman, the Nationalist Muslim leader was elected President of the K.P.C.C., E.M.S. Namboodiripad and P. Narayanan Nair were elected the General Secretary and the Treasurer of the K.P.C.C. respectively.<sup>180</sup> Manjunatha Rao, P. Krishna Pillai and Moyyath were elected to the Working Committee from the Taluk Committees. In the Working Committee, excepting two members, all others were Socialists.<sup>181</sup>

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177. The Mathrubhumi, 2.7.1937.

178. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 170.

179. Interview with K. Damodaran, on 20.3.1976. See also A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 85.

180. The Mathurbhumi, 4.1.1938.

181. The Congress Socialist, 21.1. 1938.

Assuming control of the K.P.C.C., the Socialists proceeded to turn it into an anti imperialist organisation. They, however, met with stiff resistance from the rightists. This was manifested in the very first meeting of the newly elected K.P.C.C. A decision was taken to translate all the publications of the Congress Publication Department and other political publications. M.P. Govinda Menon proposed an amendment to the last sentence adding 'those which were not in contradiction with Congress principles' The amendment was lost with 13 people voting for and 40 against.<sup>182</sup> It was proposed to invite Jayaprakash Narayanan to preside over the State Conference scheduled to be held in April. K. Madhava Menon moved an amendment requesting that Abdul Kalam Azad be called, which was also voted out.<sup>183</sup>

In the Tenth Kerala State Conference at Bakka- lam in May 1935, a resolution was presented advocating the participation of each and every Congress Committee in the peasant and workers' movement. An amendment which sought to insert the clause 'without contradicting Congress ideas' was rejected ~~and~~ amidst cries of 'Inquilab Zindabad'.<sup>184</sup>

Endeavouring, thus, to transform the Congress into an organisation engaged in a consistent struggle against feudalism and imperialism, the Socialists proceeded to build up a trained cadre of political workers - the first prerequisite for such a struggle.

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182. The Mathrubhumi, 8.2.1938.

183. Ibid.

184. Ibid. 14.5.1939.

In the first meeting itself of the newly elected K.P.C.C., it was decided to raise a volunteer corps within a period of 6 months and Chandroth was entrusted with its organisation. A volunteer committee was formed and a sum of Rs.1500/- was set aside in the Congress budget for raising the volunteer corps. It was decided to impart training initially to a batch of 40 people who were to work as officers, form taluk and village committees and to train the volunteers of these committees.<sup>185</sup>

The volunteer officers training camp was started on May 18 at Thikkody which lasted for one month. In the beginning, physical training, drill and first aid were taught and guidelines for health and hygiene given. Later, lectures on Economics, Politics and History were also delivered by the leaders.<sup>186</sup> Thus in the K.P.C.C. as well as in the organisational work the Socialists established their ascendancy. Simultaneously, they began exhibiting tendencies to act independently of the Congress High Command. In the lectures given in the volunteer camp, emphasis was given to subjects like revolutions, taxation, peasant movements etc., and not to Ahimsa and Satyagraha. The Socialists also participated in the freedom struggle in Travancore in defiance of the Haripura resolution which forbade the

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185. Ibid. 12.3.1938.

186. A.I.C.C. Papers, F. No. p. 12, Part I, 1938 - 39. (N.M.M.L.) The subjects included: French, Chinese, and Russian Revolutions, History of the Congress, Revolutionary Nationalism, Indian Economic Developments, The Tax System, Depression, Concepts of Society, Classification of State, Theory of Revolution, Progressive Movements in India - Kisan, Women, Students, Youth, Malabar Rebellion, History of the Tenancy Movement in Malabar, Labour Movement in Kerala, History of the Congress in Kerala and the History of the Democratic Movements in Cochin and Travancore.

participation by Congressmen in the people's struggle in princely states. Three jāthas were organised to Travancore. The first jatha, consisting of 28 volunteers, was led by A.K. Gopalan.<sup>187</sup> At the same time, we find a letter written by E.M.S. Namboodiripad to the General Secretary of the Congress in which he denies sending any jātha to Trivandrum under the auspices of the Congress.<sup>188</sup> But we find reports to the contrary. The National Front reported that K.P.C.C. after duly conducting a training camp has sent a jātha to Trivandrum.<sup>189</sup> A.K. Gopalan has also written that the K.P.C.C. set up a sub-committee to help the Travancore struggle and that the Working Committee of the K.C.S.P. decided that the party should participate actively in the struggle.<sup>190</sup> In the jāthas, the volunteers were mostly Socialists and the first jātha was led by A.K. Gopalan. It is quite possible that E.M.S. Namboodiripad's letter was meant to assuage the anxieties of the Congress High Command about the provincial units not following centres' directives and he might have denied the K.P.C.C.'s role to avoid disciplinary action.<sup>191</sup>

#### The Formation of the C.P.I. Unit.

The Socialists in Malabar had opportunities to meet Communists from other provinces during All India Conferences of the C.S.P. and the Congress and also <sup>during</sup> some

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187. A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, p. 101. See also C. Narayana Pillai, Tiruvitamkur Swatantra Samara Charitram, (Trivandrum, 1972) pp. 476 - 482.

188. See letter dated 12.9.1938 in A.I.C.C. Files, p. 12, Part I, 1938-39 (N.M.M.L).

189. The National Front, 18.9.1938.

190. See A.K. Gopalan, N. 34, pp. 100 - 101.

191. E.M.S. Namboodiripad later wrote that Kerala Socialist leadership gave direct organisational assistance to the Travancore struggle. See Kerala: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. Second Edn. (Calcutta, 1968) p. 162.

provincial conferences like the Radical Conferance. E.M.S. Namboodiripad met the Communists of Andhra for the first time in February 1935, while attending a conference of the Congress Socialist Party at Guntur. In October of the same year, while attending a radical conference in Madras, he and P. Krishna Pillai met Sundarayya. They had discussions with him.<sup>192</sup> Ghate, another Communist leader used to visit Malabar frequently during 1935 - 36 and meet Socialists like P. Krishna Pillai, K.A. Keraleeyan and others.<sup>193</sup>

By this time, Communists in India had started participating in the conferences organised by the Congress. This was in line with certain international developments which were taking place then. In 1935, in the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, the Communist Party of India was chided for its failure to join actively in the anti-imperialist struggle. Dimitrov, presenting his thesis on the United Front, stated that "In India Communist must support, extend and participate in all anti-imperialist activities not excluding those which are under national reformist leadership".<sup>194</sup> By this time the A.I.C.S.P. had also changed its earlier strategy of turning the Congress into a Socialist organisation and the emphasis was now shifted to making it an anti-imperialist organisation

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192. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Interview on 21.8.76 at his residence in Trivandrum.

193. K.A. Keraleeyan, Interview.

194. Dimitrov, On United Front. Reprint (New Delhi, 1971) p. 57.

through a United Front.<sup>195</sup> This led to the C.S.P. making an understanding with the C.P.I. and its members were taken into the National Executive of the C.S.P.<sup>196</sup> All this provided the Socialists from Malabar wider opportunities to meet and discuss with Communists, thereby moving closer to the C.P.I.

By the time of the Lucknow session of the Congress in 1936, E.M.S. Namboodiripad had, through Sundarayya, established close contacts with the Communist Centre which was operating in Lucknow. K. Damodaran, then a student of the Kasi Vidya Peedh, and a sympathiser of the C.P.I., had also attended the Lucknow conference.<sup>197</sup>

At the Faizpur session in 1937, attended by Communists like Dinkar Mehta, Bharadwaj and others, it was decided that the members of the National Executive of the A.I.C.S.P. who had become Communists, should function as a faction.<sup>198</sup> After some months, in a meeting held in Calicut and attended by Ghate, a unit of the C.P.I. was formed in Malabar, with E.M.S. Namboodiripad, P. Krishna Pillai, N.C. Sekhar and K. Damodaran as the members.<sup>199</sup> This group functioned as a nucleus inside the Congress in Malabar, disseminating Communist ideas. The formation of the unit was, however, kept secret as the C.P.I. was then an illegal organisation.

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195. Thomas A. Rusch, N. 53, p. 331.

196. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Interview.

197. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N. 71, 17.4.1977, p. 8.

198. Ibid. 8.5.77, pp. 14. The members of the faction were:  
Dr. Azad, Dinkar Mehta, Soli Batliwala, A. Ahammad,  
Sajjad Saheer and E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

199. Ibid. p. 15. Also K. Damodaran, N. 179.



The Transformation of the K.C.S.P. into the C.P.I.

Within two years of the formation of the C.P.I. unit in Malabar, certain developments took place in the international sphere which had for reaching effects on the National Movement in India. By September 1939, Germany and England were at war with each other and in the same month, Hitler signed a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union. So to the Communists in India, Britain became the immediate enemy rather than Germany. The Socialists in Malabar, seizing this as an opportunity for striking for freedom, accelerated the anti-war, anti-imperialist struggle. During the last two months of 1939, there were vigorous anti war demonstrations and meetings in Malabar, almost all the meetings being held under the auspices of the K.C.S.P. with its leaders as main speakers.<sup>200</sup> While this was gaining momentum in Malabar, the national leadership, both of the Congress and the C.S.P., were vacillating without forming a clear-cut policy regarding the World War. Inside the A.I.C.S.P. leadership, a schism developed centering around the attitude towards Russia. While M.R. Masani, Mehta and others resigned, others chose to remain within the party. Malabar, however, was not affected by such schisms. The Socialists in Malabar did not share the anti-Russian stand of Masani and others. To them, Russia was an example to be followed, a fact which they explicitly stated in speeches in various meetings.

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200. Public (Genl.) Dept., G.O. 2010, Dtd. 17.1.1939  
(T.N.A.).

Secondly, the K.C.S.P. leadership had, by this time, moved closer to Marxism and the C.P.I. and the members did not remain as 'pure Socialists'. So the conditions created by the war, the indecisive nature of the Congress leadership, the schism in the leadership and the inability to follow the official leadership of the A.I.C.S.P. which was then playing the role of a loyal opposition, all presented a situation which necessitated an organisation quite different from the existing one, to carry on the anti-imperialist movement. So after a series of meetings in December 1939, it was finally decided to join the Communist Party of India and in the Pinarayi meeting towards the end of December, the entire K.C.S.P. was transformed into the Malabar unit of the C.P.I..<sup>201</sup>

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201. N.E. Balaram, N. 87, pp. 151 - 154. Also E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Interview, K. Damodaran, Interview.

APPENDIX I

ORGANISATION

- Name - The name of the party is the Kerala Congress Socialist Party.
- Objects - The object of the party is to establish a Socialist Government in India.
- Members - Congress members, non communalists and those prepared to work according to the programme of the party could be members of the party.

The ~~Managing~~ Committee will have power to oust those who act against the objectives and the programme of the party.

The party members should give 5% of their income to the funds of the party.

A meeting of the party will be held once a year and the party will have every right over its activities and framing rules and regulations. The Managing Committee composed of 10 members elected at the annual session of the party will have the full powers of the party. A District Committee will be appointed in each District and those Committees should bring into force the directions of the Managing Committee. The Managing Committee should meet at least once a month.

Source: Under Secretary's Safe No. 867.

Dtd. 20.12.1934 (T.N.A.).

APPENDIX II

PROGRAMME OF WORK

1. To work very actively within the Congress, to have the aims and objects and the programmes of the Socialists recognised by the Indian Congress.
2. To establish agricultural associations and trade unions in the country and also to interfere in those already in existence and to create a strong movement by participating in the depressed economic fight of agriculturists and labourers to secure complete independence and Socialism.
3. To organise Youth Leagues, Womens Associations and Volunteer Corps to secure the Cooperation of Youth and Women.
4. To endeavour to secure to the subjects of Native States their public rights to secure their cooperation for the party.
5. To combat strongly all wars and to utilise such occasions to strengthen the national fight.
6. Not to enter into any pact or agreement with the British Government in regard to administration of the country.
7. To help the strikes of labourers and agriculturists.
8. To boycott British goods and all organs obstructing national progress.

Source: Under Secretary's safe No. 897.

Dated : 20.12.1934 (T.N.A.).

APPENDIX III

REORGANISATION OF THE K.C.S.P.

Divisional Committees.

1. The Divisional Committee should be formed by members after a Divisional Conference.
2. The Divisional Committee members should have been members of the K.C.S.P. for at least 3 years.
3. The Divisional Committee Secretary should be elected in the Divisional Conference.
4. The Division should be divided into zones and its boundaries demarcated by the Divisional Committee members. The groups working in these zones should submit the report of their activities to the respective Divisional Secretaries, who in turn should send a condensed version to the General Secretary through central office.
5. The various group secretaries of a zone should meet at least once in a month and the zone secretaries in a division should meet once in 3 months.
6. The members of the Executive Committee are also ex-officio members of the Divisional Committees of their respective native places.
7. The Divisional Conferences should elect separate workers and peasants sub-committee in which the Secretary of the Divisional Committee will be a member.

8. These sub-committees should submit their reports after studying about their respective conditions and problems.
9. The groups and the Divisional Committees should not publish their group proceedings or issue independent statements. They should only report about activities or render their opinion and advices to the Executive Committee. At the same time they will have every independence to carry on propaganda work in their respective divisions.

Source: Prabhatam, 26.6.1939.

APPENDIX IV

RESOLUTIONS PASSED IN THE ALL MALABAR KARSHAKA SANGHAM  
CONFERENCE AT CHEVAYUR ON 21.12.1938.

I. The following clauses should be included in the proposed Tenancy Amendment Act:

(1) The custom of paying an amount equivalent to one years rent as Munpāttom by the Verumpāttakkār should be abolished. The fair rent should be fixed for those Kānakkār who had paid only a nominal amount as kānom.

(2) The fair rent should be fixed on half of the net produce and not on full produce as is the case. The fair rent should be calculated after reducing an amount which is  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  times the amount of seed sown and not on  $2 \frac{1}{2}$  times which is the prevalent practice.

(3) In other places (i.e. Kasargod) the fair rent fixed according to the Tenancy Act should be enforced.

(4) The Tenancy Legislation should include fallow land cultivation and pepper cultivation.

(5) The practise of evicting a tenant by the landlord for this cultivation should be stopped.

(6) The practise of Policceluthu should be abolished.

II. We request the Ministry to put into practise a system of taxing only those whose income exceeded a particular amount and to exempt all others whose income is below this specific amount.

The practise of attaching the standing crops cultivated by the tenant for the landlord's failure to pay tax, should be stopped immediately.

- III. The failure of the Monsoons this year resulted in crop failure. The Government should reduce land tax and also force jennies to reduce pāttom.
- IV. Proclamation of the Goal: This conference proclaims the ultimate goal as the establishment of a social order after the disintegration of the dominance of the jennies and the capitalists. The main impediment in the way to attain this goal is British Imperialism. The establishment of an administrative system which is completely free from British Imperialism is the primary duty of the agriculturists. This conference requests all agriculturists to cooperate with the Congress and strengthen it to attain this goal.
- V. This conference congratulates the Congress Ministries in the provinces which have passed the Agriculturist Relief Bill, the Madras Estate Act Amendment Bill and the U.P. Tenancy Bill.
- VI. This conference protests over the issue of the circular by the sub-collector to destory the peasant movement developing in Chirakkal, Kottayam and Kasargod taluks and also over the police rule under the supervision of the authorities, in Chirakkal and Kasargod taluks. This conference states the right of the peasants to use methods like refusing to pay rent and tax and resorting to social boycott and assert the determination to use these methods if forced to. While doing so, the conference also proclaims that in the present conditions



in which a Congress Ministry functions and acts like the Agricultural Relief Bill are passed, the peasants have not resorted to a no rent, no tax campaign.

- VII. Wars are waged by imperialist powers to make other countries depended on them. In case of a war, the freedom struggle should be intensified.
- VIII. The conference regrets the setting aside of the request to remove the Hitchcock Memorial, by the Madras Government. The memorial should be removed without waiting for demonstrations demanding its removal.
- IX. We request the Madras Government to instigate the central Government to impose a custom duty on foreign good imported to India in order to save Indian merchandise from ruin.
- A law should be enunciated reducing rent and tax by half with regard to coconut cultivation as the price of coconut is decreasing steadily.
- X. We demand the abolition of the Management system for educational progress, redress of the grievances stated by the Teachers Union and the recognition of the Union and we proclaim our full fledged support to the teachers movement.

Source: The Mathrubhumi, 21.12.1938.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM UNDERGROUND YEARS TO INDEPENDENCE

The transformation of the K.C.S.P. into the C.P.I. did not lead to a radical change in the political activity in Malabar. The communists retained their position in the K.P.C.C. Working inside the Congress, they tried to transform it into a militant body by engaging in an uncompromising agitation against imperialism. This was different from the position of the C.P.I. at the national level where it had two choices: Either it could continue the alliance with the Gandhian leadership of the Congress or it could attempt to lead a more vigorous movement against British imperialism and the war. That the C.P.I. turned to the second alternative is clear from the Polit Bureau resolution of October, 1939.<sup>1</sup> The resolution declared the war as imperialist and stated that the task was "the revolutionary utilization of the war crisis for the achievement of national freedom".<sup>2</sup> As different from this, the Congress Communists in Malabar, being in control of the K.P.C.C., did not have to create a strong anti war feeling among the people as a pre-requisite for moving the Congress towards struggle. They rather led the struggle against imperialism and war in a more vigorous way while remaining as

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1. P.C. Joshi, Communist Reply to Congress Working Committee Charges (Bombay, 1945), p. 35.

2. Ibid. For full text of the resolution, see pp. 35 - 39.

Congress members. Their retention of the seats in the K.P.C.C., while on the one hand was motivated by the fact that the C.P.I. was still illegal and that the Congress alone provided a strong political platform for the struggle, and on the other, was sanctioned by the C.P.I. leadership. The Independence Day Manifesto issued by the C.P.I. in January, 1940, proclaimed the party's loyalty to the Congress while at the sametime picturing the world situation as one of deep crisis of capitalism.<sup>3</sup> So the year 1940 witnessed militant and aggressive demonstrations in Malabar which turned violent in many places resulting in the death of both policemen and C.P.I. workers. Though this violence was not intentional, the Congress High Command was greatly perturbed and the K.P.C.C. was suspended. The rightist elements in the K.P.C.C., who had earlier tried every conceivable methods to stem the growing tide of unrest against war and the British Government, were now put in charge of the Congress organisation. We shall discuss in the first section, the happenings up to the removal of the ban on the C.P.I. towards the middle of 1942. The emergence of the C.P.I. from underground and its activities upto India's independence will be discussed in the second section.

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3. Gene. D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, Communism in India (Bombay, 1960) p. 178.

PART I

FROM IMPERIALIST WAR TO PEOPLE'S WAR

1. The Struggle to Control the K.P.C.C.

By the end of the second week of January, 1940, the rift between the rightists and the Congress Communists became more marked. The K.P.C.C. nominated only Congress Communists to the District Board elections. The rightists declined to contest and published a manifesto accusing the Congress Communists of working against Gandhi's leadership.<sup>4</sup> The main point of attack of the rightists against the Communists boiled down to this - that the Socialists were working against Gandhian principles.

Earlier in January, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and 40 other members of the K.P.C.C. had issued a manifesto denouncing the Independence Day Pledge prescribed by the Congress Working Committee. Referring to the spining clause in the pledge, they stated that:

"the clause is an inseparable concomitant of the Congress leadership which aims at postponing the struggle as long as possible ..... When such a struggle has become inevitable, isolating all revolutionary forces from the fight and

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4. Home Dept., Political, File No.18/1 of 1940. (N.A.I.)

finally making the way clear for some compromise which is the inevitable characteristic and end of all satyagrahas. The pledge has only served to create a quarrel on the issue of the importance of charka with a view to hide the fundamental differences which exists between those who believe that this way is an imperialist one and who do not so believe, between those who desire the continuance of the negotiations with the Viceroy and others who think it is high time to stop such negotiations and finally between those who consider this as the fittest occasion to commence struggle and others who think such a course will be dangerous ..... We have no faith in the fundamental principles underlying the charkha and the village industry."<sup>5</sup>

The statement is illustrative of the Congress Communist's differences with the Congress High Command. Secondly, it reveals clearly their attitude towards war. The independence of thought and the courage to come out openly against the Congress High Command is also noticeable. This defiance, borne out of ideological differences, was to continue for 7 more months and was to culminate in the suspension of the Communist dominated K.P.C.C. after the September 15 incidents.

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5. Cited in Subbarayan's Report in A.I.C.C. Papers, F. No. p.11, 1942 - 46. (N.M.M.L.)

The last meeting of the K.P.C.C. before the expiry of the term of office bearers was held on February 15 at Calicut, in which 87 members out of 97 were present. Abdur Rahiman was elected as the President of the K.P.C.C. defeating K. Kelappan. P. Narayanan Nair and Manjunatha Rao were elected Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. K.P. Gopalan, Chandroth, Keraleeyan and others were elected to the Working Committee. More than half among those who were elected to the A.I.C.C. were Communists. After the election some of the members of the Gandhi Seva Sangham staged a walkout. A resolution was presented in the meeting which urged the Congress to stop all mediatory talks with Britain and to prepare the nation for a country wide struggle. M.P. Govinda Menon moved an amendment adding after struggle "under Gandhi's leadership and as per his programme of work". When put to vote, the amendment was lost and all the Gandhi Seva Sangham members walked out.<sup>6</sup>

At the all India level, the C.P.I. had softened its attitude towards the Congress leadership, which it had earlier dubbed as reactionary. The emphasis, now was to build up a strong anti-war, anti-imperialist movement. With the conclusion of Russia's treaty with Germany, the British imperialism was seen as the immediate enemy. This necessitated the strengthening of the Congress as an anti-imperialist organisation. A split

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6. The Mathrubhumi, 16.2.1940.

in the Congress was to be avoided at this critical point and the Congress Communists in Malabar tried to arrive at a compromise with the rightists by including Kelappan and P.K. Moideen Kutty in the Satyagraha Council on April, 15, 1940.<sup>7</sup> But this did not succeed. Condemning the relation as an 'unreal alliance', they tendered their resignation from the Council on the next day itself.<sup>8</sup>

After this incident, the K.P.C.C. met at Calicut on May 4. Kelappan in his speech raised doubts about the right or the ability of those who did not believe in Gandhism programme of non-violent satyagraha to lead the movement. So he wanted them to leave the campaign to those who had great faith and belief in the Gandhian programme. Kelappan then moved a resolution to form a Satyagraha Committee in which the Gandhi Sevites had a majority. As this was not carried, he, along with M.P. Govinda Menon, staged a walk out. A resolution condemning the action of the Gandhi Sevites was passed. Iftikarudhin and T. Prakasam, who had attended the meeting, put forward a compromise proposal by which P.C. Sankar, P.K. Moideen Kutty, M.P. Govinda Menon and C.K. Govindan Nair were made members of the Working Committee.<sup>9</sup> Every effort was made to avert a complete split in the K.P.C.C. in the meeting on 19 May, at Cannanore. The main topic of discussion was about police repression. By this time, about 270 workers

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7. Ibid., 16.4.1940.

8. Ibid., 18.4.1940.

9. Ibid., 5.5.1940 and 7.5.1940.

were arrested for participating in various strikes that had broken out in Malabar. There were lathi charges in Pappinisseri, Ponnani and Calicut.<sup>10</sup>

At this time the A.I.C.C. was showing signs of moderation in the struggle against imperialism. A section of the Congress members openly expressed their resentment over the Congress vacillation. This compromising tendency of the Congress was criticised in an article which appeared in the Comintern in June. It urged the C.P.I. to "ride this revolutionary wave to power".<sup>11</sup>

In the same month, the police cracked down on Congress Communists. Restriction orders were passed against them and their houses were searched and Communist pamphlets were seized.

In Malabar, where the Congress did not show any moderation, Abdur Rahiman, Chandroth and P. Narayanan Nair were put behind bars on preventive detention.<sup>12</sup> A.K. Gopalan had, on the advice of the Party, shifted his work to Tamil Nad as there was a summons order pending against him.<sup>13</sup> The Prabhatam Press was searched and some Communist literature was seized. The houses of E.M.S. Namboodiripad and the Secretary of the Cannanore Town Congress Committee were searched. Karl Marx's Address to the Communist League was

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10. Ibid., 21.5.1940.

11. Gene. D. Overstreet, N.3, p. 186.

12. P. Narayanan Nair, Aranūrrāntilūde, Malayalam (Kottayam, 1973) p. 209.

13. A.K. Gopalan, In the Cause of the People, (New Delhi, 1973) p. 136.



confiscated from the later's house. In the search conducted in the union office of Cannanore Beedi Workers, a pamphlet captioned Marxist and some placards with anti-war slogans written on them were found.<sup>14</sup>

Abdur Rahiman and Narayanan Nair being President and Secretary of the K.P.C.C. respectively, their arrest led to fresh infighting between the rightists and the Congress Communists. The former, seeing this as an opportunity to capture the K.P.C.C., stated that the K.P.C.C. meeting which was reported to have been convened at Cannanore on 19 July was unconstitutional and proposed to hold a meeting on 25th at Perintalmanna.<sup>15</sup>

According to the decision taken in the K.P.C.C. meeting, Anti-Repression Day was observed on July 21 throughout Malabar. Major meetings were held in 17 places.<sup>16</sup> There were procession by workers and peasants in Calicut and Cannanore.<sup>17</sup> The workers and peasants were participating in large scale, in political demonstrations. The anti-imperialist movement was progressing well in Malabar.

In the first week of July, the K.P.C.C. Working Committee met at Calicut. The proceedings were kept secret. However, it was reported that a resolution was passed condemning police repression and the activities of the Gandhi Seva

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14. The Mathrubhumi, 9.6.1940.

15. Ibid., 23.7.1940.

16. Public (Genl.) Dept., G.O.2135, Dtd.29.10.1940 (T.N.A.).

17. The Mathrubhumi, 23.7.1940 and 24.7.1940.

Sangh.<sup>18</sup> Finding it impossible to bring the rightists into the movement against imperialism, the leftists decided to go ahead with the programme, even if it meant splitting the Congress. At the same time, the rightists decided to fight it out. A rival meeting of the K.P.C.C. was held at Palghat in which P.K. Moideenkutty and C.K. Govindan Nair were elected President and Secretary, respectively. A resolution condemning the activities of the leftists was passed.<sup>19</sup>

The schism in the Congress in Kerala which led to the formation of two K.P.C.C.s was discussed in the Wardha Ganj Working Committee meeting of the A.I.C.C. Pattabhi Sitaramayya was deputed to elect new office bearers for the Congress in Kerala.<sup>20</sup> Pattabhi visited Calicut on September 1. On the 2nd, K.T. Kunhiraman Nambiar was elected President and K. Damodaran the Secretary of the K.P.C.C.<sup>21</sup> Pattabhi addressed meetings in Tellicherry, Cannanore, Perintalmanna, Ponnani and Feroke. In some of the meetings, slogans like "Down with landlordism", "Inquilab Zindabad", "Kisan Mazdoor Raj Zindabad" and Communist Party Zindabad" were shouted.<sup>22</sup>

But this victory of the Congress Communists did not last long. In their bid to turn the Congress into a militant body, the Communists had stretched the rather rigid Congress organisation too far and upto now the Congress had shown willingness to accommodate their radical ideas and activities. But events in September forced the Congress High Command to act

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18. Ibid., 10.8.1940.

19. Ibid., 11.8.1940.

20. Ibid., 21.8.1940.

21. Ibid., 3.9.1940.

22. Ibid., 3.9.1940.

in favour of the rightists in the K.P.C.C. Obviously, accommodation had reached the end of its possibilities.

Having won tacit recognition of their hold over the K.P.C.C., the **Communists** resolved to observe a Protest Day against Police Repression on September 15. Meetings, defying the ban, were held in 15 places. In Valluvanad, there were no meetings as they were cancelled by M.P. Govinda Menon, President of the Taluk Congress Committee. In Calicut, the procession was lathi charged and dispersed but the meeting was held in the evening. Nineteen persons, including Manjunatha Rao and A. Damu, were arrested.<sup>23</sup> In Morazha, near Pappinisseri, the crowd resorted to stone throwing as soon as the S.I. ordered a lathi charge. The S.I. of Talipparamba fired two shots from his pistol and was felled to the ground by a big stone. The S.I. of Baliapatam and 4 constables were struck to the ground. The Sub-Magistrate, the S.I. of Talipparamba and the remaining constables escaped from the scene. The S.I. of Baliapatam was found dead later and out of the 4 constables wounded, one died in hospital.<sup>24</sup> At Tellicherry, as a result of lathi charge the public became riotous and resorted to stone throwing. In the hussle that followed, 6 members of the police party received injuries and one died later in the hospital.<sup>25</sup>

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23. Ibid., 17.9.1940.

24. Ibid., 19.9.1940.

25. Ibid., 21.9.1940. See also Home Political Dept. F. No.5/18 of 1940 (N.A.I.).

The A.I.C.C. members were 'stunned' on hearing about the September 15 incidents, as they had informed the K.P.C.C. not to defy orders under section 144. The General Secretary of the K.P.C.C. informed Nanda Koliyar and P. <sup>u</sup>Subharayan who had come to enquire about the incidents, that the A.I.C.C. directive was not received in the office.<sup>26</sup> The K.P.C.C. was suspended and an ad-hoc committee consisting of Nanda Koliyar, M.P. Govinda Menon and C.K. Govindan Nair was formed for the working of the organisation until further orders from the A.I.C.C.<sup>27</sup> This was the culmination of the struggle between the Congress leadership and the K.P.C.C. Earlier, the Congress High Command had always applied brakes to temper down the anti-imperialist, anti-war movement in Malabar whenever the Congress Communists tried to push it to a more militant plain. Thus, the Anti-Repression Day called for on the 26 May, was not observed on Gandhi's instruction. Again, a Civil Liberties Day, decided to be observed on August 18, was not observed as the Magistrate had banned it and the Congress High Command was not in favour of the K.P.C.C. defying this ~~pkx~~ ban.<sup>28</sup> At the sametime, Communist leaders were being arrested and the labour volunteers and others who had picketed recruitment to Territorial Force were being

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26. Ibid., 20.9.1940. Subharayan reports that in Calicut, Communists like Manjunatha Rao, K. Damodaran and Sharada Krishnanx had received prohibitory orders by the 14th. See Subharayan's Report in A.I.C.C. Papers, No. 5.

27. Ibid., 14.10.1940.

28. A.I.C.C. Papers, F. No. p. 11, 1942-46. (N.M.M.L.)

put behind bars.<sup>29</sup> So the movement had, by this time reached a stage where remaining within the Congress under Gandhi became a liability. So the Congress Communists in Malabar went ahead with the observation of an Anti-Repression Day inspite of the prohibitory orders.

This action, however, led to their expulsion from the K.P.C.C. leadership. The rightists could step into the vaccum created by the large scale arrests of the Communists - by the end of September 108 people were jailed<sup>30</sup> - as they had not participated in any of the preceding anti war meetings or demonstrations organised by the Communists.

## 2. The Movement Goes Underground.

Though the Socialists in Malabar had a political platform for overt action till September 1940, the underground party unit had started functioning from January 1940 onwards, with Chirakkal as its headquarters.<sup>31</sup> By the middle of 1940, leaders like E.M.S. Namboodiripad and P. Krishna Pillai had gone underground. The other leaders like K. Damodaran and N.C. Sekhar went underground after the September 15 incident. From the sources consulted it is not possible to discuss the nature of the underground organisation. Its chief functions must have been receiving and distributing party pamphlets, form party cells and provide shelters for those who went underground. Most of the leaders who went underground did

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29. A.I.C.C. Papers, F. No. p. 12, Part I, 1939-40.(N.M.M.L.)

30. The Mathrubhumi, 26.9.1940.

31. N.E. Balaram, Keralathile Communist Prasthānam, Part I, Malayalam (Trivandrum, 1973) p. 156.

not go to far off places but only to different parts of Madras.<sup>32</sup> K.A. Keraleeyan was arrested from Madras, N.C. Sekhar from Coimbatore, Ramachandra Nedumgadi from Tirunneveli and A.K. Gopalan from Trichirappally.<sup>33</sup> Subramanya Sharma and C.H. Kanaran had also gone to Madras. C.H. Kanaran returned shortly and acted as the contact between the Central leadership and Malabar.<sup>34</sup> Umanatha Rao, who acted as the link between Party units in Malabar and Madras was also arrested from Madras. P. Krishna Pillai was arrested from Trivandrum. It should be noted that P. Krishna Pillai, K.A. Keraleeyan, K. Damodaran and N.C. Sekhar were arrested by December 1940.<sup>35</sup> It seems that the Party failed to provide safe shelters to the leaders.<sup>36</sup>

### 3. Party Cells and Underground Literature.

The underground party unit had started functioning in January, 1940 with Chirakkal as its head quarters.<sup>37</sup> Party cells were formed in North Malabar with taluk Committees in Kasargod, Chirakkal, Kottayam, Kurumbranad and Calicut and organisers in other taluks.<sup>38</sup>

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32. By Madras it is meant the present Tamil Nad State.

33. A.K. Gopalan, N. 13, p. 143.

34. N.E. Balaram, N. 31, p. 158. The term Madras is used to denote the present Tamil Nad.

35. The Mathrubhumi, 25.3.1941, See also Home Polt, Dept. F. No. 129 of 1941 N.A.I.) and Public (Genl.) Dept. G.O. 297 Dtd. 12.12.1941 ( T.N.A.).

36. N.E. Balaram writes that most of the leaders were arrested soon after they went underground which could have been avoided if the Party had taken a little more care. See N.E. Balaram, No. 31, p. 160. This was not confined to Malabar. We get similar reports admitting the arrest of most of the party leaders due to inadequate preparations for underground operations. See Chalasanani Vasudeva Rao, Bharata Communist Party Nirmana Charithrea, cited in Gene. Overstreet, N.3, p.184.

37. N.E. Balaram, N. 31, p. 156.

38. Ibid.

The formation of Party cells was going on inspite of strict police vigil till 1942. A police raid conducted in Kallayi in 1941 provides an insight into the working of the cell. The police party heard the administration of oath - "I ~~do~~ believe in the principles of C.P.I. I will not let out secrets of the Party even if I die".<sup>39</sup> The police also heard Kayyil Krishnan, the organiser of the cell, reading out and explaining the Communist Bulletin No. 8, which gives an account of the war favourable to the Soviet Union and which condemns the Japanese attempts to interfere with the despatch of munitions from U.S.A. to Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> The report of the Firka Secretary which was seized from Kayyil Krishnan's house, reveals that there were regular cell meetings. Pamphlets were read, explained and discussed in study classes. Among the 6 people arrested in the raid, one was a teacher, 3 were Beedi workers and the last one, a cooly.<sup>41</sup>

Pamphlets were circulated extensively. In addition to two monthlies - Comrade and Communist Bulletin - pamphlets like "Against Imperialist Challenge Hurl People's Might" and Proletarian Path were widely distributed. The C.P.I. unit of Kerala, published monthly notes, cyclostyled and distributed pamphlets like "Bury the Police Rule". The 37th issue of the circular was published towards the end

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39. Public (Genl.) Dept., G.O. 1608. Dtd. 6.6.1942.(T.N.A.)

40. Ibid. The contents of the Bulletin are given in Home Polt. Dept. F. No. 241/41 of 1941 (N.A.I.).

41. Ibid.

of 1941. Some Taluk Committees also issued pamphlets.<sup>42</sup>

Among the pamphlets distributed, priority was given to Karshaka Sangham activities. Party circular No.37 advocated direct action if the jāthas to the Tahsildar failed to achieve any fruits. It advised the workers to fix up a fair price to paddy and pay only that amount. It further added that this should be done in an organised way and not by individuals separately.<sup>43</sup> Circular No. 14 stated that there should be two secret workers in a Karshaka Sangham unit for maintaining stability. These workers were not to work openly and were to be maintained out of the 'rice dole' collections (Rice collected from each family by volunteers).<sup>44</sup>

Testifying to the operational ability of the Party, posters appeared all over North Malabar in January, 1940 and all over South Malabar in January, 1941.<sup>45</sup> On September 15 posters captioned "we will not forget this" (obviously the September 15 incidents of the previous year) appeared in many places in Malabar.<sup>46</sup> These, in addition to proclaiming the existence of the Party units all over Malabar also popularised the Party policies.

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42. Home Polt. Dept. F. No.7/9 of 1941 (N.A.I.) See also Public (General). Dept. G.O. 2538. Dtd. 10.11.1941 (T.N.A.).

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. N.E. Balaram, N. 31, p. 166.

46. The Mathrubhumi, 18.9.1941. See also Public (Genl.) Dept. G.O. 2538, N. 42.



K. Damodaran remarked that it was during the period of underground activities that the maximum number of Party literature was produced.<sup>47</sup> Though these Party literature, study classes and discussions, the members were taught the basic tenets of Marxism. In fact, the fundamental principles of Marxism were learnt during the years of underground operations. E.M.S Nambudiripad has written that he had not read any fundamental book on Marxism before he joined the Party and that he learnt about them during 1940 - 42, while in underground.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. Peasant Movement Develops in Kasargod.

The anti imperialist movement in Malabar had its reverberations in the neighbouring Kasargod taluk also. By the beginning of 1941, the Karshaka Sanghams on the borders of North Malabar and in Kasargod and Hosdurg taluks were actively demanding the abolition of illegal exactions like Vasi, Nuri and Vechukānal. The Kayyur unit of the Karshaka Sangham decided to organise a jātha on March 30 to the palace of the Neeleswaram Raja, the biggest landlord in Hosdurg taluk. A propaganda jātha was undertaken by the Karshaka Sangham volunteers on the 25th.<sup>49</sup> Tension

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47. K. Damodaran, Interview, 29.3.76.

48. E.M.S. Nambudiripad, "Tiriñjunōkkumbōl" in Desabhimani Weekly, 27.2.1977, p: 8. It should be noted that E.M.S. Nambudiripad was one of the chief theoreticians in the Kerala unit of the C.P.I.

49. V.V. Kunhambu, Kayyūr Samara Charitram, Malayalam, (Trivandrum, 1974), p. 54.

was thus mounting up in Kayyur. On the next day a police man, who had come to Kayyur, was beaten up while he was sleeping. Early morning on the 27, the S.I., accompanied by a batch of policemen arrived and beat up some Karshaka Sangham members who were sleeping in the tea shop of Madathil Appu, searched some neighbouring houses and arrested V.V. Kunhambu and T.V. Kunhiraman.<sup>50</sup> The news about these spread throughout the neighbourhood. On 28, two jathas from Palayi and Kayyur began marching towards Cheriakkara. On the way, they found Subbarayan, the constable who had beaten up some of the Karshaka Sangham members the previous day, standing in front of a toddy shop. They caught hold of him and made him walk in front of the procession holding a red flag. Approaching Kayyur, he, in a desperate bid to escape, jumped to the adjacent Neelaswaram river. The mob threw stones at him and he was drowned.<sup>51</sup> As V.V. Kunhambu has testified, the constable was drowned because he couldn't swim wearing his full uniform.<sup>52</sup>

A 'reign of terror' followed this incident in which the local police and the M.S.P. unleashed inhuman torture on the people. A case was charged with 61 accused, the first three being Madathil Appu, V.V. Kunhambu and E.K. Nayanar.<sup>53</sup> By the third week of April, 50 persons were arrested and many houses searched.<sup>54</sup> The Karshaka Sanghams

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50. Ibid., pp. 54 - 55.

51. Home Dept., G.O. 678, Dtd. 24.3.1943 (T.N.A.).

52. V.V. Kunhambu, N. 49, p. 61.

53. Ibid., p. 68.

54. The Mathrubhumi, 19.4.1941 and 26.4.1941.

of South Kanara were banned. Earlier, the Malabar Karshaka Sangham was also made an illegal organisation.<sup>55</sup>

The judgement in the Kayyur riot case was delivered on February, 1942, Madathil Appu, Chirukandan, Podara Kunhambu Nair and Pallikkal Abubakkar were sentenced to death and 18 others were convicted to varying terms of imprisonment. V.V. Kunhambu and 38 others were acquitted.<sup>56</sup>

An appeal was made in the High Court of Madras. But the Court confirmed the death sentence passed on the 4 Karshaka Sangham workers. The mercy petition was rejected by the Viceroy. In England, D.M. Pritt and V.K. Krishna Menon worked in vain to submit a petition in the Privy Council. But all these efforts failed to save their life. <sup>h</sup>outing "Communist Party Zindabad", they attained martyrdom on March 29, 1943.<sup>57</sup>

While it is true that the Party literature advocated an all out struggle against the British, demonstrations which turned violent in Mattannur, Morazha, Kayyur and other places cannot be regarded as the result of a deliberate plan. In other words, the attack on the police cannot be taken as indicative of the movement becoming<sup>ing</sup> violent. The police was to a large extent responsible for it turning violent. The S.I. of

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55. Ibid., 26.4.1941.

56. V.V. Kunhambu, N. 49, pp. 88 - 89.

57. Ibid., pp. 90 - 102.

Pappinisseri was very notorious and some of the villagers had personal animosity with him.<sup>58</sup> The constable who died in Mattannur had created resentment among some of the villagers.<sup>59</sup> The judgement delivered on Kayyur case contained criticism of the character of the constable who had died. So the policemen who died had attained notoriety before. Added to this was the use of wrong tactics by the police in trying to disperse the crowd with force, thereby provoking violence.<sup>60</sup> It was these factors which caused the demonstrations to turn violent more than anything else. At the same time, one must not overlook the fact that the policy of the Communist dominated K.P.C.C. in disobeying the prohibitory orders was in line with the Manifesto issued by 40 members of the K.P.C.C. in January 1940, denouncing the compromising tendencies of the Congress leadership. What is emphasised here is that the specific act of assaulting the policemen was a spontaneous act, the spontaneity being generated by the situation itself and not one which was advocated by the party literature.

#### 5. Imperialist War becomes People's War.

Meanwhile, certain international developments of this period exerted decisive influence in Indian politics.

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58. The news about his death was received with joy in Ponnani as he had molested some Muslim women while he was in Ponnani. K. Damodaran, Interview, 29.3.1976. See also Report of Dist. Magistrate to Chief Secretary Madras Government, In Home Polt. Dept. F.No.5/18 of 1940 (N.A.I.).

59. Public (Genl.) Dept. G.O. 2470. Dtd. 14.12.1940. (T.N.A.).

60. The Home Secretary noted that a campaign of protest can easily turn violent and warned that without adequate forces one should not excite g crowds. See Home Polt. Dept., F.No. 5/18 of 1940. N. 58.

In June, 1941, Soviet Union was attacked by Nazi Germany which resulted in the Russian entry to the II World War on the side of the Allies. This led to rethinking among Communists all over the world regarding the characterisation of the war. The present task, it was stated, was the defense of the Soviet Motherland. But the Indian situation was not discussed in the Communist journals in Russia and England till September, 1941.<sup>61</sup> In India, the issue generated heated debate both among the party veterans who were in prison and those who were underground. The official policy of the C.P.I. remained the same and it continued to regard the war as imperialist. The pamphlet entitled "Soviet German War" issued by the Polit Bureau in July, 1941, clearly stated that "our attitude towards British Government and its imperialist war remained what it was".<sup>62</sup> This policy enunciated by the underground C.P.I. organisation under the leadership of P.C. Joshi was in tune with the prevalent mood of the people and the national fervour which, by virtue of their being in close contact with the masses, they were able to discern. The Communist leaders in Deoli Jail, however, advocated that the C.P.I. must give unconditional support to war and British war efforts. "The Deoli Thesis" propounding "People's War" slogan was smuggled out of prison.<sup>63</sup> "A Note From Jail Comrades" stated that the task of the Communists was to isolate the main enemy, and that the war was a "War of the International Working class to defend Socialism and Safeguard

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61. Gene. D. Overstreet, N. 3, p. 192.

62. Quoted in Acharya Narendra Deva, Socialism and the National Revolution (Bombay, 1946) p. 152.

63. Gene. D. Overstreet, N. 3, p.195. The authors write that the view that India must support British War efforts dominated in the discussions in Prisons. We get reports to the contrary at least in case of one prison - that of Vellore. See A.K. Gopalan, N.13, p. 147.

the future Revolutionary Governments".<sup>64</sup> The People's War slogan began to appear in the Party press in India from October, 1941 onwards.<sup>65</sup> The Party Letter No. 55 admitted that "we" - i.e. those who were underground - "did not react on the same sound proletarian manner as our Comrades in jail did."<sup>66</sup> The Polit Bureau of the underground C.P.I. formally accepted the People's War policy on December, 15.<sup>67</sup> The key slogan propounded was: "MAKE THE INDIAN PEOPLE PLAY PEOPLES ROLE IN THE PEOPLES WAR".<sup>68</sup>

Direct confrontation with the authorities leading to riots (organised by the C.P.I.) vanished from Malabar in the years to come. The characterisation of the war as "Peoples War" by the party was obviously followed by a decision to abstain from violent demonstrations and to support war efforts. This won for the Party recognition of the Government and the order passed in 1934 banning C.P.I. was cancelled on July 23, 1942.<sup>69</sup> Several of the arrested members of the former K.C.S.P. were released and orders of restriction passed on 53 persons were cancelled.<sup>70</sup>

Thus ended the period of underground activities. The period is significant in that for the first time the party experienced the need for an underground machinery. Though

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64. "A Note From Jail Comrades", Information Document No.11/48, (Archives of Contemporary History, J.N.U.)

65. Gene. D. Overstreet, N.3, p. 193.

66. Party letter No. 55, Dtd. 13 December, 1941 in Information Document, N. 64.

67. Gene. D. Overstreet, N. 3, p. 193.

68. P.C. Joshi , N.1, p. 45 (Original emphasis).

69. The Mathrubhumi, 23.7.1942. See also Public (Genl.) Dept. G.O. 2152. Dtd. 23.7.1942. (T.N.A.).

70. Public (Genl.) Dept., G.O. 2506 Dtd. 24.8.1944.(T.N.A.)

the underground party apparatus had been swung into action by January 1940, it was not well-knit or strong enough to withstand police repression.<sup>71</sup> The movement did not succumb to police repression mainly because of a dedicated cadre which had been built up, through volunteer organisations and study classes by the end of 1940. In the course of underground work, an organisational precision - regular meeting of Party Cells, circulation of pamphlets, group discussions, maintenance and submission of reports to Taluk Committees, chalking out programmes for individual workers, collection of funds etc - emerged.<sup>72</sup>

The period from 1940 to '42 taught the party workers the fundamentals of the underground party machinery and the chief contribution of this was educative. The organisational precision which emerged by '42 was conducive for the smooth functioning of the party organisation after coming into open. It was during the underground years that the fundamental principles of Marxism were taught to the rank and file through widespread distribution of pamphlets and party letters and through study classes. It was during the period of underground activities that the Party unit in Malabar established closer links and helped to consolidate the Communist groups in Travancore and Cochin.<sup>73</sup>

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71. A.K. Gopalan writes that "it was only after September 15, that the Party realized the necessity for a strong underground organisation". See A.K. Gopalan, N.13, p. 142.

72. The police raid in Kallayi is particularly illustrative. See Public (Genl.) Dept., G.O. 1608, No. 39. See also N.E. Balaram, N. 31, pp. 158 - 59.

73. N.E. Balaram, N. 31, p. 157.

From the middle of 1942 onwards, the C.P.I. enters into a new phase of activity. After years of suffering police repression and after two years of underground activity, it could come out and work openly. Part II deals with the Party's activities from gaining legality upto India's Independence in August 15, 1947.

## PART II

### THE C.P.I. AND THE PEOPLE'S WAR POLICY

The C.P.I. was not able to hold a public demonstration or meeting during the first two years of the war. The meetings were in small groups, organised by Party Cells. Inter Cell Communications were performed secretly. From now on these activities were replaced by a spate of public meetings and demonstrations. Towards the second half of 1942, the Party also began to publish a daily, Desabhimani, after collecting a fund.<sup>74</sup> In these, the style of functioning resembled the late 1930's period, the difference being, the Party's stand was 'offensive' in the period where as it was 'defensive' in the later period. The need for meetings, demonstrations and a Party Paper was great mainly because People's War policy meant swiming against the national current. And this needed explanation.

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74. For the fund, E.M.S. Namboodiripad contributed over Rs. 70,000 out of the money obtained by selling his ancestral property. See E.M.S. Namboodiripad, How I became a Communist, (Trivandrum, 1976) p. 147.



One of the first activity undertaken by the C.P.I. after gaining legality was to observe a national week in August and to observe August 2 as "Kayyur Day".<sup>75</sup> As per P.C. Joshi's directive, August 6 and 7 were observed as the "National Demands Day" and the "War Batta Day".<sup>76</sup> In the various meetings that were convened, the Peoples War policy was explained.

In the meantime, on the national plane, the Congress was preparing for an all out confrontation with the British Government. The Cripps Mission had failed to ~~sxx~~ satisfy both the Congress and the Muslim League. The C.W.C. meeting in Wardha passed the Quit India Resolution demanding that the British rule be withdrawn. This was endorsed on 9, August in the A.I.C.C. session in Bombay. Immediately after this, all the top leaders were arrested - the beginning of the large scale arrests which was to follow.<sup>77</sup> In Kerala, the K.P.C.C. was declared an illegal organisation in the first week of August.<sup>78</sup>

The 'August Revolution' was, however, decried by the C.P.I. It organised meetings in which the Congress was requested to abandon the Satyagraha Movement. The public was requested not to participate in the movement as it was not under the leadership of the Congress in the meetings

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75. The Mathrubhumi, 28.7.1942.

76. Ibid, 8.8. 1942.

77. Ibid., 10.8. 1942.

78. V.A. Kesavan Nair, Irumbalikullil, Second Edn., Malayalam, (Calicut, 1954) pp. 164 - 166.

held in Thalikkulam, Ponnani and Palghat on 12th and 13th.<sup>79</sup> In some places the meetings ended in pandemonium. In Chirakkal, on August 30, a section of the crowd walked out and convened another meeting.<sup>80</sup> In the Cannanore meeting on August 14, and also in the meeting at Cherukunnu, there were some disturbances.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout September, meetings were held in many places in Chirakkal taluk and in Ponnani, Tellicherry and Payyanur. In all these meetings, the release of national leaders was demanded.<sup>82</sup> November 1 to 7 was observed as National Unity Week. Meetings were held throughout the week, most of them preceded by rallies in which red uniformed volunteers carrying staves, participated.<sup>83</sup> In Cannanore, Talipparamba and Chovva, Muslim League leaders participated in the meetings and the demand for a separate nation for Muslims-Pakistan - was raised.<sup>84</sup>

In their constant appeals for the release of Congress leaders, the C.P.I. was trying to look national and to gain respectability. At the same time, in inviting Muslim league leaders to participate in their meetings, the C.P.I. was acknowledging the Muslim League as the spokesman of the Muslims and elevating it to the same stature as that of the Congress.

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79. The Mathrubhumi, 14.8.1942.

80. Ibid., 6.9.1942.

81. Ibid., 18.8.1942.

82. Ibid., 19.9.1942 and 24.9.1942.

83. Ibid., See issues 4.11.1942, 5.11.1942, 7.11.1942 and 11.11.1942.

84. Ibid., 12.11.1942.

REACTION TO PARTY POLICY.

The public resentment against the policy of the Communist Party which was reflected in the disturbances at meetings organised by the party now manifested in other sections like the workers and teachers unions. For the first time since the unions were formed under the K.C.S.P. leadership, schisms developed, leading to the formation of rival unions.

Schism in the Trade Union Movement.

The first of such rival or breakaway unions was formed among Beedi Workers. On November 3, the All Kerala National Workers Union was formed in Cannanore in a joint meeting of the workers from 8 weaving factories in Cannanore. A resolution was passed which while acknowledged the fact that it was the K.C.S.P. which had organised workers and led them in struggles, accused the C.P.I. of becoming a reactionary party.<sup>85</sup> This feeling was not confined to the Weaving Factory Workers. On November 17, the United Workers Union was formed in Tellicherry by former C.P.I. workers protesting against the Party policy.<sup>86</sup> A meeting of the Beedi workers in Ponnani on the 11 December, stated that its relationship with the C.P.I. resulted in nothing but misunderstanding. They, then decided to join the National Beedi Workers Union.<sup>87</sup> Under the leadership of Noorudhin, an erstwhile C.S.P. leader, a jātha

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85. Ibid., 7.11.1942.

86. Ibid., 22.11.1942.

87. Ibid., 15.12.1942.

was organised on January 1, 1943. On the same day, the National Beedi Worker's Union was formed in Cannanore with 100 members.<sup>88</sup>

The C.P.I. and the Teacher's Union.

The first reaction against the Party policy by the Teachers Union members came in December, 1942, when the Ponnani Taluk Teacher's Union President resigned from the post, accusing the C.P.I. of using the Union for Party propaganda work.<sup>89</sup> That there were reservations about Communists working inside the Union is clear from the statement made in the joint meetings of the Unions of Chockli, Olivilam and Kariyad, on October 30, 1943. It was stated in the meeting that the Kerala Unit of the C.P.I. had deputed T.C. Narayanan Nambiar and 3 others to work in the Teacher's Movement and to associate it with the C.P.I. It was further stated that this decision outlined in the Party Letter No. 8 issued by the Kerala unit of the C.P.I. had come to the notice of the conference. It was also alleged that the Union Fund was used for Communist propaganda work. The conference resolved not to allow such things and demanded the resignation of those who carried such work.<sup>90</sup>

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88. Ibid., 4.1.1943.

89. Ibid., 30.12.1942. Here it is interesting to note that in the Sixth Annual Conference of the Aided School Teacher's Union held at Tellicherry on January 6, 1943, the Mathrubhumi reported that Communists had participated enthusiastically. The President of the Union, in a letter to the Editor, stated that the Union was not in the hands of the Communists. See Ibid., 9.6.1943.

90. Ibid., 3.11.1943.

Following the Peoples War policy, as is clear from the above, resulted in the C.P.I. losing its influence within the Trade Unions and the Teachers' Union. One cannot from the sources consulted determine the nature of leadership of the rival unions which were formed. No doubt, such formations were abetted by the Congress, eager to gain a foothold among the workers and the teachers. At least in ~~xx~~ one case, that of the Beedi Worker's Unions, Nurudkin, a former C.S.P. leader, took the initiative in forming rival unions. No rival unions were formed among the teachers but the existing Union was no longer under the leadership of the C.P.I. members. On the other hand, any connection with the Party was denied. The C.P.I., at the same time, retained their footing among the peasants, which stood unitedly with the Party.

#### Meetings and Demonstrations.

Throughout the first half of 1943, the pattern of political activity was more or less the same as that of the previous year. But the Government, while allowing ordinary meetings to be convened, viewed with distrust similar activities by the C.P.I. among the peasants and certain peasant meetings and demonstrations were not allowed. Towards the second half of 1943, the Party launched an altogether new mode of activity - Grow More Food Campaign.

In the beginning of the year meetings were held in Kottakkal, Tellicherry, Payyanur, Palghat, Kollam, Cannanore, Mannarghat, Sreekrishnapuram, Kollengode, Perintalmanna and

Ottappalam when Lenin Day was observed on January 21, 1943.<sup>91</sup>  
In Payyanur, there was an Anti-Japanese Poorakkali.<sup>92</sup> Earlier,  
as members of the K.C.S.P., the C.P.I. leaders had utilised  
different forms of propaganda, the prominent among which <sup>was</sup> drama.  
From 1943 onwards prominence was given to folk art and folklore.  
This was an excellent way to propagate the Party policy, as  
the illiteracy in the rural side necessitated the supplanting  
of printed matter with other media<sup>s</sup> of propaganda.

Eventhough demonstrations organised by the C.P.I.  
were allowed after 1942, it did not mean the type of relative  
independence enjoyed by the leftists during 1936-39. The  
Government differentiated between harmless and potentially  
dangerous demonstrations and not all demonstrations were  
allowed. Thus, the C.P.I.'s decision to celebrate 'Purna  
Swaraj Day' on January 26 was not allowed by the Government.  
The holding of the tri-colour flag or the distribution of  
badges were also not allowed.<sup>93</sup> In Perintalmanna, the police  
detained the local leaders and others in the police station  
for two hours. Such obstructive tactis were used in  
Sreekrishnapuram and Vadakara also.<sup>94</sup>

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91. Ibid., See issues 24, 26 and 27.1.1943.

92. Ibid., 27.1.1943. Poorakkali is a folk dance prevalent  
in North Malabar.

93. Ibid., 29.1.1943.

94. Ibid., 1.2.1943.

But it was the peasants organisations which were viewed with great distrust by the Government. The ban on Karshaka Sangham was not withdrawn simultaneously with the withdrawal of the ban on the C.P.I. So it was decided to function under a different name - All Kerala Kisan Sangh. The first meeting of the Sangh was to be convened at Nattika in Ponnani Taluk. The Government, just on the previous day of the meeting, passed an order prohibiting all meetings in Ponnani Taluk. The venue of the meeting was then shifted to Shornmur in Valluvanad Taluk and all the delegates who had come to attend the meeting were asked to proceed to Shornmur. The meeting was prohibited there also. Again the delegates were asked to move on to Calicut, where finally the meeting was held. The indignation over such obstructive tactis was voiced in the meeting.<sup>95</sup>

#### Social and Constructive Work.

The People's War policy led to the political alienation of the C.P.I. The nature and scope of its political activity became limited. At the same time there was increasing popular pressure on the party which on the one hand necessitated the clarification of the People's War policy frequently and on the other, resulted in the waning of the party's influence among the workers and teachers. On the face of this, the C. P. I. could not remain idle

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95. A.K. Poduval, Kerala Karshaka Prasthanathinre Oru Laku Charitram, Malayalam, (Trivandrum, 1969), pp.67-68.

especially in the midst of widespread national sentiment and the consequent increase in the prestige and popularity of the Congress as a result of the Quit India movement. This led to a shift in the activity of the Party. From organisation and agitation, the Party turned to social and constructive work.

The social service rendered by the C.P.I. workers was mainly confined to Cholera stricken areas. In the sphere of constructive work, the workers and peasants were directed to abstain from strikes and to increase production. So the pursuance of the People's War Policy resulted in a reduction in trade union militancy. The best way to cooperate with the British government and to help British war efforts was to abstain from strikes and thus pave the way for increased production in all spheres.

Towards the middle of 43, a Cholera epidemic had broken out throughout Malabar. The C.P.I. workers engaged themselves in educating the people hygienic principles. In Cannanore, towards the end of June, 40 Party workers in 5 squads of 8 visited 793 houses, educating the people on how to eradicate Cholera. In the first week of July, as reported in the Peoples War, 180 red uniformed Volunteers marched to four parts of the town shouting anti-cholera slogans and removed accumulated refuse.<sup>96</sup> In Palghat, the Party Volunteers rendered their helping hand to the Municipality authorities in removing unclaimed dead bodies.<sup>97</sup>

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96. Peoples War, 18.7.1943. Microfilm N.M.M.L.

97. The Mathrubhumi, 10.8.1943.



Grow More Food Campaign and the Kisan Sangh.

The All India Kisan Conference held at Bakna in Punjab in April 1943, had formulated some practical programmes for increasing food production. This programme was incorporated in the pamphlet written by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, published in August. Peasants were asked to eschew all violence and concentrate on food production.<sup>98</sup> The Kerala Kisan Sangh met in September and chalked out a Five Point Programme for increased production and its effective distribution.<sup>99</sup>

In August, the Kerala Kisan Sangh leaders with 6 labourers decided to erect a bund to the canal which overflowed every year destroying crops, in Kodumunda. The number of labourers increased from 6 to 45 the next day and to 70 in the

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98. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, "Krishikkār Nāḍukākkuka", Malayalam, (Calicut, August 1943).

99. A.K. Poduval, N. 95, pp. 69, 70.

The points are given below: Persuade jennies to lend with or without pāttom, uncultivated cultivable land and to cultivate sūch land in a joint effort by the people to save the country. The produce should not be allowed to go into black market and should be distributed through Citizen's Committees.

(2) The money needed for such cultivation should be collected from all classes of people either as loan or as debt.

(3) Convert shallow lands to cultivable lands by building bunds and by pumping out water. Improve agricultural facilities where there were none by constructing canals and by repairing old wells and tanks.

(4) Improve agriculture by using manures to be obtained from Agricultural Department and by cutting down foliage from forests.

(5) Approach the Government and the Agricultural Dept. with exact statistics for growing more g food and to collect a fund for the same as donation.

third day by which time the construction work was complete.<sup>100</sup> Kannenkayal in Ponnani Taluk had been left shallow without being cultivated for years. It was decided to cultivate the land again. A Food Committee of 35 members was formed and a bund was raised and water pumped out.<sup>101</sup> P. Narayanan Nair, the Secretary of the All Kerala Kisan Sangh inaugurated the sowing. A good crop was harvested from there.<sup>102</sup>

It was decided to grow tapioca in fallow lands in Morazha and Andur in Chirakkal taluk. The land tax was paid to the officials. A fund was collected, a fence raised and tapioca was planted in the area. It grew up well. But due to the animosity towards the Kisan Sangh, the authorities deputed M.S.P. to pluck out and destroy the tapioca plants.<sup>103</sup>

Though a detailed programme was chalked out it would seem that they were not carried out in earnest. In Kodumunda, it was only on the third day that 70 people assembled to complete the work. The Government, it would seem, was averse to any activity by the Kisan Sangh in Chirakkal taluk areas. At the same time, the Kisan Sangh did not make the action of the M.S.P. an issue to fight it out because of its policy of cooperation with the Government.

#### Produce More Campaign and Workers.

B.T. Ranadive had presented a report on production in the First Congress of the C.P.I. in Bombay, on 28 May, 1943.

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100. Peoples War, 26.8.1943.

101. Desabhimani, 19.9.1943 (Calicut).

102. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 12, p. 242.

103. Ibid., p. 243.

He advocated a reduction in trade union militancy, abstention from strikes and for the formation of committees to put forward suggestions to eliminate waste and increase production. This report was translated into Malayalam.<sup>104</sup>

Accordingly, the workers of the Star Tile Works in Kallayi put forward 4 suggestions to cut down cost of production and to increase output. The Management in turn agreed to take back all those who had been dismissed and to give 50% batta if the production increased. The workers of Tiruvannur Cotton Mills also proposed some suggestions for increasing production.<sup>105</sup> Some time later, the Common Wealth Factory workers decided not to avail themselves of a holiday during Deepavali and reported for work on that day.<sup>106</sup> The emphasis obviously was on increased production in every sphere.

One cannot evaluate whether the suggestions were put through and whether it led to any substantial increase in production. What is significant is that basic concepts like class war and class enemy paled into insignificance though temporarily. The new entrants to the party during this period grew up in the atmosphere of class collaboration unlike their seniors in the party. To the old timers, the period must have presented a difficult situation since they were now required

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104. B.T. Ranadive, "Tholilālivarḡhaum Dēśarakshayam",  
Translated into Malayalam. (Calicut, 1943).

105. Deshabhimani, 19.9.1943.

106. Ibid., 14.11.1943.

to cooperate with a person whom they had earlier declared as their enemy and exploiter. The difficulties to cope with the new situation reflected in the party organisation also.

Rumblings inside the Party.

Around this time some developments took place within the party organisation. P. Krishna Pillai, the Secretary of the Party, violating the Party clauses and practices, issued a circular disbanding the Party Centre at Malabar. He had taken this decision without consulting C.H. Kanaran or P. Narayanan Nair who were in constant touch with him. Krishna Pillai then dispatched most of the Malabar leaders to various other places. P. Narayanan Nair has written that the action was motivated not by differences over tactics or Party policy but by other things like the attitude of some of the Party workers, their approach to problems, way of life etc., and the criticisms, slanderings and counter-slenderings over these.<sup>107</sup> E.M.S. Namboodiripad's opinion is that the original source of that organisational action was the differences on how to carry on the political line of the People's War. "He couldn't see eye to eye with the way in which the Central Committee and the State Committee were implementing that line".<sup>108</sup> Anyway, Krishna Pillai was persuaded to withdraw the circular through Centre's intervention at the initiative of E.M.S.Namboodiripad.

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107. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 12; pp. 243 - 45.

108. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Interview on 21.9.1976.

A new Party Centre began to function in Malabar, including some new members and some old members.<sup>109</sup> The first major organisational disorder that propped up after the formation of the Party was thus patched up. And it ended as a 'storm in the tea cup'. But as P. Narayanan Nair has written, there was no attempt to rectify the defects which continued as a legacy even after decades.<sup>110</sup>

Accusations and Explanations.

Towards the end of 1944, there was an increased attempt on the part of the Party to explain its policy. It was necessitated by the action of the Congress which accused the C.P.I. for its anti national stand. In its reaction to these accusations, the C.P.I. did not show the same bitterness as that of the Congress and its initial attempts to pacify the Congress is noticeable in activities like convening a meeting to felicitate Jawaharlal Nehru on his 55th birthday.<sup>111</sup>

In November, the released Congress leaders met at Calicut and passed a resolution banning communists from primary membership of Congress. The C.P.I. was accused of taking to "constitutional liberalism" and of betraying and opposing the August Revolution. The C.P.I. launched a campaign to answer the charges with a public meeting in

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109. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 12, p. 245.

110. Ibid. In this connection, it is interesting to note that K. Narayanan Nair, a Party worker in Vadakara, resigned from the Party, complaining against the high handed bureaucratic behaviour of some of the Party Officials and the limitation of the freedom of opinion to Party leaders only. But he later withdrew his resignation. See The Mathrubhumi, 11.1.1944.

111. The Mathrubhumi, 18.11.1944.

Calicut on November 28.<sup>112</sup> Another meeting was convened at Quilon on December 1, presided over by Moyyarth.P. Krishna Pillai, who spoke in the meeting, stated that '42 Movement was not a movement led by the Congress Party. He advocated for the creation of Pakistan for Muslim.<sup>113</sup> In another meeting at Koothupparamb on the 8th, a section of the crowd demanded an apology from Krishna Pillai for calling 4 public workers as fifth colomunists - a charge which on enquiry was proved to be incorrect. On his refusal to do so, there was disturbance~~s~~ and slogans like Mahatama Gandhi Ki Jai were shouted.<sup>114</sup> In Kasargod, a meeting was held under the Presidentship of K.A. Keraleeyan. When Krishna Pillai began to speak some people went up to the dias and stated that they also wanted to speak. A student carrying a tri-colour flag, spoke for 10 minutes interrupting Pillai's speech. As the uproar increased, the police intervened and the meeting was adjourned.<sup>115</sup> On December 22, in a meeting convened at Nediyruppu it was stated that the Congress pamphlet which contained an implicit allegation that the C.P.I. was receiving bribes had come to its notice. The charge~~s~~ about the acceptance of bribes was denied. But it was admitted that the Government gave some 'concessions' of which the party members also were beneficiaries. The Mathrubhumi of January 4, 1945, contained a note given by

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112. Peoples War, 17.12. 1944.

113. The Mathrubhumi, 3.12.1944.

114. Ibid., 14.12.1944.

115. Ibid., 20.12.1944.

the Party explaining the term 'concessions' as rations and such other measures.<sup>116</sup>

Towards the middle of 1945, Congress leaders like Kelappan, C.K. Govindan Nair and others were released from jail. They were given reception in public meetings in which they severely criticised Communists for their 'anti-national stand'. The C.P.I., then started a campaign to explain the Party policy. Two booklets were brought out and distributed.<sup>117</sup>

The accusations levelled against the party and the party's defense of its policy revolved round a central issue - the characterisation of the War. Following the People's War policy, the C.P.I. lost much of its prestige, its influence among various sections and by 1945, some leaders began to leave the party. In September, Vishnu Bharateeyan, an erstwhile leader of the K.C.S.P. and a leader of the C.P.I. resigned from the Party as he found it difficult to work in accordance with the Party programme.<sup>118</sup>

#### C.P.I. Contests Elections.

The Viceroy had announced on his return to India in September, that the election to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, long over due, would be held shortly. All the leading parties - The Congress, The Muslim League and the C.P.I. - decided to contest the elections.

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116. Ibid., 4.1.1945.

117. Peoples War, 9.9.1945.

118. The Mathrubhumi, 4.9.1945.

In its election Manifesto, the C.P.I. sought the support of the voters for its programme of "a united struggle of all freedom loving Indians bound together in a joint front of all popular and patriotic organs".<sup>119</sup> The immediate declaration of Indian Independence by the British Government was demanded. The Manifesto, while opposing partition of India, demanded the setting up of an All India Constituent Assembly with the delegates elected from 17 sovereign National Constituent Assemblies and having plenipotentiary powers. These Assemblies "will enjoy the unfettered right to negotiate, formulate and finally to decide their mutual relations within an Independent India on the basis of complete equality".<sup>120</sup>

The Desabhimani of the 18 March, 1946, contained a manifesto of the Party programme to be pursued by the candidates inside the Legislators if they were elected. It contained promises to introduce ordinances and bills in the Assembly to abolish blackmarketing and corruption, distribution of cultivable waste to the landless and the abolition of the system of tenancy.<sup>121</sup> Prior to the elections the Party published 6 demands - political, social and economic and workers, peasants and teachers demands.<sup>122</sup>

The election campaign in Malabar was launched in September 1945. In the election rally meeting at Calicut on 30th the Party policy was explained. The policy was to support Congress in constituencies where the Party was not contesting

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119. Election Manifesto of the C.P.I. appended in P.C. Joshi, For the Final Bid For Power, (Bombay, 1946), p. 101

120. Ibid.

121. Desabhimani, 18.3.1946.

122. Ibid., 22.3.1946.



and where parties like Hindu Mahasabha, Justice Party and other independent candidates were contesting, to support Muslim League in certain constituencies where the Party was not fielding its own candidates and to field its own candidates in places where the Party had a strong backing. As the Party's policy was to abolish blackmarketing, the Party would put up its own candidates if any known black marketeer was to contest.<sup>123</sup>

Meetings were convened in Perintalmanna, Karivallur and Sreekrishnapuram to explain Party's election policy.<sup>124</sup> Throughout November, meetings and jāthas were organised, the number of which was as follows: Chirakkal - 4 jāthas and 100 meetings, Kottayam - 2 jāthas and 39 meetings, Calicut - 2 jāthas and 70 meetings, Eranad - 2 jāthas, Palghat - 1 jātha and 15 meetings, Valluvanad - 25 meetings, and Ponnani - 2 jāthas and 40 meetings.<sup>125</sup> This was followed by distribution of pamphlets and door to door canvassing.<sup>126</sup>

Election meetings were held throughout Malabar in February, 1946. The attendance varied from 200 to 3000 in these meetings. In some of the meetings convened by the C.P.I., Muslim League and Congress speakers were invited to state their respective Party policies.<sup>127</sup> Some local committees of the C.P.I. issued election manifestoes of its own as Kundotti unit which demanded a hospital and a high school for Kondotti,

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123. Ibid., 2.10.1945 and 7.10.1945.

124. Ibid., 21.10.1945 and 6.11.1945.

125. Peoples War, 2.12.1945.

126. Desabhimani, 2.2.1946.

127. Ibid., 12.2.1946, 16.2.1946, 19.2.1946 and 21.2.1946.

the appointment of Mullas to teach Muslim religious studies, the allocation of cultivable land to agriculturists and to conduct scientific tests to determine whether the soil found in some of the hills in the taluk contained iron ore.<sup>128</sup>

P.C. Joshi visited Malabar during the second week of March. He addressed a huge meeting of 30000 people in Cannanore on 8.3.1946.<sup>129</sup> He visited Tirur, Tellicherry, Calicut, Payyannur, Talipparamb and other places. By the 13th, an Election Fund of Rs.43184-10-4 was raised and a sum of Rs.14000 was collected to be handed over to Joshi.<sup>130</sup>

The Party had fielded candidates in Calicut, Kottayam, Malappuram and Chirakkal Constituencies. In all these the Communists were defeated. The Congress polled about 72.57% of votes and the C.P.I. 27.43%. On an average, the Congress candidates polled 28,648 votes per candidates and the C.P.I., 10,829 votes.<sup>131</sup> But this cannot be taken as

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128. Ibid., 20.2.1946.

129. Ibid., 9.3.1946.

130. Ibid., 13.3.1946 and 15.3.1946.

131. The Mathrubhumi, 27.3.1946 and 28.3.1946. The results are given below:

(1) Calicut - A. Chandu (Congress)	-	28626
- A.K. Gopalan (CPI)	-	9234
(2) Kottayam - M.P. Damodaran (Con.)	-	27640
and Wynand - C.H. Kanaran (CPI)	-	11280
(3) Malappuram: M.P. Govinda Menon (Con.)	-	28229
E.M.S. Namboodiripad (CPI)	-	5518
(4) Reserved: K. Raghavan (Con.)	-	28085
E. Kannan (CPI)	-	5234
(5) Chirakkal: Manikoth Kumaran (Con.)	-	30662
K.P. Gopalan (CPI)	-	22880

a criteria to judge C.P.I.'s popularity. The election was not based on adult franchise. The electorate was restricted and the primary qualifications of a voter was based on property and income. Secondly, for the Party, fighting election was only "part of the revolutionary strategy to use elections as an occasion to mobilise the people under its banner".<sup>132</sup> The election, however, gave an opportunity to assert the separate identity of the C.P.I. as a political party and to assess its popularity and influence.

Kisan Sangh Agitates for Poonam Cultivation Rights.

Malabar at this time was gripped by acute famine conditions. In an effort to produce more, the Kisan Sangh asked the Government to take immediate steps to allow shallow land cultivation - Poonam - and the distribution of cultivable waste to agriculturists.

At the same time, some landlords in North Malabar started harassing the peasants by disallowing poonam cultivation. The Thottathil struggle was started against such harassments. Peasants used to take wood and green foliage from the forest belonging to Talekkat Mana in Timuri and Cheemeri village. When the ~~xxxx~~ forest was brought under a new management, the peasants were not allowed to bark the trees. The Kasargod Kisan Sangh, on November 15, announced its intention to oppose this and peasants from Timuri and Cheemeri went

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132. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Interview.

in procession to the forests and took out wood and foliage. The police's attempt to arrest Kisan leaders were foiled by the peasants, including a large number of women. The police registered a case against Subbramanyan Tirumunpu and 7 others. But later an amicable settlement was arrived at and the cases were withdrawn and the peasants demands conceded.<sup>133</sup>

In the same month, the peasants from Kuyilur went in a procession to the sub-Collector, Tellicherry and presented a memorandum requesting the distribution of shallow land to agriculturists for cultivation. The Malabar Kisan Sangh also presented a memorandum to the Revenue Minister in the Interim Ministry. But this was of no avail. In the meantime, the Kallyat Jenmi, engaged goondas to harass peasants who in turn organised Volunteers corps for self defence. On December 9, the police attacked volunteers who were performing drill and exercise. An M.S.P. camp was opened in the area. In Irikkur, the Kisan Sangh decided to undertake cultivation which led to clashes with the M.S.P. On December 30, 5 people were killed in police firing. A case against 60 people was registered.<sup>134</sup> In another case of an alleged murder of a Pāppān - Mahout - 7 people were arrested and were later convicted for life imprisonment.<sup>135</sup>

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133. A.K. Poduval, N. 95, pp. 74 - 5.

134. Ibid., pp. 79 - 82.

135. It is said that several Kisan Sangh workers were hiding in a nearby forest when an elephant wandered to their hiding place, followed by the Pāppān. Chandroth and others warned the Pāppān not to disclose their hiding place. But later, he got drunk and disclosed this news. Interview with V. Narayanan Nair.

Chandroth, one of the coorganisers of the Hunger

Karivellur, where a clash between the peasants and the police occurred, was an area deficit in food production. So the Kisan Sangh resisted the attempts of the kāryasthan of Chirakkal Raja to take the rice obtained as pāttom out of Karivellur and insisted on its being distributed through cooperative societies. On December 20, a party of 90 police men came to Karivellur. Soon, about 6000 peasants assembled before the store house where the paddy was kept. The police fired at the mob resulting in the death of two. A.V. Kunhambu was arrested and a case against 196 persons was registered.<sup>136</sup>

Tension was, thus, increasing in Malabar. On January 1, 1947, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, P. Narayanan Nair, Krishna Pillai, Devadas and other workers of the Desabhimani were arrested.<sup>137</sup> On January 20, the Madras Government issued an order on Desabhimani forfeiting its security amount of Rs.4000/- for publishing an article which urged the people to agitate for the withdrawal of M.S.P. from Malabar.<sup>138</sup>

After some years of docility, the peasants once again rose up against the harassments of the landlords. Direct action like starting poonam cultivation where this right was denied and the stopping of the rice transport from a deficit area were undertaken.

The Party leaders as well as cadres were subjected to police repression during the last phase of the National

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Contd. 135. Jatha in 1936, tendered an apology, came out of the jail and joined Congress. See A.K. Poduval, N. 95, p. 81.

136. A.K. Poduval, N. 95, p. 73.

137. P. Narayanan Nair, N. 12, p. 256 and p. 265. They were released only on August 15.

138. The Peoples Age, 27.7.1947 Microfilm (N.M.M.L.).

Movement. Though, they were released on Independents Day, they were to be jailed again. The main issue before the C.P.I. at this time was the attitude to be pursued towards the Nehru Government. As is clear from the Mounbatten Resolution, the C.P.I. under the Secretaryship of P.C. Joshi pledged its support to Nehru and the popular governments in India and Pakistan.<sup>139</sup> Within an year, difference of opinion cropped up inside the party, and it was to accept Ranadive's Thesis on unmitigated violence against the Congress Government.

Summary:

Even after joining the C.P.I. the Socialists had retained their position in the K.P.C.C. as C.P.I. then was an illegal organisation. Working inside the Congress, they were able to hold their position against the dubious tactics of the rightists and were able to turn the Congress into a militant anti-imperialist organisation.

As they were ousted from the K.P.C.C, the ~~Communists~~ had to go underground in the second half of 1940. Though they were not fully prepared for it, they could hold tenaciously against the police repression which followed. Their attitude softened towards the end of 1941 as the result of the change in the characterisation of the war. By the middle of 1942, the ban on C.P.I. was lifted and

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139. John Kautsky; Communism and the Politics of Development (New York, 1968) p. 25.

they could come out openly. The change in the line produced difficulties for the C.P.I. as the leftists had secured the sympathy and support of the masses because of their consistent anti-war, anti British attitude and as the change of line necessitated the complete reversal of this policy. The gaining of the legality coincided with the launching of the Quit India Movement by the Congress. The People's War line necessitated opposing the Quit India Movement and therefore the Communists were dubbed as 'British agents'. The Communists retaliated by calling all Congressmen as Jap agents and fifth columnists.<sup>140</sup>

In following the People's War policy, the C.P.I. became isolated from the main political stream. Splits occurred in organisations which had steadfastly supported the C.P.I. previously. For the first time, rival trade unions were formed in Malabar. But it is opined that it was during this time that the Party grew into a mass organisation.<sup>141</sup> The membership of the C.P.I. which was 5000 in 1942 rose to 60000 by 1947.<sup>143</sup> From the sources consulted, it is not possible to determine the growth of the Party in Malabar. It can be assumed that such phenomenal increase in membership was present in Malabar also. This was the result of the policy to make it a mass party by throwing open the membership

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140. V.A. Kesavan Nair has written about two cases in which Congressmen were arrested because of alleged cheating by Communists. See V.A. Kesavan Nair, Irumbalikkullil, N. 78, pp. 142 - 43.

141. A.K. Gopalan, Kerala, Past and Present (London, 1959), p. 70.

142. Peoples War, 4.10.1942.

143. Gene. D. Overstreet, N. 3, p. 357.

to all, by removing the rather rigid formalities. The constructive work undertaken by the Party also perhaps drew more people to its fold. However, these new members grew up not in an atmosphere of struggle. They got acquainted more with constructive works like Grow More Food and anti Cholera activities, than to workers rights, strikes and organisations.

The extension of cooperation to British War efforts, though won them legality, did not lead to complete freedom of political activity. When the Kisan Sangh sought permission to hold the 45th session of the A.I.K.S. in Malabar, it was not granted on the grounds of difficulties - "Transport, food and other difficulties".<sup>144</sup> And in the course of the five years from 1942 to 1947, the Party workers, its mouth piece Desabhimani and its staff suffered in the form of intimidation, warnings fines and arrests.

Collection of funds posed no problem to the Party. Fines which were imposed did not lead to closing down of the press. Responses to the call of the Party for Fund was so great that in the course of 3 years nearly 3 lakhs of rupees were collected. This, coupled with the fact that Desabhimani, within a short span of time, attained the distinction of having the largest circulation among Malayalam publications, points to the political awareness that was created among the people.

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144. Public (General) Department, 1944; G.O. 3450.  
Dtd. 2.12.44 (T.N.A.).



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis enables us to draw some conclusions about the nature of leadership, the organization of the party and the tactics used to draw the masses into the movement. It also helps us to highlight the factors which led to the emergence of the Communist Party as a powerful political force in Malabar.

In the early period, as the Socialist movement emerged along with the Congress led national movement, the leadership, as was the case with the Congress, came from the 'middle class, upper caste' families. In order to "declass" themselves they had to go through a process of "socialisation" as testified by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan and others. The movement, thus, originated more as a result of the work from 'above.' As workers, peasants and others were being activated and as the political awareness slowly percolated down to the masses, many from the backward castes and from the lower middle class, lower in social and economic status became active in the party and consequently graduated to the leadership. C.H. Kanaran, Imbichi Bava and K.P. Gopalan are good examples. Those who had entered the movement as ordinary workers in Front Organisations like P.R. Nambiar,

E.K. Na<sup>a</sup>jar and N.E. Balaram also rose upto the leadership. This should be taken as indicative of the democratic functioning of the party for this new leadership would not have risen if the existing leadership had tried to rigidly maintain their position in the party by not letting others emerge as leaders.

The available sources do not help to give details about the organisation of the party and its class composition. The structure of the party more or less remained the same through out the period under survey. There was the Executive Committee consisting of the top leadership with taluk and village units under them. There were separate Committees for Front Organisations. During the under-ground years, the basic unit was party 'cells.'

The leaders of the K.C.S.P. was not entirely satisfied with <sup>I</sup>the organisational matters. For instance, A.K. Gopalan was unhappy with the relationship within the K.C.S.P. It was in 1939 that an earnest effort was made to ~~tone~~ up the organisation. But before the detailed programme chalked out, to appoint a Scrutiny Committee, to form Divisional Committees with separate workers' and peasants' sub-committees, could be carried out fully, the party was forced to go underground.

In the K.C.S.P., the membership was limited to 'progressive congress men' and non-communalists and so the total membership of ~~the~~ party in 1939 was 400.

During the Peoples' War period, as testified by A.K.Gopalan, the party became a 'mass party.' Membership was given to all 'honest men' and intending members were not, as during 1940-42, required to take an oath. This gave rise to certain organisational problems. K.A.Keraleeyan opined that during the Peoples' War period, there was difficulty in combining and coordinating the work of those who looked after organisational matters with those who were full fledged activists. Though the organisational machinery either of the K.C.S.P. or of the C.P.I. did not attain a high level of sophistication, it cannot be said that this hindered the development of mass movements. Rather, the movements were equally a means of developing organisation and it would seem that during 1936-39 and 1945-46 the organisational defects were overcome because the party was engaged in militant activity.

The party membership, to begin with, predominantly consisted of tile and textile workers, with the primary school teachers forming not a negligible group. But during the later period the bulk of the members came from the peasantry.

In the strategy evolved by the All India Congress Socialist Party either to take over the Congress or to split it, the Malabar C.S.P. achieved remarkable success. Rather than developing the K.C.S.P. as a loyal but militant opposition inside the Congress, the Socialists' efforts were to capture the K.P.C.C. itself. Though their initial efforts

failed, by 1938 they succeeded in bringing the organisation under their control. This was due to the mass support they had gained by then due to the alterante programme they had offered, to the one adopted by the Congress. The Socialists were able to do so because of their ideological persuasions and of their understanding of the objective reality and of the historical process. This difference they made explicit in speeches during anti-war demonstrations, in the manifesto issued in January 1940 criticising the Independence Day Pledge of the Congress, in the Minute of Dissent in the M.T.C. Report etc. Not only did the Socialists formulate an alternate programme but they engaged themselves in immediate struggles to carry it out. For this, they utilised the Congress platform. Volunteer camps were conducted and a strong body of trained political workers was created. The mass base of the Congress was widened by enrolling members from those sections which had earlier kept aloof from the Congress - the workers and peasants. By organising them for immediate struggles, the Socialists were able to spread the political consciousness and to bring them together in the anti-imperialist movement. This was qualitatively different from the Congress activities; they were able to combine the anti-feudal struggle with anti-imperialist movement. So the national movement in Malabar was under Communist hegemony for sometime. The very dynamics generated by

this made it impossible for them to continue to work within the framework of either the C.S.P. or the Congress. But by the time this stage was reached, they had succeeded in winning a base, inside the Congress as well as among the workers and peasants in the countryside.

In fulfilling this task, the determining factor was the evaluation of the immediate issues, the taking up of which, though limited in nature, brought the masses over to the party. Here the importance of using the tools of analysis provided by Socialism and Marxism to evaluate the objective situation rather than reducing the reality to a procrustean bed to suit certain tenets, must be stressed. Rather than viewing the national movement as a reactionary force led by the bourgeoisie or stressing the importance of a party of the proletariat of the Bolshevik type and as a consequence be suspicious of the revolutionary potential of the peasantry, what the Socialists in Malabar did was to take up immediate issues and organise different sections of the society on their immediate demands. This paid dividend in a predominantly agricultural, non-industrialised society as that of Malabar.

The efforts to broaden base movement were considerably helped by certain national and international events. The need to form a United Front against Fascism was recognised by the leftist forces which led to the C.P.I. to abandon their narrow sectarian and hostile attitude towards the national movement and to join hands with the C.S.P. The united front with its own regional variation

was practised in Malabar before the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in 1935 advised the Communists in India to participate in the national movement. As there was no unit of the C.P.I. in the region at that time, it was not necessary in Malabar to join hands with them. But what was formed in Malabar was the united front of all left and progressive forces under the leadership of the K.C.S.P. This brought the Communists to the forefront of the struggle. This broad unity and the Communists identification with nationalist aspirations lasted till 1942 when the C.P.I. adopted the People's War Policy, giving priority to its international tasks.

This raises pertinent questions regarding the relation between Communism and Nationalism. The question was whether a Communist, who is an internationalist could be a nationalist as well? In China, Maotse Tung answered in the affirmative, asserting that "he not only can be but must be".<sup>1</sup> In India, the adoption of the Peoples War Policy though won legality for the C.P.I. brought with it many problems. The adoption of the new line meant the reversal of the policy the Communists were following in Malabar. And in doing so, they faced the danger of opposition from the nationalists. The People's War Policy isolated the C.P.I. from the political mainstream. It was also a mistake to take a rigid anti strike, anti demonstration stand. All this put the party into the

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1. Maotse Tung, Selected Works, Vol. II (Peking, 1975), p. 196.

defensive - most of its time was consumed by the need to explain party policy. The membership of the party, no doubt, increased. But these new members grew up in the atmosphere of such activities like Grow More Food Campaigns and were not, like their elders in the party, experienced in militant mass struggles. This led to differences within the party. Splits occurred in front organisations leading to the formation of rival unions. But what enabled the C.P.I. to tide over the difficult years was the support it got from the peasantry - which, as during the earlier phase, stood enblock with the C.P.I. The Congress or any other party were not able to create schisms and to form rival unions. One of the first struggles, led by the C.P.I. after three years of refraining from any such activity, was of the North Malabar peasants who were demanding, poonam cultivation rights during 1945-46.

In the peasant organisations, small kānakkār, kulikkānakkār and verumpāttakkār predominated and this was reflected in the main demands raised during the peasant movements - demands which catered more to the interests of this section of the peasantry. At the same time, they were able to bring into the movement, agricultural labourers also. This they were able to do by instilling in them a rudimentary form of class consciousness - class consciousness in the sense of a feeling of unity within and a separation from and antagonism towards another class (here the jenmies) and also

in the sense of a realisation of the necessity of a struggle against the interests of this class. This consciousness was instilled through pamphlets and study classes and also by the organisation of militant struggle itself.

Thus the C.P.I. integrated the anti-feudal struggle with the movement against imperialism and organised various sections of the society like the workers and peasants continuously raising the level of consciousness by      drawing them into militant struggles in defense of their rights. In other words, they put forward a policy and programme <sup>different</sup> from the Congress nationalists which accounts for the mass support it gained in Malabar by the end of the colonial period.

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## GLOSSARY

Amśom	-	A land revenue division in Malabar. It is comprised of one or more <u>dēsoms</u> .
Cherumas	-	A Harijan caste; Generally agricultural labourers.
Dēsom	-	A sub-division of an <u>amśom</u> . The village unit for which revenue statistics are maintained.
Edangali	-	A grain measurement.
Fasli	-	The agricultural year used by the Revenue Department, Government of Madras, extending for July to June.
Jātha	-	A procession on feet.
Jenmi	-	Landlord.
Kānom	-	A customary tenure interpreted by British courts as possessing the characteristics of both lease and mortgage.
Kānakkāran	-	The holder of <u>kānom</u> tenure.
Kāryasthan	-	Manager. Usually associated with the house of big landlords.
Kudiyān	-	<u>Kānom</u> tenant.
Kulīkānom	-	Mortgage of waste land with a view to its being planted.
Marumakkathāyam	-	The matrilineal system of inheritance practised in Kerala by certain castes and in North Kerala by some Muslim families.
Mēlkānom	-	Given by the <u>jenmi</u> to a third party with power to redeem an outstanding <u>kānom</u> . Created by document called <u>mēlchārth</u> .
Mappila	-	Muslim of Malabar.
Nairs	-	An important caste group in Kerala.

Nambiars	-	A section of Nairs.
Namboodiris	-	The Malayali Brahmans.
Nuri	-	A feudal levy realised by the <u>jenmi</u> in North Malabar when paddy is being measured out.
Otti	-	Usurfractury mortgage, the full value being advanced.
Pāppān	-	Mahout.
Para	-	A grain measurement. A Palghat <u>para</u> or standard <u>para</u> holds 10 <u>edongalis</u> .
Parambu	-	Dry land.
Pāttom	-	Rent.
Policceluthu	-	Literally, "tearing and rewriting the document". The renewal of a lease.
Poorakkali	-	A folk dance prevalent in North Malabar.
Punam	-	Fallow land cultivation especially in hill tracts in North Malabar.
Raja	-	Former rulers of chieftaincies.
Seelakas	-	Allowance paid to the <u>jenmi</u> in North Malabar (feudal levy).
Taluk	-	A revenue sub division of a district.
Tarawārd	-	A <u>Marumakkathāyam</u> , ususally Nair, joint family.
Tiyyas	-	A caste group belonging to the 'backward' category. Known in Palghat as Elavas.
Vāsi	-	A feudal levy realised by the <u>jenmi</u> in North Malabar.
Vāyanaśāla	-	Reading room.

- Vechukānal - A feudal levy realised by the jenmi in North Malabar.
- Verumpāttom - Ordinary lease for a year. Tenancy-at-will.
- Verumpāttakkāran - Tenants leasing in land on tenancy-at-will. In the case of kōvilagam verumpāttakkāran a renewal fee is paid and they are entitled to hold land for 12 years.
- Zamorin - Anglicised version of Samootiri; the most powerful ruler of Malabar whose capital was Calicut (the title continues to the present day.

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