

The Working Class In The Anti-Imperialist Movement

Elections to the Central Legislative Assembly were ordered by the then Governor-General, Lord Willingdon in 1934 with the firm belief that the Congress had been weakened by the 1930-33 repression. The actual result, however, showed that the opposite was true. Like in most other parts of the country, the Congress candidate from the Malabar-cum-South Kanara general constituency secured over 80 per cent of the votes polled. It was thus made clear that, far from weakening, the Congress had become a real people's organization with firm roots among the masses.

This was made still more clear in the subsequent general elections to the Provincial Legislatures (1937) when all the Congress candidates in the general constituencies in Malabar secured overwhelming majorities and several candidates opposing the Congress forfeited their deposit. Particularly significant is the fact that all the candidates put up or supported by the Justice Party and who claimed to represent the 'backward castes' were defeated. The hold of pro-British leaders over the masses belonging to those castes was clearly weakening, if not breaking.

While the Congress was thus emerging as the undisputed leader of the democratic people of Malabar, an internal crisis was slowly developing within the Congress organization itself. The new revolutionary forces of left nationalism and socialism that had taken shape in the course of the 1930-32 struggle had crystallized into a definite socialist group within the Congress

challenging the Gandhian leadership. No sooner was the Congress re-organized in June-July 1934, that a bitter struggle started between this left and socialist group and the Gandhian leadership inside the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee.

As has already been mentioned, the KPCC of 1934-35 had a leftist majority. It was, therefore, natural that the Provincial Political Conference which that committee organized in May 1935 should have had on its agenda a series of resolutions giving expression to revolutionary sentiments. Resolutions demanding the abolition of Indian native states, drawing attention to the growing danger of war, supporting the immediate demands of workers and peasants, etc., were moved at the conference. This led to heated controversy, since the Gandhian right-wing leaders of the Congress stoutly opposed all these resolutions. That controversy, at the end of which the leftist resolutions were adopted by majority, was characteristic of the subsequent years: the entire Congress organization in Malabar was the arena of a fierce struggle between the right and left wings in which the left wing was stronger.

The left wing, however, did not confine itself to activities within the Congress. While working inside the Congress to bring about radical changes in the programme and methods of work of the organization, it also carried on independent work of agitation, propaganda and organization among workers, peasants, students, teachers, etc.

For the first time in the history of Malabar, trade unions started functioning in all the industrial towns. All of them were led by one or other of the organizers of the newly-formed socialist group in the Congress. There was systematic coordination between the socialist-led Congress Committees (beginning with the Provincial Congress Committee itself) and the trade unions. The 1934-35 strike wave among the industrial workers was thus led and organized in such a way as not only to set up industrial trade unions but to link up their day-to-day activities with the agitation, propaganda and organisation geared to rallying the working class for the anti-imperialist united front.

Work among the peasants was also started. A basis for it was laid with a critique of the Malabar Tenancy Act passed in 1930 and demands for amendments to it. It has already been mentioned that the early tenancy movement was concerned more with the demands of the *kanamdars* (who are a privileged minority among tenants) than with the demands of all tenants. The Tenancy Act that was passed in 1930, therefore, did not give any real relief to the majority of tenants; the fixity of tenure granted to *Verumpattamdars* was subject to so many conditions, and the rate of 'fair rent' fixed for them was so high, that their position remained more or less the same as before. The demand was, therefore, formulated that all tenants including *Verumpattamdars* should get full and real fixity of tenure, that the rate of 'fair rent' should be reduced and that other pro-tenant changes should be made in the provisions of the Act. In Malabar, taluk and local peasants conferences were held to formulate these and other demands and peasant organizations at district, taluk and local levels were formed. The socialist-led Congress Committees and Congress Conferences also lent support to these demands. Thus was brought about that coordination of the independent class organization of the peasantry with Congress committees which laid the basis for a real anti-imperialist united front, with the peasantry as its main driving force.

One other class organisation that was characteristically part of the anti-imperialist movement of the period was the Teachers' Union. This was the organization of teachers in 'aided' elementary school—a type of school in which the teachers were, and continue to be, literally at the mercy of the management. Living wage, security of service and other demands of these teachers became the slogans that linked the teachers with the industrial workers in the towns and with the peasants in the villages. Coming as they did from among the peasants, the teachers had a real interest in the amendment of the Tenancy Act and other peasant demands; at the same time, being subjected to the similar exploitation as the industrial workers (wage-labour), they were as interested in the demand, struggles and organizations of the industrial working class. The Aided Elementary School

Teachers' Union, therefore, took more or less the same organizational form and adopted a similar form of struggle (strike as did the working class; while, being the most enlightened section of the rural poor, they provided the most active and capable cadre for building up the peasants' organizations. In fact, it was the combination in one and the same person of the office-bearer of the village Congress committee, the leader of the Teachers' Union and the organizer of the Karshaka Sangham that made the anti-imperialist movement strike deep roots in the countryside.

These mass organizations, together with student and youth organizations, reading rooms, night schools, etc., helped the leftists in the Congress in their struggle against the rightists. Whatever manipulations the right-wing Congressmen might carry on at the top, they could not do anything below. The new constitution of the Congress, enforced in 1935, with its restrictions on the number of members of the KPCC and with various provisions like the manual labour clause, enabled the rightists to capture the KPCC. Lower committees like the district Congress Committees as well as most of the taluk and village committees however, remained under the control of the leftists, so that these Congress committees became another forum to articulate the class demands of the toilers, a training ground to get active cadres from the working class and peasantry.

The right wing leadership resisted this type of revolutionary activity. With the majority that they manipulated to secure in the KPCC when the 1935 constitution of the Congress came into force, they dissolved several district, taluk and local Congress committees and suspended some Congress organizers in 1936. They were deliberately provoking a split in the organization, since it was only through a split that they could dominate the Congress. But the approaching general elections to the provincial legislatures under the new constitution, together with the fact that all the active and selfless cadres of the Congress belonged to the left, made the Congress President and the Working Committee revoke these disciplinary actions: by the time the elections were over, the position of the leftists had become so strong that the KPCC itself came under their leadership.

A big decisive factor in this last development—the restoration of the leftist majority in the KPCC—was the close cooperation between the nationalist Muslims and the socialist-led Congress of Malabar. It has already been mentioned that the Congress in the post-1921 period was virtually split into two—a Hindu group and a Muslim group. Muslim Congressmen had, for some time after the 1930-32 struggle, even kept themselves out of active political work. The emergence of the socialist-led leftists as a definite group fighting the right wing gave hope to these nationalist Muslims who began to work in cooperation with them. It was this alliance between the socialist-led Congressmen and nationalist Muslims that helped to reduce the rightists to a minority within the KPCC; it was this again that took the kisan and teachers' movement into the Muslim-majority areas of Malabar.

The new KPCC with the socialist-led leftists and nationalist Muslims together in the majority carried the mass movement several steps forward. The gigantic political campaigning of the period of the general elections, followed by the enthusiasm roused by the formation of the Congress ministry, had already led to a tremendous mass upsurge: the trade unions, kisan sabhas, student unions, teachers' unions, etc., grew as never before; the Trade Union Demands Declaration Day (September 19, 1937) witnessed the biggest rally of the working class in Calicut and Cannanore. It was, however, after January 1938 (when the KPCC came under leftist leadership) that the Congress in Malabar became a real organ of people's struggles. One of the first things that the new, socialist-led KPCC did was to organize provincial, district, taluk and village level volunteer camps through which, in the course of a year, nearly 3,000 volunteers were given physical and political training. These 3,000 volunteers, headed by taluk and district level captains, formed the backbone of the 500 or so village Congress committees for the regular functioning of which systematic organizational steps were taken by the KPCC.

This unprecedented organizational work roused the peasantry of North Malabar, gave them confidence in their own organized strength and led them towards the first mass peasant

struggle in the history of Malabar—the 1938-39 campaign against feudal levies. That campaign was so strong that the landlords and bureaucrats raised the cry of anarchy. And ‘anarchy’ it was to those who wanted to maintain feudal domination intact: not only did the peasants withhold the payment of rent for the season (winter 1938-39), till a solution was found to the question of levies; they also resorted to that traditional weapon of the peasantry—social boycott—against the landlords and their stooges.

This act of the peasantry so enraged the landlords, bureaucrats and right-wing Congressmen that they demanded prompt punitive action against the peasants. The KPCC and lower Congress committees, however, declared themselves on the side of the fighting peasants and urged upon the Congress ministry to bring about an amicable settlement. The result was that the Congress ministry appointed a committee to go into the question of amending the existing Tenancy Act; the leaders of the kisan movement on their part advised the peasants to pay rent to the landlords. The latter, however, were forced to drop the demand for feudal levies.

The Congress organization in Malabar in 1938-39 was thus a model of an anti-imperialist united front in action. On the one hand, it helped the working class and its allies in revolutionary struggle—the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie—to organize themselves and their struggles; on the other hand, it rallied all these revolutionary classes and their organizations behind the common slogans of the anti-imperialist movement.

It, however, roused the anger of the right-wing Congressmen who lost no opportunity to run down this Congress organization. They went so far as to non-cooperate with the Congress organization in the 1940 elections to the District Board, resulting in the defeat of several Congress candidates. Since, however, the new District Board had a majority of Congressmen with a few Socialists also in it, the Adviser's regime that came to power at the end of 1939 took the first opportunity to dissolve it.

It is significant that, while the Adviser's regime dissolved the District Board in which Socialist-led leftists shared power, the

Congress Working Committee dissolved the KPCC itself. A Socialist-led Congress organization even in a corner of the country was a hindrance to the carrying out of the anti-struggle (individual satyagraha) line which the Congress leadership was then pursuing. With this dissolution of the Socialist-led KPCC and with the intense war-time repression against the leftists, the internal struggle between the rightists and the leftists in the Congress took a new turn.

II

The emergence of the working class and socialist movement began earlier in the states part of Kerala than in Malabar. Apart from the Alleppey Labour Union, whose formation and adoption of a resolution advocating responsible government have already been referred to, there was the Karshaka Thozhili (Peasant and Worker) Movement in Kodungalloor in 1933. This movement demanded the scaling down of agrarian debts and took the form of mass satyagraha. A Communist League had also been formed in Trivandrum in 1931-32. Hence, when the trade union and socialist movements came to be organized in 1934-35 on an all-Kerala scale, they were not confined to Malabar. They were, unlike the earlier Congress movements, really all-Kerala movements. New trade unions and socialist groups were formed in Trichur, Cochin and other industrial centres of Cochin and Travancore, while the existing Alleppey Trade Union came to be linked with the all-Kerala movement.

One of the major activities of these socialist groups was to work within the democratic movement for responsible government and, to this end, agitate for the reversal of the Congress policy of ‘non-interference in the internal affairs of Indian states’. The Cochin and Travancore Political Conferences were held in 1937 which urged on the Congress Working Committee to allow the Congress organization in the states to carry on political activity and not confine itself to ‘constructive work’. When, however, the Haripura Congress adopted its well-known resolution on the formation of independent states people's organizations, an organization called the Cochin Congress was formed in Cochin, while the leaders and organizers of the Joint Political Congress in Travancore State formed, together with

other national democratic politicians, the Travancore State Congress. Both had, as their central slogan, responsible government under the Maharaja.

The course of development of these two organizations was different because the policies pursued by the two governments differed. The Government of Travancore headed by the dewan Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer made it clear that it would not allow any agitation for responsible government, as that slogan was a challenge to the authority of the Maharaja. The State Congress came to clash with the government within a few weeks of its formation and had to start a civil disobedience movement within six months. The Government of Cochin took a different attitude and declared that it had no objection to responsible government and that, on the other hand, responsible government was its own goal. Since, however, that goal could not be realized immediately the government argued, it was introducing an instalment of constitutional reforms, widening the franchise and transferring one department—the department of rural development—into the hands of an elected and responsible minister. This gave a handle to rightist leaders of the Cochin Congress to sabotage the development of the organization on militant lines. They decided to accept the new instalment of reforms, made their representative agree to the ministership and then began to cooperate with the government.

Because of the open hostility of the Government of Travancore to any movement with responsible government as its aim, the leadership of the Travancore State Congress could not pursue such an avowedly compromising policy. But they did their utmost to avoid direct mass action to enforce the democratic demand. It was the socialist-led Youth League which took the initiative in starting direct action; the State Congress Working Committee had to follow suit.

Thus was started that glorious mass action which is known as the 1938 State Congress struggle which was far more extensive than the 1921 Malabar movement: while the latter was by and large confined to certain taluks of Malabar, the 1938 Travancore movement embraced the whole state of Travancore.

The difference between the 1921 Malabar movement and the 1938 Travancore movement, however, consisted in the qualitatively higher character of the latter, for, one of the characteristic features of the Travancore struggle was the part played by the working class of Alleppey under the leadership of the Socialist Party.

The 20,000 and more coir workers of the town of Alleppey and the two taluks of Ambalapuzha and Chertala declared a general strike not only to enforce their own partial economic demands but also to express solidarity with the State Congress demand for responsible government. The strike was so magnificently conducted that, for days together, Alleppey town and the surrounding industrial belt were in the hands of the workers. The one-lakh-strong rally at Alleppey on October 23, 1938, the militant resistance offered by the workers to the police, the firing that followed it and the arrest of over 500 leading cadres of the union—these were the first actions in which the working class was steeled for bigger and more glorious action of eight years later, the famous Punnapra Vayalar of 1946. The conscious and effective leadership given to this strike action by the socialist leadership, particularly P. Krishna Pillai who personally led the organization of the strike, won the confidence of the Alleppey working class for the Socialist Party.

Together with the working class of Alleppey and the surrounding industrial belt the mass of students all over Travancore came into action even in the most remote corners of the state. The magnificent strike and demonstrations of students in colleges, high schools and even elementary schools were a sight unprecedented in the history of Kerala. This was one more instance of what had taken place in many colonial and semi-colonial countries—demonstrating the ability of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly students, to play, on occasions, the role of the vanguard of the democratic movement. There is no doubt that, next only to the general strike of the Alleppey working class, the statewide student actions shook the state machinery to its very foundations.

Though not on such an all-state scale and hence insuffi-

ciently noticed by the State Congress leadership, peasants also came into action with their own forms of struggle. Just as in the 1921 Malabar rebellion, so in certain localities of Travancore, peasants prepared themselves to resist the military forces and, to this end, started cutting lines of communication. It is worth mentioning that the first persons to be executed on charges of waging war against the state in Kerala after the 1921 rebellion were the leaders of this movement which was, however, confined to a few villages.

The most significant feature of the 1938 Travancore struggle was the fact that the all-Kerala Socialist leadership gave direct organizational assistance to it. Not only did Krishna Pillai personally organize the Alleppey strike but he and other all-Kerala leaders of the Socialist Party were the brains behind the underground activities of the State Congress. Socialist cadres from all over Kerala were sent to Travancore to assist in the organization and regular functioning of the illegal apparatus of the State Congress. Above all, the two *jathas* which marched from Malabar to Travancore, particularly the first, under the leadership of A.K. Gopalan, electrified the entire State. Thus was born in action the unity of the democratic movement of Kerala—that, too, under the leadership of the working class and socialist movements—which was later to form the basis of the struggle for a democratic united Kerala.

All these features of the struggle in Travancore created as much panic in the bourgeois leadership of the all-India national movement as in the government headed by Sir C.P. As in the case of other militant mass actions, Gandhi found in the State Congress a deplorable element of violence; he objected to the fact that the State Congress leadership denounced not the government in general but the head of the Government, Sir C.P., personally. He said that it was wrong on the part of the State Congress leadership to have submitted a memorandum to the Central Government exposing the misdeeds of Sir C.P. and 'advised' the State Congress leadership to withdraw it. Since the penalty for non-compliance to this 'advise' would have been withdrawal of the moral support of the all-India leader-

ship to the State Congress struggle, the Working Committee of the State Congress was forced to withdraw the memorandum. This was the end of the great 1938 upsurge, since the people saw this action as nothing but surrender to the government.

The intense dissatisfaction among the rank and file at this surrender expressed itself in the formation of a definite left wing inside the State Congress—what was then called the Radical Group. Furthermore, the Youth League which had initiated the 1938 struggle reconsidered the entire political situation and decided to start a new struggle, the open reading of the withdrawn memorandum being its initial form. This received tremendous support from the people and even from a section of the State Congress leadership which, though forced to comply with Gandhi's 'advice' was at heart opposed to the withdrawal of the memorandum. However, it could not acquire the mass national character of the earlier struggle, since it was conducted by only a section of the nationalist movement.

This marked the beginning of a conflict between the left and the right within the Travancore State Congress, similar to that which gave rise to the Socialist Party in 1934 in Malabar. The socialist groups that had been functioning in Travancore till then were confined to certain towns and had become a major political force only in the industrial belt surrounding Alleppey. The 1939 struggle of the Youth League and the formation of the Radical Group, however, led to the transformation of left and socialist groups into a national political force, some of the best-known State Congress leaders (like K.C. George, M.N. Govindan Nair, T.V. Thomas, P.T. Punnoose, Srikantan Nair, etc.) being the leaders of these movements.

Left and socialist forces were also developing in Cochin. Although the 1938 instalment of constitutional reforms and its acceptance by the Cochin Congress successfully diverted the national movement into constitutional channels, discontent began to express itself. The socialists and other discontented democrats began to grope towards an alternative to the Cochin Congress and organized the Cochin State Praja Mandalam. They also took up the question of agrarian reforms, formulated the

demands of tenants in connection with the Tenancy Act in force and organized a statewide *jatha* to popularize these demands. Out of this campaign arose the first independent class organization of the peasantry in Cochin—the Cochin State Karshaka Sabha. The demands formulated and the type of organization formed were more or less on the lines of what had been done in Malabar. The organizers of the Praja Mandalam and Karshaka Sabha, it may be added, organized, in 1941 a defiance of the ban on a conference at a time when the leaders of the Cochin Congress were cooperating with the government in its 'war effort'.

The national upsurge of the nineteen-thirties and the role played in it by the working class and socialist movements were thus on a truly all-Kerala scale. For, though the form in which and the intensity with which they manifested themselves varied as between Malabar, Cochin and Travancore, they did not remain localized; the political national movement with a true all-Kerala leadership was thus slowly emerging. It was the organized working class guided by socialist ideology which stood at the head of this movement.

III

The main source of strength of the national upsurge of the nineteen-thirties was, as will be clear from the above, the fact that the new forces of the working class and the socialist movements were deeply rooted in the general democratic movement. The first generation of socialists in Kerala were in fact the very same people who had earlier carried the banner of nationalism and democracy. Socialism was to them a natural and logical development of revolutionary democracy; they could therefore successfully link up the class struggle of the industrial proletariat and its allies with the overall nationalist struggle.

This, however was at the same time, the great shortcoming of the working class and socialist movements as well as of the revolutionary democratic movement under their leadership. For, this meant that the various socialist groups in Kerala that were united under the banner of Congress Socialism, and the class movements that were growing under the Socialist leadership,

had not yet completely freed themselves from the ideological influence of the national bourgeoisie that was heading the national movement. The socialist cadres that were reared in Kerala had not carried on that struggle against the bourgeoisie and its ideology, Gandhism, which could alone have given them the proletarian class outlook towards the various problems they had to tackle.

We have seen that Socialism came to Kerala as a movement within the congress, as a party of Socialists working inside the Congress. That is, the approach of our Socialists was essentially that of Congressmen, extreme vacillation manifesting itself on those occasions when a firm fight had to be put up against the bourgeois leadership of the Congress. This does not mean that they did not put up a fight against the leadership of the Congress, *inside the Congress*; this, of course, they did and that was why they could build up the Congress itself on progressive democratic lines. This struggle inside the Congress, however, was so circumscribed by *the anxiety to preserve the internal unity of the Congress as an organisation* that they failed to carry on a *determined ideological struggle against Gandhism*.

The clearest example of this anxiety to preserve the internal unity of the national organization was seen in 1939-40 when the Socialist leadership advised the Travancore Youth League to withdraw the second civil disobedience movement which, as stated earlier, was started as a protest against the directive of Gandhi that the anti-Dewan memorandum be withdrawn. The Socialist leadership was so anxious to maintain the unity of the nationalist movement against the common enemy that it failed to see the importance of the discontent growing in the ranks of State Congressmen and to give shape to this discontent by forming a definite left wing.

This attitude of loyalty to the bourgeois leadership of the national movement affected Socialist work in the mass organizations as well. The trade unions, Karshaka Sanghams and other mass organizations that they built up were independent only in an economic sense, in that so long as it was a question of fighting economic battles, they acted independently of the

Congress. In fighting political battles, however, they did not emerge as independent mass organizations. The only example of a political general strike of the working class in Kerala in the years before the Second World War was the 1938 Alleppey strike organized in support of the State Congress struggle.

As for the peasantry, not only did the Karshaka Sangham fail to fight any political battles, but the very understanding of the Socialist leadership on the agrarian question was that the abolition of landlordism was a programme to be implemented only after Independence was established, the immediate perspective being one of waging partial struggles to secure partial demands. In other words, working class and peasant organizations were looked upon not as mass political organizations operating independently of, and if necessary in opposition to, the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, but as the vehicles through which the workers and peasants are mobilized behind that leadership.

The ideological root of such tailing of the bourgeoisie was the failure to see the crucial role of the peasantry under the leadership of the working class in the national revolution: the failure to see that agrarian revolution is the axle around which the wheel of the national revolution turns: that only the working class, headed by the Communist Party, can successfully lead the agrarian and hence the national revolution. Failure to see these basic elements of the strategy of Marxism-Leninism as applied to colonial conditions made our Socialists look upon the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie as the leading and decisive force in the revolution, the working class having little or no role.

This wrong approach to the strategy of revolution constituted a grave short coming in the further development of the working class and socialist movement. It did not however, do any immediate harm. What was needed at that time was the building up of independent class organizations, the induction of the working class and peasantry into the anti-Imperialist movement and the organization of the left and socialist wing as a force against the right-wing in the Congress. These tasks of

the movement were, in the main, fulfilled, though it is indisputable that the correct approach to the strategy of revolution would have helped the better fulfilment of these very tasks.

The biggest asset of the pre-Second World War Socialist movement in Kerala was that, unlike the top right wing leadership of the Congress Socialist party, it was sincerely pro-Soviet and pro-Communist. As a matter of fact, it was the grand achievement of the First Five-Year Plan in the USSR, in the midst of the most severe economic crisis in the capitalist world, that attracted the working class and petty bourgeoisie of Kerala to the side of Socialism. It was, therefore, unthinkable for the young Socialist groups of Kerala to go anti-Soviet as the Masanis and Mehtas did.

The result was that, as the internal struggle inside the Congress Socialist Party acquired greater intensity, the ranks of the socialist movement in Kerala supported the pro-Soviet and pro-Communist left wing as against the anti-Soviet and anti-Communist right wing. Furthermore, a definite Communist nucleus was formed in Kerala in 1937 composed of some of the top-most provincial leaders of the Congress Socialist Party. The work of this group in the years 1938-39, together with the clash of Communist and Socialist policies which followed the outbreak of the Second World War, resulted in the complete transformation in 1940 of the Congress Socialist Party in Kerala into the Communist Party.

With this ends one phase of the history of the working class and Socialist movements in Kerala: the phase in which these movements remained more or less within the bourgeois national movement. It was only after the formation, in 1940, of the Kerala provincial and lower committees of the Communist Party, only after an illegal apparatus was set up to carry on the work of the Party, that the Socialists of Kerala ceased to look upon the Congress as the central organization through which they had to carry on their political activities. This organizational demarcation from the Congress arose out of a clash of policies between the Communists and the congress on the issue of India's role in the War. Hence this was the beginning of a phase in

which the working class and its political party started on an open ideological and practical struggle against the bourgeoisie and its leadership.

It will be appropriate here to refer to some works by anti-Communist authors which came out in the 1970s and which give a distorted view of the origin, growth and character of the Communist movement in Kerala.

The first is the autobiography of Minoo Masani which came out in 1977. The General Secretary of the Congress Socialist Party, Jaya Prakash Narayan he says, was so soft to the Communists that he put E.M.S. Namboodiripad in charge of the party organisation in Kerala, along with Ramamurthi in Tamil Nadu and Sundarayya in Andhra. All the three, he adds, were Communists who thanks to the lack of vigilance on JP's part, were brought into leading positions in the CSP; they used their positions to turn the CSP into Communist Party in the respective states.

The fact of the matter however is that E.M.S. was elected the Joint Secretary of the All India Socialist Party along with Masani, Goray and Gautam at the very first conference of the Party in October 1934. None of the delegates who attended the Bombay Conference from Kerala (including E.M.S., Krishna Pillai and A. K. Gopalan) had in fact any contact with Communist party at that time. No question therefore arises of E.M.S., a Communist, being permitted to infiltrate into the CSP.

It was a year after the Bombay Conference of the CSP that the late Krishna Pillai and E. M. S had the first contact with the Communist Party of India through Sundarayya; it took almost two years after our first contact (in 1937) to form the first unit of the Communist Party of India.

During this whole period, the CSP leaders of Kerala worked as honest and loyal workers in the cause of Socialism, to develop the trade unions, Kisan Sabhas and other mass organisations as well as to develop the Congress as a radical anti-imperialist organisation in Kerala. It was this solid work in the urban and

rural areas of the state and not the mercy of Masani and Co., that made them leaders of the trade unions and the peasant movement, members of the AICC etc., making E. M. S the secretary of the KPCC and a member of the then Provincial Legislative Assembly of Madras as well.

Krishna Pillai, AKG and EMS in other words were Congress-Socialist leaders in their own right and not because JP or some body else "put them in charge," as Masani wants the people to believe. Why then did the Congress Socialists of Kerala join the Communist Party en bloc? Because they were tremendously impressed by the gigantic strides taken by the Soviet Union in its (first) Five Year plan. They naturally came to the conclusion that the Socialist Revolution in Russia showed the revolutionaries of India, as the revolutionaries of the other countries, the path forward. They therefore joined the very first group of Congressmen who declare socialism to be their final objective—the group headed by JP, Masani and so on.

It may be added here that, if in fact the founders of the CSP in Kerala had come into contact with the then illegal CPI before the formation of the All-India CSP, they might have probably plumed for that party. For unlike Masani and Co, they did not have the background of the British Labour Party whose 'Socialism' was infected with anti-Communist anti-Soviet prejudices.

Naturally therefore, the moment they got the first opportunity to contact the then illegal CPI, they entered into serious and business like discussions with them, and on weighing the merits and demerits of the policies laid down by the leaders of the CPI on one hand and Masani and Co, on the other, they found the former more correct. Their changeover from Congress Socialism to Communism was thus as natural as the earlier transition from Gandhite or Nehruite Congressmen into Congress Socialists.

Masani's anti-Communism, let us add, took him in a short time into the position of an employee to the Tatas, from there to the Congress and finally to the Swatantra Party of which he

was the founder: Which is more natural, from Congress Socialism to Communism or to the Swatantra Party via employment under the Tatas, one would like to know.

The second anti-Communist author to whom reference has to be made is V. M. Fic who in his *Kerala : Yenan of India* writes :

“The most outstanding feature of the activities of the Congress Communists was their introduction of Marxism into the ranks of the communal organisation. This move anchored the future communist party within the bodies of communal power, the very root of politics in Kerala. E. M. S. Namboodiripad and his other Brahmin colleagues, organised the Namboodiri movement among young Brahmins; they published news papers and stage plays which pitted the young generation against the Hindu orthodox and traditional leadership. Hence, Communism was introduced into this elite caste, under the guise of a reformist movement.

“Similarly other Congress Communists injected Marxism into ranks of other Hindu castes. Some Congress Communists were influential leaders of the Nair Service Society and introduced Marxism through programme linking it with social reforms. Among the third Hindu caste, the Ezhavas, Marxism was introduced through the work of its prominent Congress Communist leaders K. P. Gopalan, C. H. Kanaran, R. Sugathan and others”.

Along with this work of “injecting Marxism into the communal organisation”, the author goes on, the Communists organised the workers, the peasants, the Congress committees etc. He thus wants his readers to believe that the Communists Party in the earlier years of its development in Kerala gave the same place to the communal organisations as to the trade unions, Kisan Sabhas etc. and to the cultural front. He tries to substantiate this by resorting to a device which is totally alien to the standards of scientific integrity which should be expected of a scholar.

It has been shown in the foregoing pages that the modern democratic movement in Kerala had its beginnings in the orga-

nised movement for the reform of the family, property inheritance caste-based social relations etc., which have continued for centuries but which were recognised as out of tune with modern times. However, since the customs and manners, family and property relations etc. varied from caste to caste, the movement for modernisation had in the beginning a caste basis; the forward looking members of a particular caste organised themselves for reforming and modernising society.

As the movement developed however, realisation started dawning on the progressively thinking sections in every caste that separate movements for reform in the customs and manners of each caste has a common direction-modernisation of the family, marital relations, property etc. It was further realised that modernisation of society in its turn is integrally created with the political freedom of the country and the rights of the working people. Each caste organisation came to be divided between the conservatives who insisted on remaining confined to the limits of that particular caste and those who wanted their caste or community to become integrated with the general democratic movement for radical reforms.

As early as in the first half of the 1920s, a dynamic leader of the SNDP, T. K. Madhavan, for instance, advised his colleagues to take the help of Mahatma Gandhi in the very cause of advancing the position of the backward castes in society. Still another leader of the same caste organisation, K. Ayyappan, became one of the first initiators of the rationalist movement in Kerala; he began to popularise the idea of the working class, Socialism etc. Those who were with such nationalist, radical or socialist ideas in one community naturally clashed with their more conservative colleagues in the same community. Every caste and communal organisation reflected these conflicting trends.

These developments, briefly described in the foregoing pages of this volume, have been dealt with in greater detail in the present author's *How I became a Communist*. These activities, like the activities of the Left Congressmen during the 1930-33 civil disobedience movement, undoubtedly helped the growth of

the radical and Socialist ideas among the people culminating in the formation of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934. By that time however, those who took the initiative in forming the Congress Socialist Party and developing it into the Communist Party had lived down the period when they were radicals working in the caste and community-based organisations.

The initiative taken in 1934 to form the Congress Socialist Party showed that those who had earlier worked in the caste or communal organisations with a view to bringing about radical socio-cultural transformations, together with the leftist or radical elements within the Congress, came together as the organisers of the common people on class lines cutting across caste and communal barriers. As was noted by G. K. Lieten, the author of *First Communist Ministry in Kerala 1957-59*, "what seems to have been in the case in Kerala is that vested interest have been trying to keep the masses under the regressive ideology of communalist organisations who transmitted their followers to political parties of the same vested interests, while at the same time the progressive parties were organising the masses on democratic issues and in doing so made deep inroads into communal bases. Several developments indicate that the latter forces were getting the upper hand".

The 1930's in fact witnessed a furious battle between the conservative and radical elements in the caste organisations particularly in the Malabar area to which reference was made in the beginning of this chapter. The 1937 elections to the Madras Legislative Assembly from the Malabar area were fought between two forces—on the one hand, the Congress reflecting the national aspirations of the entire people, powerfully supported by the young Socialist Party which was fast developing into the Communist Party; on the other hand, the caste organisations of the Thiyyas and other 'backward' castes who denounced the Congress as "a caste Hindu organisation." Well known nationalists and pro-British elements from the same caste fought each other in a sizable number of constituencies. In every one of them, the pro-British elements supported by the Justice Party of Madras were defeated. While helping the

Congress in its electoral struggle against the pro-British candidates, of course, the Socialists carried the message of class struggle—the struggle of the poor and downtrodden against the exploiting classes cutting across and communal barriers. Carrying this message of struggle waged by the entire nation against the British rulers, and by the poor against the rich cutting across the caste and communal barriers, was the role played by the Congress Socialist - Communist organisers which Fic distorts into developing caste and communal organisations as part of Communist work.

Fic's distortion of reality does not end here. He extended it to the subsequent phases—the mid-term election that followed the liberation struggle of 1959. Adopting the notorious method of giving distorted statistical tables to prove his point, he says that the two general elections of 1957 were conducted on communal lines. But here again, one sees the utter lack of academic honesty and integrity expected of a research scholar. For, his tables XI and XII have the title "voting pattern" of Hindu and Christian communities. He however gives only the number of *seats* secured party-wise and community-wise. How does the number of votes secured by a party candidate belonging to a particular community explain "the voting pattern"? Is it to be assumed that the voters in the constituency which returned a particular MLA belong to his community? How do you then explain the fact that four of the elected M. L. As belong to the Brahmin caste which in no constituency is more than 1-2 per cent of the voters?

Anybody who knows anything about Kerala knows that, except in the present Malappuram district, there is no single constituency where any one caste or community is in the majority. Candidates belonging to all castes and communities should have the support of people belonging to castes or communities other than their own, particularly in these days of heightened political consciousness, with no caste or community as a whole being rallied behind any single party. The biggest contribution made by the political electoral process in Kerala is that, in place of the single factor of caste or community as in the days before the present Indian constitution, the voters

are increasingly influenced by the class and political factors, or the economic and political policies to which parties and individual candidates stand committed. Not even the Muslim Maulavis and the Christian Bishops who controlled the vote banks at one time can today sway the electorate in a big way. Even in 1957 and 1960, the grip of caste among the Hindu electorate had been broken; hence the 40 and 44 per cent votes polled by the Communist Party in 1957 and 1960 respectively.

Scholars of the type represented by Fic commit the error of trying to make the people believe that the political democratic process preceding and following the formation of the Communist Party has not made any difference in the influence exercised on the popular mind by the caste and communal consciousness. In fact however, the economic and political developments in the country, including the growth of political parties and the fighting organisations of the working people, are making the common people increasingly realise that it is the socio-economic and political life, rather than caste and communal ties, that shape their life and development. The Communist party with its philosophy and practice of class struggle has been playing an important role in taking this consciousness to the people.

Before we conclude this discussion, it is necessary to refer to a shortcoming in the otherwise scientific analysis made by Lieten. While correctly nailing down the errors committed by Fic and Co., Lieten fails to bring out the real significance of the emergence and development of the Communist Party. As was pointed out in the foregoing pages of this chapter, 1933-34 witnessed the entry of a new class, the modern working class, as an active political force in the state. A large number of factory workers, poor peasants, ill paid school teachers and other employees etc., had jumped into the Congress-led sathyagraha struggle of 1930-32. This had its impact on the new radical left wing in the Congress which arose in the years following the 1930-32 Civil Disobedience Movement and which culminated in the formation of the C.S.P.

Lieten fails to note the significance of these developments. While describing the process of the development of the Communist

movement in Kerala through the evolution of two personalities - A.K.G. and E.M.S. - he fails to note the dynamic role played by Krishna Pillai who is unanimously admitted to have been the key person in the process of forming the C.S.P. and transforming it into the Communist Party. Born in a family of pauperised poor peasants and having had no opportunity to have even school education, Pillai became the key figure in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930 exerting his influence on all his colleagues including A.K.G. and E.M.S.

Pillai however was only a symbol of the new-type political workers unknown to the earlier generation. Pauperised peasants, ill paid teachers, rural and urban wage-workers, middle class intelligentsia having no university degrees - this is the type that could never aspire to become the leaders of political parties before the formation of the C.S.P. in 1934. It was however from this very section that the overwhelming majority of the Congress Socialist-Communist cadres were drawn.

The birth of the Party therefore meant that, as opposed to the professional politician of the bourgeoisie who dominated Congress politics till then, politicians belonging to the new class were increasingly asserting themselves. The strengthening and development of the Communist Party in subsequent years meant that men and women belonging to this new class were becoming not only the leaders of political parties but MLAs, Ministers MPs etc. That was why the vested interests in the political and economic life in the state could not tolerate the emergence of the Communist government in 1957.

V

The months immediately following the outbreak of the Second World War saw an intensification of the struggle between the left and the right inside the Congress. The left came out with a declaration that the War was an imperialist war and that therefore India should have nothing to do with it. The right on the other hand, said that the War was an imperialist war, since Britain had not accepted the independence of India, thus

implying that it would cease to be an imperialist war if India's status as an independent nation was accepted by Britain. From these conflicting characterizations of the war arose conflicting tactics—the leftist tactics of *unconditional resistance to an inherently unjust war* and the rightist tactics of *conditional support to that unjust war* or rather the tactics respectively of intensification of the mass struggle against imperialism and bargaining with imperialism.

This struggle between the left and the right was, in Kerala, not merely a continuation of what had been taking place in the pre-War years, a struggle between two groups inside the Congress. It was a struggle between the bourgeois leadership of the national movement on the one hand and the Communist Party that was emerging as an independent political party on the other. It meant further the adoption of certain forms of organization and methods of struggle that were never before known to the people of Kerala.

It was in January-February 1940 that at a series of meetings of the Congress Socialists it was decided that the Congress Socialist Party should be transformed into the Communist Party and that efforts should be made to implement the revolutionary plan of action chalked out by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India in its well-known document, *The Proletarian Path*. This was logically followed by the decision to set up the illegal apparatus of the Party not only because the Communist Party was a party under ban but also because Government had already started repression. Dozens of cases had been registered against leftists for having carried on anti-war and 'seditious' propaganda and many were already in jail. It was therefore thought necessary to keep out of jail the cadre necessary for the continuous functioning of the Party organization. The functioning of this organization for over two years—from the beginning of 1940 to July 1942 when the ban on the Party was removed—was a revealing experience for the people of Kerala in general and Communists in particular.

Initially however, the Communists were in a peculiar position: they were, on the one hand, an independent political party

functioning illegally and fighting the official policy of the Congress; on the other hand, they were the leaders of the provincial, district and lower units of the Congress organization. They had, on the one hand, to popularize the independent revolutionary political line of the Communist Party and, on the other, as Congressmen to keep within the limits set by the rules of satyagraha as laid down by Gandhi. This conflict led to the call issued by them as Congressmen to observe an Anti-Repression Day (September 15, 1940) and to the simultaneous organization of militant resistance to the police on that day in their role as Communists. The well-known Morazha and Mattannaur cases which lead to the death sentence on K.P.R. Gopalan was a consequence of this militant action in the course of which two young comrades, Aboo and Chathukutty, laid down their lives. That day was therefore the first occasion on which militant resistance to the police was consciously organized by a political party as against the hitherto spontaneous resistance of the people.

This action therefore enraged the Government as well as the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. While the former unleashed a reign of terror in all areas where Communists were strong, the latter dissolved the KPCC and other Congress committees that had a majority of Communist-led leftists. The Communists had therefore necessarily to strengthen their illegal organization and to emerge before the people as an independent political party. That they did this successfully for nearly two years—October 1940 to July 1942—evoked the admiration of all genuine anti-imperialists in the province who began to look upon the Communist Party as the real leader of the anti-imperialist movement. It was thus during this period of illegality that the Communist Party, as a political party (and not merely as a group of good and hardworking Congressmen), became the leader of the anti-imperialist movement.

Meanwhile, however, the character of the War had changed: on June 22, 1941, the War ceased to be an attempt of antagonistic imperialist groups to repartition the world among themselves. It became a war decisive of the future of the Soviet Union and thus of the future of Socialism globally. Since, however, this

change in the character of the War was of a type as could be perceived only by the class-conscious representatives of the proletariat, it led to a very complex situation. On the one hand the genuinely left petty bourgeoisie, although sympathetic towards the Soviet Union but could not, on that account alone, see any transformation in the character of the war so long as Britain continued to rule our country. The advanced elements among the working class, on other hand, felt that nothing should be left undone to defend the land of Socialism. Consequently the Indian Communists, after an initial leaning towards the former position, took in 1942 the stand that with the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany, the war had become a People's War.

This made a basic change in the alignment of forces inside the national democratic movement in Kerala. The undisputed position of leadership over all genuine anti-imperialists which the Communists had enjoyed till 1942 was shaken. The right-wing bourgeois leadership of the national movement, which had always appeared to the rank and file anti-imperialists as compromising, now assumed the role of uncompromising fighters against imperialism, engaged in 'a last-ditch battle with the enemy'. The Communists who had always been regarded to be the fighters appeared compromisers. The hitherto solid unity of the left elements was thus broken, a section of the leftist allying themselves with the right-wing Congressmen. Anti-Communism became the hall-mark not only of the right-wing but sections of the left also. A new generation of anti-imperialists emerged which believe that the Communist Party was a paid agent of British Imperialism.

This development had disastrous consequences for working class and other mass organizations. The hitherto solid unity of trade unions, student organizations, etc. was broken. For the first time in the history of our working class movement, a bourgeois-led trade union movement, the National Labour Union, came into being; the Students' Congress began to rival the Students' Federation. On a far smaller scale than these two, and only in certain localities, the Peasants' Congress also started growing: rival organizations—this became the slogan of the anti-Communist section of the national movement.

The same thing happened to the Socialist movement. There had, till 1942, been no anti-Soviet, anti Communist bias inside the socialist movement in Kerala, thanks to the genuinely socialist convictions of the first generation of Socialists here. That was why not a single member of the Congress Socialist Party of Kerala dissented when it decided, in 1940, to transform itself into the Communist Party. The apparent conflict that however surfaced in 1942 between loyalty to the international proletariat and loyalty to our anti-imperialist movement created a new generation of socialists in Kerala who were as anti-Soviet and anti-Communist as the Masanis and Mehtas.

This was a very significant development because it showed that the apparent unity of the Congress leading the 1942 movement contained within itself the seeds of future crisis. The desire to develop the national movement in the direction of socialism was as genuine for this generation of socialists as hatred for the Communists who appeared to be standing in the way of 'the final struggle' against imperialism. Hence, as it began to become clearer, as the days passed, that the right-wing leaders were trying to come to an agreement with imperialism, the new 1942 generation of socialists began to get disillusioned with their-rightwing allies. This, as we shall see, was what led to the subsequent radicalization of the socialist ranks, to the formation of the Kerala Socialist Party and Revolutionary Socialist Party and to the possibility of a united front between them and the Communists.

Another factor complicating the political situation was the growth of the Muslim League as a major political force. Not since the days of 1920-21 was there such an awakening among the Muslim masses as in the War years: while in 1921 the Muslim masses were rallied behind the Congress, they were now rallied against it. Since the rallying of any section of the masses against the Congress was, in the eyes of Congressmen and anti-Communists leftists, a rallying of reactionary forces, they considered the masses behind the Muslim League to be as reactionary as the League leadership. The opposition of the Communists to this attitude, their advocacy of the slogan of

Congress-League unity. was another reason for the anti-Communists prejudice within the anti-imperialist movement

VI

Such a complex political situation required a high degree of political maturity on the part of the Communist Party. It was a question of linking up the national task of anti-Imperialism of the Indian proletariat with its international responsibility. It was again a question of fighting the pro-fascist sentiments growing among the anti-imperialist masses in such a way that, while it would effectively expose the conscious fascist agents, it would win over the majority of anti-imperialists. It was, moreover, a question of so working among the Muslim and non-Muslim masses as to help them to see the anti-democratic character or the stand taken by the leadership of both the Congress as well as of the Muslim League. It was, above all, a question of preserving and extending the unity of the trade unions, kisan sabhas, student organizations, etc., in such a way that the day-to-day demands of the mass of the people were secured without resorting to such forms of struggle as would help the conscious fascist agents.

There is no doubt that the Communist Party failed to show such a high degree of political maturity. Various mistakes were committed in assessing the anti Imperialist content of the 1942 upsurge, in evaluating the significance of the birth of socialist and left elements in the wake of that struggle, in understanding the negative role of the Muslim League and its slogan of Pakistan, and in the tactics of struggle on working class and other mass fronts. The essence of these mistakes consisted in the underestimation of the national factor in working out the tactics of the revolution, in the failure to realize that Communist in a colonial country can fulfil their class tasks only if they take proper account of the national aspirations of the people which are the decisive political factor.

The main point, however, is not that these mistakes were committed and that the Party in consequence got temporarily isolated from the non-party mass of anti-imperialists. The main

and decisive point was that, in the first major political conflict with the bourgeois leadership of the national movement, the Communist party took its international class tasks as the axis of its political activity. It required a tremendous amount of political conviction and courage to swim against the current of national sentiment and openly take the international task as the main task. This was particularly so for the Communists of Kerala who, as we have seen, grew within the national movement and hence carried with them innumerable remnants of bourgeois nationalism. Yet they carried out this task as a united party; all the fervent hopes cherished by the opponents of the party, that it would either be forced to give up its slogan of People's War or would get disrupted, were dashed to pieces.

This, however, was not all. It was precisely during the 1942-45 period, when it had to contend with blind prejudice on the part of the majority of anti-imperialists, that the party grew into a mass political party. The weekly organ that the party started in 1942 very soon acquired the status of the leading political weekly in the Malayalam language. The successive calls for Party funds received a magnificent response, the amount collected in the 1942-45 period being over three lakh rupees. By every criterion of the organizational strength of any political party—such as funds collected from the people, the number as well as the quality of work of whole-time and part-time cadres, the circulation of the Party organ, the average sale of political pamphlets and other publications, etc.—the party recorded admirable success.

The main reason for this advance in the political influence and organizational strength of the Party was that, though its solgans on the national-political plane ran counter to the sentiments of a majority of anti-imperialists, its parctical day-to-day activity was eminently suited to the needs of the people : the Party took up all issues that affected the daily lives of the common people, such as food, cloth, sugar, kerosene, etc. Not only did the Party agitate for people's solutions to these problems, it also organized the people in Food Committees, Grow More Food Committees, etc. Through these activities, as well as through

the functioning of trade unions and karshaka sanghams, the Party sought to solve many immediate problems of the people.

It was because of these activities that, at the very time when mass organizations were being disrupted with the formation of national trade unions and students, congresses as well as Muslim labour unions and Muslim student federations, the number of organizations under Communist leadership and their mass membership grew as never before. The Party's efforts in the direction of developing a people's culture also led to a tremendous enrichment of the literary, artistic and scientific heritage of our people, thus drawing vast numbers of men and women of culture towards the Party.

A significant step taken by the Communist Party in the 1942-45 period was the formulation of the slogan of United Kerala. This had of course, been formally accepted ever since the Indian National Congress agreed to the principle of linguistic provinces in its own constitution and made the Malayalam-speaking areas a separate Kerala province for organizational purposes. But the fact that the major part of Kerala lay in the two Indian states of Cochin and Travancore, in whose 'internal affairs' the Congress was prohibited from 'interfering', virtually reduced the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee to a 'Malabar' Congress Committee. That was why, even when the Travancore State Congress and the Cochin Praja Mandalam brought these two states into the realm of active struggle for democracy, the national movement under bourgeois leadership remained split in three parts. Only with the emergence of the socialist movement and its transformation into the Communist Party did an all-Kerala political leadership emerge.

The Party, however, did not remain satisfied with this practical unification of the democratic movement throughout Kerala, but, through a series of articles and pamphlets raised the programmatic slogan of uniting all the homogeneous Malayalam-speaking-majority areas of the Madras Presidency and the states of Cochin and Travancore into one province without the two Maharajas. This, as we shall see, was a slogan which caught

the imagination of the people and created a very powerful mass movement for democracy.

Let us, however, state in anticipation that it was the Communist Party alone that gave an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal content to this slogan. The Party took the clear and forthright stand—(1) that the struggle for United Kerala is an indivisible part of the struggle of the people of India for the liquidation of imperialist rule; (2) that the struggle for United Kerala is also a struggle for ending princely rule and other remnants of feudalism, a struggle for the introduction of full and genuine democracy for the people; (3) that the boundaries of United Kerala are to be so drawn that all those contiguous areas of Madras, Travancore and Cochin where the Malayalam-speaking people are in majority shall be included; (4) that the struggle for United Kerala being the struggle for democracy, the common people of Kerala in alliance with their brethren in the neighbouring nationalities, are the decisive force in that struggle.

These basic premises of the Marxist interpretation of the national question in Kerala enabled the Party to carry on an ideological struggle against the various disruptive slogans advanced by the feudal, bourgeois and petty bourgeois parties with regard to United Kerala.

VII

Just as in 1934 the people belied the hopes of Lord Willingdon by rallying behind the Congress at the polls, so, too, in 1946 did they dash the hopes of the Congress leaders of seeing the Communist Party suffer an ignominious defeat. This was despite the slogan which Nehru himself raised: 'The Communists were on the other side in 1942'. Although the Congress, the Socialist Party and others like the INA, Netaji, etc., launched a vigorous offensive, political as well as physical, against the Party in the name of 1942, a sizable section of the electorate voted Communist in all areas where the Communists had become a force. It is true that they secured very few seats in the legislatures; the few they got were only in special labour constituencies and not in general constituencies. But the number of voters who braved the politi-

cal and physical offensive of other parties and expressed confidence in the Communist Party was an indication that the Communists had grown stronger and not weaker because of the bold, independent stand they took in 1942-45.

So far as Malabar was concerned, the Communists fought the Congress in five general constituencies which constituted two-thirds of Malabar. The votes polled by them in these five seats were on an average 25 per cent, the percentage in one of these (Chirakkal) was however as high as 44 per cent. Considering the heavy odds they had to contend with in fighting the Congress with its appeal to the traditions of 1942, this 25 per cent poll was indeed a creditable record.

The main thing, however, was not the size of the pro-Communist electorate but its political quality. For, the 25 per cent of the voters who recorded their votes in favour of the Communists were not merely voters exercising their franchise, but the vanguard of a new phase of mass political action – strikes, kisan and student struggles, etc. Though the Congress secured an overwhelming majority in the provincial legislature, it had to face not only gigantic people's movements for the satisfaction of immediate demands but also a determined struggle to smash imperialism. It was the Congress, not the Communists, that was to join 'the other side' in these struggles. The 25 per cent vote polled by the Communists in Malabar, together with similar votes polled by them in other parts of India, was an index of the Communist leadership in this post-war revolutionary upsurge.

Within a few months of the General Election of 1946, the workers of the South Indian Railway Labour Union launched their glorious general strike. Along with other parts of the Madras Presidency, Malabar participated in this. Not only did the railway workers of Malabar stand solidly behind the strike leadership, other sections of the workers and the general public also came out in solidarity actions in support of the strike. This was followed by the strike actions of the municipal workers, beedi and cigar workers, etc., as well as government employees.

Peasants, too, came into action; their campaign for the right

to cultivate fallow lands and to retain their own food requirements before complying with the demands of the government's procurement officials, was the first large-scale militant mass action of the peasantry in Malabar. Using Police and Malabar State Police, terror of unprecedented magnitude was unleashed by the Congress ministry to crush this wave of struggle. The Congress Government also resorted to detention without trial of the leaders of these struggles—a method of repression which had been universally condemned when resorted to by the British.

This phase of struggle had far more of a mass character in Travancore than in Malabar. The struggle in Malabar was made out to appear as if the Communists were trying to create trouble for the Congress Government which had the electoral support of the majority of the people. Hence just as there was a section of the people who were firmly with these agitations, there was another section firmly opposed to them. The struggles in Travancore, in contrast, were clearly directed against the universally hated government of Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer. The labour strikes, food rallies, students' actions and other mass actions in Travancore were launched in the midst of a political situation in which two slogans echoed throughout the state: 'Down with the American Model' (The reference is to the proposed new constitution for Travancore modelled on the American Presidential type of the executive as opposed to the British Parliamentary executive) and 'End the Dewan Rule'. The Communists being the most determined fighters against the American model and Dewan Rule, there was perfect cooperation between them and the mass of Congressmen including a section of the Congress leadership itself.

There was, however, one section of the Congress leadership in Travancore which panicked as much as did the government at this new phase of struggle. They could not, of course, openly support the government since the latter was as unbending as ever in its opposition to responsible government. They were, however, prepared to accept the new constitutional proposals of the government, provided some slight changes were made in them. What is more, they were totally opposed to the launching of any mass action against these proposals. The govern-

ment naturally tried to utilize this section to neutralize the entire Congress leadership and in order to isolate and crush the vanguard, the working class led by the Communist Party, and then to crush all opposition.

That the government succeeded in this for the time being is shown by the fact that when it raised the slogan of 'Communist violence and anarchy', the right-wing leadership of the Congress tacitly agreed with it. The concentration of the government's armed forces in the Ambalapuzha and Chertala taluks, the organization under its auspices of the landlord's goondas in the villages of the area, the series of arrests and other repressive actions resorted to by it—all this did not rouse the indignation of the State Congress leadership. But, when the working class under Communist leadership took defensive measures to meet this offensive, they denounced it as 'violence' and virtually supported the government's declaration of martial law. It was not the brutal firing and other official atrocities that enraged them, but the heroic resistance put up by the organized volunteers of the people led by the working class of Alleppey. The hostility of the Congress leadership to the heroic defence put up by the working class led by the Communist Party at Punnapra and Vayalar was the one factor which helped the government in beating back the people's movement for democracy.

The long term consequence of this betrayal by the Congress leadership, however, was not what either the government or the Congress leadership had bargained for. Though confused for the time being, the people in general began gradually to see that what was crushed Ambalapuzha and Chertala taluks was not merely the working class and its political party but the main force of the democratic movement. For, they saw that it was after Punnapra and Vayalar that the government, Sir C.P., raised the slogan of 'Independent Travancore' with no responsible government. The people, therefore, began to organize themselves for a struggle against the government. Student struggles started in various parts of Travancore. The militant rank and file of the Congress started organizing committees of action to effectively lead the struggle for responsible government. The leadership of the State Congress itself was forced not only to

start preparations for a new struggle but also to contact the underground Communist leadership to give a militant character to that struggle. This new round of struggles forced the government to announce the end of Dewan rule and the establishment of responsible government.

As in 1938, so also now, the Government of Cochin followed a different policy. It announced that it was expanding the scope of the constitutional reforms introduced in 1938 and throwing open all departments except for finance and home to administration by elected ministers responsible to the legislature. While thus trying to win over the compromising leadership of the Praja Mandalam, which, of course, accepted the 'reforms', the government attacked all the genuinely democratic elements in the Praja Mandalam as well as the leftists including the Communist leadership who had become the spearhead of the people's movement. Other sections of the democratic movement like the students were also attacked. This attack was finally directed against the Praja Mandalam itself, its ministers being forced out of the ministry by the stooges of the palace. This, however, could not last long because in the conditions of the general democratic upsurge of the post-war years, the demand for democratic rule could not be resisted; responsible government had ultimately to be conceded in Cochin as well.

In these years of the post-war upsurge, the Communist Party began to come out of the comparative isolation in which it found itself in the 1942-45 period. The Party took the consistently democratic stand on all issues and fought most courageously, with the utmost determination, for the demands of the people. Even the most prejudiced anti-Communists began to see that, whenever there was an issue that agitated the people, the communists were there to champion the interest of the people: SIR, Punnapra-Vayalar, North Malabar, Anthikkad, etc., in Kerala, as well as Tebhaga in Bengal, Telengana in Andhra, etc., in other parts of India, together with the glorious RIN revolt in Bombay, helped in once again drawing the best anti-imperialist democrats towards the Communists. Particularly significant was the shift taking place inside the Socialist Party, the majority of the 1942 generation of Socialists getting more

and more dissatisfied with their leadership and being inclined towards a revolutionary reorientation of their policy.

In this period of post-war revolutionary upsurge, the shortcoming of the Communist Party noted earlier, its failure to have a correct approach to the strategy of revolution, became a real hindrance to the development of the revolutionary movement. Sunk as the Party was in an outlook which tended to underestimate the role of the working class and peasantry, it could not correctly gauge the character of the mass actions of 1946-47. For example, in the development of the struggle in Travancore, the Party failed to work out a plan of linking up the resistance of the working class of Alleppey with the struggle of the peasantry for land on an all-state scale. So did the Party in Malabar fail to support the peasant struggles of North Malabar with strike action of the working class of Malabar. The result was that, though the working class of Ambalapuzha and Chertala taluks, the peasants of North Malabar, the workers and middle class of Cochin, etc., fought heroically; though, in each of these struggles, the Communists stood at the head of the fighters, these separate struggles could not be coordinated and developed into a common struggle for People's Democracy.

The ideological root of the Communist Party's shortcoming in the post-war years was its failure to see that the gigantic struggles that had started breaking out towards the end of 1945 were struggles for the realization of People's Democracy, i. e., for the consistent carrying out of the democratic revolution under the leadership not of the bourgeoisie but of the proletariat, so that the subsequent socialist revolution could be prepared for. The Party failed to see in 1947-48 that a fundamental transformation in agrarian relations had already been put on the agenda; that the vehicles of carrying out these transformations were the revolutionary peasant committees in the villages linked on the one hand with the revolutionary committees of action in factories and, on the other, with similar committees of the petty bourgeoisie and other democratic elements. Further, it was not appreciated that in bringing about these fundamental transformations in agrarian relations, the working class and peasant-

try would have to beat down the opposition of the reactionary sections of the bourgeoisie; moreover this struggle against reactionary elements could be successful only if utmost reliance was placed on the resourcefulness and initiative of the masses of workers and peasants, on their ability to discover ever-newer and newer forms of resistance to the enemy. Failure to see these elements of a qualitatively new political situation made the Communists trail behind the bourgeoisie at a time when the people as a whole had already started looking up to the Communist Party as an alternative leadership challenging the bourgeoisie.

It should nevertheless be mentioned that, though with an inadequate realization of the character of the period and of the tasks for the period, the Communist Party was the only force that stood with the people in these struggles. It was the leadership given by the Party that made possible Punnappra-Vayalar, North Malabar, Anthikkad, etc., the glorious indications of a new phase in the struggle for independence and democracy—a phase in which the working class and not the bourgeoisie was looked upon as the leader of the people.