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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to write an objective history of the trade union movement in Kerala is fraught with several dangers. First, documentary and archival source materials are few. This is particularly true with regard to the trade unions in the State prior to 1947. During this period 1920-47, several attempts were made by the ruling establishment to raid trade union offices, destroy the records and imprison the leaders. In Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, the scale of repression on trade unions was unimaginably brutal. However, some of the active insiders in the trade union movement as well as those involved in the mainstream socio-political movements had taken pains to write down their autobiographical observations and reminiscences in the form of historical narratives. Among them special mention has to be made about the work by PUTHUPALLY RAGHAVAN whose book *Viplavasmaranakal* (Reminiscences of Revolution) in five volumes written in Malayalam constitute a wealth of documentation of what happened in Kerala till 1964. Besides there are other important works cited in the Bibliography that helped this author to attempt a historical narrative/documentation of the trade union movement with as much objectivity as possible.

As a part of this documentation, the author met 195 trade union leaders and recorded their reminiscences on audio tapes and the same was transferred to compact discs (CDs) in the MP3 format. The total recorded time comes to about 120 hours. It is for the first time that such a documentation work has been undertaken in any of the states in India. However, very recently, the Indian Association of Labour Historians in collaboration with the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute in Noida has initiated a similar documentation work with assistance from agencies like the ILO.

In our historical narrative of trade union movement in Kerala, we have attempted to draw exhaustively from the reminiscences of trade union leaders as recorded on tapes to throw light into various episodes, events, and, undercurrents in the movement. No attempt has been made by this author to use his discretion to edit or extend or elaborate on the reminiscences, as the audio files had been kept pure and unalloyed. These reminiscences throw light on the family background of the leaders, their entry into the union movement, reminiscences about events, episodes, leaders who had inspired them, and their views about the character of the early movement and that of the contemporary scene. Some of the veterans whom we had met during 1999-2001 had left this world and a number of them had since then fallen ill and bedridden, unable to speak. The recordings were made mostly in the

residences or union offices of the trade union leaders. Some even volunteered to come to the author's residence to do the audio recording. We do not claim that the list of trade union leaders covered in this audio recordings is all comprehensive, but we can make a rightful claim that with the exception of a few notable leaders we have covered the most important personalities who gave dynamism and direction to the trade union movement in the State. However, a notable omission should be mentioned here. Baby John, the veteran RSP leader and trade union leader while serving as the Labour Minister of Kerala had suggested to the Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) to get the history of trade union movement in the State written by some scholars. But when the KILE requested this author to undertake this work, Baby John had fallen ill and lost his voice. Even at the time of writing this, this great leader had not recovered from his illness. There are some written material about Baby John and his contributions to the union movement, particularly that related to Kollam district. To compensate for this loss, we attempted to get the services of one of his earliest compatriots, Madhavan Paruvathotti of Chavara who spoke extensively about the life and work of Baby John.

There were a few veteran trade union leaders like Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair, N. Sreekantan Nair, George Chadayanmury, T.K.Divakaran, T.V.Thomas, S.Varadarajan Nair, and, O.J. Joseph who had left this world long ago. But they were the builders of the movement. The author decided to meet their spouses or children and get their reminiscences recorded. Though Saraswathy Amma, wife of Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair also passed away, we tried to get some material from her home. Luckily, we secured a photocopy of an autobiographical diary written by Saraswathy Amma and it gives a lot of insight into the life of Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair. Maheswary Amma, wife of N. Sreekantan Nair, and, Subhadramma, wife of George Chadayanmury allowed this author to record their reminiscences about their husbands and this material has been used in our historical narrative. Regarding T K Divakaran, his son Babu Divakaran, present Labour Minister of Kerala, was kind enough to share his memories of his late father. V.Prathapachandran, Secretary of the State Unit of the INTUC shared his memories of his late father S.Varadarajan Nair. K.R. Gowri Amma, wife of T V Thomas did not allow this author to meet her for the purpose of recording her reminiscences about her life and work as well as that of T V Thomas. The author has the satisfaction that in most of the recorded reminiscences, the leaders had spoken about their colleagues and other contemporaries and we have drawn on these materials to fill the gaps as well as to tie the loose ends to get a chronological narrative picture of the union movement. We may have missed a number of important trade union leaders from different parts of the State but for want of time and resources we could

not meet them. No one was deliberately avoided or kept out in this documentation exercise.

To supplement the audio files we have also prepared a photo album containing photos of all the 195 leaders whom we had met. The album gives details of their date of birth and contact addresses. A list of leaders is given in Annexure. We will be making an attempt to transfer these photos along with a brief write up about the life and career of these leaders into Compact Discs (CDs) for long-term preservation. We have also plans to get the audio files properly transcribed in order to get a printed account of what the leaders had said during the recordings. Excepting for the reminiscences of Dr. P H Daniel of the Estate Staff Union of South India (ESUSI), which is in English, all others are in Malayalam.

A second danger that affects the attempt to write an objective history of the trade union movement is the existence of conflicting interpretations of important episodes in the socio-political history of the State including the episodes in the trade union movement. As far as possible, to escape criticism on the author's bias or ideological inclinations, we have brought together all the available views and interpretations so that the reader of this narrative could draw his own conclusions. We have also relied heavily on newspaper reports, which, according to this author, carry a good deal of objectivity.

Thirdly, it may be noted that while early records of most trade unions were destroyed by the ruling establishment and its armed police, one felt sad that neither the trade unions nor their leaders were aware of the importance of maintaining even after 1947 their historical records, strike notices, copies of posters, memorandum of settlements and awards and even souvenirs published by them which used to contain a rich source of material like articles based on reminiscences of old timers in the movement. Very few trade unions have ever attempted to write about their own history and growth. Unfortunately, most veterans in the union movement have not written down their observations and reminiscences in any systematic manner, nor have any one in the trade union offices taken initiative to get them recorded or documented.

Fourthly, our attempt at documentation of the history of trade union movement in Kerala has clearly revealed that this movement was inextricably inter-connected with the social and political history of the State. Therefore, one was forced to give the historical narrative along with some overlap of social and political developments in the State in a chronological manner. This might perhaps give the impression that the present work is a narrative of socio-political history of the State of Kerala comprising Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions. We found it extremely difficult and dangerously precarious to narrate the major events and episodes in the trade union movement completely in isolation from the events and episodes in the socio-

political history of the State. Indeed, it is worth to note that in majority of cases, the trade union leader is also a political party leader or a social activist. Many stepped into political activity after working in the trade union field, while there were others who moved from politics to trade unions. No wonder that such extensive and intensive political and trade union inter-linkages, may not be seen in any other part of India.

Fifthly, we feel that any objective historical narrative of the trade union movement in Kerala could give only broad and sweeping visions of the developments. We, therefore, thought that an attempt to narrate the developments from the regional perspective would be worthwhile. There are, for instance, regions or centres where important trade union struggles had taken place and some of them might, in the normal course, would be ignored or forgotten because they were not directly linked with the mainstream development of trade union movement. Thiruvananthapuram was a chief centre of action, it being the capital city of the State. Besides, it has a number of state owned enterprises like State Road Transport Corporation, State Electricity Board, Government Press, KELTRON etc. A number of novel initiatives like the Scavengers' Movement led by Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai took place in Thiruvananthapuram. The mobilization of temple employees also took place here. The other notable centres in the State are Kollam (Cashew, Minerals), Alappuzha (Coir), Munnar and Peerumade (Tea Estates), Aluva and Ernakulam or Kochi (modern enterprises like the FACT Ltd and Aluminium Company Ltd., traditional industries like Tiles), Thrissur and Anthikkad (Toddy tapping, textile mills), Feroke (Tiles), Badagara (Toddy tapping), Kannur (Plywood, bidi and cigar, cotton mills) and Kasaragod (Bidi). At these centres important episodes in the trade union movement had occurred. There are also episodes specifically related to particular industries and employments. Episodes that were specific to individual enterprises like Aaron Mills, A.D. Cotton Mills, FACT Ltd, Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company, Cochin Port, several plantation estates etc also have great historical significance. In a two-year exercise on documentation like this present one, shortage of time and resources stood in the way of doing true justice to the task. But we have done the maximum, given the constraints.

The study is spread over twelve chapters, the first, the present one, being an Introduction. In Chapter II, the overall social and political situation in the State is discussed. After this, the early phase of the trade union movement is discussed in Chapter III and it focuses mainly on developments in Alappuzha, which is considered the birthplace of the trade union movement in Travancore. The inter-linkages between the political movement and the trade union movement are further explored in Chapter IV. This chapter also gives an exhaustive narration of the epic Punnappa-Vayalar struggle and documents the controversies surrounding it. Chapter V discusses the trade

union movement in Kollam. Cochin, like Travancore, was also under princely rule. From 1920s, Cochin was a hub of industrial activity with the setting up of the Cochin Port and the mobilization of port workers was an important event. Chapter VI covers developments in the union movement in Cochin and also covers the adjacent regions of Aluva and Thrissur. The *Praja Mandalam* movement in Cochin is also covered in this chapter since most of the leaders in this were also involved in mobilizing the working class in the region.

There are significant variations in the character of the trade union movement and the political movement in Malabar, which was under the British Rule and the region constituted a part of the erstwhile Madras State. P. Krishna Pillai, the founding father of the left and communist movement was responsible for welding the movements in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore into an integrated one. Though born in Travancore, P.Krishna Pillai reached every nook and corner of the State of Kerala and inspired thousands of activists. The story of the trade union movement in Malabar is given in Chapter VII.

After this, we move on to Thiruvananthapuram, the capital city which had witnessed a good deal of political confrontations with the ruling establishment and being the seat of government and administration, the struggles in other parts of the State used to reach this city. The Secretariat gates had witnessed a number of protest marches and demonstrations. Many disputes were settled at conferences held in this city. Thiruvananthapuram also witnessed the unique scavengers' movement. Chapter VIII covers the notable struggles in this region, unionisation of government employees, struggles of Temple employees, Electricity Board, KELTRON, Head load workers and Fishermen.

Chapter IX deals exclusively with the trade union movement in the State Road Transport Undertaking. The struggle of State Transport workers is said to have inspired the unionisation of Government employees. The transformation of the State Transport from a departmental undertaking into a corporation, however, did not reduce the controlling powers of the Minister of Transport in the day-to-day affairs of the undertaking. Several episodes of struggles in State Transport have been due to frequent interventions of the Minister and also due to politicisation of issues.

The plantations are spread through the highland regions of Kerala. After citing the early attempts at setting up of plantations in the State, Chapter X throws light on the conditions of life and labour in the estates. The story of estate staff union is traced on the basis of the reminiscences of its founding leader Dr. P.H. Daniel, who had started his career as a medical doctor in one of the estate hospitals. The movement of estate workers is discussed in the form of struggles in Munnar and Peerumade, Pathanamthitta, Wayanad and

Thiruvananthapuram. Indeed this Chapter gives an overview of major struggles in the plantation industry.

Chapter XI, though it deals with one of the most important issues in the trade union movement, may turn out to be a little controversial. This chapter is entitled “Politics and Independence of Trade Unions”. The political party and the trade union are two different entities. The relation between these two entities has been a controversial issue in recent years, particularly after the split of the Communist Party into the CPI and the CPI (M). Following this, the AITUC was split into two the AITUC owing allegiance to the CPI and the CITU coming under the CPI (M). The issue became a heated one when the CPI (M) started exercising some control over the CITU. A few top leaders of the CITU claimed that it is a class organization and its members could belong to any political party. But all of them being members of a class organization should stand united and fight for class goals. The CITU could not be subservient to the CPI (M) and the top leaders of the CITU started asserting their views. This led to some open confrontation between the CPI (M) and the CITU. The party took action against top CITU functionaries and many of them were eased out from both CPI (M) and the CITU. Disciplinary actions were taken against them and some were demoted in the party hierarchy. Thus Chapter XI was intended to bring to the reader a dispassionate documentation of the politics and independence of trade unions with special reference to the CPI (M) and CITU relationships.

The concluding Chapter XII discusses the emergence of the pro-labour character of the State, divisions in the union movement, spread of unionisation, affiliations and changing character of working class and the leadership. We could not avoid discussing the issues of union movement in the context of the on-going economic reforms and after making stocktaking, we conclude that change is inevitable and under the given circumstances, the trade unions should lead the society from the vanguard.

Before we end this Chapter, we must say that we are aware of the limitations of this study. Shortage of time, non-availability of source materials, limited coverage of trade union leaders giving their reminiscences etc. are some of the limitations. However, we believe that we have made an earnest effort in documenting the trade union movement. We hope that this study could be a starting point - a kind of benchmark for further studies and documentation. We hope that the trade unions and the leaders would become aware of the importance of documentation of labour movement. Some of them could start documentation of their own history, so that the literature on this theme would register a commendable growth in future.

We need to initiate some work in the fields of collection and preservation of documents relevant to labour, oral history relating to working class struggles, documentation of innovating experiments in working class

mobilization and study of working class in informal and unorganised sector. If the present study inspires others, it would be a great thing.

THERON F. SCHLABACH in his “Ten Commandments of Good Historical Writing” has rightly apologized to the Author of the original Ten Commandments. But what SCHLABACH had stated continues to be a reliable guideline for any one who ventures into historical writing. The present study more or less has tried to follow the guidelines. They are: (i) Facts and details should always support the main ideas, (ii) Draw reader’s attention to the events and episodes and avoid self-conscious discussion of the author’s strategy. (iii) Document every quotation, paraphrase and ideas borrowed from a source. (iv) Write lean, tough, logical precise prose and avoid obscure vocabulary. (v) A paragraph is an instrument to develop an idea or to make a succinct statement for emphasis. (vi) Effective quotation is a literary device – not a way to transfer information unprocessed and undigested from your sources to the reader. (vii) Sense of time and context is an important criterion. (viii) Passive column less writing does not show scholarly objectivity. (ix) One should not relegate essential information to footnotes. (x) Write as if the reader is intelligent but totally uninformed on any particular subject. In every way try to make the writing a self-sufficient unit.

It is left to the judgment of readers of this historical narrative of the trade union movement in Kerala to decide whether this author has fulfilled the Ten Commandments of Good Historical Writing cited by THERON F. SCHLABACH. Let the readers judge.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SITUATION IN KERALA

As prelude to this, one may attempt to give an overview of the socio-political situation in India, which had got reflected in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar the constituents of the present Kerala State. The period between the close of 19th Century and the first decade of the 20th century was remarkable since it witnessed the emergence of revolutionary thought and action. World capitalism, colonialism and imperialism were being tested severely by revolutionary forces. In India though the Indian National Congress (INC), had organized the freedom struggle many inside it felt that the struggle totally lacked revolutionary spirit. The radicals had started to question the moderates in the INC, the former raising the slogan “Freedom is our birth right”.

On September 20, 1871 Chief Justice Norman and on February 8, 1872 the then Viceroy Lord Mayo were killed by radical revolutionaries. The Santhal tribes took to arms against the British and native feudal lords. The Barsathi Revolution shook Nagpur. The struggle by Indigo workers in Bengal shook the British supremacy in the East. Dacca was taken over by agricultural workers. In 1877 India witnessed the largest workers' struggle. In the next five years there occurred more than 25 large workers' struggles all over India. It was in 1890 that N.M. Lokhande formed the Bombay Mill hands Association, the first trade union in the country.

In the field of social cultural and educational fields great events and movements were initiated. The Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, Sri Ramakrishna Mission etc. projected India's strength. Swami Vivekananda addressed the World Conference on Religions and on his return he toured India extensively to sensitise the Indians. Tilak and Gokhale to kindle the spirit of nationalism among the Indians initiated the Deccan Education Society and the Bharat Seva Sangh.

2.1 KERALA SCENE

In Kerala in the first decade of 20th century the farmers and tenants of Malabar registered their protest against the exploitation by the landed gentry supported by the British rulers. Several farmers' struggles were conducted at Panthaloor, Nenmeni, Paaval, Meppathur, Thirkkalloor, Malappuram, Ponnani, Keezhmuri, Mannarkad, Perinthalmanna and Kuttichira. Backward classes and castes also initiated struggles against inhuman treatment meted out to them by the superior forward classes and castes. The struggle was for securing social equality and freedom from enslavement of one class or caste by another. Some of them were closely linked with the freedom movement.

Professor A. Sreedhara Menon, the distinguished historian has given a graphic account of the popular insurrections and royal dissidence in Kerala. He wrote¹:

"The role of Kerala in India's struggle for freedom is not less significant than that of any other state of the Indian Union and viewed in the national perspective, it has its own distinctiveness too. However, the contribution of the State in this field has not received the attention it deserves. There are several episodes connected with the freedom struggle in Kerala which should have found their place in historical narratives dealing with India's freedom struggle, but they have not been honoured even with casual footnotes in the accounts compiled by national historians".

He cites, among other things, several episodes of struggles like the resistance against Portuguese Colonialism led by Kunjali Marakkars (1500-1600), the fight against the imperialist designs of the Dutch in Colachal (1741), the Attingal Outbreaks against the British (1697 and 1721), the Thalasserry struggles between the British and the combined forces of Kolathunad, Kottayam and Kadathanad (1750) and the entry of the French at Mayyazhi (Mahe) and their intrigues with local princes. This encouraged the British to establish their hegemony through wars and also treaties and "by the end of the 18th century the whole of Kerala came under the political control of the British, Malabar District as part of British India and the states of Travancore and Cochin as protected states. There then followed several armed insurrections and popular upheavals organized by the patriotic elements of the population who were determined to over throw British authority and regain lost independence". Prof. Sreedhara Menon wrote²:

"The dispossessed princes and chieftains and aggrieved sections of the population like the peasantry and the tribal communities were in the forefront of these insurrections and upheavals".

He, however, quotes Kathleen Gough, the anthropologist who has classified these early anti-British uprisings into five types namely, restorative, religious, social banditry, terrorist vengeance and armed insurrection. The uprisings in Kerala too came by and large under these categories. It may be noted that in recent years this historian made certain comments on the Punnappa-Vayalar Struggle and his description of its character initiated a lengthy debate. There are many others who felt that this important episode couldn't be considered a part of mainstream freedom struggle. But a close examination of secondary sources as well as reminiscences of people who participated in this struggle suggest that on many occasions the working class has conducted struggles both for working class issues and political issues. Indeed, the trade union movement in Kerala cannot be discussed in isolation with the socio-political movements.

After tracing the rebellion of the Princes of the Kozhikode Zamorin's family, the Pazhassi Revolts of 1793-97, and 1800-1805, Prof. Menon says that "*the Pazhassi Raja's martyrdom made him a cult figure in the history of Kerala and won for him a niche in the hearts of the people of Kerala for generations to come*". Velu Thampi, Dalawa of Travancore, executed the next important armed insurrection. This was an open war against the British. Velu Thampi chalked out a common plan of action in consultation with Palith Achan. The British forces were attacked simultaneously at Kochi, Kollam and Alapuzha, killing several Britishers. However, Velu Thampi had to stage a strategic retreat to Kundara. It was here that he issued the famous Kundara Proclamation (January 11, 1809) exhorting the people to rally under his banner for a patriotic struggle against the British. It boosted the morale of the people and provided the motivation for a mass upsurge of unprecedented dimensions. But at a later stage the struggle failed to achieve any result and Velu Thampi had to advise the Maharaja to sign the Treaty of 1805 with the East India Company to safe guard the interests of the state. After retreating to Mannadi, he committed suicide to avoid being captured by his enemies.

The Kurichiya Revolt of Waynad region of North Kerala in 1812 was a typical peasant uprising against the British policy of revenue settlement which forced the people to pay the land revenue in cash rather than in kind. This revolt brought the whole of Malabar under their control and consequently the British had to bring reinforcements from Mysore and Canara (present Karnataka) for suppressing the revolt. This was followed by Mappila outbreaks led by the Mappila(muslim) peasantry impoverished by rack-renting, extortionate renewal fees and inadequate compensation for making improvements in land. The famous Logan Commission in 1881 made inquiries into these issues and submitted recommendations for the redress of peasant grievances. About 22 out breaks by the Mappillas have been reported and some of them were against the British and a few against Hindu upper caste Namboodiri and Nair feudal lords who were supported by the British. At the end, in order not to lose their control over Malabar, the British enacted legislation (Malabar Compensations for Tenants' Improvements Act of 1887) based on Logan's Report.

There were also several incidents of Royal Dissidence when the British authorities frequently interfered in the administration of the states, sometimes defying the wishes and directions of native rulers. In some cases the British Resident appointed the Dewans. We had the case of Swathi Thirunal in Travancore who became so disillusioned with the set up that he became a recluse and ceased to take any interest in the affairs of the state as a sign of protest (1829-1946). In Cochin, the ruler Sri Rama Varma (1895-1914) wanted to set up an advisory council, introduced tenancy reforms and establish village panchayats but it did not evoke prompt response from the

Madras Governor whose prior concurrence was needed for implementation of the proposals. The Maharaja in disgust and feeling helpless abdicated the throne.

The British Residents and their Agents as well as the Dewans, who functioned as nominees of the British had a field day and followed unpopular policies, corrupt practices, and repressive measures against local people. The ground was thus prepared for political awakening and launching of popular struggles for responsible government of the people by the people. In these struggles all sections of people, students, peasants, farm workers, factory workers, members of caste organizations, intellectuals and social activists actively participated.

2.2 POLITICAL AWAKENING IN KERALA

The Indian National Congress (INC) spearheaded the national freedom movement since its inception in 1885. It attracted the attention of the people of Kerala. Chettur Sankaran Nair, G.P. Pillai, V. Raiyuru Nambiar, Mannath Krishnan Nair, C. Kunhirama Menon, Dr. T.M. Nair, C. Karunakara Menon, K.P. Achutha Menon and several others used to attend the annual sessions of the INC. The Congress was more active in Malabar as it was directly under the British administration. However, according to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, organized political movement began only after the turn of the 20th century.

Mention may be made about the formation of a District Congress Committee in Malabar in 1910 and holding of the first Political Conference at Kozhikode in 1913. The branches of Dr. Annie Bezant's All India Home Rule League were set up in many centres in Kozhikode in 1915. The Home Rule League and the District Congress Committee held joint meetings and processions. When the District Collector Innes held a meeting to raise public contributions to the Governor's War Fund in 1916, the Congressmen led by K.P. Kesava Menon staged a walk out. The District Congress Committee held Political Conferences every year. The Palakkad Conference in 1916 was held under the presidency of Dr. Annie Bezant. The 1917 Kozhikode Conference had Sir. C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, who later became the controversial Dewan of Travancore. Most of these conferences used to be attended by the well to do like the rich and feudal landlords and the resolutions passed lacked revolutionary tone or content. The demands confined to appeals for reforms, increased representation in legislature, expansion of local self-governing bodies, better educational facilities and repeal of repressive measures. The Conferences appealed to people to make generous contributions to War Funds and affirmed loyalty to the British Crown. Obviously, the leaders belonged to the upper classes and were moderates in every sense. According to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, their activities centred on Prayer, Petition and Protest.

2.2.1 Manjeri Political Conference

It was during the Manjeri Political Conference held in April 1920, that the rift between Moderates and Extremists came into the open. The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of April 1919 shocked many and Sir C. Sankaran Nair resigned his membership from the Viceroy's Executive Council. The Manjeri Political Conference was a water shed in the political history of modern Kerala. The division between the landlords on the one side and tenants and workers on the other became concrete. K.P. Raman Menon led the extremists and K.P. Kesava Menon supported him. They declared that the country was already fit for full self-government and the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were unsatisfactory. The Conference expressed solidarity with Indian Muslims on the Khilafat issue and called for extending people's participation in the non-co-operation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. In 1921 a new Kerala Provincial Congress Committee was formed with K. Madhavan Nair as its first Secretary.

2.2.2 Era of Memorials

In Travancore, Brahmins from neighbouring states were appointed to government posts in preference to natives with requisite qualifications. This created resentment. In 1882 three students of the Maharajas College, Thiruvananthapuram (the present University College) namely G. Parameswaran Pillai (Barrister G.P. Pillai) N. Raman Pillai (son of Dewan Nanu Pillai) and R. Ranga Rao (son of Dewan Peshkar R. Ranganatha Rao) were removed from the rolls for having written articles criticizing the policy of discrimination against natives in government appointments. On January 1, 1891 a Memorial signed by over 10,000 persons was presented to the Maharaja to register their protest and this has come to be known as the Malayali Memorial Agitation. The Memorial was drafted by K.P. Sankara Menon of the Madras bar and signed by people of all casts and communities.

As the Malayali Memorial was a Nair sponsored affair, the Ezhavas prepared an Ezhava Memorial signed by 13176 persons from that community demanding that the Ezhavas be made beneficiaries of all those rights and privileges being enjoyed by those who had become converts to Christianity. This Memorial was initiated by Dr. Palpu a medical graduate and a victim of Governments' discriminating policy. Since the Governments' response to this Memorial was not satisfactory, a second Memorial was prepared and this was presented to Lord Curzon, the viceroy during his visit to Travancore. The Viceroy made it clear that he cannot interfere in the matter. Though the Memorials failed to achieve tangible results, they marked the commencement of the long drawn out struggle by under privileged sections in Travancore for securing social justice.

The entry of Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai in the political arena was a milestone in the history of Kerala. A fearless journalist, he was determined to fight against corruption, nepotism, and moral turpitude. He was a champion of popular liberties. He edited the Malayalam newspaper *Swadeshabhimani* published by the great Muslim social activist Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi. The Government confiscated the newspaper and the press and deported Ramakrishna Pillai from the State on 1 September 26, 1916. He was the first to bring socialist thought and a biography of Karl Marx to Malayalees long before the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi in the Indian political scene and almost a quarter of a century before the birth of the Communist Party in Kerala.

In 1914 the Home Rule League convened a conference in Thrissur and organized the Gokhale Memorial Association to educate people about the fight for freedom. In 1918 the Kochi Mahajana Sabha was formed on the initiative of C.P. Achutha Menon (author of Cochin State Manual) and T.R. Ramachandra Iyer. The INC leaders in Thrissur were E. Ikkanda Warrier and Muthedathu Narayana Menon. In Cochin a leading figure was Paliath Cheriya Kunjunni Achan. All of them tried to instil political conscious among the people of Cochin State.

The extremists were setting up revolutionary organizations in the nationalist movement and they inspired some in Kerala too to initiate similar ventures. In Punalur, Vanchi Iyer, a clerk working in the forest office became a member of a secret society and he murdered Ashe, the British Collector of Tirunelveli at the Maniyachi Railway Station on June 17, 1911. After the killing, Vanchi Iyer shot himself to end his life.

During the First World War, some Indian revolutionaries sided with Germany against Britain. Chempaka Raman Pillai from Thiruvananthapuram was such a revolutionary who joined others like Hardyaal, Taraknath Das, Barkathullah, Chandrakant Chakravarthy and Heramba Lal Gupta in forming the Indian National Party in Berlin. A.C. Narayanan Nambiar of North Malabar was another colleague. Chempaka Raman Pillai mobilized Indians in Germany in the fight against British imperialism, set up at Zurich the International Pro-India Committee to acquaint the people of Europe with the basic issues involved in India's struggle for freedom, started the English newspaper *Pro-India* and established contacts with Kaiser William. He also went to South Africa to hold talks with Mahatma Gandhi. He joined the German Navy as an officer in the German ship EMDEN that attacked the British fleet in the Indian Ocean. Chempakaraman Pillai set up a Provincial Government of Free India on December 1, 1915 with Kabul as headquarters. The British fixed a price for his head and engaged Martha Hari, the notorious woman spy to seduce and trap him. In 1919 he organized the League of Oppressed People with branches in various parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin

America. He endorsed Gandhiji's stand on the Khilafat Issue and supported the Non-co-operation Movement. He also played host to several national leaders including Motilal Nehru, M.N.Roy, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and K.M. Panikkar. It was Champakaraman Pillai who suggested to Subhash Chandra Bose the idea of forming the Indian National Army (INA) outside India to secure the liberation of the motherland. But tragically the end of Champakaraman Pillai came on May 26, 1934 when he became a victim of Nazi persecution.

2.2.3 Social structure

According to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, the social history of modern Kerala is inextricably inter-twined with its political history³. The social renaissance which took place in the State in the 19th and 20th centuries was at once the cause and consequence of the political awakening.

The high castes like the Namboodiris, Kshatriyas and Nairs constituted the land owning class while Ezhavas and Mappilas (Muslims) belonged to the tenant class subjected to the oppression by the former. Under the British rule, the feudal landlords became powerful. Slavery in the most primitive form prevailed and the tillers of land were often attached to the land and its owners. They were denied even basic human rights. Women of lower castes including the Ezhavas were not allowed to wear blouses to cover their chest. Non-Brahmin castes including Nairs were denied some social privileges. A series of iniquitous cesses and levies were imposed on the underprivileged sections of the society. The backward communities (*Avarnas*) among the Hindus were denied entry into temples, schools and public services. The evils of untouchability, inapproachability and unseeability were practiced. The practice of *theendal* (pollution) was widely observed. The members of the lower castes had to keep themselves at the prescribed distance from those of the upper castes. Many of the roads, particularly those leading to the temples, were inaccessible to lower castes, though the Christians and Muslims were exempted. Inter-marriage and inter-dining were not allowed. There were, for instance, Brahmin hotels and Nair hotels, which did not serve food to people of, lower castes. No wonder that Swami Vivekananda called Kerala the *brahntthalayam* (mad house) of India.

Several obsolete customs made the social structure more complex. They included *Marumakkathayam* (inheritance through female line), *Thalikettu Kalyanam*, *Thirandukuli* and *Pulikudy*, which promoted wasteful expenditures pushing many families into bankruptcy. To fight these social evils a number of social reform movements were initiated. Motion may be made about Sree Narayana Movement, Yogakshema Sabha, Malayali Sabha, Nair Service Society, Catholic Mahajana Sabha, etc. Reference had been

made earlier about the Malayali Memorial and Ezhava Memorial. The leading figures in the social reform movements were Dr. Palpu, Sree Narayana Guru, Kumaran Asan, T.K. Madhavan, C.V. Kunhiraman, K. Ayyappan, C. Krishnan, Ayyankali, V.T. Bhattachari, Kurur Unni Namboodiri, Chattampi Swamigal, C. Krishna Pillai, K. Kelappan, Mannath Padmanabhan and Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi. They succeeded in bringing about substantial transformation in the social structure and attitudes in Kerala. People began to acquire a progressive social outlook. The underprivileged sections of society became increasingly conscious of their rights as well as their strength. The social change promoted political consciousness among the people.

2.2.4 Major Episodes

Kerala could not remain isolated from the mainstream all-India freedom movement. It played its role in the non-co-operation and Khilafat movements of the early twenties. Malabar, in particular, witnessed large-scale boycott of foreign goods, courts of law and educational institutions. The Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) organised the first All Kerala Provincial Conference at Ottappalam on April 23, 1921 and during the session the police beat up a few delegates.

In 1921 immediately after the Ottappalam Conference the historic Malabar Rebellion, known as Mappila Uprising started. It was a massive upsurge in Malabar making deep inroads in the Eranad, Valluvanad and Ponmani taluks. Government banned all meetings and demonstrations under section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Armed with knives, swords and spears the Mappilas attacked Manjeri Police Station, destroyed all records and later looted the Majeri treasury. They released the prisoners from police lock-up and took possession of arms. The police and Government officials fled in panic. The Mappilas adopted guerrilla tactics and inflicted heavy losses. The British imposed martial law, and unleashed a veritable reign of terror. Suspecting the hostile role of the Hindus in some places, Mappilas attacked the Hindus too. By November 1921, the British could suppress the Mappila revolt following the gruesome incident known as the "Wagon tragedy". Sunil Sarkar described this as the "Blackhole of Podannur". For a short period, the Mappilas could wipe out the British from Eranad and Valluvanad taluks. Later the Congress leaders like M.P. Narayana Menon, K. Madhavan Nair, K. Kelappan, E. Moidu Maulavi, Mohammed Abdul Rahiman, K.P. Kesava Menon, and Hassan Koya Mulla tried to bring back communal harmony and amity in Malabar. However, the British arrested many on charges of treason. Some of them were deported or shot dead. The episode witnessed loss of life to about 10,000 people.

The Mappila rebellion was essentially an agrarian outbreak. Mappila youths discharged from armed forces at the end of the First World War became frustrated with unemployment. There are some who believe that this episode was a communal flare up or an outburst of religious fanaticism. Prof. Sreedhara Menon is of the view that “*the rebellion was the result of the combined communal factors...It was at once an anti-British political upheaval, an agrarian revolt and a communal flare-up*”⁴.

After the Mappila rebellion, both the Hindus and Muslims developed some hostility towards the Congress. The Second Provincial Conference of the Congress met at Palakkad in 1923 under the presidency of Sarojini Naidu. It appealed for communal and religious harmony. The Conference organized a *Misra Bhojanam* (inter-dinning) in which Sarojini Naidu, C. Rajagopalachari and Devadas Gandhi participated. K.P. Kesava Menon and his associates started the *Mathrubhoomi* daily from Kozhikode in March 1923, while Muhammed Abdul Rahman brought out another daily *Al-Amin* in 1924. The year also marked the movement for improvement of tenancy rights and security of tenure and its leaders were G. Sankaran Nair, K.P. Raman Menon, and, Mannath Krishnan Nair. This made the landlords bitter enemies of the Congress.

2.2.5 Political developments in Travancore

It was in the early 1920s, that the State Congress in Travancore came into being. According to Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon, A.K. Pillai, who had returned to India giving up his legal studies in England took up political work in Travancore under instructions from Gandhiji. He took a leading part in the Ottappalam Provincial Conference. On his initiative a Congress Office was opened in Kollam with the close co-operation of K.G. Sankar and together they did yeomen service in spreading the ideals of the Congress⁵. In Trivandrum too, a Congress Committee started functioning at the time on the initiative of A.K. Pillai and V. Achuta Menon.

According to Puthuppally Raghavan, the congress activities spread far and wide. The first chapter in his masterly work *Viplava Smaranakal Vol. I*, he wrote about the arrival of the Congress in his native village⁶. He says that a meeting was held under the presidency of G. Raman Menon who had resigned his post of school inspector to register his protest against the arrest of Swadessabhimani Ramakrishna Pillai in 1910 and later acquired the Law Degree and started practice at Kayarkulam. A.K. Pillai attended this meeting. According to Puthuppally Raghavan, A.K. Pillai was a native of Thevalakkara in Karunagappally Taluk. He left his legal studies and Barrister Examination in Inner Temple to return to India on the advice of Gandhiji. Soon A.K. Pillai succeeded in organizing 64 Congress Committees with in

two years, while he functioned as the secretary of the Travancore Congress Committee. He also started a biweekly from Kollam which later got transformed into the first congress newspaper “*Swaraj*”. He also started a magazine called “*Swadesabhimani*”, where in he published a brief life history of Lenin. Soon after publishing this, A.K. Pillai had to write a sad obituary on Lenin in the issue dated 24.1.1924.

Puthuppally Raghavan has described the style of functioning of regional Congress Committees⁷. The Congress Committee at Puthuppally constructed a small shed to conduct study classes and impart skills in making khadi and handlooms and for this Charkas, Cotton, and other necessary materials were collected. Proper arrangement was made to sell the Khadi output. Classes were held to teach Sanskrit, Malayalam, English, Hindi, Mathematics, History and Geography to students who had passed class IV examinations. One hour of skill training was made compulsory for all students. All this was in true Gandhian tradition. A.K. Pillai, Kuzhikkala Kumar and K.G. Sankar had applauded these activities and asked other provincial committees to follow this. It was thus that many provincial committees began work in promoting khadi, self-reliance and swadeshi, non-co-operation, inter-dining and fighting evils of casteism and untouchability. Thus social reform movements got interconnected with the freedom movement.

T.K. Madhavan believed that the movement for eradicating untouchability in Travancore could be strengthened by acquiring the support of top leaders of the Indian National Congress as well as provincial Congress Committees in Travancore. So in September 1921 he met Gandhiji at Tirunelveli and secured in writing a message from him. In 1923 T.K. Madhavan distributed a leaflet on the issue of eradicating untouchability during the 38th session of the INC and conducted a press conference to elaborate on the conditions prevailing in Travancore. He was given all support by K.P. Kesava Menon and Sardar K.M. Panikkar and also by national leaders like C.R. Das and P.C. Roy. Soon after that, the KPCC set up a committee with K.Kelappan as convenor and T.K. Madhavan, Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad and T.R. Krishnaswamy Iyer as members to do further campaign to eradicate untouchability. Along with A.K. Pillai the Committee members travelled all over Kerala and held campaign meetings. It may be noted that K. Ayyappan had set up the *Sahodara Sanghom* on May 29, 1917, at least five months prior to the October Revolution. The first meeting of this Sanghom was held in Cherai and conducted inter dining and started a campaign to mobilize the untouchables and backward classes and to make them aware of their human rights.

The *Poura Samatwarada Prakshobhanam*, which took place in Travancore, was an agitation for civil rights. The leaders of the aggrieved

committees like E.J. John and T.K. Madhavan formed the Civil Rights League in 1919 and took up the issue with the Government. The Ezhava Memorial of 1886, the idol installation at Aruvippuram by Sree Narayana Guru in 1888, the establishment of the SNDP Yogam on May 15, 1903, the representations made in the Travancore Prajasabha and Assembly by Mahakavi Kumaran Asan, Sarasa Kavi Mullur S. Padmanabha Panikkar, T.K. Madhavan and Ayyankali and the *Poura Samathwarada Prakshobhanam* set the stage for a concerted struggle for a positive social and cultural change. It was in this scenario, that the famous Vaikom Satyagraha started.

2.2.6 Vaikom Satyagraha

In the 1923 Kakinada session of the INC, T.K. Madhavan succeeded in bringing the attention of the delegates to the gravity of the untouchability problem in Kerala, particularly in Travancore. Gandhiji fully endorsed the support of the Congress to any struggle to eradicate untouchability and restrictions on the free movement of people belonging to the lower castes. In 1924 the Congress Committee meeting held in Ernakulam set up a campaign committee consisting of T.K. Madhavan, Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad, T.R. Krishnaswamy Iyer, Kannanthodathu Velayudha Menon and Kelappan (convenor). The committee decided to organise a Satyagraha at Vaikom in order to get the approach roads to the famous Siva Temple opened to the lower castes, *Avarnas*.

According to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, the historic Vaikom Satyagraha began on March 30, 1924. On February 29 the members of the campaign committee had reached Vaikom after covering most parts of Travancore. The Devaswom authorities and the Government were bent upon suppressing the agitation and erected strong barricades on all roads leading to Siva Temple. A meeting was held in the ground near the Vaikom boat jetty in the evening and it declared that the non-violent agitation would commence the next day morning. The representatives of the people of Vaikom, mostly belonging to the upper castes, met the committee members and appealed to them to postpone the agitation by ten days. The Committee suggested that they could wait for a month. As instructed by Gandhiji, Satyagraha was to be conducted by a batch of three and once that batch was arrested, the next batch would take over.

The first batch, according to Puthupally Raghavan, consisted of Kunhappi (a *Pulaya, scheduled caste*) Bahuleyan (an *Ezhava, backward caste*) and Govinda Panicker (a *Nair, forward caste*). They were arrested and sentenced for six months imprisonment. The first batch was symbolic of the unity between the lower and upper castes for fighting a scandalous social evil. Leaders like T.K. Madhavan, K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Kelappan, A.K. Pillai,

K. Velayudha Menon, Krishnaswami Iyer, Chittezhathu Sanku Pillai, K. Kumar, Barrister George Joseph, E.V. Ramaswami Naicker, Ayyamuthu Gownder and others participated in the Vaikom satyagraha and got arrested and convicted for a jail term. T.K. Madhavan, K.P. Kesava Menon, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, Mannath Padmanabhan, C.V. Kunhiraman, M.N. Nair, George Joseph, A.K. Pillai and Alummoottil Channar(A.K. Govinda Das) were the main leaders guiding the Vaikom Satyagraha. C. Rajagopalachari, S. Srinivasa Iyangar and Swami Sradhanand visited Vaikom and extended their support to the agitation.

When Sri Mulam Thirunal Maharaja passed away on August 7, 1924, Regent Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bai ordered the release of all those arrested in connection with the Vaikom Satyagraha. At the suggestion of Gandhiji, caste Hindus organized a *Savarna Jatha* (demonstration by upper castes) led by Mannath Padmanabhan from Vaikom to Thiruvananthapuram. Under the leadership of Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, the marchers presented a petition signed by 25,000 persons. The national dailies gave wide publicity to the developments in Travancore. The *Savarna Jatha* had Edavanattu Padmanabha Menon, K. Kelappan, Prakkulam Parameswaran Pillai, K.P. Sankara Menon, K.G. Kunju Krishna Pillai, Kannanthodath Velayudha Menon, K.G. Sankar, Dr. P.C. Kesava Pillai and Dr. K. Govinda Pisharody and others as Commanders, and Lieutenants. Several other prominent citizens joined the jatha enroute.

The Reagent received the petition but could not give any assurance. On March 9, 1925, N. Kumaran, moved a resolution in Sri Mulam Praja Sabha demanding freedom of movement for all on public roads. Unfortunately, when put to vote, this resolution was defeated by a majority of one vote cast by Manager Parameswaran, brother of Dr. Palpu, one of the founding fathers of the SNDP Yogam. Finally a compromise formula was reached between the Satyagraha leaders and the Police Commissioner Pitt. Under this, the approach roads to the Vaikom Temple were thrown open to all and the display boards indicating the bar on the entry of *avarnas* were removed. It was on March 12, 1925 that the historic meeting took place between Mahatma Gandhi and Sree Narayana Guru at Varkala. In October 1927, Gandhiji visited Thiruvananthapuram again and it was during his discussion with Watts, the Dewan of Travancore, that orders were issued in 1928 throwing open the approach roads to temples to *Avarnas* all over Travancore.

The struggle for securing freedom of movement for lower castes on public roads, for eradicating untouchability and for promoting inter-dining brought about a significant change in the mindset of people. It instilled confidence among people of the lower strata including workers, and small peasants to stand together and fight social and economic injustice. It also inspired those who were leading the trade union movement in Alappuzha.

2.2.7 Revolutionary Upsurge

The INC at its Madras session in December 1927 decided to boycott the Simon Commission. During the *hartal* held in protest against the Simon Commission, several national leaders who offered Satyagraha were severely beaten up. Lala Lajpat Rai was beaten up on October 30, 1928 and few days later, on November 17, he died of injuries. To retaliate, the Police Superintendent Sanders was shot and killed by revolutionaries of Punjab. They included Bagavat Singh and Chandrasekhar Azad, who were deputed by Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. The students and youth of Kerala who had access to national newspapers and to political and social activists soon got exposed to the political developments in the country. The 1920s were charged with the revolutionary sparks emanating from the Nagpur Flag agitation. Tax boycott of Bardoli, agitations conducted by the Swaraj Party, Kakkori, Lahore and Meerut Conspiracy cases, working class struggles in Bombay and Calcutta, boycott of Simon Commission, *hartals*, the hanging of Ram Prasad Bismil, Rajendra Lahiri and Roshan Singh, deportation of prisoners to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans, the martyrdom of Jathindradas and Manindranath and other similar incidents⁸ they created a revolutionary spirit in the minds of people who had a taste of oppression and exploitation during their life. Late 1920s also saw the strike of Railway employees of South India led by V.V. Giri.

In the Fourth Provincial Conference of the Congress held on May 25-27, 1928 at Payyannur, Jawaharlal Nehru delivered the presidential address. He spoke of the inseparability of the concepts of political independence and social freedom. The extremist dominant group in the Congress in Kerala welcomed Nehru's emphasis on Socialist ideology and the motion of complete independence (*Purna Swaraj*). It may be noted in this context that the INC adopted the motion on *Purna Swaraj* in its Lahore session on January 1, 1930. The Payyannur Conference was also notable because, it demanded the introduction of responsible government in the princely states. The leaders all over Kerala who aspired for freedom and responsible government set the stage for greater political unrest through people's mobilization.

2.3 ERA OF STRUGGLES (1930-47)

Prof. Sreedhara Menon describes that the year 1930 turned out to be the *annus mirabilis* (wonder year) in modern Indian history. The Lahore Session of the INC passed the resolution on *Purna Swaraj* on the New Year Day of 1930 and Gandhiji set out on his Dandi March on the first day of March 1930 with 78 volunteers among whom were four from Kerala including C. Krishnan Nair and one Titus from Kottayam. C. Krishnan Nair left his studies in Aligarh and had joined the Sabarmathi Ashram. On April 6,

1930 Gandhiji broke the salt laws as a symbolic act of defiance and launched the Civil Disobedience Movement. Soon followed the boycott of foreign cloth and call for prohibition through picketing of liquor shops. Most leaders including Gandhiji were arrested to weaken the movement. The authorities imposed press censorship. In several places police and army were deployed to defeat the struggle. In some places the Indian police personnel refused to fire at the satyagrahis. They were consequently court marshalled and deported. On May 12 the textile mill workers in Sholapur struck work. The control of many towns was taken over by the freedom fighters. On April 18, 1930, 74 revolutionaries laid a siege and took over the ammunition depot of Chittagong under the leadership of Surya Sen.

The struggles all over India were supported by struggles in Kerala too, particularly in Malabar. The main venue of salt Satyagraha in Kerala was the beaches at Payyannur and Kozhikode. K.Kelappan led a batch of 32 volunteers and broke the salt laws at Payyannur on April 21, 1930. The picketing of toddy shops and boycott of foreign cloth were also conducted at several places. T. Subramanian Thirumumbu, K.P. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai, C. Achutha Kurup (Son of Mahakavi Vallathol), Koodalithazhathu Kunhiraman Nambiar and Moyyarathu Sankaran were the members of the batch of satyagrahis led by K. Kelappan. Moyyarathu Sankaran had left his medical education at Calcutta in 1915 and returned to Malabar to join the Congress movement and worked along with K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Madhavan Nair and K. Kelappan. In 1948 Moyyarathu Sankaran was branded as a Communist and hunted out by Congress *goondas* and police, putting him finally in lock up. There the police unleashed all its brutality. His hair and skin were forcibly removed from his head to “*cut the Moscow road*” on his head and he became a martyr at the hands of the police⁹. This was mentioned in order to show that there was sufficient provocation from the side of the police and the government for peace loving activists to embark on armed struggles to retaliate in the same coin.

Another batch of satyagrahis started from Palakkad Sabari Ashram under the leadership of T.R. Krishnaswami Iyer and marched to Payyannur. On May 5, Gandhiji was arrested but agitation continued. On May 12, the police beat up those who offered the Satyagraha and broke the laws at Kozhikode beach. Kelappan, Abdur Rahiman Sahib, T.R. Krishnaswami Iyer, P. Krishna Pillai and Madhavanar were arrested and sentenced for nine months imprisonment. The struggle spread through out Malabar.

On April 30, 1930, Satyagraha march started from Thiruvananthapuram towards Malabar under the leadership of Ponnara Sridhar. Others who joined the march were M.P. Kurukkal, Kuzhikkala Kumar and Amsi P. Narayana Pillai who wrote the revolutionary marching song “*Varika Varika Sahajare, Varika Sahana Samaramayi*” (come, come

friends, we are ready for the sufferings of the struggle). The words “*Brittane virattuvin*” (terrorize the British) were later changed to “*C.P. ye virattuvin*” (terrorize C.P.). They courted arrest in Malabar. A few of the marchers also went to Bombay to take part in the salt raids at Wadala and Dharasana. G. Ramachandran led a batch of satyagrahis at Vedaranyam in Tamilnad.

Puthuppally Raghavan has given a graphic description of the Kannur Central Jail where political prisoners were housed. He himself had been arrested for participating in the struggles in Travancore. The Kannur Central jail accommodated about ten thousand prisoners mostly political detainees, railway men who struck work in 1928, members of the Gadhar Party, Anuseelan Party of Bengal, and, Hindusthan Socialist Republican Party, Revolutionaries of Kakkori – Lahore conspiracy and a number of pucca criminals. When the Satyagraha prisoners were brought, other category of prisoners were removed to other jails so as to avoid a meeting among them. N.C.Sekhar could not bear the discrimination shown to the jail inmates who used to be classified into categories A, B and C and some getting good food and treatment and others being denied the same. He was supported by Batlivala (lawyer son of the Mayor of Bombay who had been arrested for participating in a protest meeting and speaking against authorities) who refused to take 'A' class status and demanded the withdrawal of discrimination among prisoners.

The 1929 Lahore Session of the INC had decided to observe January 26 as Independence Day. In spite of struggles connected with *Purna Swaraj* and the Civil Disobedience Movement, January 26, 1930 had been observed all over India as the Independence Day. Many inmates in the Kannur jail remembered this date but were helpless to do anything. But to the surprise of all Vasudeva Rao, a freedom fighter and political prisoner in the jail tricked the jailors and hoisted the tricolour on the high tower of the jail and shouted *Bharat Matha Ki Jai, Vande Matharam* and all prisoners in the jail joined in the chorus. Jailers were speechless at this development. Rao was later put in chains and shifted to the quarantine wing of the jail. The fellow prisoners refused to enter the lock-up unless the chains were removed from Rao. They started shouting slogans and the jail superintendent expected a jail mutiny. He asked for reinforcement and the Sub Collector who came to the scene ordered a lathi charge, and after using force, the prisoners were put back in the lock-up. Inside the lock-up the political prisoners started a hunger strike and ultimately the authorities yielded to the pressure and removed the chains from Rao. N.C. Sekhar and Kurur Namboodiripad suffered the maximum punishment and the latter had to be removed to Vellore hospital. The prisoners in batches continued hunger strike demanding better food and treatment. They wanted the stoppage of serving of cooked rice containing worms. After the intervention of T. Prakasam, the jail authorities agreed to

give rice gruel without worms to all prisoners including criminals. From T.Prakasam, prisoners came to understand the progress towards the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. This pact was signed on March 5, 1931 and all political prisoners were released. But before the ink in the Pact became dry, the Government executed the great revolutionaries, Bhagat Singh, Raja Guru, and Sukhdev, the leaders of the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association on March 23, 1931.

As early as April 8, 1929, the Central Assembly had passed the notorious Trade Disputes Bill and the Public Security Act. At this moment Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw bombs from the gallery and shouted “*Inquilab Zindabad*”, “Down Down British Imperialism”. They also distributed leaflets. Though Gandhiji condemned this act, the masses were charged with revolutionary sparks. The martyrs are still remembered with reverence.

2.3.1 Badagara Conference

During May 4-5, 1931 the fifth Kerala Provincial Conference was held at Badagara and it passed Resolutions demanding the conversion of Kerala into a separate province and also starting a campaign in favour of temple entry all over Kerala. Three separate conferences, namely, the Provincial Women’s Conference, All Kerala Students’ Conference, Kerala Political Sufferers’ Conference and the Hindi Prachar Conference were held.

Soon after the Gandhi-Irwin Pact came into force, Lord Irwin was replaced by a true imperialist and conservative Lord Wellington as the Viceroy of India. Gandhiji had gone to London for the Second Round Table Conference and here in India the Viceroy had started to suppress the movement for freedom of the country. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Abdul Gaffer Khan, Vallabhai Patel, Vithalbhai Patel, Dr. Ansari, Sarojini Naidu and even Kasturba Gandhi (wife of Mahatma Gandhi) were arrested. When Gandhiji arrived in Bombay, he was arrested and taken to Yerwada jail. Lathi charges, police firing and arrests were the order of the day. The Viceroy’s intention was clear. He just wanted to eliminate the Congress by destroying its roots in British India.

But in the princely states too, a chain of struggles had been initiated. Travancore and Cochin were not exceptions. In Thiruvananthapuram, a provincial committee of the Congress with Pattom Thanu Pillai as President and Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai as Secretary took up the picketing of shops selling foreign cloth. In the picketing at the Chala market, people like V. Achutha Menon, C. Narayana Pillai, Kottur Kunhikrishna Pillai, K.G. Kunjukrishna Pillai and Aluva Kochukrishna Pillai participated. It is a paradox that a few of them subsequently, at a later date, became the supporters of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. At Alappuzha, a committee with K.

Kumar as President and Pandavathu Sankara Pillai as Secretary organised picketing and Satyagraha. A large number of women participated in this struggle. Mariamma Anthraper of Cherthala and Karthiyani Amma of Thrissur mobilized women volunteers. The latter in fact was considered as the first woman activist in Kerala who courted arrest by conducting non-violent Satyagraha. She participated in the Guruvayur Satyagraha along with K. Kelappan. In her later years, she was deeply involved in propagating Khadi and sarvodaya movement. As the picketing of shops selling foreign cloths was in full swing, the coir factory workers in Alappuzha came forward in large numbers to picket the shops during the period 6-8 p.m. The Travancore Labour Association (TLA), the first trade union in the State took the initiative for this.

2.3.2 Guruvayur Satyagraha

According to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, the Guruvayur Satyagraha, a memorable episode in the history of the freedom struggle in Kerala, took place in 1931-32. It started on November 1, 1931 in order to put pressure on the Kozhikode Zamorin, the Trustee of the Temple to throw it open to all Hindus irrespective of caste. The Satyagraha was organized by the K.P.C.C. in pursuance of the decision of the Badagara Conference and had the blessings of Gandhiji. The supreme leader of the Satyagraha campaign was K. Kelappan. The first batch of satyagrahis came from Kannur under the leadership of T. Subramonian Thirumumbu. A.K. Gopalan, Mannathu Padmanabhan, N.P. Damodaran and P. Krishna Pillai were the other prominent leaders involved in the struggle. A.K.G., the captain of the volunteer corps, was assaulted and he fell down unconscious. P. Krishna Pillai was manhandled for having dared to ring the sacred bell in front of the sanctum sanctorum, a right exclusively reserved for the Brahmins by age old tradition. The supporters of temple entry were enraged and forcibly removed the barricades around the temple. The temple authorities then suspended the pujas and closed down the temple for a month.

A.K. Gopalan, in his autobiography, gives a graphic description on the character and course of Guruvayur Satyagraha¹⁰. According to him, even some upper caste fanatics describing themselves as congressmen and wearing Khadi were in the forefront to attack the Satyagraha volunteers. They tore up the Khadi cloth worn by the volunteers and smashed the photo of Gandhiji. They asserted that it was their birthright to beat up and suppress the Harijans while at the same time supporting the struggle against the British. Some of them openly declared that if the Congress started meddling in religious faith and practices, they would leave the Congress. At the same time there were a large number of upper castes Hindus who openly supported the Vaikom Satyagraha and offered all help to the volunteers. The volunteers belonged to

all castes including the lowest *pulaya* (scheduled caste) and the highest Namboodiri among them.

The Satyagraha would start on the East Nada of the temple at 3 a.m., when it opens for *darshan* (worship) and would go up till late night. The leading speakers were Mannath Padmanabhan, V.T.Bhattathiripad, N.P. Damodaran, Kelappan, Agamanandan, Vaisranavath Raman Namboodiri and A.K.G. Paliath Kunjunni Achan spearheaded the upper caste counter movement. Soon the Guruvayur Sathyagraha caught all India attention. All India leaders visited Kerala and Guruvayur. January 4, 1932 was an important day when the Government abolished all fundamental human rights. Leaders were arrested and taken to Kannur Jail, but Government allowed the Satyagraha to continue. Jail superintendent Major Ramanan took charge of police brutality on the prisoners. At one stage the prisoners conducted a hunger strike and earned some concessions. They got a reduction in the scale of police brutality. They got time to start a Hindi class, and read books and periodicals. There were detainees from Bengal and Comrade Tewari, a colleague of Bhagat Singh. P. Krishna Pillai was also in jail along with Comrade Chandroth and K.P.R.Gopalan and their company inspired A.K.G. greatly. Later A.K.G. was transferred to Kadalur jail in South Arcot. During A.K.G.'s jail term, the captaincy of volunteers of Guruvayur Satyagraha fell on a woman Kamalavathy who had worked earlier in Bombay. Devaki Amma and Kunhikkavamma assisted her.

The songs and speeches rendered at the Satyagraha pandal were becoming stale. The mind of the Zamorin did not show any symptom of a change. Dr. P.G. Nair, Wadakkekara Balan, K.P. Karunakara Menon and Dr. Thomas and others instilled confidence in the volunteers. Young students like Meenakshy, Madhavi, Padmavathy and C. Unniraja converged on the scene. Among them Unniraja later emerged as a prominent leader of the Communist Party of India (CPI). When the news of attack on AKG and P. Krishna Pillai spread, AKG's brother Padmanabhan Nambiar collected a few supporters and in retaliation attacked several anti-satyagraha people. Padmanabhan Nambiar was a strong believer in the principle of Tit for Tat. It was this that led to the massive surge of enraged people forcing the authorities to close down the temple till January 28. When the Temple opened on 29th, Satyagraha was restarted. In September 1932 Kelappan decided to launch a hunger strike. The Guruvayur Satyagraha had reached a decisive stage.

Marches by volunteers from different parts of Kerala reached Guruvayur; Zamorin started receiving telegrams seeking his orders on granting temple entry. The upper castes in Guruvayur held a meeting in support of Kelappan and it was presided over by Mattannur Madhusoodanan Namboodiri. Meanwhile Krishna Bhat started a hunger strike in front of the Zamorin's palace. "Death or Temple Entry" was the slogan in everybody's

lips. K.A. Damodara Menon and Karthiyayani Amma offered to conduct a hunger strike inside the Guruvayur Temple. Kurur Neelakantan Namboodiripad went to North India to meet national leaders. Finally Gandhiji sent a telegram to Kelappan asking him to end his strike, as he himself would take up the sole responsibility for achieving temple entry. Kelappan decided to end his hunger strike on this assurance from Gandhiji.

The Committee overseeing the Guruvayur Satyagraha decided to send a team of volunteers to travel all over the State to mobilize public opinion in favour of temple entry. The team consisted of Subramonian Thirumumbu, N.P. Damodaran and A.K.G. In Travancore, the team was given all assistance by the Nair Service Society (NSS) and S.N.D.P. Yogam. Kasturba Gandhi visited Kerala during this time which gave a boost to the movement. A referendum on temple entry was done in Ponnani taluk and majority favoured it. In Thiruvananthapuram the team was welcomed by a large gathering led by Bodheswaran and law college students. At this meeting Pattom Thanu Pillai expressed a desire to make a speech, but the audience heckled him and asking where was he when Kelappan was conducting the hunger strike at Guruvayur. The team left for Malabar to hold marches and meetings at several places. A.K.G. started feeling that the struggles would not succeed without the involvement of the working class and petty peasants.

On January 8, Guruvayur Day was celebrated all over Kerala and the people involved in the movement extended support to a Bill on temple entry moved in the Madras Legislative Council by Dr. P. Subbarayan. On November 12, 1936 Chithra Thirunal Balarama Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore issued the Temple Entry Proclamation throwing open the temples all over Travancore to all Hindus, irrespective of caste.

2.3.3 Namboodiri Revolutionaries

V.T. Bhattacharipad was an illustrious revolutionary among the upper caste Namboodiris. He fought bravely against the social evils in the Namboodiri community. Under his leadership Namboodiri youths started openly breaking the established customs and practices. They removed *Kudumas* (tuft of hair kept at the centre of shaven head) and adopted cropped hair. They cut sacred threads kept over their chest. They indulged in inter-dining. They encouraged inter-caste marriages. V.T., as he was lovingly called, promoted the idea of widow marriage by giving his wife's sister Uma Antharjanam, a widow, in marriage to Raman Bhattacharipad of Mullamangalathu Illam (known better as M.R.B.). The marriage was attended among others by Nalappat Narayana Menon, Nilambur Valiya Raja, M.C. Joseph (the famous rationalist), Chengannur C.P. Bhattachari, Mannath Padmanabhan, K. Ayyappan, Kuttikrishna Marar, K.A. Damodara Menon,

E.M.S.Namboodiripad, Chowara Parameswaran, Parvathy Ayyappan and Arya Pallam. V.T. had a utopia when he started “*Utbudha Kerala Colony*” a kind of collective where Namboodiris could stay together as one family. To propagate its objectives, V.T. started a magazine called “*Utbudha Keralam*”. But V.T. was disappointed in seeing his Utopia crashing before his eyes after some months.

2.3.4 Emergence and dominance of Leftists

The Congress workers in Malabar were enraged when the Government declared the INC unlawful and resorted to a series of repressive measures. The withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934 saw a realignment of forces within the Congress on ideological basis. The younger sections of congressmen accepted the socialist ideology. They felt that the Gandhian method of non-violent non-co-operation would not help. They wanted to bring peasants and workers into the movement. For this they formed the Kerala Congress Socialist Party within the INC on May 12, 1934. C.K. Govindan Nair agreed to be its President, though the main forces behind were P. Krishna Pillai, its Secretary and EMS Namboodiripad as a member. In September 1937 when C.K. Govindan Nair resigned, EMS was made the President.

Following the Economic Depression of 1930s, hardships of common man became worse. Peasants, workers, teachers and even students joined in struggles under the banner of Kerala Congress Socialist Party dominated by leftists. Soon the Congress in Malabar had three groups, the dominant Leftists, the Rightists and the Nationalist Muslims, the last one led by Muhammed Abdur Rahiman. Many alleged that communists were masquerading as Congress Socialists and their aim was a proletarian revolution to establish a classless society.

The Socialists had an upper hand in the sparsely attended Kozhikode Conference of the Congress in May 1935. Meanwhile in December 1934 EMS had been elected as the joint Secretary of the All India Congress Socialist Party. The Left-Right rift became open, though leaders like T. Prakasam and B. Sambamoorthy worked out a compromise formula. The Working Committee of the KPCC would have equal number of members and non-Leftist was to be the General Secretary. Most of the Leftists were associated with the Peasant and Workers’ Movements. They set out on systematic campaigns among peasants and workers to politically mobilize them. A.K.G. led a hunger march in 1936 from Kannur to Madras to focus attention on the deplorable conditions of Malabar peasantry. According to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, A.K.G. was sentenced to nine months simple

imprisonment for having made inflammatory speeches against the Government¹¹.

2.3.5 Period 1934-47

A.K.Gopalan narrates the developments in working class-peasant struggles held in Malabar during the period 1934-47¹². A.K.G. strongly believed that the civil disobedience and non-cooperation struggles conducted by the INC and the KPCC on Gandhian lines failed because they could not mobilize the exploited and the downtrodden classes of small peasants, tenants, landless and the factory workers. In fact, the Congress Socialists, kindled by Marxist-Leninist ideology and the experience of Soviet Union building up a socialist state, wanted to build up a similar society in the country. A.K.G. described his observations on the day-to-day life of the classes of people exploited by capitalists and feudal landlords. Soon A.K.G., EMS and P. Krishna Pillai came together and took over the responsibility of bringing the exploited classes into the mainstream struggle for independence and also to build a socialist society founded on equity and justice. They also came closer to people like N.C. Sekhar and activists of the Youth League in Travancore.

As early as 1935 several trade unions had been formed. Mention may be made of the Weaving Workers of Azhikode, company union in Feroke Devadar Malabar Reconstruction Trust etc., in Malabar and the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) in Alappuzha and the Kollam Labour Union. They conducted several struggles to establish the right to form unions and fight for decent wages and working conditions including the limiting of working hours to 48 a week. A.K.G. mentions the names of early trade union comrades like Krishnan Nair, Kunjhiraman Nambiar, Gilbert Vaidyan, Choyikutty and Abdulla in the Kozhikode region. A.K.G. learnt practical Marxism from such comrades like Manari Appu, Manayikodam Abdulla, Mullikandan Raman and Kidaram Chandu. On February 19, 1935 cotton mill workers launched a strike. The employer's plan to bring blacklegs did not succeed. Local public extended full support to the strike. The objective of the struggles was to mobilize workers against the capitalists by instilling in them the spirit of brotherhood and class-consciousness. The leaders intensively interacted with the workers and observed their life, problems and aspirations at close quarters. The leaders identified themselves with the workers in every sense of the term.

In the rural areas the police and revenue authorities were just tools in the hands of the feudal landlords. Once signs of resistance by small peasants, tenants and the landless emerged, the authorities and the landlords unleashed a reign of terror all over Malabar. The All Malabar Karshaka Sanghom came into existence in 1937 with P. Narayanan Nair as President and K.A.

Keraleeyan as Secretary to do organizational work among the peasants. It was after this, that a systematic and unified peasant movement started and the Congress Socialist activists took over. Under the leadership of K.P.R. Gopalan, a number of comrades like E.K. Nayanar, E.N. Nayanar, P. Kumaran Master, K.V. Narayanan Nambiar (also known as Kuttymaster) moved around Kayyur, Chirackal and Kasargode to mobilize the peasants. They worked through such institutions like youth clubs, libraries and reading rooms, football tournaments, and drama competitions. Meanwhile, students, youth and also school teachers began to mobilize and conduct struggles. The teachers' struggle turned out to be one of the strongest sub-streams of working class movement in Malabar after their meeting held in Pinarayi in 1935.

The peasant struggles gathered momentum in Irity, Blathur, Padiyoor, Kannavam, Mattannur, and Kuttiyadi and spread over Chirackal, Kottayam, and Kurumbranad taluks. On December 18, 1938, two 500 strong marches were led by Chandroth and E.P. Gopalan from Karivelloor and Kanjikote respectively to the office of the Malabar Collector. They were in red uniforms and all the 1000 marchers reached Chevayur in Kozhikode and held a meeting inaugurated by Kozhippurath Madhava Menon. Red volunteers from Kannur and Thalassery joined the marches and moved to the Kozhikode beach. It was a real Kisan Mazdoor rally. The feudal lords felt that their end was closing in and they sought help from the authorities to suppress the Kisan movement with force. The Government opened new police stations, appointed a large number of punitive policemen, started registering false cases, and arrested the activists in the movement and subjected them to torture. Public meetings were prohibited. Prof. N.G. Ranga, the President of All India Kisan Sabha visited Malabar and spoke at several meetings of the peasants at Kodakkat and Blathur. The drama "Paatta Baakki" (balance of lease rent) by K. Damodaran was staged at several places and it made a deep impact on the peasant movement.

2.3.6 Developments in Travancore and Cochin

Both Travancore and Cochin were princely states and as such were not directly under the control of the British. The central leadership of the INC had prohibited the Congress Committees in these princely states from direct involvement in political agitations. So these Committees concentrated mainly on struggles for responsible government. According to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, "*these agitations were in a sense proxy wars against the British who were the paramount power in these states as they supplemented the struggle for freedom being waged in British Malabar under the direct guidance and control of the INC*"¹³. While the Government of Travancore adopted a policy of uncompromising hostility to the demand for responsible government, the

Government of Cochin took a cautious policy of meeting the demand in stages. The agitation in Travancore unfolded a story of repression, while that of Cochin was a mixture of repression and constitutional reforms.

The *Nivarthana* or Abstention Movement demanded ending of discrimination between upper castes and lower castes, abolishing property qualification for right to vote and wanted the introduction of adult franchise. Since the demands were not accepted, the dissatisfied sections of the Ezhava, Muslim and Christian communities formed a triple alliance under the banner of All Travancore Samyukta Rashtreeya Samithi which later changed into Joint Political Congress. The S.N.D.P. Yogam expressed its solidarity to it. One indirect result of the Abstention Movement was the famous Temple Entry Proclamation issued by Chithra Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore on November 12, 1936. The final outcome was to break up the monopoly of political power and clout enjoyed by the upper castes Hindus, particularly the Nairs. The movement also saw the end of constitutional agitations and the beginning of direct action in the politics of the State. There was no doubt about the character of this Movement in which the underprivileged sections of the population were brought to a common platform to fight for their legitimate rights.

2.4 FORMATION OF TRAVANCORE STATE CONGRESS

The demand for responsible government in princely states was raised on several occasions, but it received an impetus with the formation of popular ministries in British India under the Government of India Act. 1935. Prof. Sreedhara Menon reports that a political conference held in Thiruvananthapuram in 1938 with Dr. Pattabhi Sitharamaiah in the Chair demanded early introduction of responsible government in Travancore and Cochin. Subsequently on February 22, 1938 a meeting of prominent political leaders was held in the office room of A. Narayana Pillai, a lawyer at Pulimoodu in Thiruvananthapuram, with C.V. Kunhiraman in the Chair and it resolved to form the Travancore state Congress¹⁴. The office room of A. Narayana Pillai was on the first floor of a hotel owned by N.S. Kurup and this hotel became famous and was called the *Rashtriya Hotel* (political hotel). During the various struggles conducted by the State Congress, this Hotel was the hub of all activities and it served as a *dharmasala* and shelter for political activists. N.S. Kurup himself wore khadi and extended all help to the congress leaders.

According to Puthuppally Raghavan, the leaders who attended this meeting included T.M. Varghese, C. Kesavan, P.K. Kunju, Miss Annie Mascrene, Ponnara Sridhar, N.P. Kurukkal, C. Narayana Pillai and himself. There were two uninvited guests, namely Puthuppally Krishna Pillai and

Kottoor Kunhikrishna Pillai. The former later became a strong supporter of Sri C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, the Dewan. He was rewarded with the position of Law Member and High Court Judge for his services. The latter that came to be known as the Kerala Jawaharlal also turned hostile to the State Congress. Both these uninvited guests raised objections when C.V. Kunhiraman commenced the proceedings. But soon they were forced to leave. The adhoc committee of the State Congress constituted at this meeting later met at the residence E. John Philipose near the *Puthen Kutchery* (the present Government Secretariat). It was attended by Pattom Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese, V. Achutha Menon, Bhodheswaran, K.T. Thomas, P.K. Kunju, C. Kesavan, E. John Philipose, P.S. Nataraja Pillai, M.R. Madhava Warrier, A.J. John, K.C. George, C. Narayana Pillai, P.N. Krishna Pillai, Miss Annie Mascrene, K.P. Neelakanta Pillai and M.N. Parameswaran Pillai, the cream of political activists of Travancore.

Besides Pattom, who was elected as the President, the meeting also elected K.T. Thomas and P.S. Nataraja Pillai as Secretaries and M.R. Madhava Warrier as Treasurer. The Working Committee was constituted with T.M. Varghese, V. Achutha Menon, E. John Philipose, Miss. Annie Mascrene, P.K. Kunju, C. Kesavan, V.K. Velayudhan, A.J. John and A. Narayana Pillai as members. P.N. Krishna Pillai, Bodheswaran and C. Narayana Pillai were made members of the Publicity Committee. When P.S. Nataraja Pillai and V. Achutha Menon had to withdraw their membership on account of personal reasons, K.P. Neelakanta Pillai was elected as the secretary. Later Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai, Ambalappuzha Narayana Kurup, Changanacherry P.J. Sebastian, Kuttanad K.M. Korah, Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai, Neyyattinkara N.K. Padmanabha Pillai, Kuzhithura K.N. Kunjukrishna Pillai and Nagercoil P. Peethambaran Pillai were co-opted to the adhoc committee. On March 30, 1938 the SNDP Yogam Board of Directors met and resolved to extend support to the State Congress and its call for responsible government, adult suffrage, and freedom of speech and press, but this would, however, be subject to recognition of Raja's Rule. However, the SNDP Yogam and State Congress together would fight against the Dewan's Rule.

2.4.1 Disobedience Movement

The State Congress launched a state wide Disobedience Movement and the struggle for responsible government with effect from August 26, 1938. Gandhiji did not like this and advised the Travancore leaders through his emissary Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, to avoid a direct confrontation with the Government. But the leaders were bent upon defying law and held marches and a public meeting at Sankhumugham beach in Thiruvananthapuram on August 28. Pattom Thanu Pillai, N.C. Sekhar and T.M. Varghese were

arrested for breaking the law. Police lathi charge was held to prevent people from attending the meeting. In a free for all that followed, the crowds burnt the car of the Police Superintendent. Students launched an agitation and shouted slogans against the Maharaja when he was proceeding from the Palace to Padmanabha Swamy Temple for worship. Authorities closed down educational institutions. Demonstrations and protest marches were held in several places like Neyyattinkara, Kadakkal, Kallara, Pangode, Chengannur, Kayamkulam and Alappuzha. Kadakkal was taken over by a local leader Raghavan Pillai who came to be known as "*Kadakkal Franco*" after the Spanish dictator General Franco.

2.4.2 March by A.K. Gopalan

As police repression continued unabated, the action council of the State Congress met at Ernakulam and decided to organize a huge demonstration in Thiruvananthapuram on the birthday of the Maharaja on November 12, 1938. Volunteers from all over the State were to take part in that demonstration. The KPCC set up a sub-committee to campaign support for the Travancore demonstration. The Congress Socialist Party decided to send volunteers on a foot march and elected AKG to lead it. A public meeting was organized in Kozhikode beach in which Kozhipurath Madhava Menon, V.R. Nainar, K.A. Damodara Menon, Abdur Rahman and U. Gopala Menon participated. The foot march led by AKG went through various places like Cheruvannur, Ramanattukara, Pulikkal, Kondotty, Nediyirippu, Manjeri, Malappuram, Ramapuram, Perinthalmanna, Thrithala, Cherupulassery, Ottappalam, Shoranur, Wadakkancherry and Thrissur to reach Ernakulam. On the way AKG was greatly impressed by the reception given to the march by the Muslims of Eranad Taluk. At Ernakulam the volunteers were joined by another batch that had commenced their march from Mangalore. P.T. Punnoose spoke at the largely attended meeting at Ernakulam. Students of colleges in Ernakulam and Aluva gave the marchers a hearty welcome. The workers of the area did not lag behind. Aluva happened to be very close to the borders of Travancore while Ernakulam was in the Cochin State. A large gathering had assembled at the Aluva railway station when the marchers from Malabar reached it. A good number among the enthusiastic crowd were no doubt students. The Travancore Government had mobilized armed reserve police, guns and vehicles in plenty to prevent the marchers from entering Travancore territory. Once the marchers defied the ban and crossed the border, they were arrested. Soon Aluva got transformed into a major centre of struggles, particularly because it was an industrial centre. AKG had given his observations about the character of police personnel belonging to Travancore. They were worse than *pucca* criminals who enjoyed unrestricted freedom to take any one into custody and give any kind of inhuman and brutal

physical torture on the captive. The officers were not far behind. When AKG was brought to the Magistrate's Court in Perumbavur, he sought permission to cross-examine Inspector Chacko and that was granted. AKG used the occasion to highlight the political issues underlying the agitation for responsible government. A.M. Kunhikannan, K.T. Madhavan Nair and AKG were sentenced to eight months imprisonment and taken to Kottayam Police Station and other marchers were forcibly taken to be sent out of Travancore. In the lock-up all the three were subjected to severe beating and AKG in protest commenced a hunger strike. The news spread and a crowd of students and others surrounded the police station and started shouting slogans. The same night the prisoners were transferred to Vaikom Sub-jail. There also a large crowd gathered.

Through out Travancore at several places agitations, marches, protest meetings and demonstrations of all kinds were held. At Alappuzha as a part of the struggle for responsible government, the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) had decided to conduct a general strike. It turned out to be political strike. K.K. Warrier, K.C. George and R. Sugathan were in the forefront. Government sent armed battalions to suppress the strike. In the police firing four workers fell martyrs at Chudukad bridge area. P. Krishna Pillai who was running all over Kerala to mobilize workers and peasants and holding charge of the Congress Socialist Party deputed AKG to Alappuzha. It was during his stay in Alappuzha that AKG came into contact with R. Sugathan, C.K. Velayudhan, Varghese Vaidyan and K.C. George.

2.4.3 State Congress Campaign

Though the Travancore State Congress came into being in February 1938, it took some time for the organization to be active. To begin with, a membership campaign was started from Kanyakumari in the South all the way to Parur in the North. Several regional committees were constituted. In Nagercoil a public meeting was held on March 5, 1938 under the auspices of Civil Liberties Union to explain the objectives of the State Congress. Muthu Karuppa Pillai and Raman Pillai chaired it and Subbayya Pandaram spoke. The *goondas* employed by authorities resorted to stone throwing to spoil and disturb the meeting. The very next day the Thiruvananthapuram District Magistrate imposed a ban on all activities of the State Congress under Section 227 of the Criminal Procedure Code. Following this, ban orders were issued in several other districts in Travancore. K.T. Thomas, a Secretary of the State Congress and a leading lawyer decided to file a case against the Magistrate's orders with a view to generate wide publicity to the political demands of the Congress. The Court Room was transformed into a platform for Congress propaganda. The ban order was declared as an executive order. Soon the State Congress was forced to take up the case against A. Narayana Pillai who

was arrested by the authorities alleging conspiracy against the Government. State Congress set up a Defence Committee and his case was argued in the Court by a team consisting of T.M. Varghese, Pattom Thanan Pillai, K.T. Thomas and Miss. Annie Mascrene. They demanded cross examination of Sir C.P., the Dewan, District Magistrate Parameswara Panicker, Chief Justice Abraham Varghese, Chief Secretary Dr. Kunjan Pillai, Information Director N.P. Hariharan, K.C. Mammen Mappila of *Malayala Manorama*, P. Balakrishnan Thampi, and many others which obviously was turned down and in the Sessions Court, A. Narayana Pillai was denied bail. The State Congress then brought K.F. Nariman, a senior leader of the INC and a brilliant lawyer to Thiruvananthapuram. The Government organized a group of henchmen including poor fishermen and beggars to show placards containing slogans against Nariman and State Congress when his plane landed. However, a batch of Law College students and Congress activists led by P.T. Punnoose rushed to them and confiscated these placards and shouted slogans against the Dewan. Police clashed with them and Punnoose got a head injury. State Congress was functioning from the Van Ross Bungalow and Nariman was taken there in a procession of cars from the airport. The Sessions Court was functioning from a building at Puthenchanthai, which now houses the Ayurveda College. The Advocate General Kukkiliya raised three objections against Nariman appearing in this case. Nariman had not taken Sannath (license/registration) and enrolled as a lawyer in Travancore. He had been jailed on charges of treason in British India. Further, he was unwanted in Travancore since there was enough qualified lawyers in this State. But Nariman brilliantly countered all the objections and used the courtroom to generate as much publicity for the State Congress. The Judge delivered a pre-prepared judgement denying bail to A. Narayana Pillai. He also sentenced him to 18 months simple imprisonment. Narayana Pillai was taken to Poojappura Central Jail and a large crowd accompanied the police vehicle.

2.4.4 Dewan made Stronger

On April 5, 1938, the Maharaja extended the tenure of Sir C.P. as Dewan for a further period of five years. This strengthened the hands of the Dewan and he became more authoritative, dictatorial and aggressive. He was also very close to the Amma Maharani, the mother of Chithra Thirunal Maharaja. He initiated a reign of terror by sending out C.I.Ds and informers, and by reinforcing police stations and getting ready for an armed confrontation against the State Congress, Congress Socialist Party, trade unions, Communists and groups of political activities who questioned his Rule and demanded adult franchise and responsible government. He was in the process of crystallizing his ideas on the concept of Independent

Travancore, and American Model Constitutional and administrative reforms. He wanted to use repressive measures to wipe out any opposition to his plans. Police and criminal *goondas* joined hands to attack Thomas Muthali, editor of *Malabar Advocate*, and M.R. Madhava Warriar, High Court Lawyer and Treasurer of State Congress and working committee member and editor of *Malayali* daily, while they were taking their morning walk. Later the offices of advocates K.A. Gangadhara Menon, M.N. Parameswaran Pillai were ransacked. Miss Annie Mascrene's residence was also ransacked. When she registered a complaint, she was served with a Notice for defaming the Police Department in general and Inspector Latif in particular. A few days later on June 7, K.P. Neelakanta Pillai, Advocate and Joint Secretary for the State Congress was attacked at Pattom by three *goondas* who broke his head with an iron rod.

The State Congress Committee met and decided to stage a protest meeting and it was announced that if it were banned, volunteers would defy it. This decision was taken under pressure from the Youth League group. Ponnara Sridhar who had undergone intensive Seva Dal training led the protest march from the Van Ross Bungalow accompanied by all the prominent Congress leaders. C. Kesavan sang a revolutionary piece written by Bodheswaran. At the meeting held at the Railway Station Maidan, Pattom Thanu Pillai, G. Ramachandran, E. John Philipose, Ponnara Sridhar, C. Narayana Pillai and P.N. Krishna Pillai spoke and a resolution registering the feelings of the people of Travancore against the repressive measures of the Dewan was passed.

A meeting held at Ooruttukala near Neyyattinkara town by the State Congress was also disturbed by Dewan's Police and the hired *goondas* (popularly known in those days as *Kanji police*). The same was the experience in Chirayinkeezhu. Meetings were held in Nedumangadu and Cherthala. But the meeting held at Chengannur held on June 25, 1938 ended in violence engineered by the authorities. Several persons were injured in police lathi charge led by the notorious Inspector Nallamuttom Padmanabha Pillai. But at the end the police force had to flee the venue when the crowd started throwing stones at them injuring many.

At this juncture, *The Hindu* daily on July 9, 1938 carried a dispatch from Associated Press of India (API) saying that a convention was being organized to set up a Travancore State Federation and a Travancore National Congress on the lines of the Indian National Congress, since the present State Congress failed to take a positive view on communal issues and interests. A notice was released calling a meeting to be held on July 13, 1938 at Bharat Buildings near the Over bridge Junction. The members of the Youth League who wanted the State Congress set up to continue as such decided to disturb the meeting of National Congress. Ponnara Sridhar, Puthuppally Raghavan,

Sreekantan Nair, Sankaranarayanan Thampi, Kurukkal and Kunhiraman Nair of the Youth League reached the hall well in advance and occupied seats. The leaders who wanted to set up the Travancore National Congress started arriving at the hall. They included Mannath Padmanabhan of the Nair Service Society, T.C. Mukkadan of All Kerala Catholica Congress, Thariat Kunhithomman, P.S. Mohammed, Padiyara Joseph Kunju, P.M. Mohammed, M. Sivarama Pillai, Kottur Kunhikrishna Pillai and K.M. Kesavan. They requested the Youth League leaders to leave the hall before the meeting started. The latter did not want to create a direct confrontation. Bridge Junction to expose the evil machination of the National Congress to the people listening to them. This group of leaders under the banner of National Congress were close to the Dewan and followed his advice. The Dewan then roped in 33 trusted legislators to send a telegram to Gandhiji informing him that State Congress in Travancore was using its cadres to indulge in unlawful activities including, abusing women and they were using Gandhiji's name to support what they say and do. But the State Congress issued a press release to counter the allegations. Later the Travancore National Congress attempted to conduct a convention at Kollam attended by Mannath Padmanabhan, Kottur Kunhikrishna Pillai, Kayyalakal, Mukkadan, P.S. Mohammed and K.G. Parameswaran Pillai. But it was the last convention of the organization.

On July 11, when the Legislature was convened, members who had joined the State Congress demanded a separate block of seats in the Assembly Hall. On the opening day they marched from the State Congress Office at Van Ross Bungalow wearing Gandhiji caps and shouting slogans demanding responsible government. National Congress who had fewer members also demanded separate block of seats. They alleged that State Congress cadres were abusing them on public roads and public places and wanted the Dewan to give them due protection. The Dewan deployed cavalry and mounted police on the main road in front of the University College and it provoked the students. It finally resulted in violent clashes injuring many. (In 1921 there was a similar police violence unleashed on the students at the same place). The injured included children of Sadasya Thilakan T.K. Velu Pillai, Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer, Advocates P.C. Iype and C. Oommen. Youth League leaders reached the spot and removed the injured to the General Hospital but hospital authorities, under instructions from the Dewan, closed the gates. But the leaders gate-crashed and secured medical treatment for all the injured. The Dewan issued a ban order on the activities of the State Congress for two months.

2.4.5 The Youth League

The Youth League decided to organize a students' movement and hold a protest meeting on 17th and later on 23rd of July. In the second meeting,

people from distant places came to Thiruvananthapuram by all means of transport. The Youth League decided to hold its annual conference during August 20-22, 1938 and invited Kamaladevi Chathopadhyay, leader of the all-India Congress Socialist Party. Daily meetings were held at Thampanoor Railway Station maidan to popularise the League agenda. Besides Youth League leaders, K.C. George, P.N. Krishna Pillai, John Philipose, C. Kesavan, and Miss Annie Mascrene spoke at these meetings. Soon N.C. Sekhar who had gone to Malabar for engaging himself in political mobilization returned to Thiruvananthapuram. But the authorities imposed a ban on him from making public speeches. But N.C. defied the ban and suddenly appeared from nowhere and climbed on to the dais to make a speech on responsible government and condemning the repressive measures of the Dewan. His speech ended with an appeal for freedom of speech and "*Inquilab Zindabad*". N.C. Sekhar was then arrested and the very next day a protest meeting was held at the same venue.

Ban orders on all activities of the State Congress were imposed in several places. Though top leaders became lukewarm as they did not want to engage in any provocative act, the rank and file led by the Congress Socialists and Youth League kept up the pace of the struggle for responsible government. Top leadership was for coming to an understanding with the Dewan and adopted a mediatory posture. The Youth League had invited Kamaladevi Chathopadhyay to chair the convention of the All Travancore Youth League during August 20-22, 1938 at Thiruvananthapuram. On her way to Travancore, she was requested to return, as there was a ban order on her visit. She was unmoved and boarded the train to Thiruvananthapuram with Miss. Annie Mascrene. When the train reached Thiruvananthapuram, she was not allowed to move out by Youth League leaders, Miss Annie Mascrene and Chinnamma, sister of K.C. George. The distinguished visitor had to spend the day at the Retirement Room at the Railway Station. But when she stepped out into the station portico to proceed to the venue of the meeting, she was arrested and the magistrate remanded her to the Central Jail for two days. The meeting of the Youth League was, however, held with K. Damodaran in the Chair. P.N. Krishna Pillai read out a translation of the English speech, which Kamaladevi had prepared earlier. She cited that in most provinces the Congress has come to power through elections and a State like Travancore could not keep away isolated under the Raja's rule. The jail authorities secretly took Kamaladevi Chathopadhyay in a car and took her to Tirunelveli for deportation. This act of deportation was reminiscent of the one meted out to Swadesabhiman Ramakrishna Pillai in 1910. Ponnara and his group had followed the police vehicle and as soon as Kamaladevi was set free, they took up the responsibility to escort her safely to Mangalore.

2.4.6 Sir C.P. and the First Regulation

The Dewan Sir C.P. soon promulgated the First Regulation of 1114 Malayalam Era on August 26, 1939 and imposed a total ban on public speeches by the Congress leaders. Army held a route march in Thiruvananthapuram. Cavalry and Reserve Police covered almost all roads and junctions. Students boycotted classes and demonstrated. Large crowds moved to the Sanghumugham beach where the State Congress had called a meeting. Pattom Thanu Pillai defied the ban and spoke followed by T.M. Varghese. Both were arrested and later the Magistrate remanded them for two days in Central Jail. The ban was defied in several other places and those arrested were brought to Thiruvananthapuram. All of them were charged with conspiracy to overthrow established government and break law and order and so were sentenced to jail term for one year and a fine of Rs.800/. On August 27 also C. Narayana Pillai, S. Neelakanta Pillai, A. Achuthan, N. Raghavan and Pereira defied the ban and spoke at a meeting. Some fishermen who came to attend the meeting indulged in stone throwing and beat up the policemen, and at the end some miscreants burnt the D.S.P's car. On August 30, students boycotted their classes, shouted slogans condemning Sir C.P. when the Maharaja was returning to his palace after offering darshan at the Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Later the students held a march to Kawdiar, Nanthancode and Palayam ending with a public meeting.

In Neyyattinkara, a huge crowd began to agitate against the arrest of their leader N.K. Padmanabha Pillai who had replaced Pattom as the next dictator of the State Congress. They turned violent when they could not get Pillai released. They burnt a transport bus and observed harthal. The Dewan deployed the army to control the crowds. They opened fire killing one Raghavan, who became the first martyr in the State Congress struggle for responsible government. According to Puthuppally Raghavan, five others were also killed, but their names were not known. At Kollam K. Sukumaran of Kerala Kaumudi daily, P.G. Varghese and M.G. Koshy defied the ban order. Lathi charge and police firing were reported from several places. When repression became unbearable, the leaders decided to shift the headquarters of the State Congress with all its office records to Ernakulam. M.M. Varkey, Barrister A.K. Pillai, K.A. Damodara Menon and P. Narayanan Nair were in charge of the new office. A team consisting of P.T. Punnoose, Miss Annie Mascrene and P.N. Krishna Pillai was sent to British India to appraise the Congress leaders there about the State Congress struggle in Travancore and to seek guidance and support. The team visited Madras, Trichy, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Mysore etc., and following that volunteers from these places held marches to Travancore. Sivaraja Pandian led a march from Madura, but he died while in police lock-up in the Kollam Kasba Station. R. Vasudevan Pillai, A.J. John and Elizabeth Kuruvila took up the dictatorship

in the State Congress as and when one was arrested. Elizabeth Kuruvila was the wife of Kuruvila, the eldest son of Elanjikkal John Vakil and she was also the daughter of Rajyasabhabhooshan Mysore Chandy. She was the first woman dictator. There was police firing in Attingal in which two congress workers were killed. One Dr. N.S. Pillai who was taken into custody was alleged to have died in police lock up, though the truth was that police torture made him permanently ill. During these episodes of police torture, the Dewan was issuing press releases regularly for putting the blame on the State Congress which was instigating violence, lawlessness, and treason as well as criminal conspiracy in the whole of Travancore. Sir C.P. even undertook on all-India tour to spread this view. But in spite of this, the A.I.C.C. met in Delhi on September 25 to endorse the struggle being conducted by the Travancore State Congress.

When Elizabeth Kuruvila was arrested, she nominated P.K. Kumaran as her successor. On Kumaran's arrest, N.V. Chacko of Parur took over as the next dictator. Mrs. Pandalam K.P. Raman Pillai succeeded him. State Congress struggle in middle Travancore was directed by the strongman Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai, Thayyil Krishna Pillai, Kadathikkat Narayana Pillai, V.R. Nanu, G.P. Neelakanta Pillai and Adinat Karunakaran Pillai. The boat workers plunged into the struggle and their leader M.K. Raman courted arrest. Mrs. K.P. Raman Pillai too was arrested by the British India Police at Madurai and handed her over to the Travancore police. Kadakkavoor Kunjuraman succeeded her. He nominated N.P. Philipose as the tenth dictator to succeed him. There were reports from London that the India League there expressed shock at the repression initiated by the Government on the State Congress in Travancore. It was also heard that Jawaharlal Nehru was expected to take up the case of princely states of Travancore, Jaipur and Kashmir and demand responsible government for their people.

In Chengannur the agitating crowds attacked the police station and forced the closure of taluk office and the magistrate's court. They destroyed culverts on roads in order to block the movement of troops. As a sequel to it, army and the police indulged in counter violence and arrested several people. Unfortunately State Congress leaders did not intervene to get bail for those taken into custody. N.P. Philipose was arrested and his nominee Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai became the eleventh dictator. Varghese Augustine, SNDP Yogam Secretary A.K. Narayanan and K.C. Job were assisting Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai in the State Congress struggles in Kuttanad area, which was mostly waterlogged with its proximity to backwaters and the sea. The struggles in Kuttanad helped to mobilize farm workers for attaining freedom and responsible government.

2.4.7 Kadakkal Struggle

Kadakkal struggle created history. Kadakkal in Kottarakkara Taluk was part of Kollam district and lay very close to Madathara reserve forest. Many from Chirayinkeezhu, Kollam, Kottarakkara and Chengannur had migrated to Kadakkal and taken up cultivation of land and all of them were hardworking. Kadakkal Market was notorious for the exploitation of small farm producers by village officials, market contractors, middlemen and their henchmen. Both buyers and sellers were subjected to extortions of many kinds. The youth of the area inspired by the State Congress struggles took up a stand to end the extortion practices. When police and *goondas* intervened, the youth got full support from the people. The police station was stoned. Several people were arrested. Village officials took to their heels. Raghavan Pillai (known later as Franco Raghavan Pillai about whom a reference was already made) clashed with the Police Inspector. The authorities summoned the army from Thiruvananthapuram and people decided to counter it by blocking the roads. People mobilized all kinds of country weapons, which came their way. They used country made guns and a few rifles which had been captured from the police. For about a month Kadakkal was under the control of Franco Raghavan Pillai. Finally authorities used extreme force to destroy houses and property of Franco Raghavan Pillai, B.D. Velu and Ummini and others who were in the forefront of the struggle. Most of the male population fled Kadakkal and women and children were sent to safer places.

2.4.8 Kallara – Pangode Struggles

Kallara-Pangode lies about 40 km northeast of Thiruvananthapuram in Nedumangad and is about 8 km south of Kadakkal. The place is also located on the banks of Aruvippuram River and extends up to Bharathannur. The place is better known as a major centre of anti-Dewan struggle. Kallara market was a major centre for hill products as well as products of local agriculture. People from Kilimanoor, Varkala, Chirayinkeezhu, Kadakkavur, Attingal, Thiruvananthapuram and Neyyattinkara used to come to Kallara market. This market was under the control of merchants, middlemen and their *goondas* who took law into their hands in collusion with the government officials and police. The authorities used to give contract to some to collect the market levies. Moncumpu Brahmins had secured extensive areas of land in the area and the most important person there was one Venikiteswara Iyer who was the younger brother of government Chief Secretary Neelakanta Iyer. Venkiteswara Iyer, according to Puthuppally Raghavan, was a typical autocratic and brutal landlord. During 1934-35 Kallara-Pangode also was drawn into the State Congress struggle for responsible government. Several

local committees were set up in Kallara-Pangode, Pattara, Mithrummala, Cheruvanam, Aruvippuram, Thachonam and Bharatannur. On September 21, 1938, a State Congress meeting was held at Nandiyod and Chellappan Vaidyar, P. Kunhikrishnan, and P.K. Padmanabha Pillai defied the ban and spoke but none was arrested. The Youth League leaders constituted a volunteer corps and started opposing usurious market charges and extortion levies and picketed the market shouting slogans like Bharat Matha Ki Jai, State Congress Zindabad, Youth League Zindabad and Vandematharam. Police made a lathi charge and *goondas* joined them but the crowd who stood witnessing the events threw stones and the police and *goondas* were forced to flee. On September 29, the people in the area decided to take to arms and fight the police and the army if the latter tried to provoke them. A huge police force led by Inspector Sayyed Usman Khan came and the agitators decided to encircle them and block all roads. One Sankara Pillai Kochappi Pillai took to his heels seeing the police van moving on the road. On seeing this, the police chased him and arrested him. Though he was innocent and had no direct involvement in the State Congress struggles, he was charged for treason and named the first accused. Later Kochappi Pillai was hanged. When the news of the arrest of Kochappi Pillai spread, the people became violent, suspecting that the prisoner might have been killed in police torture. They decided to attack the police station. On September 30, Krishnan, an ex-service man from Bharathannur went to the Inspector and appraised him about the mood of the crowd and wanted Kochappi Pillai to be handed over to him. Inspector Usman Khan immediately let Kochappi Pillai free. Krishnan took him and the people saw the true conditions of the victim caused by police torture. People could not resist their feelings and started attacking the police station. Violent clashes occurred. Police and army reinforcements, including cavalry, reached the spot and reign of terror was unleashed. There were reports that even women folk were raped by the police and army personnel. Reinforcements were brought at the request of Venkiteswara Iyer. Kallara-Pangode became a real battleground. People started fleeing from the area. Crops were destroyed. Livestock were slaughtered to feed the army and police personnel who camped there to put down the popular uprising. Kunjan Pillai, Vavakkutty, Mohammadali and Para Narayanan were beaten to death. Cases were registered against about forty people including Kochappi Pillai, ex-serviceman Krishnan (known as *Pattalam Krishnan*), Padmanabha Pillai, Nina Mohammed, Kasian Pillai and Kunjan Vakil. Another martyr, Aliyarkunju, was reported killed in lock-up. Kochappi Pillai was hanged on December 17, 1940 and Krishnan on 18th at Poojappura Central Jail.

According to Puthuppally Raghavan, the State Congress top leaders did not take cognisance of the spontaneous popular uprising in Kallara-Pangode¹⁵. The State Congress neither did send a team nor provide funds for defending the accused in courts. K.C. George suspected that the State

Congress was forced to abandon their case on account of the violent character of the Kallar-Pangode uprising.

2.4.9 The First Political Strike

Congress socialist activists felt that the struggle for responsible government and the end of Dewan's Rule had to be strengthened by instilling into it greater vitality and direct, and if necessary, violent confrontation with the authorities. They did not trust the State Congress leadership which was pursuing a lukewarm approach to the struggle and going at a slow pace. The Congress Socialist activists held a meeting at Trissur and it was attended by S.V. Ghate. By this time a wing of Communist Party of India, which had been banned, had been formed in Kerala by P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran and N.C. Sekhar. All of them were members of the State Congress too. The Thrissur meeting declared that the struggle in Kerala was a part of the all-India struggle for freedom and in this the working class had to play a leading role and for that they had to be politically mobilized. In pursuance of this, Chindan, K.K. Warrier, T.K. Raju, K. Damodaran, Padmanabhan, Aziz and others were deputed to Alappuzha. Padmanabhan and Aziz were to train red volunteers and in a short period they formed a corps of 5000 red volunteers. Strike Committees, Ward Committees, Factory Committees and Campaign Committees were set up openly and secretly under the leadership of none other than the great comrade P. Krishna Pillai. It would be clear from the historical narrative of the trade union movement in Kerala, the impatient leadership role played by P. Krishna Pillai who used to travel to most centres of popular struggle openly and even in disguise to escape arrest. He was solely instrumental in organizing the first political strike in Kerala. Two months before the strike started, the weekly *Thozhilali* published by the Travancore Coir Factory Worker's Union (T.C.F.W.U) had been banned. But the leader could get notices and leaflets printed and secretly circulated among the workers. The boat workers (*navika thozhilali*), and workers in Parvathy Mills, and H & C factory were on strike. In fact, working class struggle and struggle for responsible government were two sides of the same coin and went always together.

2.4.10 Workers' Initiative

On Octoebr 19, 1938 workers of Cherthala, Aroor, Ambalappuzha and Alappuzha held marches, demonstrations and meetings. A big meeting at Kidangamparambu maidan was held with Simon Asan in the Chair in open defiance of the Dewan's Ban Order. The charter of demands announced at the meeting included adult suffrage and responsible government as the first item. The second demand was for the release of all political prisoners belonging to

the State Congress and Youth League. The other demands related to working hours, wages, maternity leave and benefits. Simon Asan who was reported to be the maker of the first Red flag in Kerala, declared the political strike on October 21, 1938. Two days later the Maharaja's birthday was to be observed with pomp and ceremony and naturally the Dewan wanted to break the strike. The capitalists and the landed gentry also wanted the strike to fail. However, the authorities tried to get the strike postponed to any date after the Maharaja's birthday but the strike commenced. About 5000 red volunteers accompanied by tens and thousands of workers marched in military style to the beach at Alappuzha as per the blue print prepared by P.Krishna Pillai. Police countered the marches with a brutal lathi charge at factory gates where picketing was going on and also on the people returning from the public meeting at the beach. Union offices were ransacked and papers and furniture burnt. Many were injured and became unconscious and few of them were thrown into the Commercial Canal and the thick bushes on its banks. On October 24, Police opened fire at a gathering of agitating workers and two were killed on the spot. The twenty-five day long strike ended which brought 6.14 % increase in wages. But the strike was historic, since it was on the whole a political strike in which improvement in conditions of work and wages was secondary. The leaders behind the strike were mostly communists and members of the Congress Socialist Party and Youth League. This strike demonstrated that the working class could be effectively mobilized for political action.

2.4.11 The Great Palace march by Accamma Cherian

As and when one dictator was arrested, he would nominate another to succeed him to lead the State Congress agitation in Travancore. Thus Accamma Cherian became the 12th dictator. She was the brave daughter of Kanjirappally, which was also the seat of the famous Sahrudaya Reading Room functioning under the able leadership of D.C. Kizhakkemuri and K.J. Thomas. Kanjirappally, Ponkunnam, Kappad, Thampalakkad, Chirakkadavu, Chenappady, Manimala and Erumeli had already become centers of State Congress activity under the leadership of Karikkattuparambil K.V. Varkey and the Kollamkulam brothers, K.V. Mathew and K.V. Chacko. A number of Congress workers in the area defied the ban order and courted arrest. They included A.K. Pachu Pillai, K.J. Thomas, K.T. Thomas, P.T. Chacko, K.K. Pillai and K.V. Mathew. When the male volunteers were arrested and sent to jail a number of female volunteers came forward. Accamma Cherian was one of them and she deserved the nomination as the next dictator of the State Congress. Accamma Cherian had passed B.A.L.T. examination and was functioning as the Headmistress of St. Mary's English School at Kanjirappally and belonged to the Karippaparambil family.

As soon as Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai was arrested, the State Congress Office at Ernakulam had no hesitation in nominating Accamma Cherian to become the 12th dictator. October 23 was the birthday of Maharaja of Travancore, a day, which was usually observed with great pomp and celebrations and officials and people from various walks of life, used to openly exhibit their devotion to the Raja. According to Puthuppally Raghavan, in 1799 Velu Thampi Dalawa led a popular march demanding the dismissal of the Valia *Sarvadikaryakkar* (the Dewan), declaration that he would be deported and would never be allowed to enter Travancore again and the repeal of all anti-people levies and laws like Salt Tax in the State. History tells us that Velu Thampi's demands were really popular demands and all of them were granted. Now in 1938, 139 years later there was going to be a mass rally to be held by Accamma Cherian to the Maharaja's palace in the Fort near the Sri Padmanabha Temple. The main objective of the rally was to submit directly to the Maharaja a memorandum containing people's demands on issues like responsible government, adult franchise, freedom of speech and press and ending of the dictatorial rule of the Dewan. The State Congress arranged a number of khadi clad volunteers to converge into Thiruvananthapuram to participate in the popular mass rally on October 23 to be led by Accamma Cherian.

The Charter of demands prepared by the State Congress contained 12 items. Besides responsible government, it listed the following demands also (i) appoint a Committee consisting of at least 50% members from State Congress, trade unions and working class organizations to discuss and draw up a plan for granting responsible government, (ii) lift the ban on the State Congress and the Youth League (iii) scrap the black law of First Regulation of 1114 (M.E.), (iv) release of all political prisoners and cancel all disciplinary action against students who had participated in the popular struggles or supported it (v) conduct an enquiry into the repressive acts and lock-up deaths by a popular committee, and, (vi) dismiss the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer from the seat of power. The Action Committee saw to it that these demands were given wide publicity among people and for it notices were printed and circulated even before the rally started.

Accamma Cherian, accompanied by her brother K.C. Varkey and sister Rosamma Cherian (who later became Rosamma Punnoose) left by the Cochin Express to Madurai. A.K.G. and T.N. Raghavan were deputed to help them. They reached Madurai on October 22 and P.T. Punnoose and V.P. Nair and several others joined them. They were planning to reach Thiruvananthapruam on the morning of October 23, the Maharaja's birthday. But in the morning people were baffled when they read in the papers that the Government had decided to stay the Criminal Amendment Act and release all the political prisoners. This was a strategy by the Dewan who wanted to create some

confusion among the public. This did not create any effect at all and people were eagerly looking forward to the mass rally.

A team of Red Volunteers from Alappuzha, representing the working class, had reached Thiruvananthapuram and they gave a guard of honour to their leader Accamma Cherian. Their Captain Kunjunni Nair led the volunteers. They marched in army style not only shouting slogans but also singing a marching song "*Adangukilla*" (we would not yield) specially written for the occasion by M.P. Bhattacharipad (later known as Premji who secured an award for his acting in Shaji Karun's cinema "Piravi"). Accama Cherian proceeded in an open jeep after addressing the huge crowd who had assembled at Thampanur Railway Station maidan at 5.30 pm. She wore a white khaddar sari and blouse and had put a Gandhi Cap on her head. K.R. Elankath, Nedumangad Kesavan Nair and P.K. Kunjan accompanied her in the jeep. When the mass rally reached the *Vettimuricha Kotta* (Fort), the police which had been deployed in large numbers blocked the rally and as directed by Accamma Cherian, all the volunteers sat on the ground shouting slogans and singing revolutionary songs. The merchants of the Chalai Bazar provided free refreshments to the participants in the rally. A government official approached Accamma Cherian and enquired about the purpose of her rally. On telling him that she just wanted to have an audience with the Maharaja for presenting a memorandum containing demands of people of Travancore, the official went back saying that he would return in ten minutes. The Maharaja was staying in a palace on the South Street of Fort, as it was the usual practice during his birthday and also the Arat festival every year. The official did not return as promised. Instead the army commander Colonel Watkins arrived on the scene and requested Accamma Cherian to direct her volunteers to allow his car to be taken to the Maharaja's place. He also promised, if allowed to go to the Palace, he would inform her whether the Maharaja was willing to meet her. On this Colonel Watkins was allowed to take his car inside the Fort. Soon armed cavalry came on the scene and they made a charge at the volunteers who were sitting on the ground. Most of the volunteers got injured when the horses kicked them from all sides. Some cavalrymen even used their long lances to attack the volunteers. At the same time a military truck with full lights on was driven at full speed threatening to run over the volunteers. But when it reached near the volunteers, the truck driver stopped the vehicle and refused to take it forward. However, the army personnel in the truck jumped out and started kicking the volunteers with their boots and freely using their bayonets using the volunteers as good targets. Even at this point the volunteers and the crowd remained non-violent and did not resort to either retaliation or attempt to run away in fear. The captain of the army troops announced that the Maharaja was not prepared to meet Accamma Cherian and wanted the rally to be disbanded quickly. If this were done, he would be forced to shoot everyone. Accamma Cherian suddenly

came forward and shouted “shoot me if you want” She was like the great Jhansi Rani and the army captain downed his pistol and withdrew to the Fort. Meanwhile, the Maharaja was taken through Kaithamukku and several small lanes safely to the Kowdiar Palace. The Dewan also left for his safe haven at Bhaktivilas Palace. It was a historic retreat by the rulers of Travancore at the face of a popular mass rally. Seeing that there was no use in staying near the Fort, Accamma Cherian announced that all of them would move to the Railway Station maidan. There, a public meeting was held and resolutions were passed based on the popular demands included in the memorandum. At the end of the meeting, news came that the authorities had decided to release all political prisoners. The Maharaja and the Dewan who controlled him had learnt a harsh lesson and felt the popular pulse. But later events proved that the Dewan had other malicious dreams and he was willing to take many more risks to suppress the popular struggles. It was a part of his long-term strategy of perpetuating his hegemony in Travancore, that he came out with his proposal for an Independent Travancore, administrative reforms and also legal and social protection for working class, if people stopped their popular struggles. He singled out the communists and declared that he would wipe them out. In this the State Congress leaders helped him a lot as later events demonstrated. The Kerala Government honoured Accamma Cherian by installing her statue in front of the present Raj Bhavan (Governor’s residence)

2.4.12 Youth League's change of mind

In spite of the withdrawal of the ban on the State Congress and on meetings and processions, the State Congress could not carry on its activities in a normal atmosphere because the state police continued its repressive policies. The Dewan insisted that unless the State Congress withdrew its popular memorandum unconditionally, he was not prepared to discuss the issues with its leaders. This created a rift between the State Congress moderates and the Youth League radicals. The old guard moderates in the Congress unilaterally decided to withdraw the memorandum. This forced the Youth League to leave the State Congress. The later emergence of New Leftist parties in Kerala like the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP), Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and Independent Socialist Party (ISP) was triggered by this decision of the Youth League. These socialist parties could not see eye to eye with the communist party, which was still functioning from underground, as there was a ban on it. However the Communist wing within the Youth League led by P. Krishna Pillai was planning to make a final assault on the autocratic rule of the Dewan and it thought that the strong and committed working class cadres should spearhead it.

The Dewan in a very cunning manner even tried to weaken the State Congress and identified a few notable political leaders to whom he offered

attractive jobs in the Government. To some extent the Dewan succeeded in this. Gandhiji was not in favour of another campaign of civil disobedience in Travancore and that further weakened the Congress in the State. Besides there was inter-personal rivalry to acquire leadership control in the organisation with a view to get into political power.

2.4.13 Workers' strike at Alappuzha

As political prisoners were released, Pattom Thanu Pillai assumed the Presidentship of the State Congress. By October 25, coir factory workers and boat crew deployed armed battalions in Cherthala, Aroor, Muhamma and Alappuzha to repress the strike. K.K. Warrier and C.O Mathew picketed the gates of William Goodacre and Company and they were arrested. Rumours spread that K.K. Warrier (who later came to be lovingly addressed as "Keeran") was killed in lock-up brutality. Workers became violent. A.K.G., K. Damodaran and Kanaran had reached Alappuzha and stepped up the campaign. P.N. Krishna Pillai and K.V. Pathrose were arrested. T.K. Divakaran and K.C. Govindan were arrested on false charges of theft. A protest meeting was held with Varghese Vaidyan in the chair. It passed resolutions registering strong protest against the arrest of several leaders. State Congress leaders who passed through Alappuzha on their way to their headquarters in Ernakulam did not find time to stop and enquire about the struggle by the working classes which was going on. But they met at Ernakulam, passed resolutions condemning atrocities by police and set up two committees to enquire and report about the situation in Alappuzha as well as Kadakkal and Kallara-Pangode. The Committee for Alappuzha consisted of T.A. Abdulla, P.J. Sebastian, Kannara Gopala Panikkar and Accamma Cherian. But the Committees did not do any work and virtually became un-functional. The Congress leaders went to meet Gandhiji and his advice as in the past was to avoid a direct confrontation with the Dewan. The leading all India leaders like Sir C. Rajagopalachari and Pattabhi Sitharammayya had a soft corner for Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer who was a Brahmin from Mylapore in Madras. Rajagopalachari had told P.T. Punnoose on October 16 that the struggle for responsible government could not be considered as a part of the struggle for freedom and independence. He asked the Travancore leaders to withdraw all the allegations against the Dewan and prepare for a compromise with him. Several meetings were held by the Working Committee of the State Congress to discuss the question of withdrawing the allegations against the Dewan but there was no unanimity.

2.4.14 Vattiyoorkkavu Conference, December 22, 1938

The State Congress decided to hold a meeting at Vattiyoorkkavu, near Thiruvananthapuram on December 22, 1938. The Dewan imposed a ban on it and the *maidan* (ground) where the meeting was to be held was taken under the custody of police. Members of the Working Committee were arrested and taken to Poojappura Central Jail. A Narayana Pillai was expected to preside over the meeting and sensing impending arrest he was sent to Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu with instructions to reach Thiruvananthapuram only on December 22. On arrival at the Thampanoor railway station he was received and taken in a procession to Vattiyoorkkavu. Since police blocked their movement, they decided to hold a public meeting at Thampanoor itself in the presence of a full contingent of police and militia. K.R. Elanktah, Nedumangad Kesavan Nair, Accamma Cherian and A Achuthan spoke. In Vattiyoorkkavu, as originally planned, a meeting was held under the leadership of volunteer captain, Mannanthala Karunakaran. The tricolor was raised. Slogan shouting crowds destroyed the police barricades and entered the maidan. One Kunjan Nadar presided over the meeting. Thousands of copies of the prepared speech of Pattom Thanu Pillai were distributed at the venue. The meeting passed a resolution demanding responsible government in Travancore under the sovereignty of the Maharaja. After the meeting the people disbursed peacefully, though at the fag end the police could not resist the temptation to make use of their lathis on the people who were caught unawares.

On December 28, the authorities started arresting leaders one by one. Soon, A. Narayana Pillai, K.R. Elankath, Nedumangad Kesavan Nair, A. Achuthan, Paruthippaally Achuthan, Balaramapuram Raman Pillai, G. Chandrasekhara Pillai, Kunjan Nadar, S. Neelakanta Pillai and A.K. Pachu Pillai were arrested. A. Narayana Pillai nominated R. Sankar as the next dictator, and, the latter on assuming charge set up an Action Council. It justified the decision of the State Congress to withdraw all the allegations against the Dewan as advised by Gandhiji. It also condemned the move by a few radicals in the Congress for planning to launch a direct confrontation with the Dewan. Provoked by this statement, the Youth League workers met at the residence of Pandavath Sankara Pillai and decided to submit a memorandum to the Maharaja consisting of many more allegations against the Dewan. Even those who openly opposed the communists and socialists then decided to join hands with the Youth League to move forward with its new campaign. They included E. John Kuruvila, K.C. Ninan, D.C. Joseph, P.T. Chacko, V.V. Varkey, K.C. Varkey, Joseph Mathew, Karippaparambil K.C. Varkey, K.J. Chacko, and K.C. Thomas. On December 27, 1938 the decision to submit a memorandum was officially endorsed by the Youth League meeting at Ernakulam attended by K. Damodaran, Barrister A.K. Pillai, P.T. Punnoose

and Ponnara Sridhar. It was decided to entrust N. Sreekantan Nair with the task of delivering the memorandum to the Maharaja. Copies of the memorandum were printed and distributed among the public. The Dewan retaliated by issuing a prohibitory order. Following that arrests, lock-up atrocities, confiscation of property of leaders who were suspected to be behind the issue of memorandum, and issue of press releases to confuse the public were resorted to. K.C. Job, Jose, P.T., Punnoose, P.T. Chacko, V.V. Varkey, Varghese Augustine, Congress Gopala Pillai, Karana Narayana Pillai, Ittiavara Idikkula and V.D. Morris were put in jail. The Viceroy, Lord Linlithgo, was scheduled to visit Travancore on January 9. It was the same Viceroy who confined Gandhiji to the Aga Khan Palace during the Quit India Movement of 1942 and had arranged to prepare a funeral pyre for Gandhiji who was on a fast unto death. Prior to the Viceroy's visit, 400 security guards were dispatched to Travancore in a special train.

Students Federation of Travancore was planning to register a strong protest and show black flags to the Viceroy. Paravur Bashir and C.M. Stephen, President and Secretary respectively of the Students Federation were arrested and taken to Poojappura Central Jail. Viceroy started from Ernakulam in Cochin State and reached Aroor in a decorated boat and he was received by the Elayaraja Marthanda Varma, the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer and Commandant Watkis, Police Commissioner Karim and District Magistrate Chandy. They proceeded to Kollam. Even though the authorities had taken extra precautions and conducted search and raid on the previous day, anti-Dewan placards, slogans and banners greeted the Viceroy and his entourage. At Kollam also people demonstrated their ill feelings about the Dewan. From Kollam the party went to Thiruvananthapuram by a special train. In the night, a state dinner was arranged for the Viceroy and his party at Kanakakunnu Palace followed by big fireworks. In the midst of this, Sreekantan Nair could succeed in mobilizing a very large crowd of protestors in and around the Kanakakunnu Palace. Thycaud Lunch Home Bhaskar, Mannanthala Karunakaran, Ulloor Gopi, Cheruvickal Parameswaran Nair and Vasu Pillai assisted him.

2.4.15 State Congress backs out

On January 10, 1939, Pattom Thanu Pillai received a telegram from Gandhiji to withdraw the struggle for responsible government and step up the prohibition struggle in Travancore. The State Congress had already taken a decision to observe January 15, as anti-liquor day. A meeting was held at Pettah railway station maidan on January 15, and Pattom declared that though the State Congress was accepting Gandhiji's advice, the Congress might be forced to launch a new struggle, if the Dewan did not grant responsible government at the earliest. This was only an eyewash. But pressure was

building up which forced the State Congress to observe February 14, 1939 as the day of Responsible Government. An action programme consisting of picketing of shops selling liquor and tobacco, promotion of Khadi and cottage industry products, non-paying of taxes, and, subscribing to newspapers which had been banned. It also gave a deadline of January 21 for fulfilling the demands raised in the new memorandum.

2.4.16 Attempts by the Dewan to disturb communal harmony

The emergence of the State Congress had only strengthened religious and communal harmony prevailing in Travancore. Members of all communities and castes participated in the struggle for responsible government. Finding this, the Dewan thought that one method for destroying the State Congress or weakening it would be to create misunderstanding between various communities like Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians and their various denominations, Muslims and the scheduled castes (*dalits*). He, therefore, prepared a diabolical plan to wound the Syrian Christians to start with. The Syrian Christians were generally prosperous as they were industrious and hard working. K.C. Mammen Mappila, his son K.M. Eapen, C.P. Mathen and K.C. Eapen were running the big Quilon Bank. The Dewan's first target was this bank, which had secured the license of a scheduled bank from the Reserve Bank of India. The Dewan met the Finance Member in the Viceroy's Council and submitted to him false allegations against the Quilon Bank and its directors saying that they were funding State Congress activities and struggles against established government in Travancore.

2.4.17 Crash of National Quilon Bank

It was during this time that the Dewan had summoned Mammen Mappila to meet him and he was reported to have told him that C.P. Mathen was his born enemy and he would destroy him. Meanwhile the Quilon Bank merged with the National Bank to become the National Quilon Bank and Mammen Mappila had decided to register this new Bank in British India and shift its headquarters to Madras. The Dewan asked them to register in Travancore and offered them an attractive bait that all the treasury transactions in the State would be transferred to it and the Government would make a fixed deposit of Rs.75 lakhs in the Bank. The Dewan's thinking was that if the offer was accepted, being the Chief custodian of law and order, he would be able to make the Bank and its directors to dance to his tune, and, if they disobeyed, he could use the powers vested in him to destroy them. He also convened a secret meeting of leading bankers and brokers of Madras in Thiruvananthapuram and masterminded a plan to create a run on the National

Quilon Bank and destroy it. Those who attended the meeting had lot of ill will against the National Quilon Bank, which had been growing fast, and becoming the third largest scheduled bank in India. Finding that the directors of the National Quilon Bank were not showing any interest in the Dewan's offer, he started using other dirty tricks. He succeeded in getting Chattanatha Karayalar resign from the Director Board of the Bank and offered him the high position of the Presidentship of the Legislative Assembly and Chairmanship of the State Credit Bank. V.N. Narayana Pillai also was forced to resign his directorship and the post of legal advisor in the Bank and he got a posting as Government Pleader. Following this, the Dewan induced Khaderbai, another director, to resign his position.

On October 20, 1938 itself Mammen Mappila, K.M. Eapen, C.P. Mathen and K.V. Varghese were arrested in Madras using an extradition warrant and after a prolonged legal battle, the Court as well as the Privy Council, ratified the arrest. On April 4, 1939 the British India police escorted the prisoners to Thiruvananthapuram. Though the Travancore authorities under the Dewan's orders tried to get the prisoners transferred to their control, the British Sargent leading the team refused it. The Dewan's malicious intention was that once he could get the prisoners under his control, he could exhibit them in front of the public all the way from the Travancore-Madras border point, at Shengottah until they reached Thiruvananthapuram. On April 5, the prisoners were brought to Poojappura Central Jail and locked up in segregation cells, which could get neither air nor light. After a few days another director of the Bank K.C. Eapen, brother of Mammen Mappila volunteered to get admitted in the Central Jail along with others. The General Manager of the Bank K.S. Ramanujam was an agent of the Dewan and the Dewan himself had been instrumental in getting him posted in the Bank. The Dewan publicized that the Travancore Government was going to withdraw their fixed deposit of Rs.75 lakhs form the Bank, while the truth was that there was no such deposit in the Bank at that time.

The case against the prisoners was processed expeditiously and on January 4, 1940 they were sentenced to seven years rigorous imprisonment. K.C. Ramanujam who obliged the Dewan was not charged of any criminal act and he was let free and the Dewan rewarded him with a cash cheque for Rs.30, 000/- . According to Puthuppally Raghavan, out of this amount, he deposited Rs.16, 000/- in the Central Bank of India Limited in his wife Pankajammal's name and with the balance amount he boarded a ship to go to England. Though the prisoners filed appeal in the High Court, their sentence was approved. Once they were shifted from the segregation cell to the jail, iron rings were put on their feet with the intention of creating mental torture and depression. After a few days in jail in extremely hard conditions, K.C. Eapen fell ill with acute asthma. Since every one was in solitary confinement,

no help could be provided to him to ease his uneasiness and breathlessness. One night his end came and the elderly K.C. Mammen Mappila bore the tragic end of his brother in another cell in total silence and mental anguish. Not even few drops of water could be administered to K.C. Eapen who was struggling for his last breath.

The Bank was liquidated and Dewan's agents dipped their hands into its assets. The office of the Bank was put on auction for a low price. Many loans taken by Dewan's agents, friends and supporters were written off or partially written off. In spite of all this almost all the depositors in the Bank could be paid off their dues. By August end, Mammen Mappila was seriously ill and the Dewan ordered that if the former accepted the accusations and submit an unconditional apology he could be released from the jail as a special consideration. The Dewan also wanted him to give it in writing that he alone was responsible for the crash of the Bank and that the Dewan had no role in it. Finally Mammen Mappila had to compromise and the Government released him along with his son K.M. Eapen and K.V. Varghese. C.P. Mathen preferred to stay in the jail wearing the iron ring around his feet, the jail uniform and the prisoner's cap. Mrs. Mathen met the then Advocate General of the Government of India Sir B.L. Mittar and sought his legal advice to fight her husband's case. Collecting all the available materials to support his case, Mrs. Mathen appealed to the Viceroy. On hearing this, the Dewan got wild and upset. He and his stooges tried their level best to get a written apology from C.P. Mathen with a view to release him from the Jail before the Viceroy took a decision. Finally, when C.P. Mathen refused to oblige the Dewan, the latter had to come down from his earlier stand and ordered the release of the prisoner. Thus C.P. Mathen came out as a phoenix sending tremors in the heart of the Dewan.

2.5 EMERGING POLITICAL SITUATION

The leaders of the State Congress were rather confused with the emerging political situation in Travancore. The Youth League leaders and workers were directing them. The Communists were emerging as a strong force under the leadership of P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, and A.K. Gopalan. The Dewan was bent on disturbing communal harmony by introducing certain reforms in the voting system and demarcation and reservation of constituencies. The aim of the Dewan was to wean the Ezhava community away from the State Congress. However, the SNDP Yogam Secretary V.K. Velayudhan realized the underlying anti-Ezhava principles in the reforms and openly reacted by saying that Ezhava community would lose whatever it had gained through their struggles in the past. The Congress Working Committee could not find an amicable formula even after two days of discussion and finally decided to depute Patton Thanu Pillai and T.M.

Varghese to Gandhiji to seek his advice. This delegation did include neither C. Kesavan nor V.K. Velayudhan representing the Ezhavas. Those who were in the Central Jail informally discussed the Dewan's reform measures and unanimously communicated to the State Congress President to launch the struggle for adult suffrage and responsible government with greater vigour as that alone would give a final solution to all issues. Before the team led by Pattom Thanu Pillai reached Rajkot to meet Gandhiji, another team from Travancore consisting of Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai, Kottur Kunju Krishna Pillai (a supporter of the Dewan) and K.P. Kayyalakkal had met Gandhiji and explained to him the benefits of reforms, which the Dewan had announced. They tried to mislead Gandhiji about the role of Pattom Thanu Pillai, K.P. Neelakanta Pillai and M.N. Parameswaran Pillai in the past. Gandhiji, however, knew that these delegation members belonged to the National Congress in Travancore and not to the major organization of State Congress and he knew the conflict between them. Finally Gandhiji made an appeal to the leaders of Travancore to turn to non-violence, build discipline among the ranks, withdraw all allegations against the Dewan and take initiative to negotiate with the authorities for securing responsible government. Many felt sincerely, that Gandhiji had again let them down, as his advice would make the Dewan more despotic and people weaker. The Working Committee of the State Congress at its meeting held on June 8 and 9 fully endorsed Gandhiji's advice. It set up a committee consisting of Pattom Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese, and V.K. Velayudhan to meet the Dewan and negotiate with him. Gandhiji also sent a communication to the Dewan requesting him to start negotiation with the State Congress if the latter agreed to follow his advice. The Dewan, however, denied receiving any communication from Gandhiji when Japamani Nadar raised this issue in the Assembly. However, when Pattom Thanu Pillai sought an audience with the Dewan, that was granted. But nothing came out of the meeting. On the other hand, the Dewan issued a press release saying that he would not allow anybody from outside Travancore to meddle in the affairs of the State and if any one decided to break or defy established laws of the State, it would be severely dealt with. When he mentioned 'anybody from outside Travancore', the Dewan was indeed making a reference to Gandhiji. The State Congress clarified that they were not under the influence of any external forces and were not planning any direct action against the authorities and pleaded that they were willing to meet the Dewan again for negotiations. Meanwhile after learning that the Dewan was meeting a delegation of the State Congress, the Travancore National Congress also decided to send a delegation of theirs consisting of Mannath Padmanabhan, P.S. Mohammed, Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai, Kottur Kunju Krishna Pillai and K. Kunhu Panicker. They informed the Dewan that unlike the State Congress, their organization was truly independent. The Dewan informed them that he would consult them also

before taking any decision since his aim was to practice the principle of divide and rule.

2.5.1 “American Model Reforms” of the Dewan

After a few meetings, the Dewan gave a document to Pattom and asked him to keep it a secret. This document was a blue print of Dewan’s American Model Constitutional Reforms. Under this, the Assembly would have only elected representatives. The Treasury Benches would be reserved for Department Heads in Government. There would be electoral colleges, which would elect representatives to the Assembly. Adult franchise principle would be used to conduct elections to Taluk Panchayats. Zilla Panchayats would elect representatives to the Assembly. To aid Department Heads, Committees consisting of elected representatives would be set up and they would be in the form of Standing Committees. Their Secretaries would be Department Heads. The Department Heads would preside over these committees. As Puthuppally Raghavan said, the Dewan was dreaming of becoming the Governor of the State of Travancore and assuming despotic power behind the façade of democracy. The Executive would be independent and the Assembly would have no power to vote out the Executive.

In early September 1939 the Second World War started and the Dewan thought that a golden opportunity had come before him. He informed the State Congress leaders that there would be no further talks with them until the War ends. Even before the Government in British India promulgated the black law, the Defence of India Rules (DIR), a similar law had been promulgated in Travancore. The Government also raised a huge white flag on the top of the Government Secretariat building. To save Travancore from an attack by the Germans, the Dewan deployed armed forces to guard roads, bridges and important buildings and installations. The Dewan also initiated a malicious plan to level false charges like theft on many leaders and put them behind the bars. The KPCC at that time was under the leadership of leftists. It had mobilized all sections of people in Malabar and to some extent in Cochin State. The KPCC had sent many of its leaders to Travancore to assist the State Congress struggle for responsible government. A.K.Gopalan, Yousuf, Kamat, T.M. Ragahgan, T.K. Raju, M. Kanaran, Sarmaji, A.K. Narayanan, Mohammed Yusuf, P.V. Raghavan, K.K. Warrier, P.V. Kunjunni Nair, K.C. Gopalan, Manjunatha Rao and K. Damodaran reached Travancore and did commendable work in political mobilization.

2.5.2 Meeting of Radical Group

The Radical Group in the State Congress met at the Syrian Buildings at Ernakulam and it was attended by P.T. Punnoose, T.V. Thomas, C.S. Gopala

Pillai, Kottiyam Bhasi, K.T. Jacob, Joseph Thelly, C.O. Mathew, P.A. Solomon, K.V. Pathrose, Jacob Philip, Thycaud Bhaskaran and Ulloor Gopi, P. Krishna Pillai, K. Damodaran, Sarmaji, P. Narayanan Nair, and, T.M. Ragahvan. T.K. Raju also joined them in the deliberations. All of them criticized the stand taken by the State Congress. K.C. George wanted the Radical Group to use its influence to strengthen the State Congress by bringing together all the mass organizations like working class unions and students' unions. The Radical Group nominated M.N. Govindan Nair as its Secretary though he was not present at the meeting. It was decided to have an official convention in Travancore later and at that meeting M.N. Govindan Nair agreed to be the Secretary and T.V. Thomas was made the Joint Secretary of the Travancore State Congress Radical Party. This was a shock to N. Sreekantan Nair who was functioning as the Secretary of the Youth League and his emotional link with it forced him to think about strengthening the Youth League. But his colleagues convinced him about joint action with the Radicals and finally the Youth League passed a resolution moved by Ponnara Sridhar to extend full support to the Radicals.

Leaders decided to convene an all-Travancore State Congress convention, the first after the Vattiyoorkavu episode. Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai proposed that he would take up full responsibility for organizing this convention at Karunagappally. On May 28, 1939 the leaders met at Panmana Ashram, the residence of Kumbalam and decided to hold the annual convention under the leadership of Kayamkulam Zilla Council. The organizing committee consisted of Kumbalam, K.A. Gangadhara Menon, P.K. Kunju, M. Madhavan, M.N. Govindan Nair, A. Achuthan, M.R. Kunjukrishna Pillai, P.G. Varghese, and Rosamma Cherian. The Reception Committee had T.M. Varghese as President, Kumbalam and P.K. Kunju as Secretaries and M.R. Kunjukrishna Pillai as the Treasurer. They had planned to hold the meeting at Puthethu Temple Maidan, which was owned by a big local landlord. Kumbalam had got this land on long-term lease and registered a document. The Dewan, as soon as he got reports about it, directed the District Magistrate to arrest the landlord and forced the son of the landlord to file a suit against Kumbalam. Soon the District Magistrate took over the "disputed land" under his control. Kumbalam's search for a site to hold the convention led him to Thoppil Kunjan Pillai who readily gave his land for their use. Several coconut trees had to be cut down to prepare the ground for holding the convention. On August 7, the State Congress committee office started functioning in Kayamkulam and the venue of the meeting at Karunagappally was named "State Congress Nagar". But on September 2, the Second World War had started and this came handy for the Dewan and he immediately prohibited all meetings and demonstrations in the State. In spite of this, the meeting was held with Pattom Thanu Pillai in the Chair. The radical group leaders, P.T. Punnoose, P.T. Chacko, Rosamma and M.N. Govindan Nair,

opposed the political resolution on responsible government under the sovereign control of the Maharaja. They wanted the deletion of the words “under the sovereign control of the Maharaja” from the resolution. But the official resolution got passed.

2.5.3 Celebration of Dewan's Shashtibdapoorthy

On the birthday of the Maharaja, fifty-one criminal prisoners were released from jail and the Dewan was conferred with the title of *Sachivothama* as a symbol of Raja's trust in him. The Dewan was also conferred honorary doctorate by the Travancore University. The Dewan's close supporter Federation Special Officer G. Parameswaran Pillai conferred with the title of *Rajyasevanipuna*. The Dewan arranged the distribution of titles to those who sincerely stood by him. A statue of the Maharaja was got unveiled by the Governor of Madras. The Private Secretary of the Dewan was Chidambaram. He took the initiative to have a bigger celebration in honour of the Dewan's 60th birthday and directed the official machinery and resources in making it a grand event. Eulogies were showered through memorandums, statues were erected and official handouts issued, highlighting the great service the Dewan was rendering to the Travancore State and its people. Ezahava, Nair and Muslim community leaders exhibited their love, regard, respect and affection to the Dewan. The Nair Service Society (NSS) went to the extreme in installing a statue of the Dewan in front the C.P./ Sachivothama Chaultry (Rest House). Ezhavas did not fall behind. They also installed his statues. The Christian Bishops prepared a memorandum and engraved it in a gold plate made out of sixty-one sovereigns (each weighing 8 gms). The Dewan put this on display at the Napier Museum for all Travancoreans to see and worship. Later following an alleged theft in the Museum, the same was found lost and could never be traced or retrieved. When the Dewan was attacked and physically injured at a function held at Swathi Thirunal College, he decided to leave Travancore forever. K.C.S. Mani, the hero in this adventure did this assault on his own volition but his close friends G. Janardhana Kurup, Gopala Kurup, N. Sreekantan Nair, and Rubber Factory workers Chellappan Pillai and Velayudhan Pillai knew that K.C.S. Mani was going to smash the Dewan's statue in front of the C.P. Chaultry and then going to do another more adventurous assault on the Dewan at Thycaud Swathi Thirunal College premises.

The State Congress decided to observe 8th, 14th and 24th of every month as Day of Responsible Government, Day of Citizens' Rights and Day of Political detenues. Protest marches and meetings against the Dewan's autocratic rule were held. One such meeting was successfully done in Pettah in Thiruvananthapuram. Dewan used repressive measures against all who joined to openly protest against the celebrations of the Dewan's 60th birthday.

When Pattom Thanu Pillai was arrested V.K. Velayudhan was nominated to succeed him. When the latter was arrested, P.K. Kunju took over. Like this a chain of nominations had to be made in which K.M. Korah and Rosamma Punnoose had also held the position of dictator of the State Congress. Rosamma was arrested and she could get admitted in the prison along with her sister Accamma and also Annie Mascrene.

2.5.4 Shift in the Policy of SNDP

In the earlier years, the SNDP being a progressive movement of the Ezhavas, gave full support to the State Congress, but by 1939, there was a notable shift in their approach. It even went to the extent of declaring that there is no organic link between the SNDP and the State Congress even though some of the community leaders held offices in the working committee of the State Congress. It also decided that one could not hold official positions simultaneously in both the organizations. Following this, R. Sankar and V.K. Velayudhan, resigned their membership from the SNDP Board. K. Ayyappan exhorted the Ezahvas to influence the State Congress to seek the blessings of the Maharaja and through it secure responsible government in the State. But this did not make any impression on the Ezahva community. However, the Dewan made good use of Ayyappan's exhortation to prove that Ezhavas were leaving the State Congress and a similar move was not far off with the Christians and the Nairs. The then President of the State Congress, P.C. George gave a fitting reply to the Dewan's words showing that all those were blatant lies.

On March 13, 1940 the Police attacked State Congress demonstrators at Pala. Their heads were shaven off and along with hair even the skin was not spared. Similar atrocities were reported from a few other centres. At the same time the Dewan decided to release the Ezhava leaders in the State Congress citing the reasonable stand taken by the SNDP on its relation with the Congress. V.K. Velayudhan who thus got released from prison, told the press that he was solely bound to the SNDP because it alone could protect the interests of the Ezhavas. R. Sankar was another leader whom the Dewan released while he kept C. Kesavan and A. Achuthan still in prison. However, R. Sankar disagreed with the views of V.K. Velayudhan and expressed his solidarity with the State Congress. C. Kesavan was fuming like a lion in the cage, since he did not like the way the SNDP Yogam was coming out with press releases.

Following V.K. Velayudhan, Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, also shifted his stand and turned against the Congress. In the early days of the State Congress, Parameswaran Pillai had not become a member saying that he was already a member of the Indian National Congress. In January 1940 he

issued a press release saying that on account of ill health he was withdrawing all his connections with organizations like the Travancore State Congress. On hearing this, the Dewan became happy and ordered restoration of Parameswaran Pillai's pension along with all arrears. Another leader M.N. Parameswaran Pillai who was described as a "fiery revolutionary" during the days of the Karunagappally convention of the State Congress suddenly got himself converted as a supporter of the Dewan.

2.5.5 Dewan's Publicity Campaign

By this time the Dewan started a publicity campaign against the State Congress by highlighting the point that the Congress was coming under the control of militant communists and radicals and the people of Travancore were openly against this. In the first week of May 1940, A. Narayana Pillai, Ponnara Sridhar, N.P. Kurukkal, Muthayya Pillai and Puthuppally Raghavan were surprisingly released from Central Jail at Poojappura just a few days prior to the completion of their term. When they came out of the gates, police IG, Karim, took A. Narayana Pillai in his car leaving the rest to wonder where he was being taken. The IG took him straight to Bhaktivilas place, the residence of the Dewan. After a short meeting with the Dewan, A. Narayana Pillai who had first taken the initiative to call a meeting at his office to form the State Congress, gave a written apology to the Dewan and accepted the post of Government Pleader as a reward for it. The IG took Pillai back to the latter's residence. Following this, many in the State Congress leadership gave an undertaking to the Dewan to get release from prisons. While this was going on, a kind of large-scale desertion from the State Congress, leaders like Pattom Thanu Pillai, Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai, Annie Mascrene and C. Kesavan were still in prison. The then dictator of the State Congress, G. Ramachandran even went to the extent of showering praise on the Dewan. The Dewan had a heartful laugh on this great fall of G. Ramachandran and he thought that the decline and disintegration of the Travancore State Congress was around the corner. Soon G. Ramachandran disappeared from Travancore and surfaced in Madurai where he set up the Gandhigram. P.K. Kunju and T.K. Abdulla also left the Congress. By 1941, the Travancore State Congress virtually became inactive. The office at Ernakulam was closed and some left for Travancore. In 1941, E. John Philipose, K.A. Gangadhara Menon and Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai were released from jail. State Congress struggles stopped. Most leaders turned their attention to relief work to help people affected by the War, especially in Alappuzha and Cherthala. Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon in this context wrote:¹⁵

"These developments dealt a heavy blow to the prestige of the organization. Its credibility was lost and all activities virtually came to a

standstill. The State Congress was forced to go into the wilderness for some time”.

2.5.6 Quit India Movement

The Second World War had started on September 1, 1939 and India declared a war against Germany without the Viceroy consulting any of the Indian leaders. The Congress Working Committee met on March 3 with Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad in the Chair. The general opinion was that the Indian National Congress (INC) should mobilize people and conduct a vigorous popular struggle. A few felt that the INC should come to an understanding with the Government, while a few others felt that the existing Congress ministries should continue. Finally, the INC directed all Congress Ministers to resign. The end result was that these ministers could not fight to eradicate hoarding and black-marketing of essential commodities. A debate started on the character of the World War, whether it was imperialistic and whether India should support or oppose the British at this juncture. The communists and radicals felt that this was the best time to launch an internal struggle to secure early freedom, while Gandhiji did not want to embarrass the British. Even Jawaharlal Nehru had initial reservations about Gandhiji's views, though finally he yielded to it. Meanwhile in the contextual situation of the War, anti-people ordinances were issued like the Defence of India Rules (DIR). Bureaucrats, police and anti-social elements had a field day.

2.5.7 Morazha Episode

The KPCC, dominated by the leftists called for the observation of September 15, 1940 as anti-repression day. The All Malabar Karshaka Sanghom observed day to protest against the steep increase in the price of essential goods and their shortage. In spite of prohibitory orders, demonstrations were held all over Malabar. Police firing in Thalassery led to the death of Aboo and Chathukutty. In the clashes at Morazha, Mattannur and Koothuparambu, one Sub-Inspector was killed. K.P.R. Gopalan and Vishnu Bharatheeyan were charged for murder. Though K.P.R. Gopalan was sentenced to death, it was reduced to life imprisonment at the intervention of Gandhiji. In 1946 his prison term was reduced to let him free. After the Morazha episode, the police and landlords colluded and let loose repressive measures and false murder charges were registered against Madhathil Appu, Podara Kunjambu Nair, Koyithattil Chirukandan, and Pallikkal Aboobaker and they were hanged to death.

2.5.8 Hitler attacks Soviet Union

On June 22, 1941 Hitler attacked Soviet Union and on December 7, Japan bombed Pearl Harbour. This dramatically changed the scenario. The Indian National Congress leaders were confused, while the communists and the left progressives in the INC thought that Soviet Union, China and India might be endangered by the emerging strength of the fascist forces. Gandhiji spoke about the possibility of friendship with Japan. This isolated India and enraged Britain. The communists were also planning to revise their policy towards Britain in the new context. Though a bit late and most leaders in prison or underground, the Communist Party of India published a document entitled "*The March Towards Freedom*". It said India's war or struggle should be undertaken by India herself, supporting the British in the war does not mean that we are surrendering to them. The character of the War has changed. We should provide selective support and at the same time we should fight for safeguarding our basic interests. To move in this direction, we must politically mobilize all working people, workers, peasants, tenants and the landless. The CPI felt that the stand taken by the INC would force the British to brand the Congress as fascist.

2.5.9 Cripps Mission in Fiasco

On March 8, Japan annexed Rangoon and was proposing to move towards India, which lacked a responsible government. Under pressure from US, China and Australia, Britain agreed to discuss constitutional reforms with Indian leaders. The British cabinet decided to send Sir. Stafford Cripps Mission and the Mission reached India on March 25, 1942. Though the Congress reached an understanding with the Mission, Jinnah, on behalf of the Muslim League, rejected it in toto. Subsequently after a detailed study of the Mission's views, the INC also rejected them. Though the Cripps Mission failed, political prisoners were released both in British India as well as in Princely states. Mention may be made here that K.C. George was released from Alappuzha sub jail, M.N. Govindan Nair from Punalur lock-up and Ulloor Gopi from Thiruvananthapuram Central Jail. P. Krishna Pillai who was in Edalakkudy police station in Kanyakumari district was also released. It was during his confinement in this station that he came into contact with Thankamma of Suchindram through exchange of Hindi books for his reading. Later, both of them got married.

2.5.10 Formation of Communist Party Committee

All the leaders released from the prison decided to meet at the residence of M.N. Govindan Nair at Pandalam. Besides P. Krishna Pillai and

his wife, K.C. George, P.T. Punnoose, C.O. Mathew and K.V. Pathrose were there and they decided to form an ad-hoc Travancore Party Committee with K.C. George as Secretary and this was to function from Thiruvananthapuram. An anti-Japanese centre would also be opened. For campaign work, M.N. would go to Kollam, K.V. Pathrose and C.O. Mathew would be in Alappuzha, and Punnoose would operate in Chengannur, Tiruvalla, Changanacherry and Kottayam. K.C. George agreed to sell his Law Books to raise capital funds for the activities. He hired a room in a building near Manjalikkulam and put up the board displaying anti-Japanese Centre.

When the Japanese attack on India was imminent, the all India Congress Committee met at Bombay on August 7-8 and decided to launch the Quit India Movement. The Quit India Resolution was an attempt to pressurize the British Government. But the Government immediately arrested Gandhiji and other prominent leaders and took them to unknown destinations. Non-violence was soon replaced by violence. Lathi charge and police firing went on for months. Repressive measures were let loose on people.

On June 8, 1942 the *HINDU* reported that Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan, was being considered for appointment to the Viceroy's Executive Council and in charge of Defence. But his posting was as Member, Communications. He worked in this position only for 15 days and thereafter he returned to Travancore and took up the Dewanship. During this period of 15 days, the then Chief Secretary G. Parameswaran Pillai became Officiating Dewan. The State Congress committee met and elected Pattom Thanu Pillai (who was then in jail) as the President and in his absence Accamma Cherian was directed to function as President. The meeting held on August 10, 1942 did not make clear its stand on the Quit India movement but an amendment brought by C. Narayana Pillai was carried and the Resolution was approved supporting the Quit India Movement. The same night C. Narayana Pillai was arrested and sent to Poojappura Central Jail.

2.5.11 Tricolour on the Secretariat Flag Mast

With a view to make their presence felt at the above mentioned State Congress meeting, a large number of communists, congress socialists, and members of the Youth League had reached Thiruvananthapuram on the previous day and in a meeting they discussed the views of the all India Communist Party and the directives relating to the Quit India Movement. Besides, they discussed shortage of food and essential goods, hoarding and black marketing, inflation anti-Japanese agitation and release of political prisoners. T.M. Varghese met them at C.P. Chaultry and E. John Philipose who wanted some compromise with the communists regarding the State Congress meeting scheduled for the next day. The fact was that these two

leaders had suspected that the communists were trying to capture the control of State Congress and wanted to avoid a confrontation. They offered the communists two positions in the Congress Working Committee. After they left, the communists like M.N. Govindan Nair, P.T. Punnoose, C.G. Sadasivan, Varghese Vaidyan, and Ulloor Gopi discussed the offer and decided to accept it. Though the suggestion by K.C. George that M.N and Punnoose should be sent as their nominees to the Congress Working Committee, Varghese Vaidyan suggested the name of N. Sreekantan Nair who openly expressed his desire for the post. At this juncture, M.N. withdrew from the contest.

In Travancore, the Quit India agitation was started on August 12, 1942 and C. Narayana Pillai was the first to be got arrested. Following that, Ponnara Sridhar, Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair, Padma Singh, Muthukaruppa Pillai, Sivan Pillai, Subramonia Pillai, Nagalingom Pillai and C. Kesavan were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment and fine. Some Congress leaders like K.A. Gangadharan Menon and Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai, unmindful of the agitation and series of arrests, continued to attend to their lucrative legal practice. The main support for the agitation came from the students of Thiruvananthapuram. In 1941 itself, K.C. Mathew and P. Parameswaran had formed the Thiruvananthapuram Students Organisation (TSO) and N.D. Jose, Chattanatha Karayalar (Junior), G. Janardhana Kurup, Prabhakaran, the son of Mahakavi Kumaranasan and K. Balakrishnan, assisted them. When Jose and Janardhana Kurup were arrested, Kampiserry Karunakaran, then a student of the Sanskrit College, conducted Satyagraha in the University College and he was arrested. Subsequently, the Quit India agitation in Thiruvananthapuram lost vigour. This provoked Mananthala Karunakaran, an adventurous revolutionary at the time. He was sad at the stand taken by the Communist Party of India on the Quit India movement. Getting desperate he secured the support of Cheruvikkal Parameswaran Nair and hired a coconut tree climber to attempt a big and risky adventure. On the mid night of August 14, 1942, they removed the White Flag, which the Dewan had raised soon after the World War II started and in its place hoisted one tricolour flag at the Secretariat flag mast. A second one was raised in front of the University College on a mango tree. When Thiruvananthapuram city opened its eyes on the morning, the people flocked to see the tricolour flags. Knowing this, the Dewan got wild and asked his police to remove the flags immediately and held a high level meeting of police officials. The officials pointed out that either Mannanthala Karunakaran or Puthuppally Raghavan must have committed this daring act. Both of them along with Accamma Cherian, the acting President of the State Congress were then arrested under the Detention Law for which production of the accused before a Magistrate was not mandatory. Karunakaran and Raghavan were confined

to Peroorkada outpost of Palayam police station for a period of fifteen months.

The Dewan started issuing serious warning to the students of Thiruvananthapuram and asked them to withdraw from the agitation path and if they did not obey, he would be constrained to take punitive action against them.

2.5.12 Withdrawal of Sreekantan Nair

In the trade union movement at Alappuzha, the Travancore Labour Union had been transformed into the Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFWU). In the 1940s there was a controversy regarding the leadership issue. Most of the trade union workers preferred T.V. Thomas to be their President and he was backed by the communists too. But N. Sreekantan Nair had an eye on the Presidentship. At this stage, P. Krishna Pillai, the leader respected by all, found that at Kollam the trade union movement was not very active and wanted a senior leader to go over there to activate it. He suggested the name of N. Sreekantan Nair. Reluctantly, Sreekantan Nair went to Kollam. At that time K.C. Govindan, who had founded the Kollam Factory Workers' Union, was not a serious contender. K. Chellappan, a worker in the H & C factory was functioning as Secretary. After working as President of the Kollam Factory Workers Union for a short period, N. Sreekantan Nair resigned and started a Charkha Sangh, leaving the post of President to M.K. Kumaran. This was described as Sreekantan Nair's escapade from popular struggles. It was M.N. Govindan Nair who brought M.K. Kumaran to make him a full time communist party worker at Kollam. But very soon, M.K. Kumaran left Kollam to join the editorial staff in *Kerala Kaumudi* founded by C.V. Kunhiraman and edited by K. Sukumaran. Incidentally, mention may be made that E.K. Nayanan (whose name was Krishnan Nair during under ground days) had been working in that Paper.

2.5.13 Gandhiji's Fast, 1943

On February 9, 1943 Gandhiji commenced his 21 day fast and he was immediately taken to confinement in the Aga Khan Palace. Jaiprakash Narayan, Lohia and Aruna Asaf Ali were in underground leading the struggle. On August 2, the Home Member in the Viceroy's Council informed the Central Legislature that till June 1, 1943, 18000 political workers had been detained, 75941 were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment and about 940 had been killed in police firing and another 1630 had been injured. In fact this was an under estimation. Provoked by this, Jaiprakash Narayan, Lohia and Aruna Asaf Ali prepared an Action Plan which included, among other things, refusal to pay taxes, reject official currency, boycott police and revenue

officials, educate people about the dangers of shortage of food and essential goods and blow up roads, railway lines and communication networks to defeat the movement of troops.

T.V. Thomas, in his capacity as the President of TCFWU issued an appeal on behalf of the working class for the immediate release of Gandhiji. Following this, trade unions controlled by communists sent telegrams to the Viceroy. The communists decided to organize rallies and demonstrations all over Kerala. But the decisions taken by the State Congress in this context made that organization a laughing stock. It decided that members of the State Congress would offer daily prayers for Gandhiji, wear black badges and observe a day's fast.

2.5.14 The rise of Independence League and the INA

Gandhiji successfully concluded his 21 day fast, which brought considerable relief to the people, and leaders who loved him. But the Government refused to release Gandhiji from his confinement at Aga Khan Palace. On February 28, 1944, Kasturba, wife of Gandhiji, passed away and soon after this tragic loss, Gandhiji got a bout of Malaria. Meanwhile, Lord Linlithgo was replaced by Lord Wavell as the new Viceroy and he quickly issued orders to release Gandhiji unconditionally.

In January 1942, Rashbehari Bose had formed the Asia International in Tokyo and held the Asian People's Conference in Osaka on January 24. "India for Indians" was a slogan adopted during this meeting. In another meeting held in Tokyo on March 28, the Indian Independence League was formed. D.S. Deshpande, Gupta and Ramamoorthy assisted Reshbehari Bose. Barristers K.P. Kesava Menon and Raghavan attended the meeting held on March 28. When Kaulalampur was taken over by the Japanese forces, the British army made a big retreat, but the Indian soldiers in the battalions collected the arms and surrendered before the Japanese. They joined the Indian revolutionaries and founded the Indian National Army (INA). Its first General Officer Commandant was Captain Mohan Singh. When Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose took over the leadership of the INA, it had 30,000 armed soldiers. Rashbehari Bose had created history when he threw a bomb at Viceroy Lord Harding during a ceremonial procession on December 23, 1912. After this incident, he escaped arrest and went to Japan. Even after thirty years, his revolutionary spirit had not been impaired. Subhash Chandra Bose had been in Germany to mobilize Indian soldiers of the British army who had been taken into custody by Germany. He had the help and blessing from German government in his fight against the British. On October 21, 1943 he declared the birth of a new nation "Independent India" and a war against both Britain and America. Netaji had reached Singapore in a submarine passing

through oceans where mines had been laid both by Germany as well as the Allied forces. It was an adventurous trip and indeed a great miracle.

Indian revolutionaries had reached all corners of the world even before the commencement of the First World War. Mohammed Barkhatullah, Virendranath Chathopadhyay, Dr. Chempakaraman Pillai, Hardayal, Dr. Nijan Chandras Gupta, Birendranathdas Gupta, Tharakadasnath, Jitendranath Lahiri and others were the prominent among the Indian revolutionaries. The Gaddar Party was another organization fighting for India's emancipation. In Kabul, a group called Indian National Volunteers (INV) on December 1, 1915 set up an Interim Government of India. Now after 28 years, Netaji had announced the establishment of the Interim Government of Independent India.

The INA took control of Kohima and Imphal. Netaji appealed to Gandhiji to understand the reality, that without an armed struggle, the British would not leave India and assured him and the people of India that the INA would see to it that no Japanese entered our country. The British sent strong enforcements to Kohima and Imphal as soon as this appeal came over Netaji's radio station Azad Hind. The British Indian Air force made many sorties on Imphal. The heavy monsoons and shortage of essential goods posed problems for the INA personnel. Japanese forces made a retreat when British forces confronted them. Most of Burma came under British control. The INA was at the point of total disintegration. Netaji's colleagues and members of the Cabinet in the War Cabinet of Independent India, Shanawas Khan, Dhillon and Captain Lakshmy were taken as prisoners. In June 1945 Netaji reached Malaya. On August 22, 1945 Radio Tokyo announced the tragic end of Netaji in a plane crash over Taiwan on August 18-19 during his journey towards Japan.

2.6 FOUNDING OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN KERALA

According to Puthypally Raghavan, the communist party of Kerala came into being in 1943 as an interim committee consisting of four taluk committees in Malabar, two committees each in Cochin and Travancore. Comrade P. Krishna Pillai was the Secretary of the Kerala State Committee. Here we discuss only the formation of the Travancore Committee of the Party. The founding of the Party Committees in the other regions is discussed in later chapters. The Secretary of the Travancore State Committee was K.C. George. Its office was located near Pulimood in Thiruvananthapuram, a few meters away from the Government Secretariat. Every day when the Maharaja passed through the Main Road to have *darshan* at Padmanabhaswamy Temple, this office and the Red Flag did not miss his eyes. This fact was noted by the Dewan and soon he directed K.C. George to come to Bhaktivilas

Palace to meet him. The Dewan told him that he would not allow any one or organization outside Travancore to interfere in Travancore affairs. K.C. George immediately knew that what irked the Dewan was the display of the Sign Board showing "Indian Communist Party - Travancore State Committee". Later K.C. George changed this Board by another one displaying the words "Travancore Communist Party". To satisfy the Dewan K.C. George announced himself as the President and P.T. Punnoose as the Secretary of the Travancore Communist Party. Ulloor Gopi, Kattayikkonam Sridharan, and Kattayikkonam Sadanandan were regular visitors to the Party office. The party published "*People's Age*" and about 300 copies of this newspaper were distributed in Thiruvananthapuram itself. K.C. George was at that time was the Secretary of the Bar Association and therefore at least 100 subscribers were lawyers. One of the oldest trade unions in Thiruvananthapuram was the Press Workers' Union organized by N.C. Sekhar around 1931 when the Communist League was founded. In the 1940s a union was formed in the Rubber Works with Karunakaran as Secretary. Under strong pressure from the workers, Annie Mascrene was made the President. Another important union in Thriuvananthapuram was the Shop workers' Union led by Muthaiyah.

The Party collected books and periodicals on Marxism-Leninism and distributed them. When K.C. George returned after a trip to Bombay, he brought a large collection of Soviet publications and about 200 copies of "*Comrade K.P.R.*", a biography of K.P.R. Gopalan. The Party started a small bookstall to sell these books and put it in charge of C.J. Thomas, then a student of the Thiruvananthapuram Law College. This bookstall later became the Prabhat Book Stall.

2.6.1 Elections to the Legislature 1944

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the Dewan had suspended the Travancore Legislature. But on March 1, 1944, the Dewan announced elections to the Legislature. Pattom Thanan Pillai, the President of the State Congress welcomed the Dewan's decision. The Dewan's strategy was to create a division between the State Congress and the Communists and with one stroke defeat their popular struggles against him. But the Dewan had a shock when the All Travancore Trade Union Congress (ATTUC) dominated by the communists extended unconditional support to the Congress. The Dewan had declared that any one who had been charged sheeted by the police and spent a jail term would not be eligible to file nominations and this was deliberately meant to keep out most leaders from contesting the elections. When the State Congress announced the commencement of its election work on March 29, the news of the demise of Sri Avittom Thirunal, son of Rani Karthikathirunal came and the Dewan proclaimed a period of mourning for

three months prohibiting all demonstrations and public meetings in Travancore. To strengthen this ban, the Dewan followed it by Defence and Security Ordinance. Rationing of petrol was introduced.

When finally elections were held, the State Congress secured only 11 seats. The SNDP, NSS, Muslim League and various Christian groups had put up common candidates to oppose the State Congress. All the anti-State Congress candidates had the blessing of the Dewan. E.K. Madhavan, V.K. Velayudhan, A.K. Bhaskar, Varkala Madahavan, Kadakkavur Madhavan, and, M.K. Nilakantan had the backing of the SNDP and NSS. P.K. Kunju won from the Muslim reservation constituency of Alappuzha. The Dewan nominated K.R. Narayanan, and K. Sukumaran of *Kerala Kaumudi*. In many other constituencies, the Dewan's nominees were elected. There was no unity among the Congressmen. There was a quarrel between the Congress High Command and the legislature party. Neyyattinkara Narayana Pillai was the leader of the Party and P.S. Nataraja Pillai, the Secretary. The quarrel led to the resignation of Narayana Pillai and the leadership fell on K.A. Mathew. P.S. Nataraja Pillai then decided to resign. The Dewan thus succeeded in weakening the State Congress in the Legislature also. Later the Dewan could easily convert some of the State Congress leaders into his strong supporters.

The NSS, SNDP, Muslim League and various Christian groups stood solidly behind the Dewan. Most leaders of these groups deserted the State Congress. Many of them won the elections unopposed simply because the authorities rejected the nominations filed by Congress candidates. Among the 11 Congress candidates who were elected, mention may be made about A.P. Udayabhanu, Sankaranarayanan Thampi, P.S. Nataraja Pillai and Neyyattinkara T.K. Narayana Pillai. R. Sankar had been in detention during this period. By the time he was released, the State Congress had become weak. It was in this context that R. Sankar was elected the General Secretary of the Congress. But he too started to spend most of his time and energy in his legal practice. But the communists evolved a strategy to bring the SNDP closer to the State Congress. For this they wanted R. Sankar to resign the Secretary ship of the Congress and stand for election to the post of General Secretary of the SNDP. If Sankar got elected their objective would succeed. Sankar agreed to send a telegraphic message to the State Congress indicating his resignation. Ultimately in spite of the speculations to the contrary, R. Sankar got elected as the General Secretary of the SNDP unopposed since the rival candidate P. Kunjukrishnan withdrew from the contest. But soon after he took over charge of the SNDP, the true colour of R. Sankar was known. He stated that he would never take any step to bring the SNDP closer to the State Congress. On the contrary he would extend cooperation to the Government.

2.6.2 Mutiny by the Defence Forces

On November 19, 1945, the students of Calcutta held a massive demonstration to demand the release of INA detainees and withdrawal of cases against them. The police fired several rounds at the Dalhousie Square, killing a number of demonstrators. For about three days, Calcutta saw pitched street battles and finally the end of it came when the authorities released three important INA officers, who were all Hindus, while Muslim officers were not released. This was meant to divide Hindus and Muslims. But the people stood together and continued the demonstration until the Muslim officers were also released.

Meanwhile Bombay, Karachi, Delhi and Madras started witnessing working class strikes. In Jabalpur the Indian Army launched a strike. In Bihar, Delhi and even in Kochi, police launched a strike. On February 2, 1944, about 1500 naval cadets including a few officers in HMIS Talwar of the Royal Indian Navy started a mutiny when provoked by abuse of Indian personnel by Commanding Officer King. The mutiny soon spread to about 40 warships involving more than 20,000 personnel. The naval mutiny posed a serious threat to the Viceroy's Government. In most warships and naval establishments the striking personnel pulled down the Union Jack, the British flag, and in its place hoisted the flags of the Indian National Congress, Muslim League and the Indian Communist Party. February 27 saw the biggest general strike and hartal in Bombay. Indians had recognized their identity and they rose united across party, communal and ideological divisions to fight their common enemy, the British. Defence forces, police, industrial workers, peasants, agricultural workers, students and ordinary citizens joined the struggle. At the request of the authorities, the national leaders in the freedom movement appealed to the defence forces to lay down their arms and surrender because the authorities assured that they would not resort to any victimization. But the authorities cheated when the surrender became a reality.

The Labour Party was elected to power in Britain on July 26, 1945. On December 4, a ten-member delegation was announced and the Labour Government directed them to India to discuss the issues relating to India's demand for Independence. On March 23, 1946 the Cabinet Mission consisting of Lord Pethick Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and A.V. Alexander reached India. Hope for early Indian independence became bright. At that time there were about 585 princely states and their future was a complex issue. Will they join the Indian Union or desire to exist as separate entities?

2.6.3 American Model Reform

The Travancore State Congress had met on January 21, 1946 to discuss the future of the State if India was granted Independence. At the Udaipur conference of Princely States, the Maharajas of Udaipur, Patiala and Bikaner, and, V.T. Krishnamachari and Sardar K.M. Panikkar representing governments from princely states decided to come to an understanding with the Indian National Congress (INC). Pattabhi Sitaramaiah, the President of the Council of Princely States was well known for his high appreciation of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan of Travancore. He was able to make Sardar Vallabhai Patel convince about C.P's greatness. It was in this context that C.P entered into collusion with the Nawab of Bhopal to assert that princely states should be given freedom to set up a separate Federation. On January 15, 1946 C.P announced his idea of Constitutional Reforms described as the American Model. In this set up, the Dewan would be the Chief Executive whose tenure would be as long as the Maharaja wished. The Dewan would be similar to the American President, but not an elected one. The Legislature would have two Houses. The Lower House would have members elected on the basis of adult suffrage while the Upper House would house nominated members.

It is interesting to note that R. Sankar and the SNDP welcomed this American Model of Constitutional reforms. National leaders like K.M. Munshi and B.G. Kher also suggested that the proposal by C.P. could be given a trial. But Nehru was not enthusiastic as he was fully aware of CP's repression in the State. The State Congress was for responsible government under the sovereignty of the Raja and it expressed its appreciation about certain specific elements in the proposal like adult suffrage and elected Lower House. However, the Dewan was not to be taken kindly.

We shall continue this narrative after we document the early phase of the trade union movement in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, which overlapped with many developments in the social and political situation in the region.

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CHAPTER III

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT: THE EARLY PHASE

The period immediately following the end of the First World War in 1919 was marked in India by industrial strife on an unprecedented scale¹. Contrary to expectations, prices after the War did not collapse, but rather they went up. Organized demands for higher wages met with opposition from employers and strikes became inevitable. The strike activity was soon stimulated by public discussion in newspapers, active participation by men of repute and the struggle for independence from the British colonial rule. The working class and the student community mobilized themselves to launch marches and demonstrations. Trade unions in those days were working as strike committees. They actively struggled for the recognition of the right to organize. The Indian Trade Union Act was passed in 1926 and trade unions that were granted registration could engage in legitimate trade union activity as laid down in the law. The development at the all India level influenced those in the provinces and princely states. We shall discuss in this chapter the early phase of trade union movement and working class struggles in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions of the present Kerala State.

3.1 EARLY PHASE IN TRAVANCORE

A Royal Proclamation abolished *predial* slavery in Travancore in 1855. A system of money wages was gradually established. It recognized freedom of contract. That marked the first stage in the improvement in the conditions of work and wages of labour. The passing of the Factories Act in 1913 brought further benefits to labour². During the first quarter of the 20th century, the State was under the grip of poverty and unemployment on a large-scale. Conditions of labour deteriorated still further with the onset of the economic depression of the 1930s.

For convenience of discussion of the early phase of trade union movement in Travancore, we would be taking the important centres separately as there are some regional as well as industry specificity in the developments. The major centres were Alappuzha, and Kollam, though there were several sub-centres attached to and linked with them. Only by the 1940s, some sort of interlinking and consolidating process emerged in the trade union movement and that too largely with the arrival of the Communists and Socialists on the scene. They were the unifying forces in the movement. What we attempt below is an objective documentation of the growth of the trade union

movement in early Travancore. We shall first consider Alappuzha and then Kollam.

3.1.1 Union Movement in Alappuzha

There is a certain amount of obscurity regarding the origin of the trade union movement in Kerala. One version is that attempts at organizing labour in the coir mats and matting industry in Alappuzha began as early as 1920s³. The organization was known as the Travancore Labour Association (TLA). The post-war prosperity of the industry had come to an end with the mushroom growth of uneconomic units and decline in the market for coir goods. Some of the units were constrained to close down and wages paid to labour were deliberately reduced. There was also widespread unemployment. It was under these circumstances that the TLA was formed.

3.1.2 Conditions of Work and Wages

K.C. Govindan, one of the earliest trade union leaders, has narrated the conditions prevailing in 1921 when he reached Alappuzha seeking work in some coir factories. He was then only 22. He found that jobs were begging and even coolies could earn as much as Rs. 40 a month. “The streets were busy with workers hurrying to their factories. Most of the workers came from the suburbs or from adjacent countryside, often walking six or seven miles. Many of them carried country torches for their return journey in the night. They were well dressed when compared to the farm labourers or poor tenants from whose stock they came. The workers who reached the factory on time at 6 a.m. were given a cup of black coffee free”⁴.

According to K.C. Govindan, all the European factory buildings were *pucca*, while the small factories owned by the natives were thatched bamboo structures. Nair hotels served Ezhavas in a separate section, while Ezhavas were debarred from entering Brahmin hotels. However, Muslim and Christian hotels gave free access to all. Most of the immigrant workers lodged themselves as paying guests in houses owned by locals.

The first coir factory was reported to have been established in 1859 by James Darragh (Darragh Smail & Co). Europeans gave the native workers training in weaving. Initially workers were recruited to work as apprentices. The major European firms were Darragh Smail & Co., Volkart Brothers, Bombay Co., Aspinwall & Co., Madurai Co., William Goodacre & Sons and Pierce Leslie & Co and they dominated the industry. Among the Indian firms,

the most prominent were Empire Coir Works, Alleppey Co., General Supplies Agency and Modern Agency.

"In an 8-treadle broadloom, two workers were needed to weave a roll which could fetch them a wage of Rs.18 ¾ per roll. If there was full time work, they could weave as many as three rolls a week. The money was divided equally between the two weavers. The average weaver weaving on small looms could get approximately Rs.20 a week"⁵. This bright picture of jobs going begging and even a coolie earning Rs.40 a month did not last long due to the decline in demand for coir products in the years following the end of the First World War.

According to R. Prakasam, the wage rate in the pre-war period was only four *annas* a day. Soon piece rate was introduced. Workers used to start from home much before sunrise to reach factory and toil there till dusk. *Mooppans* (job contractors) recruited the workers and supervised them. They were like tyrants showing no kindness to workers and extorted *mooppukasu* (a kind of commission). Heavy fines and penalties were imposed even for small mistakes or misbehaviour. The penalty was sometimes equal to a week's wages. *Mooppans* could get help from the police in beating up workers. Workers did not enjoy any right⁶. 85% of workers did not have any land or hut to live on. Tenants had to do free labour in landlord's land. But some landlords used to give a *mundu* (dhoti) once a year. Some workers used to spend 3-4 hours in early morning to draw water and irrigate coconut trees of the landlords before going to perform factory work. If they reported late in the factory, they were denied work, and, sometimes given physical punishment. It was reported that in Darragh Smail Co., work used to start at 6 am and go up to 6 pm. One day a few workers spontaneously decided to collectively represent their hardships before the company management. According to sources tapped by R. Prakasam, this happened in 1907. The European manager drove the workers away. Next day morning, the workers assembled at the factory gates. The manager gave the signal for the entry of workers into the company by blowing his whistle. At this, clerical staff and *mooppans* alone entered the factory. The workers stayed out and this incident of 1907 was the first reported collective agitation executed by coir factory workers without the help of a formal organization or a leader.

The management called a few workers and talked to them. Workers demanded a reduction of 2 hours in their workload. Finally, after prolonged discussion, management agreed to give a small relief to the effect that the workers could report for work at 7 am, instead of 6 am. Workers agreed to it. However, this gave a signal to employers in the region. They started cutting wages and resorted to mass dismissals of workers who had agitated or

protested against them. Some companies shifted their operations from the town area to hinterlands and resorted to contract work. Work was got executed by contractors and sub-contractors and small factories at lower wages using the labour of the poorest of the poor in the rural areas. It was in this context that the need for a formal organization was felt.

P.N. Krishna Pillai, who played a leading role in the trade union movement and later became the Labour Commissioner of Travancore, has gone on record that the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) was the first trade union of workers in this region. He said⁷:

“... Its founder and leader was a *mooppan (Sardar)* in one of the coir factories by name Bava Mooppan. He was inspired as in the case of other early trade union leaders in other parts of the country purely by humanitarian considerations. The labour was subject to all sorts of extortions and exploitations in those days such as unauthorized deductions from wages, regular premium paid by labour to *mooppans*, contract labour conditions of the worst nature, payment in kind, compulsion to purchase goods and to avail of services at exorbitant rates from employer's shops”.

K.C. Govindan's had stated: “The *mooppan system* was not so degenerate when I joined as worker (1921), but later it became a source of various abuses. *Mooppans* were paid by commission on the wages distributed to the workers as well as monthly salaries. Later this *mooppankasu* became the biggest source of corruption. Nepotism became rampant. The easiest and most paying jobs were given out of turn to those whom the *Mooppan* liked. Molestation of women by them became common If there were any dramas or wrestling shows in the town, the *Mooppans* would force the workers to buy tickets. They would then give only half the money collected to the organizers, on the pretext that all the money was yet to be collected. They imposed heavy fines even for small mistakes... Once a *mooppan* fined a worker Rs. 5 for going to a temple festival without his permission”⁸.

The George Committee (1939) also gives an account of the nature of exploitation. Its report referred to abuses in payment of wages in kind⁹. “The transactions are not limited to rice and provisions. Tea and refreshments are also supplied and in a few cases, we came across the practice of issuing chits to barber shops. The owner of these shops need not be paid in cash. The chits of the workmen represent part of the wages due to them, and the barber can get rice and provisions from the factory owner's shops to the extent of the chits in hand. In one instance, the labour representatives alleged that the

factory owner who was also a toddy shop contractor supplied toddy to his workmen in lieu of wages”.

The Committee also came to know about illegal extractions from workers in the form of briberies, recovery of *mooppukasu*, unremunerated labour rendered for *mooppan*s, collections for special occasions such as marriages and other festivals with *mooppan*'s family etc. The management in most cases was found to be oblivious of these unjust and illegal extractions and the system continued unabated.

3.1.3 Vadappuram Baba: The birth of TLA

Vadappuram Baba was a fascinating character. Born in 1886, he was responsible for taking the initiative in establishing the Travancore Labour Association (TLA). He had traditional Kudi *Pallikkoodam* schooling and on both his parents passing away, he was forced to seek work at an early age. Baba shared his first experience of seeking work when K.C. Govindan approached him for securing work. When Baba went to seek work in Darragh Smail Co, Anderson, the Yard Superintendent denied him a job as Baba was clad in a single *mundu* (dhoti). But when Baba approached him well dressed he was taken for work and earned seven *Chakrams* a day as an apprentice. This was an eye opener to Govindan.

Govindan gives a good description of Vadappuram Baba. “He was a skilled worker and organizer. He left Darragh Smail and drifted from one factory to another till he was appointed a *Mooppan* in M.L. Janardhanan Pillai's General Supplies Agency. He worked there till he was dismissed for authoring a provocative social pamphlet. It was the period when T.K. Madhavan's temple entry movement was creeping in to the minds of young people. Baba was active in the *Ezhava Yuvajana Sangham*. This organization published a pamphlet appealing to the Ezhavas to boycott temples that practiced caste pollution and untouchability. ‘Love those who love you; Hate those who hate you’ was the main theme of the leaflet. Baba used to subscribe to and read *Samadarshi*, a weekly. ... Being a steadfast devotee of Sri Narayana Guru ... he was very much disturbed by the social plight and low status accorded to workers”¹⁰.

Baba took the initiative for convening a meeting of like-minded persons and held it in the courtyard of Alummoottil Kesavan. It was presided over by P.S. Mohammed, an advocate and social worker. A seven member governing body of a Labour Union was formed. M.K. Antony, who was practicing medicine in Alappuzha, was elected as the President, P.K. Baba as the Secretary and Palpu Asan, a textile shop owner, as the Treasurer. There

was no opposition to the formation of the union from the Indian employers as Bava was able to convince them that it was in their interest also to have a well-organized work force. Therefore, after initial hesitation and misgivings, most of them decided to cooperate with P.K. Bava's experiment. ... To P.K. Bava, the formation of the Labour Union was the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream.

K.C. Govindan remembers that K.M. Cherian, the manager of Purushotham Govindiji Coir Factories Ltd., in a casual conversation, first suggested the idea of workers' association to Bava. K.M. Cherian was a man with modern outlook and well versed in various aspects of the labour problem. However, it took 12 long years before the seed planted by K.M. Cherian in Bava's mind could find fertile soil to blossom. Abbu Sait, Proprietor of Empire Coir Works endorsed Bava's ideas. Bava sought the help of the mooppans in other companies. Mention may be made about Kunjachan Mooppan of Pierce Leslie & Co, Varkey Mooppan of Navroji & Co, Madethickal Gopalan Mooppan of Thuthensi Govindiji & Co who extended their cooperation to Bava.

The meeting on March 31, 1922 also appointed a sub-committee consisting of M.K. Antony, P.S. Mohammed and Bappu Vaidyar to draw up the by laws of the Union. Since the last two did not cooperate, Antony had to draw up the draft rules himself. Realizing the inadequacies of the draft it was rejected and a fresh meeting was convened on 19th July 1922 under the Presidentship of A. Krishna Iyer. The meeting authorized T.C. Kesavan Vaidyar, a respected social worker, to redraft the document. Since it was found that all members of the governing body other than P.K. Bava were inactive, it was dissolved. A new governing body was elected with T.C. Kesavan Vaidyar as the President. It was unanimously resolved by the gathering to rename the organization "Travancore Labour Association (TLA)¹¹.

The above statement by K.C. Govindan does not seem to be accurate. The same applies to the narration by R. Prakasam. While Govindan cites July 1922 as the time of forming the TLA, R. Prakasam puts it as April 1922 (1097 Malayalam Era, *Meenam* 18). According to sources gathered by Prakasam, a meeting under the leadership of P.S. Mohammed, a social worker was held at an open piece of land owned by Alummottil Kesavan, north of *Kandakaran Kulappura*. Vadappuram Bava was the guiding spirit who took the initiative for this meeting. The meeting was attended by a large number of coir factory workers. This meeting decided to form a labour union with Dr. Antony as President, and P.K. Bava as Secretary. After four months, another public meeting was held and it decided to change the name of the Labour Union into

TLA. The element of inaccuracy becomes obvious when we refer to the report appearing in the *Malayala Manorama* of January 30, 1920.

3.1.4 Kollam Strike of 1920

The paper reported about a strike in Kollam in the factory of M/s. Harrisons and Crossfields. Workers there launched a strike to register their protest against increase in prices as well as low wages given to them. A meeting was held in a maidan near the Cantonment. M/s. Govindan Nair BABL, K.C. Govindan, K.C. Kesavan, T.K. Madhavan, T.K. Narayanan and others participated. The meeting was presided over by A.R.Madhavayyar, BABL. The paper reported the major decisions of that meeting as follows: (1) to start a union named the Travancore Labour Union (TLU), (2) working hours should be limited to 9 per day and the time to be 7 a.m. to 12 a.m. and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., (3) on Saturdays working hours should be limited to 7, morning 7 to 12 and after noon 1 to 3, (4) wages should be increased by 50%, (5) Bonus to be paid at the rate of 20% of wages, (6) If there is work during holidays, the workers should be paid the double the normal wages. It was also decided to send a deputation to the employer and the team for that consisted of A.R. Madhavayyar (*Malayali* Chief Editor), C. Mohammad Kunji and T.K. Narayanan (Manager of Malayalam Industrial Company).

The deputationists met Mr. Meki, Manager, Harrison Company and he agreed to consider some of the demands put forward by them. The bonus was raised from 10 to 20%. Working hours were reduced to 9 and work would start at 7 a.m. instead of at 6.30 a.m. The manager told the deputationists that the company was not earning such profits to offer a 50% increase in wages. Workers were not happy and they continued the strike. At this juncture both Mr. Meki and another manager of the company Mr. Clayer decided to meet the deputationists again for another round of talks. As a result of this meeting, workers decided to report for work, calling off their agitation¹².

It is clear from the above that the trade union movement in Alappuzha started at least a few years before 1920, though a formal association of workers was born only in 1922 in the form of the TLA. But in Kollam too, the workers had been mobilized by 1920. In short, Alappuzha and Kollam were centres of trade union activity by early 1920s.

3.1.5 Spontaneous Strike of 1907

R. Prakasam has stated that, as early as 1907, there was a strike in Darragh Smail Company¹³. In this company, the work started at 6 a.m. and

went up to 6 p.m. A few workers decided to represent their hardships to the company management. The management threatened them and drove them away. Next day morning, the workers assembled at the company gates. The manager gave the signal for the entry of workers into the factory by blowing his whistle. At this, only the clerical staff and *mooppans* entered the factory and workers stayed back. The management then decided to call a few workers and talked to them. Workers demanded for a reduction of 2 hours in their daily work. Finally, after prolonged discussion, the management agreed to allow the workers to report for work at 7 a.m. instead of at 6 a.m. The workers accepted this. This happened when workers did have neither a formal organization nor a proper leadership.

Employers took this as a signal and decided to take measures to give a blow to workers' collective action. Wages were cut and any resistance to it by workers countered effectively. Managements also decided to dismiss those workers who agitated or protested. Some companies shifted their operation from Alappuzha town to nearby villages/rural areas and extensively resorted to contract work. Thus work was got executed at much lower wages employing the labour of the poorest among the poor.

3.2 ACTIVITIES OF TLA

Those who were leading the trade union movement soon realized that, besides the involvement of workers, the TLA also needed funds. In the early days P.K. Bava used his own earnings to meet the expenses of the TLA, but this could not go for long. So it was decided to collect funds from the workers, sometimes using persuasion and also an element of compulsion and pressure, particularly when the majority of workers had not secured a working class consciousness and whatever they earned were not even adequate to meet their daily needs. Bava could, however, impress upon the worker members on the need to make TLA financially viable. He could also raise donations from the coir yarn traders who came to the factory. The funds thus collected were used to print and distribute notices and leaflets. A membership campaign was started on August 7, 1922. Majority of workers in the Empire Coir Works joined as members. K.C. Govindan wrote thus: "The broad minded proprietor of the firm allowed the Association to discuss organizational matters even on the firm's premises. Even then, the number of workers, who were willing to join the Association on their own accord, was very few. Therefore, *Mooppans* in many of the companies had to be co-opted into the management committee. It was their influence and compulsion that initially brought the workers to the Association"¹⁴.

The managing committee used to meet once a month. It scrutinized the accounts and published the details for the information of the workers. The first four members of the TLA were P.K. Bava, Chungam Karumban, Kuttampambil Achan Kunju and K.C. Govindan. The TLA extended its support to the liquor boycott movement in Alappuzha and Cherthala regions. This movement had the involvement of all the Ezhava social reform organizations. The TLA took the initiative to train 100 toddy tappers as coir workers, if they agreed to leave their age-old profession and guaranteed them honourable and gainful employment. The TLA would also give them Rs.10 during such training. Many toddy tappers accepted this offer and the TLA implemented its scheme. This was a great achievement on the part of an infant trade union organization.

Native employers, compared to the European ones, were narrow-minded and did not like the popularity of the TLA. The new Police Officer in the town refused to cooperate with them in pursuing their ill designs against workers. When these employers prepared defamation charges against the police officer to get him transferred, the TLA took up the challenge in organizing a public campaign in disproving them, and extending its support to him. A public meeting was convened under the presidentship of Advocate S. Padmanabha Menon. In the words of K.C. Govindan, "the employers, who were the source of all these troubles, along with their hirelings, also came to the meeting. Because of the subtle diplomacy of the President, nothing untoward happened. M.L. Janardhanan Pillai, the leader of this faction, thereupon, withdrew support to the Association and sponsored another association named *Thozhilali Sanghom* (Workers' Organization). For various reasons, just like its birth, its demise was also quick."¹⁵

The TLA showed some interest in the activities of the Travancore Mahajana Sabha and deputed P.K. Padmanabhan Asan (the editor of *Kshemodayam*) to participate in the Second Conference of the *Mahajana Sabha* held at Kollam on January 4, 1942. Padmanabhan Asan distributed printed notices among the delegates describing the pitiable conditions of workers, and, in spite of his efforts, the *Mahajana Sabha* did not take a sympathetic view on the matter and the TLA leaders were disappointed. The *Mahajana Sabha*, however, did not survive for long.

The TLA was not an association of workers meant only to fight the employers. Its early leaders wanted the TLA to diversify its activities and demonstrate to the workers that it could better the life of workers and their families. According to K.C. Govindan, one notable achievement of the TLA was the formation of a death benefit fund meant to meet the burial/cremation and related expenses. It was decided that Rs.25 should be paid to the family,

when an adult member of a workers' family died and Rs.15 when a child died. Whenever a death took place in a worker's family, a group of ten workers from the TLA would visit the family, pay the amount and take part in the funeral. On the next payday, the amount was collected from the workers by the *mooppans*. Similarly the TLA also established a health care system for workers. A building was rented and facilities for Ayurvedic and Allopathic treatment were provided. TLA also mobilized volunteers to look after the patients. Expenses of the treatment were met by the TLA. Special funds were mobilized to meet expensive treatment. Thus, the TLA demonstrated that a trade union could render many kinds of services to its members and this helped in the formation of a collective consciousness among the workers.

The members of the TLA used to gather at its office in their leisure hours to talk and debate on various issues relating to them. This gave inspiration to the TLA to start a Reading Room and encouraged workers to read and acquire knowledge. The TLA decided to organize annual conferences and the first of such a conference was held on April 6 and 7, 1922 at Bhagavati Vilasom Theatre at Alappuzha. Nearly thousand workers attended this. It also conducted an Arts Festival of the workers with competitions for elocution, handwriting and public reading as well as music and drawing. K.C. Govindan remembers that this conference was presided over by C.V. Kunjuraman and Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai on the first and second days respectively. K.K. Kuruvila spoke on labour movements.

Vakil K.M. Krishnan had received a telegraphic message that K.P. Kesava Menon and T.K. Madhavan had been arrested in connection with the Vaikom Satyagraha. During the Conference, the TLA decided to send a batch of 50 workers as volunteers to Vaikom. They were clad in khadi and left for Vaikom under the leadership of Swami Satyavrathan. The TLA also decided to set up branches all over Travancore in order to spread the influence of the Association.

The TLA Conference passed several resolutions, and, demanded, among other things, representation for labour in the Travancore Legislature, a ban on untouchability practices, enforcement of compulsory and free primary education, free medical care for factory workers, financial assistance for disabled and old workers, and adult franchise as a right. A new managing committee was formed with K.M. Krishnan as President and P.K. Bava as Secretary. After the Conference, the TLA faced a financial crisis. Allegations of misappropriation of funds were raised. The honesty and integrity of P.K. Bava was questioned. This forced Bava to withdraw from all public activities causing a decline in the TLA¹⁶. K.C. Govindan took the initiative in

organizing a new union called *Thozhilali Mitram* (Friend of the workers) and he was elected the Secretary of the new organization. This body decided to sow its efforts in the field ploughed by Bava. A small fund was raised and public meetings were held. One of the important activities of the new organization was training workers for public speaking¹⁷.

P.K. Bava did not want his child TLA to die. He invited the organizers of *Thozhilali Mitram* to revive the TLA. On November 9, 1924 a special meeting was held at Kanchiramchira School under the Presidentship of Vakil K.M. Krishnan. R.P. Govinda Pillai, editor of the newspaper *Kuttanad*, C.G. Pillai, a congress activist and many others participated. On his request, P.K. Bava was relieved from the Secretaryship of the TLA and Kochittanparambil Velayudhan was elected the Secretary. K.C. Govindan was elected the Assistant Secretary. The meeting decided to publish a journal *Thozhilali* and Bava was made the Publisher as well as the Printer to spread the message of the activities of the TLA. Later S. Vasu, a relative of Bava, left the post of Assistant Editor of *Al Ameen* of Kozhikode, and became the Editor of *Thozhilali*. K.Velayudhan functioned as the Assistant Editor¹⁸.

During the period 1924-26, the TLA, which hitherto had confined itself to Alappuzha coir factory workers, began to extend its influence to other regions and working class groups. Mention may be made about TLA's efforts and success in mobilizing rickshaw workers of Alappuzha against police harassment and bringing about a settlement. Plantation workers in Peerumade wanted the TLA to establish a branch there. But the TLA was handicapped by the lack of a proper constitution, regulations, bylaws and legal registration. The Second Annual Conference of the TLA was held on June 7, 1925 in a temporary theatre near *Alappuzha Sarkar Thottam* (Government Garden). Sardar K.M. Panikkar, Secretary of Narendra Mandalam, presided. According to K.C. Govindan, people like Kannanthodathu Velayudha Menon, and K.A. Ibrahim MLA of Cochin and A.B. Salem participated and spoke at the meeting. It was proposed that the TLA should be made a unit of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC). The conference also considered the establishment of a labourers' cooperative society. Thus the *Alappuzha Labourers' Paraspara Sahakarana Sangham* was formally registered on July 18, 1926. It started a provision store and distributed short-term loans.

Soon the TLA founded a Night School for workers to teach English, Malayalam and Arithmetic and public speaking. Steps were taken to formally draw up a constitution for the TLA and membership was given to any one who paid 4 annas as admission fee. The membership grew to around 20,000. Employers became unhappy and they victimized workers who went to the TLA office and attended its meetings. To counter this, the managing

committee sent groups of volunteers to visit the homes of the workers and discuss the social and economic problems and register them as members of the TLA. A good many of the *Mooppan*s cooperated in this campaign.

The TLA desired that every conference, whether communal or political should hold a separate session on workers. It was the SNDP, which for the first time passed a resolution at its Kollam meeting on May 8-9, 1926, to limit working hours and avert accident hazards at the work place. But some who saw a communal tinge in it misinterpreted this. The leaders of the TLA were really shocked at this turn of event. The Third Annual Conference of the TLA was held at Bhagavati Vilasam Threatre, Alappuzha on June 20, 1926. K.C. Govindan gives this description. "Workers from the factories marched to the conference hall in a procession accompanied by music and fanfare. E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, a socialist leader and the founder of the self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu, presided over the conference. Many of the leading merchants as well as the citizens of the town participated in the conference. P.K. Madhavan was elected President and S. Vasu, the Editor of the *Thozhilali* was elected General Secretary. In order to assist them, P.K. Bava was elected Vice President and K.C. Govindan as Assistant Secretary"¹⁹.

Soon the TLA started facing serious problems. Its decision that committee members were to be elected on the basis of the membership in each factory stood in the way of re-electing the most active members. The dissensions and rivalry within the organization increased. Financial difficulties mounted. The publication of *Thozhilali* ceased temporarily. The TLA could not give concrete proposals to the retired High Court Judge N. Kumaran who had agreed to introduce a Labour Bill in the Legislature.

K.C. Govindan gives some idea about the early strikes in the Alappuzha region. Alappuzha Coir factories attracted people from all over the state who came in search of gainful employment. The influx of workers in the region had a depressing effect on wage rates. It was partly neutralized by the entry of new entrepreneurs stimulated by increase in export orders for coir products. But competition was such that with the increase in exports, some undercutting was effected which led to a decline in prices. Since there was no shortage for labour, *mooppan*s and contractors became arrogant and arbitrary. With deteriorating conditions of workers, strike had to be launched and the TLA had to intervene.

3.2.1 The Strike of 1928 at Commady Depot

In April 1928, the management at the Commady Depot of the William Goodacre and Co reduced the wages of the mat and matting weavers. When the management refused to hear the workers and reconsider its decision, the workers decided to launch a strike²⁰. It was not a strike launched with the prior intimation to the TLA. But the TLA decided to intervene. Bava wrote letters to the management but the latter ignored them. The TLA was in its infancy and was not able to sustain a long strike. The management closed down the Commady Depot and dismissed all the workers. The workers held a demonstration and proceeded to the Kidanganparambu maidan (ground) for holding a protest meeting. Soon the workers at the head office of the company were planning to join the strike. The TLA had also started to raise a strike fund. The workers at the head office submitted a memorandum demanding a favourable decision from the management to resolve the strike at the Commady Depot. K.C. Karunakaran also raised the matter on April 26, 1929 in the Legislature. Finally, fearing a total strike in all the units of the company, the management decided to restore the wages to the pre-strike level.

3.2.2 Strike at Thomas D'Cruz and Co.

Following a general cut in wages, the matting weavers in Thomas D'Cruz and Co. made a representation to the management to reverse the decision. Finding no response from the management, the workers began a strike. They sought the help from the TLA. Though it did not approve of the spontaneous strike without consulting the Association, the TLA decided to intervene. After discussion, the management agreed to restore the wage rates to the original level. But along with that the management sent out a signal by dismissing some of the active workers of the Association.

3.2.3 Strike at Aspinwall Company

Soon after the settlement of the strike at Thomas D'Cruz and Co., workers in Aspinwalll and Co were forced to launch a strike when their wages were cut at the Aryad unit. Their wages were already lower than their counterparts in the head office unit. The workers thought that a further reduction in their wages was totally unjustified and sought the help of the TLA. The efforts of the Association did not succeed and so a strike became inevitable. The strike lasted three weeks. K.C. Govindan writes²¹:

"The Association called for a public meeting near the company. C.K.Krishna Panicker (Cheerappanchira), a prominent Ezhava Community leader presided over the meeting. The President was brought to the meeting place on horse back in a procession. About five thousand persons, including a large number of workers, participated in the meeting. Workers in the nearby companies agreed to donate a rupee a week towards the strike fund. The Management, on the other hand, was adamant. Mr. Smith, the manager, made a statement that the factory would remain closed till the workers withdrew the strike unconditionally and that the management would not consider any proposal from the workers regarding the administration of the factory. This stance provoked the workers and we began to actively consider declaring a strike in the main factory of Aspinwall Company in Alappuzha town also".

To break the strike, the company brought blacklegs. It started to contract out the work and entrusted it with V.N. Sebastian, an influential *mooppan*. The TLA called on the workers to launch a direct action in the form of picketing at the factory to prevent blacklegs from entering it. However, Sebastian could take a few blacklegs into the factory with the help of police. The TLA once again approached the management. P.K. Bava and an advocate accompanying him were told that the management would restore the wages if workers withdrew their strike unconditionally. At this, Bava agreed to protect the company's prestige and workers called off the strike. The success of the TLA was that many European managements started saying that they could no longer take the Association for granted.

3.2.4 Fourth Annual Conference of TLA

The year 1928 was a milestone in the history of Indian trade union movement. It was in this year that the South Indian Railway Strike was held with its fallouts in the trade union movement in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The Fourth Annual Conference of the TLA was held on June 3, 1928 at Vanivilasom Hall, Alappuzha²². The editor of *Poura Prabha*, Z.M. Paraet (Kottayam) presided over the meeting. A.B. Salem, Kannanthodathu Velayudha Menon and K.K. Panicker addressed the Conference. The Conference passed a resolution that the TLA should be registered under company regulations. It appealed to the Government to nominate a workers' representative to the Legislature. A deputation led by P.K. Bava, P.K. Madhavan and P.S. Mohammed was sent to meet the Government authorities and make a representation on the matter. P.S. Mohammed was elected

President and P.K. Bava Secretary of TLA and A. Varkey Mooppan, K.C. Govindan and K.A. Kesavan (Kandathil) were elected Vice President, Assistant Secretary and touring Secretary respectively. It was also decided to resume publication of *Thozhilali*. P.S. the Government as a representative of the Muslim Community nominated Mohammed, though the TLA had been demanding representation for labour. But this nomination of Mohammed did help the working class since he was able to defeat a move by the representative of the factory owners to introduce a bill declaring strikes as illegal. In this K.A. Krishna Iyengar the Deputy President of the Assembly supported him.

3.2.5 Another Crisis in TLA

There again emerged dissensions in the TLA. Allegation on misappropriation of funds followed and some insulted the Secretary P.K. Bava, who had sacrificed everything to make the workers' organization a reality. At the Empire Coir Works, where the TLA had originated, wages of workers were reduced by 4 annas. Workers naturally complained to the TLA Secretary Bava. But considering the problems facing the company, he tried to persuade the workers to accept the lower wage rates. The workers refused to comply. Some workers decided to bypass Bava and the TLA and submitted a memorandum to the company management. Following this, Bava resigned from the Secretary ship. K.C. Govindan was then asked to look after the duties of the Secretary also. The management committee set up an arbitration board with P.S. Mohammed and S. Vaidyanatha Iyer to settle the dispute at Empire Coir Works through negotiations with the management. The dispute was settled amicably because of the magnanimity shown by the company.

In the special general body meeting of the TLA held at Kidangamparambu maidan on July 13, 1928, Bava's resignation was accepted and K.C. Govindan was elected as General Secretary. K.C. Govindan states that he felt proud to recollect that from thence onwards the Association made remarkable progress. The membership of TLA increased rapidly and the financial position improved. Learned scholars like E. Subha Krishnayya, well known *Brahmasamaj* worker, T.K. Narayanan, editor of *Amrit Bharathi*, P. Kunjiraman, K.K. Panicker and S. Vaidyanatha Iyer spoke in the special public meetings organized by the TLA on various aspects of labour and social problems. In one of the meetings, a resolution was moved requesting the Government to introduce comprehensive labour legislation in Travancore²³.

3.2.6 Fifth Annual Conference of TLA

The Fifth Annual Conference of the TLA was held at Alappuzha Vanivilasam Hall on April 7, 1929. Prior to this, a special meeting of the TLA was held on March 7, 1928. It was presided over by the District Court Advocate K. Kunju Panicker. Elanjickal Varghese Cheriyam Kunju and P.K. Madhavan spoke. It was P.K. Bava who proposed a vote of thanks²⁴. While it passed a resolution expressing allegiance to Maharani Regent and the royal household, the meeting demanded a nominated seat for a representative of labour.

The Fifth Annual Conference was held amidst great fanfare²⁵. P.S. Mohammed MLC presided over the Conference. In the evening a public meeting was held with Rao Bahadur Krishna Iyengar, a leading lawyer and social worker and Deputy President of the Assembly in the Chair. Delegates from the Quilon Labour Union (QLU) like its Secretary K.P. Narayanan, Dr. M.R. Govinda Pillai, Thevally Narayanan and Ramadev participated in the Conference. K.G. Gopalakrishnan from Cherthala, T.K. Narayanan from Kollam, A.B Salem from Kochi and Ruggmini Amma also spoke. Vaidyanatha Iyer proposed vote of thanks.

3.2.7 Sixth Annual Conference of TLA

This was held on April 27, 1930 at Alappuzha Vanivilasam Hall, and, M. Rama Varma Thampan, famous rationalist and socialist, presided²⁶. More than 5000 participated in this Conference. Thomas Chandimukkadan, A.B. Salem, P. Ignatius, K. Ayyappan, and T.M. Mohammed spoke. Ignatius was a Congress activist and had received special training in trade union activities. The Conference passed a resolution condoling the sad demise of T.K. Madhavan. Among other things, it demanded representation to labour, and setting up of a committee to give recommendations for promoting industrialization of the state. The TLA decided to acquire a land and building for its office. P.S. Mohammed was selected as President and K.C. Govindan as Secretary.

K.C. Govindan reports an incident in which the manager of Darragh Smail and Co assaulted a clerk working under him. The clerk sought the help of the TLA, which considered his case and organized a mass public meeting at Alappuzha beach. The clerk described to the workers the insult and physical injuries he had to suffer and the workers unanimously passed a resolution protesting against the action of the manager. The managing committee of the TLA decided to initiate steps against the manager and defend the clerk. The

European manager, frightened by these developments, apologized to the clerk and compensated him for the injury. This incident further strengthened the position of the TLA in the region and workers started feeling more secure.

The TLA hosted an official reception for the volunteers who, under the leadership of Ponnara Sreedhar, were on their way to Malabar to participate in the salt Satyagraha on May 11, 1930. A purse was handed over to Ponnara Sreedhar at that meeting. The volunteers included N.C. Sekhar, K.N. Kunju Krishna Pillai, N.P. Kurikkal, Narayana Pillai and Thiruvattar Thanu Pillai. This indicated the close relationship between trade union movement and the movement for freedom and independence. Working class was getting politically conscious.

A special meeting of the TLA was held in the first week of September 1930²⁷. More than 2000 workers attended this meeting which was presided over by P.S.Mohammed. Interestingly it was reported that the local police inspector Kartha also attended this meeting held at Kidangamparambu Maidan specially because a subject for discussion was attitude of the police to workers and their agitations. S. Padmanabha Menon, T.M. Mohammed, K. Kunju Panicker, M. Varghese, K.C. Govindan and V.K.Velayudhan spoke at the meeting. It reiterated its demand for a nominated member in the legislature to represent labour. It resolved that in future, managements should intimate the TLA about any move to cut workers' wages. It appealed to workers to provide accurate information to the forthcoming population census and wanted them to give their subscriptions to the Association regularly without fail. The weekly subscription then was *one chakram*.

3.2.8 Small Pox Epidemic in Alappuzha

Late 1930 and early 1931 saw the rapid spread of small pox in epidemic proportions in Alappuzha. Many workers and their families fell victims to it. The TLA could not sit silent. It brought out a pamphlet on the causes and remedies of small pox to educate the people. A small group of volunteers was also formed. TLA also decided to send a deputation to the Dewan to appraise the authorities about the seriousness of the problem. This was a result of the decision arrived at a special meeting of the TLA in January 1931²⁸. Ramavarma Thampan presided over the meeting. T.M. Mohammed and N.A. Krishna Pillai spoke. It was in this meeting that R. Sugathan expressed a vote of thanks. The meeting also decided to mobilize at least 1000 new members for the Association. It also appealed to the municipality not to give permission to conduct dramas, wrestling matches, and cinemas in the region, considering the spread of the small pox epidemics and initiate steps to

keep the town hygienically clean. It also demanded immediate posting of four more doctors in the hospital. Another important decision of the TLA was to persuade workers and their families not to buy anything from hotels, which refused to reduce their prices in spite of a general fall in commodity prices. These were novel initiatives coming from a trade union or labour association during the period of an emerging depression.

3.2.9 Seventh Annual Conference of TLA, 1931

The Seventh Annual Conference was presided over by B. Shiva Rao, an all India trade union leader and a participant in the Round Table Conference in London²⁹. Kottur Kunju Krishna Pillai, P.N. Krishna Pillai, George Kakkanadan and M.L. Janardhanan Pillai, spoke at the Conference. But according to the *Malayala Manorama*, K.A. Krishna Iyer, C. Kesavan, G. Raman Pillai, N. Narayana Kurup, S. Vaidyanatha Iyer, M.Krishnan Menon, V.K. Velayudhan, M.S. Anirudhan, George M. Varghese, T.M. Aboobaker, and, E.J. Cherian Kunju, also participated in this Conference. This account appearing in the *Malayala Manorama* daily in 1931 seems to be more reliable than what K.C. Govindan wrote in his memoirs published in 1986. It was P.K. Bava who translated Shiva Rao's speech into Malayalam. Shiva Rao wanted the TLA to send a delegation to the forthcoming conference of the AITUC to be held in Madras. He asked the TLA to mobilize its members and agitate for the enactment of protective labour laws in Travancore on the model of the British regulations. K.C. Govindan writes: "Shiva Rao in his speech dealt with the multifarious aspects of the labour problem in India... He referred to the Karachi Congress Session and recalled the resolution initiated by Mahatma Gandhi promising a number of facilities, including fixing an eight-hour workday for the workers, if the Congress came to power. He stressed the need for linking the TLA with national and international labour organizations and he appealed to the Indian Government to send a labour representative to the ILO Conference that was going to be held in Geneva."

The TLA presented a gold medal to Kedamangalam Pappukutty for contributing poems and articles in *Thozhilali*. There was a strong contest for the post of Secretary, when the office bearers were to be elected by the annual conference. One Sivaprasad was proposed by a faction to contest for the post of Secretary. K.C. Govindan was also in the fray. Even P.K. Bava, who was very close to Govindan, and, who was instrumental in inducting Govindan into the union movement took a stand to defeat Govindan from getting elected. Sivaprasad expressed his inability to stay in Alappuzha and work as Secretary and this brought support to K.C. Govindan and he got elected.

V.K.Velayudhan was made an Honorary Secretary and Gopalan Mooppan the Treasurer.

3.2.10 The Strike of July-August 1931

A special meeting of the TLA was held at *Alisserry Velyil*. E.M. Kovoor, an Advocate of the Alappuzha District Court presided³⁰. 4000 workers participated. Vaikom P. Chandrasekhara Pillai, George M. Varghese, K.C. Govindan and V.K.Achuthan were the main speakers. The subject of discussion was about launching a strike, since both the European and native companies had announced a cut in wages. There were spontaneous agitations in several companies and TLA decided to intervene. Managements then agreed to raise the wages a bit, if workers returned to work. But workers were cheated and the TLA decided to spearhead the agitation under its banner.

It was just prior to this strike that the TLA accorded a grand reception to K.F.Nariman, the Congress Leader who reached Alappuzha during his tour of Travancore. When Jawaharlal Nehru and family came to Alappuzha, a public meeting was organized at the *Kidangamparamba Maidan* on May 29, 1931. At this meeting P.S. Mohammed, the President of the TLA, read a citation and K.C. Govindan presented it to Nehru.

The port workers of Alappuzha had no formal or informal association though they were feeling the urge for it. In 1931, a wage dispute broke between the contractors and head load workers. The workers submitted a memorial to the managing committee of the TLA outlining their grievances. A sub-committee of the TLA reported on the labour problems in the port and suggested the holding of a general body meeting of port workers. Raman Kunju was in the forefront of this initiative.

The Strike of July-August 1931 started first in Bombay Company. The company management refused to see V.K. Velayudhan, deputed officially by the TLA. The strike lasted three months. Workers declared that they would continue to strike even if they starve. In fact, the TLA took the bold decision that free lunch would be provided to the striking workers every day. Both V.K. Achuthan and C.K. Velayudhan who were leading the strike could finally bring about a settlement. When the strike ended, they quit their jobs in the Bombay Company and joined Pierce Leslie Company.

Due to factional fights in the TLA, K.C. Govindan resigned from the post of Secretary and in the meeting held in January 1932 V.C. Vasu Vadhyar was elected as General Secretary. But Govindan could not abandon the daily routine of social and trade union work.

3.2.11 Eighth Annual Conference of TLA, 1932

This was held on March 8-9, 1932. P.S. Mohammed chaired the first day session of the Conference and K.K. Kuruvila guided the proceedings of the second day. Gopalakrishna Pillai, K. Ayyappan, P. Kesava Dev and Vaikom P Chandrasekhara Pillai were the main speakers. P.S. Mohammed and V.K. Velayudhan were re-elected as the President and Hon. Secretary. V.C. Vasu Vadhyar continued as General Secretary, since K.C. Govindan did not contest. But Govindan was included in a special propaganda committee as a member and this committee was entrusted with the task of organizing public meetings of workers in other major working class centres like Muhamma, Cherthala, Ponnamvelly and Kuthiathode. TLA was thus planning to mobilize more members and set up rural branches of the TLA.

K.C. Govindan writes³¹:

“Shortly after the conference, Dewan Austin visited Alappuzha. A deputation from the TLA led by V.K. Velayudhan submitted a memorial to him. The memorial mainly discussed the grievances of the coir workers, like the uncertainty and reduction of wages, the lack of representation to labour in the Legislative Assembly and the need to amend the Factory Regulation Act. The Dewan gave a patient hearing and assured us that he would consider our demands”.

Factional fights in the TLA continued. P.S. Mohammed became controversial when he refused to take a stern stand against wage reductions. When Vasu Vadhyar resigned, a special general body meeting was held and M.C. Narayanan was elected as the General Secretary. Since M.C. Narayanan could not bear the heavy burden of the job, V.K. Achuthan was elected to take his place on March 7, 1932. Achuthan was earlier acting as the printer and publisher of *Thozhilali*.

Travancore was witnessing waves of agitation all over the state under the banner of Abstention Movement. When the news of C. Kesavan's arrest in that context spread, the workers in Alappuzha struck work, though it was not officially called by the TLA. The District Magistrate banned all public meetings and this was used to refuse permission to the TLA to convene the Ninth Annual Conference.

3.2.11 Ninth Annual Conference of TLA, 1933

This Conference was held on September 10, 1933 at *Vanivilasom Hall* in Alappuzha. It is interesting to note that the veteran leader E.V. Ramaswamy

Naicker presided over this Conference. After passing a condolence resolution on the sad demise of S. Vasu, a former editor of *Thozhilali*, the name of A. Balakrishna Pillai, Editor of *Kesari* was proposed as the President of the TLA, though he was not present at the venue. V.K.Velayudhan was elected as the Vice-President and P. Kesava Dev as General Secretary. Since Kesava Dev was a fiery radical and a veteran of left and progressive writings in Malayalam, the moderates in the Conference expressed their reservation but majority approved his election. A. Balakrishna Pillai declined to become President and in his place V.K. Velayudhan was elevated to that post.

Kesava Dev was one of the most celebrated progressive writers of Kerala. He always supported militant trade union action. Government had banned him from making public speeches. Some in the TLA wanted him to break the ban and this caused some irritation among others. Since Kesava Dev was editor of *Thozhilali*, he wrote articles in it and they contained what he really wanted to convey through public speeches. These articles recharged the workers who were agitated on the issue of wage reduction. Leaders thought that they were being forced to call for a General Strike and they decided to initiate a two month long preparatory campaign and raise a strike fund³². The employers felt that they should mobilize and destroy the TLA. The Chamber of Commerce first sent petitions to authorities demanding stern action against the TLA. P. Kesava Dev was identified as the chief instigator of the troubles in Alappuzha. After a few days, the Managing Committee of TLA called off the strike in Empire Coir works. Kesava Dev did not like this and he left for his native place after registering his strong protest. In his absence, V.K. Achuthan functioned as Acting Secretary. In February 1934 the TLA appointed Pandavathu Sankara Pillai as Secretary.

3.2.13 Tenth Annual Conference of TLA, 1934

Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai presided over this Conference. P.N. Krishna Pillai, K.M. Ibrahim, Ramachandran and E. Madhavan spoke at the Conference. It was in this Conference that a demand for standardizing wage rates was made. Another demand was for banning the employment of children below 14 years in factories. Pandavathu Sankara Pillai was elected General Secretary and M. Krishna Menon as President. Since Pandavathu Sankara Pillai had many other pre-occupations, M.S. Anirudhan was elected as Honorary Secretary of TLA and K.K.Padmanabhan as Assistant Secretary. Subsequently the TLA invited K.C. Govindan to come back and take charge as General Secretary.

K.C. Govindan with his vast experience in the Coir industry work found that the major cause for wage reduction was the intense rivalry among exporters to cut costs and increase their share in the market. Only a few European companies and Indian companies paid wages regularly. Payment of wages in kind was still prevalent. The increase in the prices of commodities was unbearable. One remedy for these evils was protective labour legislation. The TLA, therefore, decided to convene a special general body meeting on February 3, 1935. Kottur Kunju Krishna Pillai, a member of the Legislative Assembly was invited to preside over the meeting. At the meeting, the member promised to introduce a new Labour Bill. To resolve the issue of wage reduction, the TLA appealed to Government to set up a conciliation board with power to settle wage disputes as and when they arose. A deputation was sent to meet the Dewan and prolonged correspondence followed. Government made it clear that it could not interfere in any dispute raised by the TLA until it was legally registered³³. Following this, the TLA submitted an application for a licence according to Section 26 of Company Regulations. At this juncture, Krishna Menon, the President of TLA passed away and his position was filled by Chalayil Dr. K.P.Panicker, a feudal landlord of Kuttanad and brother of Sardar K.M. Panicker. The special general body meeting held on April 2, 1935 was significant. It decided to organize a labour march all the way to Trivandrum and submit a Memorial on the grievances of labour directly to the Maharaja. K. Joseph was elected Convener of the Propaganda and Campaign Committee.

Public Meetings and campaigns were held. Leaders of the national movement extended their support. Public opinion was in favour of labour. Employers held anti-labour campaigns. They alleged that labour leaders were colluding with leaders of Abstention Movement and the Joint Political Congress and requested the Government to repress the workers' agitation. M.L. Janardhanan Pillai, and K.C. Karunakaran, representing Indian companies succeeded in influencing the managers of European companies to form a joint forum to confront the TLA. N.G. Hayden, Chairman of Travancore Chamber of Commerce made a statement that the workers were being used as pawns in a political game and appealed to Government to control the deteriorating law and order situation in Alappuzha.

The TLA did not keep a low profile. The May Day Celebration of 1935 was an exhibition of working class defiance, though the TLA was careful to avoid creating an impression of disrespect to the Maharaja. On May 5, a meeting was organized at *Kidangamparambu Maidan* to pay respects to the Maharaja and celebrate the jubilee of Emperor George V. The above developments made it very clear that the TLA respected the Maharaja and his Dewan and did never think of questioning the authorities. It was clear that the

TLA was yet to become a true working class organization and to acquire a political ideology. The right-wingers, moderates and those having close links with caste organizations still controlled the TLA. Things began to change, when the TLA took the decision to participate in the All Kerala Labour Conference at Kozhikode. R. Sugathan was elected to represent the TLA at this conference.

3.2.14 All Kerala Labour Conference

The All Kerala Labour Conference held at Kozhikode was part of the First Convention of the Congress Socialist Party (C.S.P.). Sixteen trade unions participated in it. Maniben Kare, a leading trade unionist of Bombay presided. P. Krishna Pillai, K.K.Warrier, P.S. Namboodiri, K.P. Gopalan, P.K. Balan and A.K. Gopalan represented various trade unions and R. Sugathan (known better as Sugathan Sir) represented the TLA. They had come from Kannur, Thalassery, Feroke, Kallai, Thrissur, Ernakulam and Alappuzha³⁴. On his return, R. Sugathan presented a report to a meeting of the TLA held at *Kidangamparambu Maidan* and attended by about 2000 workers. The Kozhikode Conference promised all help to the struggles of the workers in Alappuzha.

The employers and the Government tried to disrupt the campaign for the Labour March. They persuaded P.S. Mohammed who had been the President of the TLA for nearly five years to come out openly against the agitation. Following this, the current President of the TLA, Dr. K.P. Panicker, announced his resignation on May 28, 1935. He was not willing to incur the wrath of the Government. The District Magistrate of Kollam ordered a ban on all activities connected with the proposed Labour March. On May 28, K.Joseph, the convener of the campaign committee, V.K. Purushothaman, a leading member of the committee and K.C. Govindan, the General Secretary of the TLA were arrested under section 90 of the Penal Code. According to K.C. Govindan, these were the first arrests in the history of trade union movement in the state. They were taken to the police station on the banks of the commercial canal in Alappuzha and put up in the lock-up.

3.2.15 Labour march

Soon workers began to gather to form a big agitating crowd in front of the police station. M.S. Anirudhan and V.K. Velayudhan, who were practicing lawyers, intervened and went to the Magistrate's house to get bail around 8 p.m. The Magistrate did not cooperate and wanted the lawyers to

wait till the court reopened the next day. The two leaders hurried to the police station and pacified the crowd and sent them home. The arrested leaders were given good and decent treatment in the lock-up. The TLA distributed the very next morning a statement giving the details of the incident. It called for a strike and *harthal*. Workers in rural centres like Muhamma, Kalavoor, Kanjikkuzhi and Cherthala joined the workers of Alappuzha in the strike and *harthal*. There was a minor incident, when coir workers belonging to the TLA tried to dissuade the port workers from reporting for work. When the police intervened, the coir workers abandoned their efforts. The Satyagraha by workers continued till evening and they stood disciplined, brave and calm in the hot sun, hungry and sweating demanding the release of their leaders. The arrested leaders were given a conditional bail, but TLA went on appeal to the Sessions Court that allowed bail without any condition.

Since Dr. K.P. Panicker had resigned, a search for a new president for the TLA was on and finally the choice fell on P.K. Kunju, a State Congress activist. He was elected on June 3, 1935 at a meeting of the TLA convened to celebrate the birthday of the British Emperor. It showed how respectful was the TLA to His Majesty, who was keeping India and Indians under his feet.

The ban on the Labour March drew statewide protests. On June 5, 1935 a mass protest rally was held at Thiruvananthapuram Railway Station maidan. In the meeting presided over by Changancherry Parameswaran Pillai, a Resolution condemning the ban on the Labour March was moved by V. Achutha Menon, a leading lawyer of the High Court. Kottur Kunju Krishna Pillai related his experience with the TLA and confirmed the peaceful intentions of the March. The Press in Thiruvananthapuram warned the Government of the danger inherent in attempts to repress even peaceful forms of protests.

The TLA continued to demonstrate its *Rajabhakthi* (devotion to the Raja) by passing a Resolution felicitating the Maharaja for the honour bestowed on him by the British Emperor granting the title of G.C.I.E. A special general body meeting of the TLA on June 11, 1935 passed this Resolution. Along with this, the TLA made an appeal to the Maharaja as well as to the Members of the British Parliament to lift the ban on the Labour March and to introduce labour legislation respectively. Copies of the appeal were sent to the British Labour Party leader Lansberry also. Following this, the Government took a conciliatory approach. Pichu Iyengar, the Police Commissioner invited V.K. Velayudhan and K.C. Govindan for talks and the leaders could convince the official that the problems of workers were genuine. However, the Government began to adopt a carrot-and-stick policy towards the TLA. On July 16, 1935 P.K. Kunju and K.C. Govindan, accompanied by

Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai met Dewan Habibullah at his residence in Bhakthivilas in Thiruvananthapuram and submitted a memorandum demanding, among other things, the introduction of a comprehensive labour legislation and representation to labour in the Assembly.

Later, the TLA registered its protest when the Government was reported to be planning to nominate P.S. Mohammed to the Assembly as representative of labour. A joint deputation of the TLA, Kollam Labour Union and *Navika Thozhilali Sangham* led by Kottur Kunjukrishna Pillai called on the Dewan and submitted a detailed memorandum. This memorandum stated that the workers did not consider P.S. Mohammed as a suitable nominee and suggested instead the name of P.N. Krishna Pillai or M.S. Anirudhan.

3.2.16 New Bills

On July 19, 1935, the Government introduced four Bills, namely, the Factories Bill, the Trade Union Bill, the Trade Disputes Bill and the Workmen's Compensation Bill in the Assembly. The employers reacted by all-round reductions in wages and this led to a number of protest meetings, submission of memoranda and despatch of telegrams. The Government asked the Kollam District Magistrate to make an enquiry into the alleged wage reductions. His report was unfavourable to workers. A few days later, the Government nominated M.L. Janardhanan Pillai as employer's representative and P.S. Mohammed as workers' representative in the Assembly. P.S. Mohammed who was not acceptable to the workers as well as the TLA thus gained entry into the Assembly, and, he, to justify his nomination as labour representative formed a labour organization called the Alappuzha Labour Union with the help of M.L. Janardhanan Pillai and K.C. Karunakaran, both belonging to the class of employers. But this new Labour Union failed to gather any support from workers.

The special general body meeting of the TLA held on September 24, 1935, under the presidentship, of A. Velu Menon welcomed the new labour bills and appealed to all legislators to pass them. On October 11, the TLA was informed that its application for legal registration has been rejected. The workers and their leaders got restless. It was in this background that the Eleventh Annual Conference was held at *Vanivilasom Hall* on January 12, 1936.

3.2.17 Eleventh Annual Conference of TLA, 1936

According to K.C. Govindan, this Conference was presided over by Pattom Thanu Pillai MLA and State Congress leader. Cherian Manjooran, P.N. Krishna Pillai and Kottur Kunju Krishna Pillai spoke. The Conference re-elected P.K. Kunju and K.C. Govindan as President and General Secretary. P.K. Kunju took particular interest in developing and popularising the periodical *Thozhilali*, which began to carry articles on socio-political issues. K.C. Govindan writes³⁵:

“Since June 1935, P. Krishna Pillai and other Congress Socialist Party leaders from Malabar used to visit Alappuzha, where they organized study classes and helped in the trade union activities. But this was not their sole intention, for they wanted to establish a unit of the Congress Socialist Party at Alappuzha and bring the trade union movement under its control. In fact, P. Krishna Pillai himself once invited me to join them. I was never a communist. More importantly, even today (1986) I am firmly of the opinion that trade unions should be free from the influence of political parties. An undercurrent of tension thus slowly began to build up between me and the Congress Socialist Party activists as well those who collaborated with them. Further, some among them also had personal grudge against me. The Congress Socialist Party clique was bent upon curbing my influence and position in the Association and matters reached a head on the issue of nomination to the Assembly ... In April 1937, we received a letter from Government asking the TLA to send a panel of names for nomination to the Assembly and the State Council. The Managing Committee considered the letter and it decided to forward the names of P.N. Krishna Pillai and R. Sugathan to the Government. P.G. Padmanabhan suggested my name. But the majority of the Committee, instigated by the Congress Socialist Party faction, insisted that only the names of P.N. Krishna Pillai and R. Sugathan need be forwarded to the Government. It was evident that they wanted to scuttle my nomination to the Assembly”.

Later, the First Class Magistrate asked K.C. Govindan to meet him with the minutes book of the Managing Committee. The Magistrate found that both P.N. Krishna Pillai and R. Sugathan were not members of the Managing Committee. But K.C. Govindan explained their background and credentials to show their close involvement in the activities of the TLA. When K.C. Govindan reported this matter in the Managing Committee, a malicious campaign was started against him and he was asked to resign from the post of General Secretary. Even though the Twelfth Annual Conference was to be

held just two weeks after, the members of the Managing Committee insisted on the resignation of K.C. Govindan. V.K. Purushothaman was then elected as the new General Secretary.

Police Inspector Chandrasekharan Nair asked K.C. Govindan to meet the Chief Secretary, Dr. N. Kunjan Pillai and seek his nomination to the Assembly as V.K. Velayudhan, P.K. Kunju and M.S. Anirudhan had already been elected to the Assembly on the reservation quota. The case for Govindan's nomination was stronger since both P.N. Krishna Pillai and R. Sugathan were not members of the Managing Committee and as such were ineligible for nomination. K.C. Govindan turned down this suggestion and made it clear to Chandrasekharan Nair that he was not inclined to pursue the matter any more.

While this crisis was brewing, the day-to-day functioning of the TLA went on smoothly. It sponsored a massive condolence meeting when the British Emperor passed away. A branch of the TLA was opened at Muhamma with Cheerappanchira C.K. Karunakara Panicker as President and P.K. Narayanan as Secretary. K.C. Govindan took the initiative in starting a branch of the TLA at Kalavancode with the help of C. Krishnan, a local social worker. A large public meeting attended by around 5000 workers was held on February 9, 1937 presided over by P.N. Krishna Pillai. R. Sugathan and K.C. Govindan spoke. A leaflet describing the aims and importance of the TLA was widely distributed in the region. Meanwhile, the court case against the campaign on Labour March dragged on for about 16 months.

The Government decided to nominate C.O. Ponnamma and P.N. Krishna Pillai to the Assembly. During a meeting with C.V. Kunhiraman, T.M. Varghese, and P.K. Kunju at V.K. Velayudhan's house, K.C. Govindan was informed that his name for nomination was removed from the list due to the infighting in the TLA. K.C. Govindan felt that he could no longer continue to hold any official position in the TLA as long as it did not have faith in him. Soon K.C. Govindan resigned his post of Publisher and Editor of *Thozhilati*. A Government Order later banned the periodical in October 1938 when K.C. Govindan was in prison in connection with the State Congress agitations.

3.2.18 Twelfth Annual Conference of TLA, 1937

On May 22, 1937 the Twelfth Annual Conference was held in Alappuzha under the presidentship of the veteran labour leader V.V. Giri. P.K. Kunju, P.N. Krishna Pillai and R. Sugathan were elected as President, Vice President and General Secretary respectively. K.C. Govindan was withdrawing from the Alalppuzha trade union movement. He gave kudos to

his colleague K. Sankara Kurup of Kalavoor who acted as the Office Clerk-cum-Peon of TLA for more than a decade, a person who had received little attention in the historical account of the period. He bore the burden of keeping the accounts and collecting the fees from workers. K. Sankara Kurup and K.C. Govindan were the only two full time activists of the TLA. Even R. Sugathan, according to K.C. Govindan, used to visit the office of the TLA every day in the morning (6.30 am to 9.30 am and evening 4.30 pm to 8 pm). As such, most of the meetings of the Managing Committee were held only at night. It was indeed a tremendous emotional strain for K.C. Govindan to withdraw from the Alappuzha trade union movement. The events left him desperate and isolated. It was at this juncture, that he got an invitation from K.G. Sankar, the veteran social and trade union worker of Kollam. K.C. Govindan could not resist the offer of shifting to Kollam and also do his best to the trade union movement there, particularly since K.G. Sankar was bed-ridden with paralysis. On June 29, 1937, the Kollam Labour Union (KLU) elected him Secretary.

After serving the trade union movement in Kollam for about nine years, K.C. Govindan accepted the invitation from V.K. Velayudhan to join Government service in 1946 as a Labour Supervisor in the newly formed Labour Department. It is, indeed, interesting to note in this context that with a view to wean trade union activists away from the movement, the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer and his government machinery offered them tempting jobs. He succeeded in roping in V.K. Velayudhan, K.C. Govindan and P.N. Krishna Pillai the veterans of the trade union movement in Alappuzha to abandon their activism and serve the Government.

Soon after these developments, the union movement decided to launch an armed struggle calling for protection of legitimate trade union rights, but also for the end of Dewan's rule and establishment of responsible government in Travancore. T.V. Thomas, the leader of the movement at that time was summoned to the Bakthivilas Palace and in the meeting Sir C.P. offered him a covetable and lucrative position in Government, if he and his colleagues like N. Sreekantan Nair and Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair just abandoned the demand for responsible government. The Dewan was willing to concede all the legitimate trade union demands but was uncompromising on all political demands. T.V. Thomas lost no time in summarily rejecting the Dewan's offer. Thus he became a shining example and a notable exception among working class leaders by rejecting favours from Government and deciding to be with the working class till the end of his life.

The developments in the early trade union movement in Kollam and other centres will be discussed at a later stage, but for the present we will

confine this narrative to Alappuzha. Neighbouring areas like Cherthala, Kuttanadu and Puthuppally had also witnessed working class agitations. A meeting of the Taluk Labour Union had been held in Cherthala in the last week of August 1929 and it was presided over by K.C. Kuttan. Kalavan Kodathu C. Krishnan and K.G. Panicker spoke. The meeting had decided to organize a campaign to admit more members to the Union³⁶. Another meeting had been reported at the end of May 1930. It was presided over by Advocate Krishna Iyengar, and P.K. Raghavan and K.P. Kayyalakkal spoke. A unit was formed in Pallippuram. Its name was *Pallippuram Thozhilali Sanghom*. The *Puthuppally Thozhilali Sanghom* was formed in September 1931 and its first meeting was held at Puthuppally English School ground. P.N. Ninan, K.V. Abraham, P.A. Cherian and K.K. Thomas were its active members. This *Sanghom* also constituted a committee of 62 members.

3.2.19 Farmers' Meet at Kuttanad

A meeting of Kuttanad farmers was held in Alappuzha during the second week of July, 1934 under the presidentship of K.C. Mammen Mappila, the Editor of *Malayala Manorama*³⁷. Dr. K. Padmanabha Panicker (member of the Sri Chitra State Council), N. Venkatachala Iyer, M.K. Ananthasiva Iyer, Kalappurackal Joseph Chacko and Mullappally Gopala Panicker attended the meeting. The meeting formed a committee with K.C. Mammen Mappila as President, Thomas Chandy Mukkadan and Gangadhara Panicker as Secretaries. The main demands were reduction in land tax, elimination of all tariff and controls on export of copra, coconut oil and arecanut, stabilization of farm prices, and, setting up of a Land Bank. Another meeting of farmers was held under the presidentship of Velappan Nair, and V. Joseph Mankadam. Mathew George and J Varkey Kottur actively participated in it. Their objective was to appraise the Government about the urgent need to protect Kuttanad paddy lands from flood. They demanded construction of a canal connecting Konothu River through Udayamperoor to Vembanad Lake. In November 1934 the rubber growers organized a mass meeting at Kottayam Commercial Bank Building under the presidentship of S. Krishna Iyer, of Indian Planters' Association. Abraham C. Thomas and C.A. Thomas spoke at this meeting, which was attended by about 500 delegates. Another farmers' meet was held at Edathua St. Aloysius English School in June 1935 under the presidentship of T.C. Narayana Pillai. Delegates attended it from 10 branches. P.L. Mathai acted as the Vice President, P.J. Joseph and Thomas Chandy Mukkadan as Secretary and Peeyuz Ouseph Kannathusseril as Treasurer.

The Vennikulam Labour Association was reported to have held a special session in January 1935 under the presidentship of G. Raman

Menon³⁸. O.C. Ninan and P.K. Gopalan Nair actively participated in it. Its demands were protection of the interests of farmers, poor workers, job security and debt relief. *Malayala Manorama* also reported the holding of the Kuttanad Labour Conference in the third week of March 1936 under the presidentship of M.C. Mathai. Joseph Thaikkav, Thomas Chandy Mukkadan and others participated in the conference held at Ladapuram Maidan in Kuttanad and it set a committee of 55 members to organize campaigns and submit representation to Government. Another meeting was held at Kainakari English School under the presidentship of P. Balakrishnan Thampi. A.K. Narayanan, Thomas Chandy Mukkadan, R. Sugathan, M.O. Joseph Nedumkunnam, Vidwan P.C. Abraham, Joseph Panavel and others participated in this Kuttanad Labour meet. The meeting passed a resolution expressing respects to the Maharaja. One of the demands of this meeting was to request the Government to grant licences to workers to collect lime shell from the Vembanad backwaters. In September 1936, a meeting of the Central Committee of the Kuttanad Labour Union was held under the presidentship of Thomas J. Vallavantha. K.C. Kuttan and C.C. Gregory were activists of this Union. Later a committee with Kayithara Ouseph Kurian as President and L.C. Augusthy as Secretary was constituted. The above details were meant to indicate the emergence of a farmers' movement in Kuttanad and Alappuzha respectively and initially they had some amount of convergence particularly when people like R. Sugathan agreeing to participate in the meetings of the Kuttanad Labour Union. However, when P. Krishna Pillai arrived on the scene and started to instil revolutionary spirit and class consciousness among farm workers and toddy tappers, boat workers, rickshaw pullers and various other sections, the identity of class interests began to be accepted.

3.2.20 New Demands of T.L.A

The TLA continued to demand legislation on Factories' Act, Workmen's Compensation Act, Trade Dispute Act and Wage Act. The meeting of the TLA Management Committee with P.N. Krishna Pillai presiding took some important decisions. It appointed V.K. Achuthan as Editor of *Thozhilali*, registered grave concern about the action by employers in cutting wage rates and decided to prepare and submit a Memorial to Government. For this, a committee consisting of P.K. Kunju, P.N. Krishna Pillai, C.O. Ponnamma, R. Sugathan, M.S. Anirudhan and V.K. Achuthan was set up. Another demand was for the representation for labour in the Economic Development Board being constituted by the State.

The TLA constituted a committee to enquire into the deplorable conditions of labour in the plantations. This committee consisted of P.K.

Kunju, P.N. Krishna Pillai, R.Sugathan and V.K. Purushothaman. It was also decided to send a deputation team to the Dewan to represent before him about the deplorable conditions of labour in the Alappuzha region, particularly those in the coir factories. It appealed to the Dewan the early implementation of the Payment of Wages Act.

In those days, most meetings of the TLA used to pass a *Raja Bhakthi* (Respect to Raja) resolution and also demand representation for labour in the legislature. In the last week of December 1937 a meeting of the TLA presided by V.K. Panicker announced the employers' decision to enhance the wages of workers engaged in copra drying to 17 *chakram*. *Kannitta* workers were to be paid 24 *chakram*. In May 1937, the workers under the banner of TLA had called for a one-day *harthal* to register their protest to the government, which failed to grant representation to labour in the legislature. In short, the TLA was very active in the Alappuzha region during the period 1930-37. The employers were convinced that they could not simply ignore the organization of working class, which was getting stronger and assertive day by day.

3.3 T.L.A. BECOMES T.C.F.W.U

The Travancore Labour Association was the first to get registration under the Travancore Trade Unions Act of 1937. On registration, the TLA was renamed as the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union (T.C.F.W.U). The history of industrial disputes in Travancore dates back to the year 1938 when the first ever general strike was held by workers in the coir mats and matting manufacturing industry under the auspices of T.C.F.W.U. This strike was used as a means of ventilating the many grievances of workers. The District Magistrate of Kollam was asked by the Government of Travancore to conduct a preliminary enquiry into them. The report of the enquiry was submitted to the Government in September 1938.

As soon as the Travancore Trade Disputes Act was passed in 1938, the Government decided to appoint a Board of Conciliation to conduct a detailed investigation into the trade disputes in the Coir Industry so as to promote a settlement of all issues. K. George, the then Land Revenue and Income Tax Commissioner headed the Board. The alleged grievances stated in the long memorandum submitted by the TCFWU to the Board related to reduction of wages, payment of wages in kind or the truck system, indirect and unauthorized deduction from wages, imposition of fines, unauthorized and unjust deductions and exactions, unsatisfactory work and health conditions, non-recognition of trade unions, and failure to provide for labour representation in the legislature. In those days wages were never settled in full

and this led to exploitation. Victimization was common and universal. The wage rates were alleged to have been reduced by 50 percent during the years 1934 to 1938. The George Committee felt that one of the basic reasons for friction and strife in the coir industry was the absence of personal contact between employers and workers. Unfortunately, the parties held the view that it will be difficult to establish harmonious relationship between them.

3.3.1 Demands of T.C.F.W.U

The demands submitted by the T.C.F.W.U to the George Committee were: (a) An increment of basic rates of wages by 25 per cent; (b) The standardization of wage rates for different types of work; (c) Improvement in the working conditions of the factories; (d) A guaranteed minimum earning for workers; (e) The abolition of contract labour; and, (f) The prohibition of unauthorized deduction from workers' wages by *mooppanas*, jobbers, contractors, etc.

The General Strike started by the TCFWU soon spread to other coir factory centres. The strike involved about 30,000 workers and lasted 26 days from August 16 to September 11, 1938. The immediate outcome of the strike was the grant by the employers of a compassionate allowance of 6.50 percent on the basic wages followed by the appointment of the Board of Conciliation mentioned earlier. Since then, the coir industry began spearheading the development of healthy industrial relation practices in the State. The Dewan of Travancore had taken a personal interest in the settlement of this dispute.

3.3.2 Impact of the Board of Conciliation

The appointment of the Board of Conciliation stimulated the Union Movement. The employers in particular could no longer challenge the representative character of the TCFWU. The Board had examined all the allegations raised by the TCFWU and conducted on the spot studies. Since 1938, the TCFWU was revitalized. The most important aspect of the activities of the Union was the establishment of a Factory committee in each individual coir factory. It discussed day-to-day problems of the workers with the employers and managers concerned, so as to deal with them promptly and effectively. It largely operated like the Works Committee envisaged in the Industrial Disputes Act. The representatives of workers in each Department or Section in the factory would sit on the Factory Committee. This arrangement provided a machinery of grievance settlement and it also promoted the spirit

of collective bargaining at the level of the factory and joint consultations at the level of the industry.

The TCFWU had its head office at Alappuzha and it had branch offices at other centres like Ambalappuzha, Cherthala and Muhamma. According to a statement submitted to the George Committee, the TCFWU claimed that it had 7481 registered members at the end of February 1939. Their membership subscription was reported to be at the rate of Rs.0.07 per month.

3.3.3 Growth of T.C.F.W.U

The Report on Labour Conditions in the Coir Mats and Matting Industry 1945 published under the auspices of the Labour Investigation Committee of the Government of India helps to throw light in the growth of the TCFWU³⁹. By 1940s, it was found that the TCFWU had so successfully instilled in its members a sense of strong consciousness of their rights and privileges that a contractor or a jobber (known as *mooppan*) was no longer able to abuse his powers. It had also successfully organized a general strike in 1938. Since then, it had become the largest and the most powerful trade union in Travancore.

By December 1944, the membership of the TCFWU reached an all-time record of 17010. It included about 90 per cent of the workers in the industry in and around Alappuzha. Apart from the Central organization, the branches had also large membership. In addition to the entrance fee of 2 annas and 3 paise, the Union also collected funds through special donations and a monthly subscription. An Executive Committee, composed of a President, 2 Secretaries and 42 elected members, representing each of the 42 wards or territorial divisions in and around Alappuzha where workers lived, conducted the affairs of the Union. The Union maintained a paid staff of to carry its routine administration and the monthly expenditure came to about Rs.450, which was covered by the subscriptions from members and donations from well-wishers.

The Union maintained a Central Reading Room at its head office at Alappuzha, besides five small reading rooms in each of its five sub offices. This helped in the emergence of a class of well-informed union workers. An Executive Committee, which acted as a liaison between the Central Office and the rank and file, ran the sub-offices. It was also responsible for routine administration and collection of dues. The Central Office at Alappuzha was engaged in welfare activities like running a Night School and a Cooperative Society, besides conducting a cultural club where workers and their children were taught music, dancing, public speaking and oratory, painting and

handicrafts. While carrying out these manifold activities, the TCFWU did not forget to champion the cause of the working class for better working and living conditions, higher emoluments and security of employment. The TCFWU had a conciliation staff for negotiating settlement of disputes. R. Sugathan, T.V. Thomas, P. N. Krishna Pillai ably guided the destinies of this first registered trade union in Travancore and their close associates. Looking back, one could easily say that the TCFWU was an ideal trade union and could even be a model for the present day unions. But unfortunately the present day unions seem to have only one item in their agenda and that is “fight”, “fight” and capture “more” and “more” from the employers and utilize the members to build political power and material prosperity.

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CHAPTER IV

GROWTH OF THE UNION MOVEMENT

Reference has been made elsewhere about the emergence of trade union movement in Alappuzha in early 1920s. Though initially it was confined to the coir factory workers and led by worker leaders, soon the movement spread and expanded to cover the entire spectrum of the working class. The period 1945-47 was one of popular struggles. N. Sreekanth Nair in his book “Vanchikkappetta Venad” had given a graphic account of the conditions of the working class during this period. The Second World War had come to an end. Industries were in stagnation since war orders that had stimulated them earlier, no longer existed now. Employers and factory owners resorted to large-scale retrenchment. They imposed wage cuts. Small factories closed shutters. Thousands of working class families were pushed into starvation. Unemployment became acute with the arrival of soldiers who had been demobilized at the end of the war. Shortage of essential goods, hoarding and black marketing resulted in steep increase in prices. Life became miserable to most of the population. In addition to this, the repressive measures of the Dewan were also there. C. Kesavan came out with his strong reactions on the inaction and insensitivity of the authorities. The Dewan was using repressive measures to put down popular protest demonstrations, marches and meetings alleging that the communists and anti-government forces were behind them. But the ground reality was starvation deaths in large numbers. According to a survey of Servants of India Society, at least 2000 died of starvation in Cherthala Taluk alone.

4.1 THE A.T.T.U.C

Under the inspiration of the Travancore Coir Factory Workers Union (TCFWU), workers in various employments had formed unions and they got affiliated to the All Travancore Trade Union Council (A.T.T.U.C), which was under the All India Trade Union Council (A.I.T.U.C). People were looking at the A.T.T.U.C. for guiding them to secure relief from unemployment, poverty, low wages and high prices. Most of them had lost faith in the State Congress, but they had a close affection to the Communists who knew their pulse. T.V. Thomas, its President and R. Sugathan, its Secretary led A.T.T.U.C. The A.T.T.U.C declared a General strike for three days in July 1946. The Dewan met this strike by promising the setting up of some machinery for resolving the demands of the workers. He wanted to project a good pro-labour image to wean the workers from the Communists. At the same time, he declared that

law and order would be protected with utmost force. The authorities distributed 7000 meal tickets; each costing 5 annas (Rs. 0.31) through trade unions in Alappuzha and another 5000 tickets were entrusted with trade unions in Cherthala and Muhamma. The authorities entrusted select hotels to provide standard meals to workers who produce these meal tickets. A card system was also introduced for distribution of cheap cloth to workers. In fact, this was an attempt in establishing a Public Distribution System (PDS), which in later years became the instrument of providing food security in the State.

The Dewan was formulating a diabolical strategy to destroy the communists who were leading the T.C.F.W.U. He deputed the Inspector General of Police (I.G) Parthasarathy Ayyangar to Alappuzha and he took up residence at Cherthala T.B (Travellers' Bungalow). He got in touch with the rich feudal landlords of the place Paattathil Kartha, Anakkottil Kartha, Kuttidan, Anthraprer and others. With their assistance the I.G. was said to have organized a cadre of *goondas* (hired thugs) like Nathapparambil Narayanan. The collusion of these groups led to the formation of a *Karshaka Sanghom* and they prepared a detailed memorandum alleging the atrocities of agricultural workers and their union leaders. This was given to the authorities. Soon followed petitions containing false charges against some workers and leaders. An impression was created that the life of the landowners and their families was not safe and the law and order situation in the region was fast deteriorating and they sought tough action by the Government to save life and property.

In the first week of September 1946 the Travancore Army made a route march in Cherthala town. In Aroor, a coir factory owner George Peter physically assaulted a few of his workers and following that, under his influence, the Assistant Superintendent of Police, P. Achuthan not only gave him full police protection but also sent a large contingent of police personnel to raid houses of coir factory workers and even abuse and rape innocent women. One of the regular past time of George Peter was to supply enough *goondas* to spoil meetings organized by the State Congress.

On September 19, N.S.P. Panicker, the Vice President of the Cherthala Coir Factory Workers' Union was arrested along with A. Sridharan, Vice President of the Farm Workers' Union and Branch Secretary of the Communist Party. Comrades, A. Sridharan, S. Ramakrishnan, K.D. Prabhakaran, P.T. Punnoose, R. Sugathan, A.K. Thampi and C.S. Gopala Pillai were also taken into custody. R. Sankaranarayanan Thampi, Vice President of the TCFWU and K.G. Madhavan, Union Convener at the William Goodacre Company were kept under house arrest. The authorities also did not spare State Congress leaders like Accamma Cherian, M.M.

Varkey, R.V. Thomas and C.I. Andrews simply because they were close to the communists.

4.1.1 Tripartite Conference in Fiasco

On September 28 and October 6, 1946, the Working Committee of the ATTUC met at Kollam and Alappuzha respectively to discuss the prevailing economic and political situation in the State, the repressive measures of the Government, the Strategy of the Dewan to wipe out the Communists and an Action Plan to tackle them. It decided to send a delegation consisting of T.V. Thomas, N. Sreekantan Nair and Kannanthodath Janardhanan Nair to meet the Dewan. The Dewan invited them to attend a tripartite conference in Thiruvananthapuram on October 8, 1946. No settlement was arrived at the Tripartite Meeting when the Dewan refused to give a patient hearing to the Team from Alappuzha. To make the situation worse, with the blessings of the Dewan and the police, the feudal landlords, factory owners and their hired *goondas* organized massive provocative encounters against coir factory workers, fishermen, farm workers, tree climbers and others. The Dewan promulgated prohibitory orders on marches, demonstrations and public meetings.

4.1.2 C. Kesavan's Declaration

The meeting of A.T.T.U.C. held on September 25, 1946 was well attended by 83 delegates representing 55 trade unions. As a special invitee, the State Congress leader C. Kesavan also attended the meeting and this highlighted the political significance of the trade union meeting. T.V. Thomas was in the Chair. The general consensus was to commence a General Strike on any day after October 12, 1946. P.T. Punnoose moved the resolution on this and N. Sreekantan Nair supported it. Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair, and C.K. Kumara Panicker spoke on the significance of the Resolution. C. Kesavan really became excited when he knew that the working class was going to fight not only for better conditions of work and wages, but also was giving importance to the demand for responsible government and the end of the Dewan's Rule. He declared that the Dewan's proposal on the American Model of Constitutional Reform was not acceptable, but Pattom Thanu Pillai had been given two weeks more to negotiate with the Dewan. C. Kesavan put his hand on the chest and declared that whatever happened to the State Congress, he and Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai would always be with the working class in the struggle.

When the Dewan found that his real enemies were the Communists and the trade union led by them, he offered a number of concessions to the Team of T.V. Thomas, Kannanthodath Janardhanan Nair and N. Sreekantan Nair when the former arranged an exclusive meeting with these leaders at Bhakthivilas Palace. The Dewan offered 4% bonus to workers based on the principle of Deferred Wage, irrespective of profit or loss. Besides, workers in Travancore were promised Leave with full wages, Minimum Wages, Fixation of Working Hours, Trade Union Recognition and several labour welfare measures. At this meeting held on October 9, the Dewan advised the leaders to keep out political issues and extend cooperation and support to his American Model Reforms. He wanted the leaders to concentrate on trade union activity and withdraw from political struggles. He also wanted them not to support the State Congress struggle for responsible government. Having been intimated by trusted informants that he might be taken into custody if he ever attended the meeting with the Dewan, Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair did not accompany T.V. Thomas to the Bhakthivilas Palace. After hearing all what the Dewan had to say, T.V. Thomas told the Dewan at his face that the Team representing the working class of Travancore strongly rejected his suggestions, and, promises. At this, the Dewan threatened that before they stepped out of the Bhakthivilas Palace, most of the leaders would be in lock up. He even shouted that he had with him 8000 police personnel and 4000 armed militia and he would wipe out any opposition to him in this State.

4.1.3 The Demands of the A.T.T.U.C

On October 27, 1946 the A.T.T.U.C. had raised the following demands: (1) Bonus as deferred wage, (2) 25% increase in wages, (3) Maternity benefit to women workers, (4) Accident insurance benefit, (5) Payment of Wages Act, (6) Tripartite industrial relations committees (IRCs) to be made statutory bodies (7) Land to the Tillers, (8) Security of Tenure (9) Abolish *Paattam* and *Vaaram*, (10) Ensure *Theerpu* and *Paattam* to farm workers, (11) Overtime wages for overtime work, (12) Fixation of maximum hours of work, (13) Give Retrenchment Compensation, (14) Withdraw military, (15) Lift controls on freedom of speech and press, (16) Release all political prisoners and detenues, (17) Conduct public trials for anti-people activities of administrators and other government functionaries, (18) confiscate the wealth of black marketers, (19) Minimum wages of Rs.60/- to be given to Military Clerks, and Police Peons, (20) Abolish all posts carrying a salary of more than Rs. 500/-, (21) Give jobs to unemployed or give unemployment relief, (22) Reform Labour Laws, (23) Ensure supply of food grains and essential goods at fair prices, (24) End Raja's Rule, (25) End

Dewan's Rule, (26) Grant Adult suffrage and (27) Construct a Railway line connecting Kochi, Alappuzha, and Kollam.

The composition of the demands raised by the ATTUC would clearly show that working class was concerned not only with their economic gains, but they had a clear political ideology and goals too. It was on receipt of this that the Dewan called for a tripartite meeting at Thiruvananthapuram, which ended in a fiasco as stated earlier.

The Dewan promulgated the notorious First Regulation on October 1, 1946 in anticipation of an imminent struggle. C. Kesavan described this Regulation as one that regulated everything except air and water for people. Holding strikes or *hartals* was to be met with a punishment of five years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.1, 000/-. It was essentially a Black Law. The authorities could ban cinema, dramas, and any kind of public performances. They could also confiscate property and assets of any citizen who indulged in acts considered as illegal at the discretion of officials. In fact, the Dewan was acting like a native Hitler.

4.2 PREPARATION FOR THE WORKING CLASS STRUGGLE

The Dewan succeeded in convincing the Maharaja about the deteriorating law and order situation in Travancore and the latter readily agreed to issue an Ordinance, making the Dewan the Supreme Commander in Chief of Armed Forces in the State. He knew that the hold of the communists on the working class was getting stronger day by day. He, in the past, had tried to create direct confrontation between the working class movement and the communal and caste organizations. He had tried to create anti-communist feelings among the public. Now it was the right time to provoke and instigate the working class into a struggle against the establishment and then use maximum force tactically to put down the struggle. The conditions prevailing in Alappuzha and Cherthala were favourable to implement his plans.

K.C. George, M.T. Chandrasenan, and P.K. Chandranandan who were directly involved in the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle had given graphic accounts of the events¹. Reference to the struggle is also made extensively in T.V. Krishnan's authentic Biography of T.V. Thomas². Other important source materials on this historic struggle are found in Puthuppally Raghavan, Thomas Isaac, Ravi Varma Thampuran, and Yadukula Kumar³. There is, indeed, a large amount of source materials on the struggle, which have appeared from time to time in several articles in souvenirs, periodicals and magazines. In the present study, it was not possible to synthesize all the

available materials, but subject to this limitation, we have attempted a documentation of that historic struggle in as much details as possible.

4.2.1 Punnappa Scene

The two centres where the struggle attained its climax were of course Punnappa and Vayalar. Punnappa is located near the west coast and closer to the sea. In the latter half of 1930s, there existed a big Catholic church. This church and a few feudal landlords owned most of the coconut gardens. The houses of tenants were mostly thatched and scattered all over. In small hamlets a number of fishermen's families lived. Aplon Arouj was one of the biggest landlords in the area. Most of the fishing gear and catamarans (*vallams* - country boats) were owned by the landlords and they used to loan them out to fishermen. There used to be constant feuds among the landlords and they were settled by drawing the poor fishermen under their control to fight against each other. In a sense, just like tenants and attached farm labour, these landlords always maintained a set of fishermen under their control through manipulating their terms of contract with them. Thus these fishermen were permanently in bondage under their lords and were leading a miserable life of below subsistence level. The church, being the biggest landowner, had a big say in the affairs of the community and society at Punnappa. As early as 1936, the Vicar of the Church was reported to have rung the Church bells to summon all faithful to the Church courtyard. He asked them to carry arms and attack the Muslims in the locality to settle a score, which he had with them. The attack that ensured became violent resulting in much loss of life and property.

The formula, in existence at that time, for sharing the catch by fishermen who go in the landlord's craft, was iniquitous. A craft with a crew of eleven had to give half of the catch to the owner of the craft. The remaining half is shared among the crew of eleven. Thus each would get $1/11$ of 50% of the total catch. Out of the share, every fisherman was subjected to deductions of various kinds and size to be given to the Church, temple, the dead and the *Karanavar* (head of landlord's family) and the balance alone could be taken as the net share of the crew members who toil to catch fish. It was with the help of such iniquitous formula of sharing of the catch, that some acquired huge wealth and status in society. Ippoloth, Anthrapper, Polikarp and Pollel families were the finest examples of this. The middlemen merchants who purchased fish also exploited the fishermen. The situation worsened day by day.

It was under these circumstances that Simon Asan came out with a programme. He printed a leaflet explaining the need for unity among the fishermen to fight injustice meted out to them by landlords and merchants. Soon trade unions were formed for fishermen, toddy tappers and coir workers in Punnappa. Naturally, landlords, the church and merchants did not like this new development and the gradual appearance of protest and resistance from the exploited classes.

4.2.2 Situation in Vayalar

Vayalar was closer to Cherthala town. The coconut gardens there were interspersed by small canals (*thodu*). Feudal landlordism of the worst type was very strong in this region. The famine of 1943 had brought untold misery and starvation deaths in the area. A few large landlords like Kattiyatt Sivarama Panicker, Paattathil Velayudhan Kartha, A.C.M. Anthraper and Parayi Tharakammar owned Land in the area. They had the backing of the caste, communal and religious organizations like the N.S.S., SNDP and the Church. The State Congress also extended their support to them. These landlords were stooges of the Dewan and enjoyed a direct line of communication with him. Police and government officials were at their beck and call. The middle class was comprised mostly of Ezhavas. The lower strata of society consisted of petty peasants, tenants, farm labour, coir workers, tree climbers, weaving workers etc. A.C.M. Anthraper was the Vice President of Travancore Land and Asset Owners' Association, and a leading government contractor and notorious for his anti-labour activities. Kattiyatt Sivarama Panicker was Headmaster of Cherthala Government High School and a noted NSS leader. Paattathil Velayudhan Kartha was his brother-in-law. Chandrappan and Krishnappan, sons of his wife by her first husband, assisted Kartha in his attacks on innocent tenants and farm workers. These two were notorious for their cruel deeds and they always carried lethal weapons. They used to evict tenants at will and forced small and petty peasants to sell their land or transfer them in lieu of debt liabilities to the Kartha. Kalluveettil Kunjachan, a stooge of Kartha and other landlords maintained a group of rowdies and *goondas* for action against the downtrodden masses. This often led to series of violent incidents in Vayalar.

Azhikkal Antony in Vayalar, during the Second World War, founded a Fishermen Workers' Union with him as President and his son as Secretary. This was only a protective cover for nefarious activities including taking control of distribution of coir yearn. He wanted the coir workers in the area to procure coconut husk from a radius of one and half a mile around his house and after processing them to sell the coir yarn to him at a price unilaterally

fixed by him. He never gave even a quarter of the prevailing wages. If workers protested, he would deploy *goondas* to attack them. It was under these circumstances that a few progressives decided to form some kind of a resistance movement by organizing the affected people. C.G. Sadasivan and C.K. Kumara Panicker (later known as Vayalar Stalin), who had joined the Communist Party, got spontaneous support from the masses. Landlords naturally did not like this. They convened a meeting at the N.S.S. Karayogam office in Vayalar. They resolved not to employ workers belonging to the backward classes and instead train Nairs to do all the work in their land. They distributed 40 shovels, 60 baskets and other materials to carry out work. The farm workers resisted this move and demanded work and also an increase in wages and that too to be paid directly by the landlords and not through their *Karyasthans* (supervisors).

At that time, the Cherthala Taluk Matsya Thozhilali Union was formed and it applied for registration. It attempted to hold a meeting and the first attempt itself was spoiled by *goondas*. But after a week, a meeting of 600 odd workers could be held without any trouble. This success led to the formation of new unions. K.C. George has given details of 11 major trade unions in Cherthala, Vayalar, Aroor and Muhamma with large membership.

4.2.3 Kuttanad Scene

Kuttanad, the granary of Travancore had also witnessed a strong farm labour movement. Most of the land in Kuttanad was water logged and paddy cultivation was possible only by extensive de-watering and preparation of bunds all round the fields. This made cultivation not only labour intensive, but also very expensive and risky. However, enterprising farmers fought all constraints and developed paddy cultivation there. Kuttanad lay close to Alappuzha and naturally during farm operations, coir workers used to migrate to Kuttanad for work. This movement of labour between Alappuzha and Kuttanad brought working class mobilization, spread of political ideology and class-consciousness and solidarity. The Kuttanad Paddy lands lay in units of *Paadasekharams*. Pulayas, the scheduled castes, performed the preparation work, while Ezhavas did the sowing and harvesting. Before the World War II, wages were paid mostly in kind.

During 1942-43, the Communist Party made its strong presence in Kuttanad. Even prior to that, attempts had been made to organize workers on caste lines. Varghese Vaidyan founded the Travancore Karshaka Thozhilali Union and C.K. Das was its Secretary. Syrian Christians and Brahmins were the major landlords in Kuttanad. According to old timers, in the feudal era the

relation between the landlords (*Jenmis*) and tenants and farm workers were ‘cordial’ and with the entry of Communists, this relation was disturbed. One sign of this change was found in the workers’ refusal to remove the towel tied as a headgear, when they confronted the landlord. Another was the boldness shown by farm workers to wear moustaches instead of shaving it off to please the landlord. When the illiterate farm workers were politically mobilized, they realized their downtrodden conditions and wanted relief from them. There were reports from Kuttanad that farm workers collectively *gheraoed* landlords and in some cases the initiative for it had been taken by women workers who were denied even basic rights like covering their breasts with a towel or wearing a blouse. Landlords retaliated by filing false charges and influencing the police to arrest the agitating workers.

The leaders decided to convene a convention at *Padanilam* that fell in the Kollam district, since the authorities had banned meetings in Alappuzha and Kuttanad. Workers proceeded to the venue in country crafts raising slogans and waving Red flags. The Kollam District Police Superintendent produced the prohibitory order before Varghese Vaidyan. There were heated exchanges between them. In the end, it was reported that, Varghese Vaidyan caught hold of the DSP and gave him a push. Luckily the police did not retaliate and they hastily withdrew from the scene. To prevent untoward incidents, the venue was shifted to a place near Ramankary, which fell within the Kottayam district.

The Dewan, who was monitoring the events closely, decided to try a strategy to divide the working class movement by inviting representatives of backward classes to Bhakthivilas, his official residence. He asked them to register their Association at government cost. Workers and other poor sections in the population were struggling with acute shortage of food and essential goods. Workers went on a three-day strike in Alappuzha, Muhamma and Cherthala. It was in this context that the Dewan ‘demonstrated his concern’ for the poor workers by entrusting meal tickets with the trade unions to be distributed among their members to enable them to secure a meal at a subsidized rate. But simultaneously, the Dewan was taking measures of repression. He ordered printing presses not to accept any printing orders from Communists or left unions. He deployed a strong contingent of armed police to Cherthala, which, in a sense, was geographically isolated. He extended all support to the landlords. He directed newspapers to publish reports relating to communist and trade union activities. Public Relations Department was fully geared to propagate the Dewan’s views. The Inspector General of Police, Parthasarathy Iyengar, and the D.S.P, Vaidyanatha Iyer, both close confidants of the Dewan, were deputed to Cherthala with clear instructions to put down, with utmost force, any popular struggle or uprising.

4.2.4 Scene in Cherthala

Vaidyanatha Iyer camped in Cherthala T.B. He called all the landlords and asked to form an association for self-defence. Nathaparambil Narayanan, the notorious rowdy, who did not own even a piece of land, attended the meeting. Under instructions from the police, this association of landlords started filing false criminal cases against farm workers and tenants who showed defiance to them. Many were charge sheeted and arrested.

When trade unions were observing the anniversary of the Malabar Farmers' Rebellion of 1921, police arrested union leaders like N.S.P. Panicker, A. Sridharan, C.S. Ramakrishnan and K.D. Prabhakaran. At Alappuzha also, leaders like R. Sugathan, P.T. Punnoose, C.S. Gopala Pillai and A.K. Thampi were also taken in to custody. Military and reserve police were deployed to Kollam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Aluva, Koothattukulam and Punalur, the major centres of working class struggles in old Travancore. A one-day strike was conducted on September 15, 1946. It was in this context that the Dewan had invited the team led by T.V. Thomas for a meeting that ended in fiasco.

Trouble was brewing in Cherthala and Vayalar due to the *goonda* rule that gripped the local people. In Kadakkarpally, the *goondas* ransacked a number of houses of farm workers and coir workers and abused and raped the women folk. As many of the men folk were in lock up, this went on for some time with out any resistance. The trade union leaders and the Communists requested the State Congress and the SNDP to find an early solution to the issues. R. Sankar, the then Secretary of the SNDP visited Cherthala but he did not go to Kadakkarpally, where the maximum brutality was staged. Many workers thought that Sankar had come as a C.I.D. of the Dewan.

Landlords, who felt more powerful than ever, then decided not to settle wages (*Theerpu*) as in the previous years and sought police protection. When the harvest day came, landlords stood firm and trade unions registered their protest. The unions were unwilling to sacrifice what they had secured through long struggle. Ultimately, the landlords had to yield just to save their crop. After a week, one truckload of armed forces landed at the office of the Cherthala Coir Factory Workers' Union. Anticipating this, a 500 strong group of workers had formed a human wall around the union office. Their number started swelling when news spread around. Soon additional reinforcements of army personnel came and ordered the workers to disperse. The workers stood there giving protection to the Red Flag. One member of the army contingent pointed a gun at a worker. Immediately, the workers caught hold of the man and his gun. The poor military personnel shouted for help and asked the

Union President to come out of the office and save his life. At this point, C.K. Kumara Panicker came out and pacified the enraged workers.

At might, the Cherthala Police Inspector Koshy charged into the Office of the Cherthala Taluk Bidi Workers' Union. On *Kanni* 25 (Malayalam calendar), a fifteen-year-old adolescent worker was caught by the landlord, Paattathil Velayudhan Kartha, for alleged misbehaviour. The boy was tied to a coconut tree and given a thorough beating until he became unconscious. Hearing this, a crowd of 30 workers rushed to the spot and got the victim released. In the afternoon, the *goondas* and relatives of Kartha, carrying lethal weapons, raided workers' houses and abused the women folk. Here also a large group of agitated workers rushed to the area with the intention of retaliation. Meanwhile the *goondas* had been given safe asylum in the Kartha's house. When workers surrounded the house, one of the members of the family came out and offered profuse apology and requested that they might be spared for the time being. In the next few days, also daily confrontations were reported from several centres, as it was peak harvesting season. Many workers were taken into custody and tied to coconut trees for administering brutal attack on them. Police went on raiding workers' houses and looted their belongings in Kadakkarappally, Thaikkal, Viyathara and Vettakkal. For self-protection, workers had to resort to retaliation. They caught hold of Nalukettingal Raman, a supervisor of Kattiyatt Sivarama Panicker and killed him in an encounter.

Police and military initiated repressive measures in a big way. Trade union offices were raided. *Lathi* (baton) charges were done at several places even harming innocent people who had gone to buy their ration from shops at Ponnamvila market. Many union workers were beaten up brutally breaking their heads. Office records and furniture were destroyed and put to fire. Besides, there were reports of inhuman brutality on those who were detained in lock-ups. In such cases, the police got help from *goondas*, since they were treated as joint operations. The *goondas* even dared to hold a march from Cherthala town to Kadakkarappally and went on a rampage, mixed with burning, looting and brutally beating up any one who came their way. In the next two days, seven truckloads of military reached Ponnamveli market area and camped at Anakkottil Kochunaranayan Kartha's coir factory and a double storied building near the market. At around 10 a.m. Kattiyatt Sivarama Panicker, Paattathil Velayudhan Kartha, Kalluveettil Kunjachan, Azhikkal Anthraper and Kuttappa Kaimal led a group of 1000 *goondas* to the market. Rowdy Parambil Narayanan, clad in Khaki trouser uniform, hat on his head, and a lethal weapon in his hand, was in the front of the procession. Landlords were safely kept in the middle, flanked on both sides by the *goondas*. Military trucks, with the personnel standing atop and pointing machine guns, were

proceeding both in the front and back of the procession to give a safety cover to the entire group. The marchers shouted “*We want Dewan’s Rule*”, “*We want Swami’s Rule*”, “*We will destroy communists and trade unions*” and “*Up, Up Vanchi Rajyam*”. A manhunt followed. On an average, 30-40 was brought to the police lock up every day. Kumaran Vakil was brought to the lock up in his lawyer’s dress, since he was taken into custody while attending the court. N.S.P. Panicker was assaulted while in the police lock-up by the police and also helped by *goondas*. Moustaches of detenues were forcibly pulled out. Many in the lock up could not stand up or walk or even crawl on the floor.

On *Thulam* 10 (Malayalam Calendar), trucks carrying dozens of injured comrades were brought to the lock up. Most of them were thrown from the trucks to the open inner courtyard of the lock up. Some were brought tied to poles. Many had bullet injuries. The inmates of the lock up had to carry pots containing their own excreta and urine and it was a past time for some constables to break these pots while they were being carried on the heads by detenues. About 300 detenues were put up in three small rooms. One day, children aged 5,8 and 12 were brought to the lock-up along with a 90 year old woman and she used to react harshly to what the police did to her. She died in lock up a few days later. Another comrade, a bidi worker of 25, got an attack of Typhoid. But the police took him to the nearest canal to immerse him in water. When the victim reacted, he was beaten up and dragged all the ways back to the lock up. He also became a martyr. A toddy tapper, who had attacked a *goonda* with his tapping knife, was brought to the lock up in an unconscious condition. When he regained consciousness, he shouted that he had done a good thing by trying to keep women and children safe.

4.2.5 Back to Punnappra again

What happened in Cherthala was repeated in Punnappra also. Punnappra was a little isolated and lay to the west of the main road from Alappuzha to Cherthala. In Alappuzha town, the TCFWU was strong and enjoyed lot of public support and most of the leaders were located there. Simon Asan, with the help of K.S. Ben and others, had organized a Fishermen’s Union. This Union was doing well under the leadership of these communist comrades. It was at this juncture that a Dheevara leader of Punnappra, Challi Chakrapani formed the Coastal Workers’ Union to bring all fishermen under one banner. It was clearly a communal card. When Christian workers did not go for fishing on the Easter Day, they were rounded up and tied to coconut trees and given a brutal thrashing. This provoked the members

of the Fish Workers Unions and they held one-day sympathetic strike. Following this, false criminal cases were registered against four comrades. Toddy shop contractors, police and excise personnel joined hands against toddy tapping workers in Punnappa. The District Magistrate issued prohibitory orders on all kinds of trade union activities, including holding of demonstrations and public meetings. Workers then agitated forcing the Magistrate to withdraw the Order. This provoked the shop contractors and excise personnel.

4.2.6 Attack on Ippolith's house

There were several incidents that led to giant flare-ups in the Punnappa area. According to one version, the attack on Ippolith's house set a chain reaction. Pollayil Ippolith, an employer, had engaged a woman, the wife of a fisherman, as his housemaid. One day, when the fisherman was laid up with illness, his wife, the maid, could not go to Ippolith's house for work. When the maid did not report for work, Ippolith's wife came in search of the maid. The maid was beaten up and all her household articles were thrown out and destroyed and the family was forced out of the house. On hearing this incident, the trade union leaders reached the spot of action, but they were arrested. They included Koottingal Kuttappan, Michael, Ouseph, Josse and Joseph. After a few days, the workers retaliated by rounding up Ippolith and his family members and giving them a brutal thrashing. The workers burnt down his house, godown and office. But they saw to it that none of the women in his family was harmed.

The TCFWU leaders protested against the promulgation of the Fish Regulation, which was described as a Black Law earlier. Leaders like R. Sugathan, P.T. Punnoose, Sankaranarayanan Thampi, Simon Asan, Bhaskaran, C.K. Velyudhan and V.K. Karunkaran were arrested. Workers boycotted factories and led a march in Alappuzha. One day in the evening, a group of *goondas* under the control of Applon Arouj caught hold of a few workers who were staying in the land of Ippolith and attacked them. Workers came in large numbers and retaliated. They went on a rampage and burnt the office of Anthraper and the house of Marian. Cases were registered against Pulikkal Gregory, Sunny Anthrose, Anjelose, Thundathil Joseph and Kunjan. On hearing the incident, a team of State Congress leaders consisting of T.M. Varghese, K.A. Ganghadara Menon, Kuttanad Rama Krishna Pillai and Vincent visited Punnappa to take stock of the situation. They told the landlords, employers, capitalists and traders of Punnappa that if they come to power, due compensation for their material loss would be paid to them.

Applon Arouj was a Congress sympathizer and that was the reason why the State Congress showed so much interest in the matter and decided to send an enquiry team to his place. At that time, he and two or three others alone like him had *pucca* tiled houses in Punnappa. When male fishermen went to sea for fishing, the boat owners and their adult sons used to enter fishermen's thatched houses to assault and rape their women folk. The fishermen could not bear this for long, and, they decided to retaliate and went on a rampage burning houses, godowns and offices of boat owners.

4.2.7 Reserve Camp at Applon Arouj's house

The authorities decided to send a battalion of Reserve Police and they forcibly occupied the house of Applon Arouj at Punnappa. Sensing danger, there started a large exodus of workers from Punnappa to Vattayal Ward, two miles north of Alappuzha town. Applon Arouj and family left Punnappa. After a lapse of several years, he told K.C. Govindan that he had not asked the authorities to set up the police camp at his house. He left Punnappa, abandoning his house, just to save himself and his family. This house, where the police camp was set up had canals on the East and West side, which acted like barricades. It was at this camp that an open fight between the armed volunteers from the working class and reserve police occurred and it resulted in the killing of Velayudhan Nadar, the Reserve Police Inspector and several others on both sides. This also prompted the Dewan to use maximum force to restore law and order in the region.

4.2.8 Preparation for the Final Assault

The Communist Party of Travancore discussed the emerging situation and it deputed K.V. Pathrose (later eulogized as *Kunthakkaran Pathrose*) to Kozhikode to discuss the issues with the Provincial Committee. K.C. George was asked to be present in Alappuzha. The Provincial Committee had certain organizational problems and P. Krishna Pillai had just disbanded the Committee. Malabar, Cochin and Travancore units were put under the control of P. Krishna Pillai, K.K. Warrier and K.C. George respectively. The Party decided to depute K.C. George to Bombay to apprise the central leadership. E.M.S. visited Alappuzha and went back to report the developments to P. Krishna Pillai.

Meanwhile, the workers had started to vacate their houses and go to special camps. Armed protection to these camps was provided. Large number of volunteers was recruited, and, they were put to political study classes and

intensive physical training including combat exercises. A number of ex-service men (soldiers, demobilized at the end of the Second World War) who could not secure jobs readily volunteered to give training in handling arms. Trade union councils were formed to look after the camps. Action Committees were formed in Punnappa, Parur, Vandanoor, Vattayal, Vadakkal, Kalarcode, Olalthaly, Vayalar, North Vayalar, Varakkad and Kavalancode. All the volunteers in the camps declared their readiness to fight and attain martyrdom.

K.C. George met comrade Adhikari in Bombay, since P.C. Joshi, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India, was away at Calcutta. Adhikari gave him the green signal by giving blanket clearance to every decision taken by the Communist Party of Travancore. Two committees were set up in Bombay and Madras to support the Action Plan being launched by the Travancore unit. K.C. George also met Mammen Mappila to seek financial aid. Mammen Mappila was waiting for settling a score with the Dewan who had engineered the crash of his Bank, locked him up in jail along with his relatives and physically and mentally harassing and torturing him. He extended full support to K.C. George and contributed Rs.200 as initial support, promising further help.

When K.C. George reached Kozhikode, N. Sreekantan Nair and G. Janardhana Kurup of Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) were waiting for him. They decided to formulate a joint action programme and reach Alappuzha at the earliest. On arrival at Alappuzha, K.C. George was taken to a place where K.K. Kunjan, C.G. Sadasivan and P.G. Padmanabhan were waiting. Here they formed an Action Committee with K.V. Pathrose as convener. The Committee set up a network for exchanging confidential communication with all the volunteer campus. These campuses had been set up in Menasserry, Olathala, Vayalar, North Vayalar, Varekkad, Velorvattom, Kalavancode, Kanichikulangara, Kanjikkuzhi, Muhamma, Puthanangady, Kannarkad, Mararikkulam, Kalavoor, Kattoor, Thumboli, Mannancherry, Aryad, Komalapuram, Chungom, Kanjiramchira, Port, Vadakkal, Kalarcode, Parur and Punnappa. These camps stocked first aid medicines. Some had special medical squads. When the news of such preparatory work for an action programme by workers reached the Dewan, he ordered the arrest of leaders like R. Sugathan, P.T. Punnoose, A. Sridharan, C.K. Bhaskaran, C.S. Ramakrishnan, N.S.P. Panicker, Kumaran Vakil, M.K. Das, Simon Asan and V.K. Karunakaran.

The ATTUC had fixed *Thulam* 5 (Malayalam Calendar), October 22, 1946 for a General Strike. T.V. Thomas wanted to discuss the issues once again because of the rapidly changing and deteriorating scenario. T.V. and Varghese Vaidyan decided to meet the Action Committee members. The

central issue for discussion was to clarify whether the forthcoming General Strike was to be one for political goals or economic goals. It was decided that the strike would be a political one. T.V. was instructed not to go underground, while Varghese Vaidyan would be going outside Travancore to mobilize support for the political strike.

T.V. Krishnan, the biographer of T.V. Thomas, has stated that behind the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, there was a two-tier leadership. Some were functioning from underground, while T.V. and C.K. Kumara Panicker and others were leading the struggle from outside. When the decision to set up armed volunteer camps was taken, T.V. Thomas was rather reluctant but K.C. George tried to convince him about the inevitability of armed revolt. T.V. felt that sectarianism was growing in the movement⁴. Instead, T.V. felt that they should be able to mobilize all sections to launch a broad-based people's struggle. Events in quick session followed. On October 21, 1946 the Dewan imposed Military Rule in Alappuzha and Cherthala. On October 22 the General Strike commenced. The same day workers held four demonstrations and marches from Chungom to Kidangamparambu via Mullakkal, Parur to Thiruvambady, Kalavoor to the North of Alappuzha via Savakottah Bridge, and, Kadappuram (Beach) to Punnappa via Vandananam. On October 24 military fired at Punnappa and on October 27 they again fired at Vayalar. The General Strike was called off on October 28. The Government banned the ATTUC and 60 other organizations. On October 29 military trucks surrounded the house of T.V. Thomas and took him into custody.

4.2.9 Leakage of Military Plans

D.S.P. Vaidyanatha Iyer held a meeting of the landlords of the Vayalar area at Ponnamvila to take certain important decisions. These decisions were conveyed in a letter to a landlord named Pulluvvelil Kurup. A student of Cherthala English High School happened to see this letter, and, realizing its importance, he immediately made a copy of this and delivered it to the Action Committee office. The decisions were (i) Defer the plan to burn down the houses of C.K. Kumara Panicker and C.K. Bhaskaran, (ii) Instead kill both of them to create and spread panic among their supporters, (iii) Give awards and medals to military and police personnel who kill maximum number of workers during the struggle, (iv) Send a police investigating team to mobilize a few *goondas* to work with them.

The above was enough for igniting the spirit of volunteers in the camps. Areca nut trees were cut in large numbers to make country lances to be used against Rifles and Sten guns of the Police and Military. S. Kumaran,

K.C. George and M.T. Chandrasenan were in charge of conducting study classes on the politics of the forthcoming struggle. At Punnappra, the important conveners of action plan were O.A. Govindan, C.A. Bharathan, Divakaranasan, A.K. Sridharan, V.R. Madhavan, M.K. Sukumaran, Niclavu, A.K. Chakrapani, T.C. Padmanabhan, R. Thankappan, T.K. Velayudhan, Kochunarayanan, A.K. Velayudhan and Kandan Karunakaran.

The Action Committee took the following decisions: (i) Volunteers of Mannancherry, Aryad, and Komalapuram would march through Thanneermukkam Road to reach Kidangamparambu maidan and defy the laws, hold a meeting, and, then disburse. (ii) Volunteers of Kalavoor, Mararikkulam, and, Thumboli to march through Savacottah Bridge towards west and reach Bapu Vaidyan Junction, and, then disburse. (iii) Those from the Beach, Vadakkal and Kuthirappathi to move south along the beach and reach near the police camp. (iv) Marchers from Parur and East Punnappra to move from eastern side and reach the police camp. (v) Those from Vandananam to move along the beach from the south to reach the police camp. (vi) Ex-service men would march from Parur market towards the town and block the movement of police forces from there. (vii) Those from Chungom, and Kalarcode zone would concentrate on destroying or damaging bridges and culverts on the roads and cut trees to be placed across roads to block the movement of police and military forces.

4.2.10 Scene of action at Punnappra

On October 22, 1946, working class belonging to coir factories, Fishing, Country Craft and steam boats, Kannitta (oil mill) and even tree climbers started mobilizing all kinds of weapons over which they could lay their hands on, and, stones of all kinds and sizes, and, also food grains for sustaining them in a long struggle⁵. October 24 saw the ex-service men parading in their uniforms and caps along with working class volunteers. The march from Vandananam to Punnappra Reserve Police Camp and the march from the Parur side passed through Alisserry, Beach, Vattayal and Vadakkal to reach Kuthirappathi in front of Kumaranasan Memorial Reading Room. They carried long lances made out of arecanut tree trunks. They had been trained, in strict military discipline and style, to charge at the police and military personnel. A meeting held at S. Kumaran's house had decided to attack the Punnappra police camp and take away the guns and ammunitions for later use. Another decision was to block the roads leading to Punnappra by placing tree trunks on them to prevent the authorities in sending armed reinforcements.

The main march was from the North of Alappuzha town. When it reached the TCFWU Office, it was at least two miles long. After shouting anti-Dewan slogans, the marchers, however, disbursed. There was no offensive action on the part of the police. But by noon, workers had started a march from the Fish Workers' Union office at Vathayan Ward towards Punnapra police camp, which, according to available reports, had only just 29 reserve police personnel and one Police Sub-Inspector, Velayudhan Nadar. A military truck going towards Punnapra was stopped on the road by workers. After a few hours of high-tension drama, a few rounds were fired to disperse the crowd in order to take back the trucks safely to Alappuzha.

In this context we should make a mention of an earlier incident. D.S.P. Vaidyanatha Iyer who was camping at Alappuzha led a military route march. It started from coastal area and passed through the scattered hamlets of workers towards East. On the way, the militia indulged in violence and arson and women and children ran away deserting their homes. On the western side of the Beach ward was situated the Fish Workers' Union Office. A number of workers had assembled there. The D.S.P. asked them to leave the place quickly. The camp captain at the site, comrade Devassy, an ex-serviceman, requested the DSP to hold the march without disturbing the people in the area as it could be held along the beach. Though the DSP was at the point of issuing orders to his men to fire at the crowd, he had second thoughts on it, as the whole crowd was standing like a fortress behind Devassy. Finally, the DSP decided to shake hands with Devassy and took a left turn and ordered the march to move towards the beach. The DSP, however, gave vent for his fury on the same day by brutally assaulting the detainees in the lock up.

The armed working class volunteers surrounded the Punnapra police camp. On seeing them, the police Sub Inspector Velayudhan Nadar took a hand-held megaphone and asked them to disburse without creating trouble. The marchers shouted that they had come specially to attack the camp. The police then fired a round of shots in the air. As had been instructed and trained, the volunteers fell to the ground and crawled forward, suddenly jumped to a standing position and charged at the police personnel with their lances and country made sickles and other assortment of weapons. A few resorted to throwing stones at the police who were advancing towards them. The volunteers shouted "*Lal Salam*" and moved forward. Somebody caught hold of Inspector Velayudhan Nadar and killed him on the spot with a sharp weapon. The small police contingent in the camp was then forced to fire several shots straight into the charging volunteers. Many were killed in the violent encounter. A few police constables locked themselves up in a room in the camp house to save their lives. Bodies of the dead and the injured were strewn all over the ground and veranda. When the police withdrew into the

inner room for safety, some volunteers took hold of a few abandoned guns and fled from the scene. They had been instructed specifically to attack the camp and snatch away as many units of firearms as possible.

P.K. Chandranandan had recorded that Kakkariyil Karunakaran killed Inspector Nadar. The physically handicapped son of Applon Arouj was found helping the police to reload the guns with cartridges. According to Chandranandan, about 20 police personnel were killed, leaving only a handful of men in the camp. The volunteers captured 7 guns and 2 of them were in the custody of Olothana Krishnan Kunjan.

4.2.11 The role of Marian

Marian too played an important role in the Punnappa episode. He was neither a member nor sympathizer of the Communist Party nor the State Congress. While a few ex-service men had helped in giving arms training to the volunteers, there were a few who supported the government by joining the gang of *goondas*. Having been a soldier, Marian was ready to fight for the government. When the volunteers marched to the Punnappa police camp, Marian happened to be there. He was reported to have taken a gun and started firing until he exhausted the cartridges. This provoked the workers.

When the violent attack was over, the policemen who remained alive in the camp directed Marian to go and report the incidents to the D.S.P. The cook in the police camp was sent to fetch a petromax lamp and he had not returned. The camp and its surroundings were in total darkness and the dead and the wounded were lying around. Some of the wounded crawled away to escape and the remaining policemen using their bayonets killed some seriously injured who lay there.

Marian agreed to go to Alappuzha T.B. To be on the safer side, he carried a bloodstained lance used by the volunteers and a lethal weapon in his left hand. This was meant to fool the worker volunteers to make them believe that he was one among them who attacked the police camp. Marian first went to the South Police Station. The constables got frightened in seeing him and feared that more volunteers were following him to attack them. But soon they recognized Marian, who was known to them as an informer and pro-Dewan in true life. He was advised to go to Alappuzha and directly report the incidents to "Swamy", the D.S.P. Sri. Vaidyanatha Iyer. On hearing Marian, the D.S.P. felt giddy but soon regained his composure. He decided to proceed to Punnappa with a large contingent of armed constabulary and a number of petromax lamps. On their way, they saw two or three policemen lying on the ground with their chests pierced with country made lances used by the

communist volunteers. At the Punnappra Police camp they discovered the dead body of Sub Inspector Velayudhan Nadar. It was difficult for the D.S.P. and his teams to reach the camp building because dead bodies of those killed in the attack were strewn all around. Marian, the informer, always demonstrated his allegiance to the authorities and he was rewarded with state pension. Later Marian was reported to have confided to K.C. George and M.T. Chandrasenan, that he felt sorry and repentant greatly in seeing many innocent people, young and old, who had no involvement in the attack on the Punnappra Reserve Police Camp, being arrested and brutally treated by the authorities.

4.2.12 Action heroes of Punnappra

Many a committed volunteers joined in the attack on the Reserve Police camp at Punnappra. Writers like K.C. George who masterminded the attack remember the following names. P.K. Damodaran was the volunteer captain and M.T. Chandrasenan was the Convener. Among others, the names of the following heroes should be noted in this context. They were Kuttan, Olanthara Krishnan Kunju, Ramakrishnan, Gangadharan, V.K. Sridharan, C.K. Danavan, M.K. Chakrapani, A.S. Sridharan, K.J. Niclav, N.K. Gopalan, T.C. Padmanabhan, Alissery Raghavan, K.P. Phalgunan, M.A. Thomas, K.B. Damodaran, Michael, V.V. Thomas, Captain Chacko, Krishnan, Gopalan, M.K. Lakshmanan, K.G. Madhavan, Johnkutty, Koonanjalikkal Sukumaran, Kunjunni, Vengara Kumaran, Lewis Pramani, Gangadharan Pramani, Kandachan, Pathrose, and, Kakkariyil Karunakaran. Of them, M.K. Chakrapani was sentenced to 21 years rigorous imprisonment on charges of killing Inspector Velayudhan Nadar. Along with him A.S. Sridharan was also sentenced to rigorous imprisonment.

4.2.13 Action at Muhamma

Muhamma Coir Factory Workers' Union was a centre managed by C.K. Karunakara Panicker as President and S.K. Das as Secretary. They organized an action force in Muhamma with Ayyappan as Convener. The prominent members of this action force were K. Damodaran, Madhavan, T.K. Narayanan and others. K.G. Chakrapani as the volunteer captain led them. This group consisted of nearly 500 volunteers who were prepared to plunge into any daredevil action on orders from their captain. The group had mobilized all kinds of country made lethal weapons besides crude lances made from arecanut tree.

On *Thulam* 7 (October 24) the group got the news about a large contingent of police and militia reaching the place and setting up a camp in a house belonging to Chandrangadan, a local landlord of Muhamma. The volunteers, under their captain, decided to march to this camp and when they reached Valiyaveliyil on the way, the police and militia, sensing their arrival, immediately left the camp. So a direct confrontation was avoided.

4.2.14 Kattoor Camp Action

The Punnappa episode generated scattered incidents in many adjoining areas. On *Thulam* 7 (October 24), the Muhamma Action committee directed its volunteers to destroy a road culvert near Mayithara Coir factory. Though the police fired at the volunteers, there was no causality. On *Thulam* 8 (October 25), the administration imposed military rule in Ambalappuzha-Cherthala Taluk. There was a vicious manhunt in Kattoor the same day. At about 12 noon, a large contingent of militia started marching towards the Kattoor camp, located near the Church on the side of the beach. Joseph, (known as Kurithram Joseph) confronted them by objecting to their march and he was immediately shot dead. Palliparambil Anthony and Kattoor Joseph who also fell martyrs on that day followed him.

4.2.15 Mararikkulam Scene

It was on *Thulam* 9 (October 26), that firing occurred at Mararikkulam. The volunteers had destroyed the bridge there, blocking road traffic to North. The military rushed to the spot and started rebuilding the bridge. Finding that only a handful of military personnel were working at the site, volunteer captain Karunakaran mobilized about 300 volunteers and marched to the site. Only on reaching the site, they realized that the information that they had received earlier was wrong. They were thus face to face with a large contingent of armed militia. There was little chance of escape. The militia opened fire and when they exhausted all their stock of ammunition they left the site in their truck towards south. In this gruesome battle, Chottachalveli Bhanu, Pereveli Kumaran, Tharayil Sankaran, Padathu Ramankutty, Thottassery Kumaran, Asari Kumaran, K.P. Kumaran, Thoppil Kumaran, Velayudhan and Padmanabhan became martyrs.

4.2.16 Post-Punnappa Episodes

Cherthala witnessed violent military offensive on *Thulam* 8 (October 25). It converted Cherthala into a military outpost. The militia went on a rampage, tearing down and burning trade union offices, furniture and records. They raided houses of suspected volunteers and if they did not get hold of the wanted men, they caught any body who was related to them. In some houses, the militiamen abused and raped women and beat up children and elders.

Police Constable Palani and C.I.D. Vasu Pillai were notorious characters in the episodes that were enacted in Cherthala. K.C. George reported that these two ‘devils’ took pleasure in forcing the arrested volunteers to sexually abuse their own mothers, sisters and daughters in the open. Those who refused to oblige were beaten to death. It is said that the Dewan’s rule created a whole genre of such inhuman police personnel in Travancore.

4.2.17 Menassery-Olathala Camp

The Dewan had arranged to airdrop the press release on the imposition of military rule in Ambalappuzha - Cherthala taluk. On *Thulam* 10 (October 28), the military held a march on the Kanjikkuzhi-Muhamma Road. A camp at Menassery had been opened on *Thulam* 8th itself and it had about 400 volunteers under the charge of K.K. Prabhakaran. The military was comfortably accommodated at a place owned by the feudal landlord Anakottil Kartha. It was here that the military fired at the attacking volunteers killing about 120 martyrs. According to K.C. George, the military men using their bayonets killed even those lying wounded.

4.2.18 Vayalar Scene

Vayalar episode is considered as the last one in the entire Punnappa-Vayalar revolt. The volunteer camp at Vayalar was ideally located so that it could be attacked by the military only if the latter approached it through backwaters. On *Thulam* 9 (October 26), the military tried to land there by motorboats but the volunteers threw stones at them forcing them to abandon their landing. But by noon, the military was preparing to march from the Cherthala T.B. and they carried sten guns and lot of ammunitions. They were loaded into a number of motorboats and the plan was to reach Vayalar shores and land at different points near the backwater front. A group of 200 volunteers assembled fully armed and carrying stones and decided to take to

any offensive. When the volunteers started throwing stones at the fast approaching boats, the militia used their machine guns to open fire and the bullets killed many. Some bullets penetrated the trunks of coconut trees. D.S.P. Vaidyanatha Iyer, who had the dark episode at Punnapra in his mind, was in full command and ordered his men to fire all around. According to K.C. George, about 150 volunteers were killed in this gruesome episode. P.K. Chandranandan remembers one Sridharan, a heroic volunteer, who rushed forward to the DSP and showed his bare chest, shouting, “*We are fighting for freedom to live like human beings. If you can live only by killing us, please do so*”. After a short recess, the firing continued. On *Thulam* 11 (October 28), also firing continued unabated. He remembers with respect the names of some comrades who became martyrs in this episode. They were P.C. Varghese, K.V. Shanmugham, R. Sukumaran, C.K. Bhaskaran, P.K. Krishnan, P.K. Abdul Khader, C.K. Ramankutty, Kesavan, Padmanabhan, N.P. Thandar and Ananthaveli Vasu. There were also a few women martyrs like Panakkikari Kalyani, wife of Nilakantan, Kochadaparambil Thankamma, wife of Prabhakaran, Tharayil Parambil Parvathy and Muthumanakari Karthiayani.

4.2.19 Some inner stories

Dewan Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer controlled the administrative set up in Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Travancore. Though the Travancore Military force was under the charge of General Officer Commander (G.O.C), V.N. Parameswaran Pillai, the Dewan had always sidelined him, whenever decision was taken to deploy the military to put down the uprising at Alappuzha, Ambalappuzha and Cherthala areas. D.S.P Vaidyanatha Iyer and the I.G. Parthasarathy Iyengar were close to the Dewan and all three of them operated on the same wavelength. The G.O.C. didn’t want a repetition of Jalianwala Bhag type massacre anywhere in Travancore. He believed that imposition of military rule was sufficient to deal with the situation. Dewan did not accept this view. He wanted direct action and offensive strategies to nip the uprising in the bud itself. When the Dewan decided to rely on his trusted I.G. and the D.S.P., the GOC registered his protest and submitted his resignation. The Dewan influenced the Raja and created the position of Colonel and Vice Colonel. While the Raja would be the Colonel, the Dewan would be made the Vice Colonel. Thus the Dewan manipulated things so that he could take charge of the armed forces directly using his new position. The GOC did not like this. But the Dewan went ahead and vested the IG with all the powers of the GOC.

This was sufficient to cause direct confrontation between the IG and the GOC. The GOC using his powers ordered the arrest of T.V. Thomas and

P.K. Padmanabhan and arranged to bring them to the Central Jail in Thiruvananthapuram. It was reported then that the Political Department at the Center in New Delhi registered its protest and expressed its displeasure at the turn of events in Travancore during October 1946, when serious negotiations for granting independence to India were being held. The status of princely states and their accession with India (British India) were important issues at these negotiations.

4.2.20 End of Punnappa-Vayalar Revolt

The Travancore militia had completed the Action Plan prepared by the Dewan and ably executed by his trusted I.G. and the DSP to put down the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt, leaving hundreds of martyrs and dismembering thousands of families in Alappuzha, Ambalappuzha, Muhamma, Cherthala and Vayalar. In the battlefield, the well-trained armed militia could wipe out any offensive action by improperly trained and armed groups of volunteers drawn from the class of the oppressed workers and the tenants. Some felt in the beginning of action that the volunteers constituted no match to the mighty state power. Yet, they went ahead because they could not bear the oppression and exploitation by the ruling class any longer. So they plunged into the battle. Some of the leaders were cautious and they wanted their colleagues to delay the action until they could mobilize enough striking power. There was allegation that in many volunteer camps, the members had been told that there was no ground to worry about the threat from the guns of the militia since they did not carry bullets. In such a situation, the country-made arecanut lances were more than enough to kill the soldiers. After killing the soldiers, they could take away their guns and ammunitions and use them for an armed rebellion against the dictatorial government.

The General Action Committee in charge of the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt met and decided to disband all volunteer camps and it directed all the leading functionaries to go underground to evade arrest. On *Thulam* 12th (October 29) the IG Parthasarathy Iyengar was camping at Alappuzha. He sent Srinivasa Iyer, then General manager of A.V. Thomas and Company as his emissary to meet T.V. Thomas and request him to meet the IG at the TB. T.V. Thomas accepted the request and reached the T.B. At that time, the GOC was also camping there. T.V. Thomas went to the IG's room and started a conversation. At that point, a policeman came on the scene and informed the IG to go over to the GOC's room. After some time, the IG returned to his room and told T.V. Thomas that the time was not opportune for continuing the conversation with him. T.V. Thomas asked why he was requested to meet the IG. Since he did not get a clear answer, he went back home.

4.2.21 Arrest of T.V. Thomas

Next day morning, as reported earlier, a large contingent of militia marched to the residence of T.V. Thomas and told him that he was under arrest and had orders to take him to the Civil Jail. T.V. Thomas calmly told the officers, that, if given some time, he would finish his morning chores and get dressed for the journey. They allowed him to do so. Meanwhile the militia surrounded the entire house of T.V. Thomas and no one was allowed to come in or go out. As soon as T.V. Thomas was taken to the military truck, the members of the militia there asked all the family members of T.V. to get out of the house. The family members including the three unmarried sisters of T.V. were driven out in to the streets with only the dress that they were wearing. The military ransacked TV's house. It closed all the doors and put up strong locks on it. Even the cows in the cattle shed were driven out to be put in the municipal pound. The family of T.V. was given shelter by their neighbour Dr. Eliyamma. The whole episode smacked the cruelty of a Dewan who could not understand the feelings of the native population. Indeed, the Dewan was wreaking vengeance and sweet revenge on T.V. Thomas who had refused to yield to his attractive offers and even threats at an earlier encounter between them at the Bhakthivilas Palace.

T.V. Thomas was taken to the Alappuzha Civil Jail, where the District Judge, Mammen Tharakan, told him that he would not direct the police to put him in Jail lock up if T.V. Thomas promised that he would not run away. T.V. Thomas could only laugh at this. Within two hours, P.K. Padmanabhan was also arrested and brought to the Civil Jail. By midnight both T.V. Thomas and P.K. Padmanabhan were taken to the military camp at Pangode in Thiruvananthapuram. Next day, they were shifted to the Central jail. They spent 10 days there and then they were taken back to Alappuzha.

It was reported that the Dewan really wanted to postpone the arrest of T.V. Thomas with a view to negotiate with him for reaching a political solution. After the arrest, the Government imposed a ban on the All Travancore Trade Union Congress (ATTUC) and all trade unions affiliated to it. Following this, on *Thulam* 14 (November 1) the General strike was officially withdrawn. On *Thulam* 26 (November 13) the Government withdrew the Military Rule.

The Nadar Murder case ended with a verdict to hang Kuttappan, Franchy and P.K. Damodaran to death and imposed rigorous imprisonment on 27 other accused in the case. P.K. Damodaran used to be lovingly called *Kolamaram Damodaran*. (*Kolamaram* in Malayalam means the hangman's mast). The court ordered the release of 47 accused in the case. Those who

were convicted to be hanged to death went on appeal against their death sentence. They won their appeal and got their conviction reduced to rigorous imprisonment. However, in 1954 the above-mentioned three comrades were released after they completed 8 years of imprisonment. Of them, *Kolamaram Damodaran* died during the latter half of 2000 AD. Unfortunately, we were unable to meet him and audio-record his valuable reminiscences for this historical documentation.

Even though the Action Committee of the Party decided to withdraw the struggle and asked all leaders to go underground to avoid arrest, this information did not reach the volunteer camps at various places. In some areas the camps were disbanded, while in others they continued. This created some confusion among the volunteers. Most leaders were not available to give them any direction as they had gone underground to escape arrest.

After the Punnappa Episode, the volunteers had taken 7 guns from the police camp. Initially they were entrusted with C.A. Bharathan, but they could not be dispatched to the pre-designated place and persons. Not knowing what to do with them, they threw the guns at Pallathuruthy rivulet near Karimpavalavil. Police later recovered the guns.

The Dewan started a nefarious media campaign to show that the Communist Party leaders had cheated the working class and pushed thousands of innocents into criminal activities. They had not only violated law and order but also had questioned the authority of the State, which always had taken a very lenient position on all matters concerning labour in the State. And after sacrificing the lives of hundreds of innocents, the leaders had gone underground to protect themselves. On another front, the Dewan put out the propaganda that the workers who had joined the Punnappa Vayalar struggle had been misled to believe that this struggle was for securing for them 13 ½ cents of lands.

The attitude of the State Congress was equally unsympathetic. It did not even issue any statement on the cold mass massacre executed by the Dewan. Pattom Thanu Pillai, the State Congress leader and elder statesman visited Cherthala, but he became a guest of Kattiyat Sivarama Panicker, a big landlord of the area. Pattom held enquiries with the I.G., Parthasarathy Iyengar. Pattom had little inclination to either make a visit to the scenes of action or console the affected families of workers.

On Chingom 19, 1123 ME (1948) a big meeting was held at Alissery Maidan at Alappuzha under the presidentship of Comrade Velunny. More than 30,000 people attended this. It took stock of the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle and discussed about the steps to be taken for achieving the unfulfilled

demands of the masses. Soon, following a physical assault on him, the Dewan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer decided to leave Travancore forever.

4.3 ASSESSMENT OF PUNNAPRA-VAYALAR REVOLT

Many writers have ventured to give their critical assessment of this great epoch making Punnappa-Vayalar Revolt in the social, economic and political history of Travancore⁶. We shall look into some of these in the present exercise of documentation. M.T.Chandrasenan who was in the thick of the revolt was also in charge of organizing political study classes at the volunteer camps and he had clashed with the police several times and in the course of it succumbing to serious injuries. He joined the trade union movement in 1938 and later joined the Communist group in Punnappa in 1945. He wrote a series of articles entitled “*Balikudeerangalilooe*” (Through martyrs' columns) in the *Janayugom Weekly* and they were later published in book form with the title “*Punnappa-Vayalar-Jwalikunna Adhyayangal*” in 1991. It carried a preface written by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, the great Novelist of Malayalam literature.

4.3.1 Thakazhi's view

We may quote Thakazhi. He wrote: “Punnappa-Vayalar revolt was the result of a demand for a comprehensive revolutionary change in society. In it, there were economic, social and political dimensions. Feudalism of the worst order was a factor that kindled it. Exploitation of working class was another contributing factor. It was a spontaneous movement or struggle. I don't find any leader in this struggle, but there was a leadership. But this leadership did not know clearly the emerging character, speed and direction of the struggle.

The struggle lasted only a few days but after that people in the region got freezed in body and soul as a result of the brutal incidents in which hundreds got killed. Knowing that they could also be killed, many were willing to join the struggle. Some black legs used to convey news and developments about the struggle to government as and when they appeared. Some others demonstrated their love and allegiance to the government of the day and got a share of the spoils. Some were neutral and kept their independence”. (Translated from Malayalam).

4.3.2 M.T. Chandrasenan's view

According to M.T. Chandrasenan, volunteer camps had been set up at several places like Menassery, Olathala, Vayalar, North Vayalar, Varekad, Velonattom, Kalavancode, Kanachikulangara, Kanjikkuzhi, Muhamma, Puthenangady, Kannarkad, Mararikulam, Kalavoor, Kattoor, Thumboli, Mannancherry, Aryad, Komalapuram, Chungom, Kanjiramchira, Port, Vadakkal, Kalarcode, Parur and Punnappa. The density of these camps was mind-boggling and the network of communication among the camps was excellent. There was some kind of central command and control. All the camps stocked first aid medicines and materials. Some of them set up medical squads. All were prepared to plunge into bloody revolt against the Dewan's rule and fight for responsible government and improvement of conditions of work and wages of toiling working class in the State. Unfortunately, the struggle was confined to a few select pocket areas and did not spread throughout the State. But the Dewan sensed the feelings of the masses and the leaders of State Congress too realized them. In spite of this, the State Congress did not support the struggle even with a press release. The only notable exception was C. Kesavan, who from the beginning was thrilled at the mass upsurge that he witnessed during his participation in a meeting organized by the All Travancore Trade Union Congress (ATTUC) at Alappuzha before the call for a General Strike was issued.

4.3.3 P.K. Chandranandan's Views

P.K. Chandranandan (PKC as he was known) was a participant in the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt. In his article “*Annu Muthal ... Innolam*” (From Then to Now) in the *Punnappa-Vayalar Silver Jubilee Seminar 1971* (pp. 145-174), he traces the historical roots of the struggle⁸. According to him, after the attack on the police camp at Punnappa, where Inspector Velayudhan Nadar was killed, the volunteers took away 7 guns and two of them were with Olothara Krishnan Kunjan. When the DSP reached the camp with additional enforcements and fully prepared to meet any second offensive by volunteers, he found the whole place strewn with bodies of the killed and severely wounded. The police was asked to use their bayonets to kill the wounded on the spot, instead of them being taken to the hospital. The DSP ordered the removal of all bodies into trucks and they were taken to Valiya Chudukad (Cemetery). All of them including the dead and partly alive were doused in kerosene and petrol and burnt. However, the DSP kept some bodies for public display to scare away people.

In Cherthala, after the police firing, the dead bodies were thrown into ponds and canals. About 600 were killed in Vayalar, Olathala, and Menassery alone. In spite of the great atrocities suffered by the communists in the struggle, the general public did not show any sympathy to them and their leaders. This was clear when the elections based on adult suffrage were held in February 1948. The communists contested 17 seats and the people rejected all of them. When Pattom Thanu Pillai became the Prime Minister of Travancore State, he continued the policy of repression against the communists more vigorously than the former Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswami Ayer. Many lock-up deaths were reported from all over the State. When the Ministry led by Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai replaced Pattom Ministry, the police repression was more brutal. Most of the left leaders were in jail, when the first anniversary of the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle was observed. In the Central Jail in Thiruvananthapuram, the political prisoners and detainees clashed with the jail wardens, and in this, a comrade Muhamma Ayyappan was killed. A case was registered against 86 detainees for breaking the rules of the jail and attempting to launch a revolt. The very next day Inspector Ponnayyan Nadar opened fire at a crowd in front of Alappuzha North Police Station, when they were protesting against the killing of Muhamma Ayyappan. In this police firing comrade Janardhanan was killed. Only in May 1951, following a Supreme Court Judgment, that the political detainees were finally released. This is to show that the spirit behind the Punnappa-Vayalar Revolt did not die out immediately after Sir. C.P. left the State.

In the post Punnappa-Vayalar era, the left movement was revived by people like K.V. Pathrose, K.K. Kunjan, C.G. Sadasivan, C.K. Kumara Panicker, P.G. Padmanabhan, P.K. Madhavan, V.K. Kunju Panicker, M.K. Sukumaran, S. Kumaran, S. Damodaran, V.S. Achuthanandan, P.A. Solomon, M.N. Govindan Nair, T.V. Thomas, Varghese Vaidyan, R. Sugathan and K.C. George and they were collaborating with the leaders from Malabar like P. Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, and, A.K. Gopalan.

4.3.4 T.V. Krishnan's Views

T.V. Krishnan, better known as TVK, a leftist worker and journalist, has written a good and authentic biography of T.V. Thomas. (*T.V. Thomas - Jeevitha Katha, 1998*). According to TVK, the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle had a two-tier leadership. K.V. Pathrose, P.G. Padmanabhan, C.G. Sadasivan, K.K. Kunjan and K.C. George were functioning from underground. T.V. Thomas and C.K. Kumara Panicker were functioning openly. In the Alappuzha Action Council, T.V. Thomas, P.G. Padmanabhan, K.V. Pathrose, K.K. Kunjan and K.C. George were the chief leaders. In the Cherthala Action

Council, C.K. Kumara Panicker, C.G. Sadasivan and C.K. Bhaskaran functioned. The overall coordination of the Action councils was entrusted with K.C. George.

After the volunteer camps were set up, T.V. Thomas was asked to declare the General strike. Initially he was reluctant to do so thinking that they could better negotiate with the Dewan. He also found that forces of sectarianism were growing in the movement. He thought that the struggle against the Dewan should not be confined to ATTUC, Communists and Alappuzha. He wanted a broad based people's struggle.

When T.V. Thomas was arrested, he had at his family house three unmarried younger sisters, brothers' wife and their 6 children. After T.V. was arrested, as reported earlier in this study, the entire house was ransacked by the police, driving out all family members onto the street with only the dress they were wearing at that time. The TCFWU office was raided and all the furniture and records were burnt or destroyed. All the properties and assets of TCFWU were confiscated by the government and auctioned off. Along with T.V. Thomas other TCFWU functionaries like C.K. Velayudhan, P.K. Padmanabhan, E. Vasudevan, K. Divakaran, A.K. Ramakrishnan, K.V. Soolapani and V.K. Kunju Panicker were also arrested. The total number taken into custody was 72. T.V. Thomas was handcuffed and allowed to wear his shirt when he was produced before the Magistrate.

T.V. told the Magistrate that it was inhuman to ask all the 72 detenues to walk all the way from Beach sub jail to the Magistrate's court. "We too are humans. Other detenues are not allowed to wear their shirts. Under what law is this being done? We are not getting adequate good food, newspapers to read, and opportunity to take a decent bath and clean ourselves. Kindly stop your victimization and brutality".

T.V.K. mentions about the atrocities of Police Reserve Inspector O.A. Khader. He used to shout at prisoners and brutally torture them. When the political detenues sat on the floor to take rice gruel, Khader would start kicking them from behind. He would see that some worms and dead rodents were put in the rice gruel supplied to the detenues and when they refused to take them he would use brutal force. Khader was, however, not bold enough to beat T.V. Thomas. He used to ask his policemen to do that job on his behalf. When they refused, he would ask a non-Malayalee policeman in the station to beat T.V. This policeman was so kind to TV that he would request him to cry aloud when the former hit the walls and showered abuses at T.V. If T.V. could cooperate, he thought he could fool Inspector Khader. When T.V. refused to oblige, this policeman himself cried aloud and Khader was impressed and happy. T.V. Thomas was 36 years old when the Punnapra-

Vayalar struggle took place. He was released from jail in December 1947 on the ground that there was no evidence to prove him guilty.

4.3.5 Thomas Isaac's Views

Writing on “*Alappuzhayude Samara Patha*”, (*Chintha, 1996*), Thomas Isaac said that the communists made substantial contributions to the freedom movement but they could not raise themselves to the leadership of the movement as would be visualized by Marxist-Leninist writings⁹. The struggle, however, mobilized the entire gamut of working class ranks in the State. There was also the welcome transition from caste consciousness to class-consciousness. The employers mostly belonged to the Ezhava caste, while the employees also belonged to the same caste. However, caste unity and harmony could not continue for long as the workers soon realized that there were inherent class contradictions between the employers and employees and these were essentially rooted in class characteristics. Confrontation between the two was inevitable and unavoidable.

Early workers in Alappuzha had a twin personality. Inside the factory, they were workers and outside they were basically Ezhavas. Social movements initiated by Sri Narayana Guru influenced them. Reformist mind soon got transformed into revolutionary mind, when they realized that Ezhava employers themselves were ill-treating and exploiting Ezhava employees. Sri Narayana Guru was preaching the mantra: “*Oru Jathi, Oru Matham, Oru Daivam, Manushyamu*” (“One Caste, One Religion One God for Man”). The Punnappa-Vayalar revolt saw the emergence of class solidarity.

4.3.6 K.C. George raises issues

K.C. George, as mentioned earlier, was coordinating the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle and he had written an exhaustive story of the struggle¹⁰. But at the end of his narration, he had raised a few issues and analysed them objectively. One important question he raised was whether the militant confrontation was avoidable. He believed that it was not. Leaders did not set up the volunteer camps. The idea caught up as soon as it was mooted and the camps just spontaneously appeared at several places and those who joined these camps approached the leaders for help in the form of political study classes and arms training. The rowdies and *goondas* of employers and feudal landlords were having a field day, and, naturally the oppressed sections thought of mobilizing themselves to retaliate.

The political study classes kindled the opposition to Dewan's Rule and a yearning for democracy and responsible government. The Punnappa episode was a gigantic one but the Vayalar episode was not. Police and military were deployed in large numbers in Vayalar but not so much in Punnappa. In Ambalapuzha and Cherthala, the communists did not retaliate the rowdies of the landlords. They explained to the people that their fight was to be directed against the Dewan.

K.C. George attempted to answer the critics who argued that the communists misled workers. It was the Dewan who tried this media campaign unsuccessfully at several places. For instance, he described the Kadakkal and Pangode rebellion as Franco Rule. The Dewan used to praise the workers but denigrate their leaders. Unfortunately, the stand taken by the State Congress strengthened the Dewan's hands. It was under these circumstances, that the communists decided to go ahead with mobilizing workers for a direct confrontation with the Dewan.

4.3.7 Enquiries made by Ravivarma Thampuran

The book entitled "*Punnappa-Vayalar - Apriya Sathyangal*" (a collection of articles written by Ravivarma Thampuran and serialized in the *Malayala Manorama* daily) was published in 1996. This was based on a variety of sources like books, articles, visits to major centers of struggle and interviews with a large number of people who took part in the struggle and who had occasion to observe the struggle at close quarters¹¹. In fact, the serial of articles carried the title "*Kanal Moodiya Punnappa-Vayalar*".

The author's field study and observation present to us a dark picture of the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, giving the general impression that it was a big fiasco resulting in the sacrifice of innocent lives. At the end of his work, Ravivarma Thampuram states that a number of questions remained unanswered. Let us see what are they:

- (a) Why did the struggle (mainly aimed at the Dewan) get confined to Alappuzha, though the State of Travancore stretched from Nagercoil in the South to Aroorkutty in the North? Did the leaders of the struggle think that by concentrating in just one centre, they could easily defeat the Dewan? But the author rightly points out that the struggle was confined not to the larger geographical area of Alappuzha, but to a smaller area of Ambalappuzha-Cherthala taluk.
- (b) Did the leaders who organized the volunteer camps and imparted arms training, get clear directions from the Communist Party of

India or even from the Provincial Committee of the Party? It was found that the local leaders made all the arrangements and declared even the date for launching the struggle and then only they got clearance from central party leadership. The clear stamp of approval came after the struggle started and volunteers began sacrificing their lives.

- (c) It was reported that T.V. Thomas, a mature and seasoned leader was totally against launching an armed struggle for achieving exclusively political goals. But pressure was put on him after the incident at Cherthala, where Nalukettingal Raman, a tenant-cum-supervisor of the feudal landlord, Kattiyat Sivarama Panicker, was killed on Kanni 28 (ME) by agitating workers. This provoked the landlords who let loose arson and destruction of property of farm worker households. Were the leaders of the struggle as mature as T.V. Thomas?
- (d) The leaders of the struggle knew in advance the superior offensive power of the Dewan's police and military forces. They had modern guns including machine guns and sten guns, trucks, well-trained personnel and political power. In the volunteer camps, physical drills were held but no training in using guns was given. Most volunteers had not seen the machine guns in action. The ex-servicemen who gave training to the volunteers should have raised this point as a weakness that would eventually end not only in the failure of the struggle but also in loss of innocent lives.
- (e) The leaders assured the volunteers in the camps that country made crude arecanut lances and the military drills would be more than enough to counter the military offensive and achieve victory. They were told that the aim of their struggle was the establishment of a socialist/communist state of the proletariat in Travancore and this was a tall claim or promise not supported by facts or resources.
- (f) The exaggerated propaganda that the Communist Party and the ATTUC were organizing a gigantic contingent of volunteers armed with all kinds of lethal weapons and trained in guerrilla warfare, must have misled the Dewan who decided to deploy the police and military forces in a big scale in the troubled areas with instructions to wipe out the struggle. Thus the battle was held between a very weak side and an enormously strong side and the result of it was tragic as expected by many.

- (g) There was no uniformity in the strategy and pattern of the struggle and the strength of each volunteer camp and the level of striking power of volunteers varied considerably. The leaders too had no clear idea about the level of enthusiasm, commitment and discipline of the volunteers. It was such groups that were driven out to face the offensive of disciplined military forces of the State operating under experienced commanding officers.
- (h) There was allegation that leaders informed the volunteers that the guns used by the police and military forces did not carry bullets and instead they used a mixture of horse gram flour and salt which would not harm or injure the volunteers. Even if they used real bullets, the volunteers could easily escape them by just falling to the ground and crawling forward. Was this true? Were the leaders of the struggle cheating the innocent workers who joined the camp so that they would be turned into guinea pigs for experimenting with a proletarian struggle against the establishment?
- (i) In many volunteer camps, though ex-servicemen were deployed to impart military style training, no attempt was made by the leaders to verify their skills. There were reports that some of the ex-servicemen had no experience in handling weapons, as they were last-grade non-soldier category employees like sweepers while in service.
- (j) Many volunteer camps started functioning properly only a week before Thulam 7 (October 26). The D-day time was insufficient to give any effective arms training of any worth. In the first centre of action, Punnappa, 28 volunteers were killed and many seriously wounded. But this information did not probably reach other volunteer camps. On the contrary, the leaders behind the scene went round saying that the Punnappa assault was a ‘big success’.
- (k) Majority of the senior leaders and members of the Action Committee did not lead the volunteers from the front. Most of them had gone underground and were safe, leaving the decision making entirely to the conveners of various camps and this led to breakdown of coordination.
- (l) There was no arrangement or plan to attend to the wounded volunteers, though some camps had stocked first aid materials.
- (m) When the volunteers were asked to march on the birthday of the Raja to register their protest against Raja’s as well Dewan’s Rule,

they had no idea that they were being led to launching an armed assault on the Reserve Police Camp at Punnappa. Most of those who participated in the march thought that the march would finally end in a mass public meeting at Paramara Maidan. But on reaching a point, which was only 300 meters from the police camp, that they were told to go forward and attack the camp. Those who justified this said that this was a fit guerrilla type action and it had to be sudden rather than a predetermined assault. The unpreparedness of the volunteers for this kind of action was evident through out the episode, ending in a massive massacre of many innocents.

- (n) Leaders used to say that the purpose of the attack on the Punnappa police camp was to capture as many guns and as much ammunition from the police and use it later for the struggle. But they could capture only 7 guns and those who captured them had no knowledge about how to use them. They kept the guns with them for a few days. Failing to receive specific instructions from the leaders, they threw these guns into Pallathuruthy rivulet.
- (o) During the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, secret messages were exchanged between leaders and conveners of volunteer camps through *Techman*, person specially trained and deputed to do the job. The day after the Punnappa episode, a *Techman* had been sent to deliver a secret message from K.V. Pathrose at Alappuzha to C.K. Kumara Panicker at Cherthala. The content of the message was to disband all volunteer camps forthwith. But this message was, for some reasons, not delivered. Had the message been timely delivered, further massacre by the police and military might have been avoided.
- (p) In his autobiography, "*Vanchikkapetta Venad*", (The Cheated Venad) N. Sreekantan Nair had stated that in the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle "emotions took over reason". "The struggle was conducted in an unscientific manner. The striking power of the working class was used at the wrong time and at wrong targets. The communists had cheated Venad (the other name of Travancore) by conducting a "*Muri Viplavam*" (half baked revolution)".
- (q) C. Narayana Pillai, a born political historian, in his book "*Independence Struggle of Travancore*", also had stated that the communists armed thousands of innocent workers and pushed them into a battlefield to confront the mighty power of the State and get perished. This was the consequence of "intellectual lunatics" of the Communist Party and its leaders. The Punnappa-Vayalar struggle

was, therefore, a criminal act executed by the Communists. What the communists were trying was to over ride, and, if possible, to push aside the non-violent struggle being conducted by the State Congress. It is indeed true that the State Congress decision to support the struggle to be launched by the working class was, for some reasons, delayed. One could not ignore the promise given by C. Kesavan and Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai to the Communists that the decision of the State Congress in the matter would be positive and would be conveyed to them without much delay. But the Communists suspected that the State Congress, particularly leaders like Pattom Thanu Pillai had a soft corner to the Dewan and had an inclination to support the Dewan's proposal on the American Model Administrative Reforms. The Communists could not longer wait to mobilize the liberal anti-Dewan forces in the State Congress and turn them over to their side. The Communists could have even tried to marginalize Pattom Thanu Pillai, who proved himself, out and right, a Pro-Dewan leader with the ambition to become the first Prime Minister in a political system that protected the sovereignty of the Raja. Had this been done, the struggle would have taken an all-Travancore character, forcing the Dewan to accept a honourable settlement of all issues.

The Dewan's policy was to divide and rule and he succeeded in this because of the obstinacy of the Communists. Even R. Sankar, the State Congress leader, as well as the General Secretary of the SNDP Yogam had made an emergency trip to Cherthala to meet C.K. Kumara Panicker to plead with him and dissuade him from launching an armed struggle. But it was reported that many, at that time, had branded R. Sankar as an emissary of the Dewan, a spy and "*Varga Vanchakan*" (the class traitor).

- (r) The Communist Party, which led the Punnappra-Vayalar struggle, did not make an assessment of the number of workers who were killed, prepare a list of them, and, trace their families who had run away from their homes for safety. The Party also did not initiate any commendable work to help the affected destitute families. According to government sources, in the police firing at Vayalar, Menassery and Olathala, 190 were killed. But the Communists put the figure at between 500 and 600. The Central Intelligent Agency estimated the number killed as 2000, while Annie Mascrene put the figure at 7000. In the Punnappra episode, the reported figure of those killed was in the range of 28-116. The big question that remains unanswered was that why no one attempted to conduct a

census survey to estimate the number of people killed during the struggle. The Communist Party and its local and branch committees could have easily done the counting.

State Pension was sanctioned to the valiant volunteers who participated in the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle only in 1971. Land was distributed among them in Chithara near Kottarakara with a view to rehabilitate the destitute families of these volunteers. But gross irregularities in distributing pension and land were alleged. Many who had never participated in the struggle got these benefits using the influence they had on the sanctioning authorities.

- (s) There is some controversy regarding what really triggered the Punnappa episode. One version was as follows. At Punnappa beach, there used to be incessant conflict between fishermen and boat owners. The total catch would be split into 31 shares/parts, of which the owner of *vallom*/boat would first of all get 18 shares, besides 1 extra share in the name of "Karnapanku". The remaining 12 shares are earmarked for the fishermen. But actually, when money was distributed, the boat owners would deduct "*Vallakkasu*" at quarter rupee or half a rupee etc. All the repair and maintenance of the boats, net and other fishing gear had, by tradition, to be met by fishermen themselves from their meager earnings.

Simon Asan, a left activist, came to the scene to spread the message that fishermen should unite and fight exploitation. A trade union was formed with T.V. Thomas as President and Simon Asan as Secretary. K.S. Ben looked after the day-to-day activities of the union. A dispute arose on the question of sharing of the catch relating to the boat of Pollel Ippoloth of Punnappa Arasarkadavil. Ippolith filed a complaint before the South Police Station against Koottungal Kuttappan, Vattathil Joseph, Palliparambil Ouseph and Joseph. Police arrested them and brutally beat them up. Ben and his colleagues apprehended Ippolith, Ambrick, Anthappan and Pouleth and appealed to them to withdraw the police case as their struggle was against the Dewan. But they did not relent. The police then arrested a few more.

K.G. Marian, a relative of Ippolith was the one who registered a fresh complaint. The charge sheet said that they attempted to attack Pollel House. The union decided to retaliate and about 22 fishermen got ready for action. They carried kerosene, matchboxes and lot of timber logs and marched shouting slogans. On the way, many joined the march. Ippolith, Pouleth, Anthappan and Denis were forcibly evicted from their office. The marchers then viciously manhandled them. Ippolith ran away and sought asylum in Applon Arouj's house. The marchers ransacked the houses of Pollel, Denis,

Marcili and Ippoloth and abused women and children in their houses. The leaders had issued clear instructions to the marchers that no harm should be done to women and children and that they should not indulge in looting and arson during the marches. But unfortunately some of the marchers just ignored the instructions. After looting the properties, they were set on fire. The marchers then returned to the union office and reported to the leaders.

By mid night on *Kanni* 31 (ME), police arrived and set up a reserve camp at the deserted house of Applon Arouj. There was a mass exodus of workers from the area. The ATTUC decided to launch a general strike. Feudal landlords and boat owners got panicky. The trade union took control of the region. Without permission, the union workers started cutting down arecanut trees to make lances. Trade union activists took those suspected of passing on information to the police into custody and the so-called self-appointed leaders would give out their judgments punishing them.

Another version about what triggered the Punnappra episode was as follows: there were frequent family feuds among the feudal landlords in the area. K.S. Ben, son of Silvi Vaidyar of Karukaparambil, was a big and prosperous feudal landlord of that area. Other landlords in the area were Arasakadavil, Challiyil and Palliparambil. Arasarkadavil had two branches, namely, Veliyakath and Pollel. Ben's father, Silvi Vaidyar was an Ayurvedic practitioner and at the same time a landlord having 8 tenants under him. He also engaged himself in fish marketing business. Silvi Vaidyar's paternal uncle was a big landlord who harvested 25000 coconuts per month from his land and he was the only person in the area owing a motorcar at that time.

There was a love affair between A.P. Anthappan of Pollel family and Kochu Theresa, sister of K.S. Ben of Karukaparambil. When others knew this, Anthappan sought the permission of his elders but it was refused. Ippoloth was the major hindrance. At the end, Anthappan was forced to marry another girl. Kochu Theresa was shocked and her family members too were in such a mood. It was in this context that K.S. Ben came closer to the Matsya Thozhilali Union (Fishermen's Union). According to N.R. Mukundan of Punnappra Nandikad, (quoted by Ravivarma Thampuran in his book cited earlier) Ben might have decided to wreak vengeance on the Pollel family.

Apart from this, there were other issues: (i) Silvi Vaidyar had a virtual monopoly in fish marketing. But Anthappan of Pollel family entered the scene as an agent of Koyakutty Musaliar of Kollam and very soon Anthappan's business grew fast, (ii) In the ATTUC groupism had emerged as soon as the Communists left the State Congress fold. Though T.V. Thomas was President of the ATTUC, Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair was mooted as a prospective candidate for the Presidentship. At Kollam the supporters of

Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair had formed the Travancore Coastal Workers' Union. T.V. Thomas deputed Simon Asan to Punnappa to get K.S. Ben to come over to his side. Ben was cultivating animosity against Applon Arouj. So naturally, the Communists considered Applon Arouj as their enemy. Thus the version goes on to demonstrate that family feuds led to arson and looting at Punnappa and the police decided to run a reserve camp at the house of Applon Arouj and the Communists who were agitating against Dewan's Rule decided to attack the camp.

Mathai, son of Applon Arouj told Ravivarma Thampuran that some more details of what led to the Punnappa episode would be revealing. On *Kanni* 31, Applon Arouj had just returned to Punnappa and got down from the bus at the market place. People told him about the arson and looting done by fish workers and requested him not to proceed to his house. Punnappa Thuruthikad Ramachandra Kurup and few others volunteered to put him in a boat and sent him to Pulimkunnu. He returned only a week after the police firing at Punnappa. He expressed his displeasure when told that his elders had given his house to the police to set up a camp and after that the elders in the family had left for Palarivattom seeking safety. Mathai too shifted to Ottamasserry after spending a few days at the house of the State Congress leader Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai.

Ravivarma Thampuran made exhaustive field trips to Punnappa, Pallathuruthy, Alappuzha, Mararikulam, Kattoor, Muhamma, Cherthala, Vayalar, Kadakkarpally, Thuravoor, Olathala and Pattanakad and interviewed a large number of people who had witnessed and participated in one way or other in the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle. Some of the incidents narrated by them are worth quoting here:

- (i) Thankamma, wife of A.M.J. Anthraper, who was the son of A.C.M. Anthraper, had this to say: the Anthraper family had extensive land under their ownership and nearly 200 tenants under them. Besides, they owned large estates in Adoor, Ezhamkulam and Skinnerpuram. There emerged the propaganda that feudal landlords were the problem creators and so they had to be eliminated. T.V. Thomas, P.T. Punnoose and Varghese Vaidyan, the Communist leaders once met A.C.M. Anthraper telling him that they were building up the Communist Party and that he should not create any unnecessary obstacles to it. They wanted him to vacate the house in Cherthala and move out to some other place for safety. He straightaway refused to do so and told the delegation that he, his family and friends would stand firm and fight to the last. The Dewan was approached and requested for police protection. The Dewan obliged

by sending a huge military contingent to Cherthala. She remembers that after the shoot out at Vayalar, A.M.J. Anthraper and tenants went to Vayalar and helped in the mass cremation of the dead bodies of the volunteers killed, numbering about 200.

- (ii) Velu of Menassery Kandanat Nikarthil said that he was forced to join a volunteer camp at Olathala and later shifted to the Vayalar camp. The feudal landlords had organized a *Rajabhakti Association* under the leadership of Kochunnu Kartha. The admission fee was one rupee. The members of this Association were deputed to the military camp. There they were directed to accompany military personnel in marking out the houses of Communist volunteers. Many joined the Association out of fear of the ruling class and the police and some of them even went to local Thahsildar's office to declare their loyalty to the Raja and secure an Identification Card to escape the manhunt done by the police. Velu was a tenant of Kattiyat Sivarama Panicker and he justified the struggle led by the Communists who were fighting for the cause of the oppressed classes of farm workers and tenants. After the Punnapra-Vayalar revolt, many men-folk went underground, leaving ample scope for the police and militia to raid houses and rape women in the house.
- (iii) E.K. Sivaraman Nair of Kadakkappally Jayavilas was a C.I.D. at the time of the bloody struggle. He firmly believed that the workers created the situation. After the killing of Nalukettingal Raman, the farm supervisor of Kattiyat Sivarama Panicker at the end of the month of *Kanni*, the volunteer camps were set up for launching the big struggle. The volunteers used to stop boats and catamarans to loot food grains and other essential goods and forcibly transport them to the volunteer camps. This was too much of a law and order problem.
- (iv) S.L. Puram Sadanandan is a veteran Malayalam writer and dramatist and a true communist too. He remembers that volunteer camps were functioning at Kannarkad, Idamuri, Valavanad, Perunthuruthi, Kanachikulangara, Varakadi, Nedumpuram, Mararikulam and Kanjikuzhi and each had about 150 volunteers. They spent the night in the camps leaving the women alone at home. Some volunteers used to take a round of night watch in each ward assigned to them and they carried lethal weapons. Once it was realized that military trucks could move to Vayalar only through the bridge at Mararikulam volunteers in Kannarkad decided to destroy it. Next day after the bridge was destroyed, the military started

building a temporary bridge just enough to enable the trucks to pass over. When this was reported to the camp, the volunteers were informed that there were only a handful of military personnel at the site, and, if proceeded immediately, the volunteers could attack them easily. As soon as the volunteers reached the spot with their arecanut lances, the military opened fire. Many fell dead and some fled from the scene. The military personnel dug holes on the ground and buried the dead in them. They put the wounded in the truck and drove away. S.L. Puram Sadanandan, who was witnessing the whole scene, ran away and he found that though only a few military personnel were at the site of the bridge, a large number of others were resting in the nearby houses that had been vacated by people who had run away earlier. Actually firing at volunteers had come from these personnel who enjoyed the safety cover of the houses. S.L. Puram went underground for about 3 months and when he surfaced in Cherthala he found that 7 cases had been registered against him. He spent next few months in police lock ups in Cherthala, Alappuzha, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram Central Jail. After the cases were withdrawn S.L. Puram returned home and started concentrating on his literary pursuits. He claims that he continues to be a true Communist, but not with either CPI or CPI (M). He strongly believes that the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle was a historical necessity and was fully justified.

- (v) K.N. Sankunny of S.L. Puram Kochuveliyil was a coir worker and he joined the Kannarkat camp. He remembers the destruction of the trade union office at Muhamma by the military. He attended political study classes conducted by M.T. Chandrasenan and K.V. Pathrose. R. Sugathan used to make frequent visits. On *Thulam 7*, the volunteers in the camp were instructed to raise the Red Flag of the Party and hold demonstrations. Satyan, who later became the famous Malayalam Film Actor, was the Sub Inspector at Muhamma. The volunteers tried to block traffic by destroying culverts on roads and by cutting down trees and drawing them on to the roads. When the volunteers returned to the camp they got a note sent by T.V. Thomas that the struggle was being suspended and volunteers should escape and protect their lives on their own. Many of the rank and files were shocked to realize that their leaders had let them down before completing the struggle to reach victory. They decided that even if there were nobody to defend and protect them, they would never become informers to the police.

- (vi) Dr. K.S. Anantha Mallan, son of Kundelathu Srinivasa Mallan, a feudal landlord and a Saraswatha Brahmin complained that the Communists during this period were running a parallel government in Mararikulam and Cherthala. They threatened to confiscate paddy and coconut from the storehouses of landlords. Naturally, the landlords sought police help. The forces fired at volunteers, raided houses and raped women folk and this was the net result.
- (vii) Puthemparambil P.K. Damodaran had been nicknamed "*Kolamaram Damodaran*". He was given death sentence but later it was reduced to rigorous imprisonment. Being an ex-service man, he had stoutly opposed the manner in which arms training was given to the volunteers in the camps at Kuthirapandi. It was P.K. Chandranandan who asked him to take up the responsibility of the training. Chandranandan and C.D. Bharathan were in charge of the camp at Kuthirapandi. On *Thulam 7*, the birthday of the Raja, a march and demonstration by the volunteers was planned and C.A. Peter was to be the Captain and P.K. Damodaran to be the Assistant Captain. But since Peter absconded, the responsibility of leading the march fell on Damodaran. It was reported later that Peter had gone to Kollam and sought asylum at the Bishop's place there.

The march of the volunteers started at 2 pm. Chandranandan addressed the marchers and told them that they were going to attack the police camp at Punnappa and all of them must be ready to sacrifice their lives if that becomes necessary. Those who attempted to runaway when police fire at them should be stopped and if necessary killed. Many had been told earlier on the Raja's birthday that they would just demonstrate their protest and disperse. But the announcement that they were to attack the police camp created some confusion. According to Damodaran, the volunteers numbered about 7000 and they carried all kinds of crude weapons.

When the volunteers marched and reached the police camp with their weapons prominently displayed, Sub-Inspector Velayudhan Nadar came out of the camp house and told Damodaran not to create trouble on that auspicious day, the birthday of the Raja. Nadar also told the marchers that they were all brothers and so should not attack each other. Nadar took his cap and threw it in the air as a symbol of surrender and a desire for peace. But the volunteers shouted that the police should surrender their arms too. At this, Nadar ordered his men to lay down their arms. Captain P.K. Damodaran then ordered "About Turn" but the policemen did not

obey it. It was then that the policemen announced that if the volunteers did not disperse peacefully, force would be used, and, if necessary, they would resort to firing.

In a split second Inspector Nadar took a gun and held it high pointing to the sky with a view to fire it. At this Damodaran blew the whistle and volunteers started falling to the ground and they crawled forward as they had been trained. Suddenly, one of the volunteers jumped forward and in a flash thrust an arecanut lance into Nadar's chest and another volunteer used some sharp weapon to cut Nadar's neck. When Nadar fell to the ground, police had no option. They started firing. The number of policemen in the reserve camp at that time was few and outnumbered the volunteers. Further, the policemen were thoroughly unprepared for action, as some of them after finishing their lunch were taking rest. After a few bouts of firing, the small contingent of policemen went inside the house where the camp was functioning and closed all doors from inside to save them. But through the windows they continued firing at the advancing volunteers. Many were killed and scores wounded. Some mildly wounded ran away and some crawled to safety. After the day's blood bath, the volunteers returned to the camp and reported the events to P.K. Chandranandan.

Damodaran went underground but was soon taken into police custody. He was charged for the murder of Nadar and sentenced to death penalty. In 1955 under great pressure from T.V. Thomas, the government led by Pattom Thanu Pillai withdrew all police cases. Damodaran alleged that P.K. Chandranandan was not present in the scene of action but the latter had denied this saying that it was he who ordered Kunjunni to hack Nadar with a weapon. K.C. George also confirmed this in his book on Punnappa-Vayalar struggle.

- (viii) Vastyan Paul of Punnappa Maniyapozhikal had stated that the firing at Punnappa started at around 3 pm when most of the policemen were resting after lunch. A few were playing local board games to while away time. Inspector Velayudhan Nadar was having his afternoon siesta. The post-mortem report on Nadar showed that he had around 128 stab wounds on his body. According to Paul, Nadar was a man of clean habits, never smoked or consumed alcoholic drinks. Had he fired at the first instance, many lives would have been saved because that was sufficient to instil fear in the volunteers prompting them to run away.

- (ix) P. Gopidas of Panampalam Pulimoottil, Kottayam was a constable in the Punnappa reserve camp. It was from his gun that the first shot was fired. D.S.P. Vaidyanatha Iyer was in charge of the operation at Punnappa. It was at his request that a contingent of 100 policemen was sent to Alappuzha. From the Alappuzha reserve camp 16 constables, 4 head constables, 1 cook and Sub Inspector Nadar were ordered to set up the camp at Punnappa, in a vacant building. This building had two small rooms and a veranda. It was located about 2 kilometres away from the nearest motorable road. Just behind the camp building, there was a water channel. In the initial days the camp members had nothing to do and led a quiet life, as there were no indications of any impending conflict.

On *Thulam 7*, all of them had a sumptuous lunch, being the birthday of the Raja and decided to rest. Many had removed their uniforms and got into civilian cloths. At about 3 pm, they noticed that armed volunteers were marching towards the police camp from East, North and South. Inspector Nadar ordered his men to collect their guns and stand ready to face the volunteers. Finding the march of the armed volunteers, about 40 men, women and children from the nearby localities ran up to the police camp and sought shelter. Nadar asked them to get inside the building.

Gopidas was standing at the eastern side, while Head Constable Krishnan took position on the Northern side. Another Head constable was keeping vigil on the Western side. Inspector Nadar came out and faced the crowd of volunteers, who were shouting "*Inquilab Zindabad*". He was at a distance of 75 meters from the volunteers when he appealed to them to disperse peacefully. He collected a Rifle from a constable, as the volunteers were advancing towards him. The captain of the volunteers blew whistle and then the volunteers fell to the ground and started crawling forward. Nadar continued to make his appeal to disperse. When Nadar was attacked, it was Gopidas who started firing and his colleagues followed. The whole action lasted 45 minutes. Besides Velayudhan Nadar, constable Parameswaran Nair was also killed. The intestines of constable Sridharan Nair were found thrown outside the body. Later Gopidas and a few of his colleagues put them back into his body and tied it with some cloth.

There was no power supply. A nearby ration shop was forcibly opened and Kerosene was brought to the camp. Few petromax lamps were lit. Cook Bhaskaran Nair volunteered to go and inform

the superior officers at Alappuzha. He proceeded after disguising as a militant worker volunteers carrying arms. The DSP found that the situation required more reinforcements, and, tried to get them from Kottayam. Next day morning, Sub Inspector O.M. Khader, Kurukkal and G.B. Satyanesan and a contingent of 100 constables reached Punnappa camp. They removed those lying wounded at the site and loaded them into trucks to be taken to Alappuzha.

- (x) P.K. Bava of Pallathuruthy Thaiparambil, who participated in the struggle as a volunteer remembers that he carried Red Chilly powder intended to be thrown at the face of policemen. This gave him the nickname "*Mulakupodi Bava*". On *Thulam* 7, the birthday of the Raja, volunteers marched from Chungom and reached Thookukulathu, south of S.D. College. The aim was to prevent the police from moving to Punnappa. About 4000 volunteers fully armed stood on the road in formation and blocked all traffic. Military trucks were found coming from the North. At Punnappa, police firing had already started. The military asked the volunteers to disperse and then they went back to Alappuzha.

Meanwhile, a contingent of ex-servicemen who were helping the volunteers in arms training was marching in military uniform. After reaching Alappuzha, they returned to Kalarcode. On their way, they reached Thiruvambady. At Thookukulathu, they came face to face with the military personnel. The ex-servicemen did not give way to the military, and, the latter opened fire and killing one ex-service man and wounding several others.

When the ex-servicemen decided to return and reach Kaithavana Camp, they took charge of the 5 guns that had been dispatched from the Kuthiranpanthi camp. The idea was to send these guns to the volunteer camp at Vayalar, where also a direct militant action was forthcoming. Fearing that the guns might be taken away by the military during their search, the ex-servicemen decided to keep them in safe custody of Kadavil Chellappan of Kaithavana. Later when nobody knew what to do with these guns, they were immersed in the Pallathuruthy rivulet. Karimpukalathil Thankappan and Umassery Chellappan executed this exercise. Later, Kadavil Chellappan himself admitted the incident to the police and fearing police reprisal, he committed suicide.

Umassery Chellappan and his friend Thankappan reported the capture of the guns to P.K. Chandranandan and Kollam Joseph and all of them decided to go under ground on *Thulam* 9. South Sub

Inspector Vattakari Gopalan, Reserve Sub Inspector Mavelikkara Unnithan and C.I.D. Vasu Pillai were deputed by the authorities to recover the missing guns. After 23 days of search they recovered them.

4.3.8 Varghese Vaidyan's Views

Varghese Vaidyan was President of Karshaka Thozhilali Union and a well-known conscience keeper of T.V. Thomas. Four days prior to the Punnappa firing, Vaidyan had left for Kozhikode to see E.M.S. Namboodiripad¹². While sitting in the Office of the *Desabhimani* daily, Vaidyan was arrested. The same day, the police sealed his printing press and bookstall at Alappuzha. His mother was driven out of his house and the same was also sealed.

The Dewan was cunning. He planned to wean both T.V. Thomas and his close associate Varghese Vaidyan away from the communist movement. T.V was offered the choice of any high position in Travancore government excepting the Dewanship. An officer of the DIG Rank approached Varghese Vaidyan and advised him to keep away from the Communist Party. He informed him about the offer of the Dewan to compensate Vaidyan adequately. Both TV and Vaidyan rejected the offers with contempt. Vaidyan continued to be in the Communist Party till 1957, when he entered the business of contract work. When the Party split in 1964 he remained in the CPI but later left it along with the S.A. Dange group to form the All India Communist Party (AICP). When Mohit Sen's UCPI came, Varghese Vaidyan became its chief organizer in Kerala.

Nine months before his death, Varghese Vaidyan revealed some inside stories in an article written by him. According to it, TV told the Communist Party colleagues that the working class and the ATTUC should not conduct a struggle exclusively for political goals. TV and EMS met in a boat plying in the backwaters. EMS had come specially to convince TV about the necessity of a political struggle. TV was reluctant even on *Thulam 2*, to issue strike the notice on behalf of the ATTUC. At night the Punnappa-Vayalar Action Committee met at a secret place in Aryad. K.V. Pathrose (Convener), K.C. George, K.K. Kunjan, C.G. Sadasivan, P.G. Padmanabhan, T.V. Thomas and Varghese Vaidyan were present. T.V and Vaidyan stood firm and opposed the idea of political struggle. But the Action Committee was assertive and asked TV to issue the Notice for the General Strike in his capacity as the President of the ATTUC. Vaidyan was asked to go outside Kerala to mobilize support for the struggle. This was interpreted as a strategy to keep out Vaidyan from

influencing T.V. in any way. According to Vaidyan, after the meeting with the Action Committee, T.V. and Vaidyan returned to the latter's house at about 4 am. Vaidyan could see tears in T.V.'s eyes. T.V. must have been thinking that the struggle he was going to launch as directed by the Party would result in the loss of innocent lives. Vaidyan had seen T.V. in that emotional mood only once, when he had lost his mother with whom he had a close love and affection.

C.K. Kumara Panicker, who was in charge of organizing camps, according to Varghese Vaidyan, was also not happy in going ahead with an armed struggle against the Dewan's mighty forces. It was a time when the Communist Party was engaged in mobilization of anti-government forces at various places like Telengana and bring about the fall of the Nehru government and establish a revolutionary people's rule.

4.3.9 About K.V. Pathrose

In any historical narrative on Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, the name of this unsung hero K.V. Pathrose has to be put at the centre¹³. He was the real dictator behind the struggle. It was in his brain that the idea of an armed struggle using arecanut lances and country made weapons originated. No wonder, many called him *Kunthakkaran Pathrose*. Born in Commady, he studied only up to the Third Standard. He held the position of Secretary of the Travancore State Committee of the Communist Party during the heyday of the Calcutta Thesis. When this Calcutta thesis failed when applied to Travancore, Pathrose was blamed and he was demoted to the Arattuvazhi Branch Committee in Alappuzha. He was a coir mat-weaving worker in Goodacre Company and became a Communist under the influence of P. Krishna Pillai. In the early days, meetings of the Travancore Communist Party used to be held at his house. When the Party split in 1964, he stopped all his party activities and started a shop to sell coir mats to make out a living. His business failed and he became a shattered person and soon fell ill with chronic Asthma and TB. He died on March 9, 1980. Before his death, he had given clear instructions that his dead body should not be buried in the Valiya Chudukad where scores of martyrs of Punnappa-Vayalar struggle had been buried or cremated. His body was buried in the SNDP Mangalam ground in Kanachikulangara in Alappuzha. He had married Sarada with the blessings of the Party but she left him after a few years. A few months before his death, Pathrose had started dictating his impressions of the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle and his son Mani was writing them down but could not proceed further as the end of Pathrose came. Had he completed that work, it might have given enormous insights into the struggle.

K.V. Pathrose had put his heart and soul into the Communist movement. Deep in poverty, he suffered untold miseries, brutal atrocities, and, physical torture. He was a Stalinist to the hilt. He wanted to implement the Party's decision on launching an armed revolt. It was mentioned earlier that the message conveying the decision of the Party to call off the struggle and disband all volunteer camps did not reach their destinations, and, as a result, at several places innocents were killed in confrontation with the police and the military. At last, the top leadership of the Party, it was alleged, decided to put the entire blame for the debacle on single person, K.V. Pathrose. He was a totally shattered man. While lying in his deathbed awaiting his end, he instructed the few people around him that no wreaths should be placed on his body. In fact, when he was dead, no wreaths were placed. No Party leaders came to witness the last journey of this unsung hero.

There is no Memorial for him. No documentation of his life and role in mobilizing the working class and in conducting the struggle had ever been done. Why was he demoted from the position of Secretary of the State Committee to the level of a Member of a Branch Committee? Why was he sidelined and totally ignored? It was known that EMS used to specially seek the views of Pathrose during Party meetings. C. Achutha Menon had spent two years in underground along with Pathrose. In front of the thatched house of Pathrose, the Kattunkal Kandathil Veedu, party leaders used to assemble daily to debate issues and take decisions. They included P. Krishna Pillai, A.K. Gopalan, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, K. Damodaran, Unniraja, K.K. Warrier, N.C. Sekhar and others. Red volunteers would stand guard. K.C. Pathrose's mother Anna Rosa had to even borrow and beg to raise money for meeting the expenditure on food and tea given to the leaders. A.K. Gopalan once described Anna Rosa as the Mother of the Party.

K.V. Pathrose and Swami Padmanabhan once went to Kollam to get the services of P. Kesava Dev. In the early years, the Travancore Labour Association represented the working class, and its leaders were P.K. Padmanabhan, Simon Asan, C.O. Mathew, K.V. Pathrose, V.K. Achuthan, Kollam Joseph, K.C. Govindan, K.C. Joseph, R. Sugathan and V.K. Purushothaman. When P. Krishna Pillai reached Alappuzha, he immediately identified K.V. Pathrose as the right person for entrusting the work of the Party in that region. Prior to 1922, P. Krishna Pillai himself was an ordinary worker in a coir factory at Alappuzha. The 1930s saw P.G. Padmanabhan, K.K. Kunjan, P.A. Solomon, S. Kumaran, S. Damodaran, P.V. Andrews, P.K. Chandranandan, M.T. Chandrasenan, O.J. Joseph, V.S. Achuthanandan, C.K. Kesavan and V.L. Thomas emerging as leaders. V.K. Achuthan is reported to have rendered valuable service to the George Committee in the collection of relevant data and its analysis.

During the strike of 1938, P. Krishna Pillai deputed K.K. Warrier and C.O. Mathew to picket factories and prevent blacklegs from entering the factory premises. The strike lasted 25 days. The police unleashed brutal attack on the strikers. R. Sugathan negotiated with factory owners a settlement and decided to withdraw the strike when the employers agreed to give an increase of one *anna* in a Rupee. K.V. Pathrose and others registered their protest, describing the settlement as surrender. P. Krishna Pillai and A.K. Gopalan arrived on the scene. P. Krishna Pillai tried to pacify those who objected to the settlement by saying:

"Leaders declared that they are withdrawing the strike. The strike committee declared that the strike would continue. Between the two who wins? Who is our real enemy? Our struggle has not ceased. Let us resolve to continue a longer struggle".

It was in 1939 that coir factories started getting big war orders especially for the supply of *Seleta bags*. It was reported that the Aspinwalll Company alone employed 2000 workers exclusively for *Seleta bag* production. It was at this time that V.S. Achuthanandan, being a skilled tailoring worker secured employment in the factory. Alappuzha witnessed anti-Japanese campaigns. The Malayala Kalabhavan at Pathirapally was planning to stage a drama based on Kesava Dev's work "*Karshakan*". Sarangapani and Vallikunnam Ramankutty Asan wrote the lyrics for the marching songs. P. Krishna Pillai brought one Sarada, a girl inmate of Kottayam Sevasadan to play an important role in the tableaux being presented in Commady and Pathirappally. Sarada was put under the protection of Pathrose and his mother.

K.V. Pathrose is reported to have played an important role in bringing T.V. Thomas to the front line leadership. In 1941 T.V. became the President of the TCFWU. On several occasions, T.V. and Pathrose clashed with each other, when wage settlements were reached on the *Seleta* work. Fearing that many top leaders like Pathrose would always oppose some of his views, T.V. used to carry a pre-prepared Resignation Letter in his pocket whenever he attended union meetings. It was always P.T. Punnoose who defused the atmosphere of tension in trade union or party meetings. While one section of cadres in TCFWU wanted to raise the Red Flag and shout *Inquilab Zindabad*, others opposed it. Communist Party cadres were instructed not to launch any agitation during the War period as the workers had to work and produce the required quantity of *Seleta* output. Employers sensed this and started freezing wages. War had brought inflation and shortage of essential goods. Government came forward to offer employment by taking up certain public works like construction of Cherthala Canal. Unemployed youth were joining

coolie regiments on a large scale and going to Assam and other border areas in East India. K.V. Pathrose did not like this, particularly the insensitivity of the Communist Party and its support to the British Government. The Party was giving more attention to anti-Japanese campaigns by organizing stage shows based on traditional Kerala art forms like *Ottamthullal*, *Padhakom*, *Chakiar Koothu* and *Pooramkali*. At Kollam when Sreekantan Nair was organizing a strike at Harrison & Crossfield Company, the Party sent P.T. Punnoose there to defeat it. It was astonishing when reports came, that in ATTUC meetings resolutions on “*Raja Bhakti*” were passed.

Meanwhile P. Krishna Pillai was planning to organize an armed struggle. A one-month long arms training was being given at Pune military camp by the British government to civilians. Krishna Pillai decided to make use of this facility to his advantage. He decided to depute Dr. K.G. Raghavan, a homeo doctor of Pathirappally, P.K. Vasu and P.G. Padmanabhan under the captaincy of K.V. Pathrose. This team got good training in handling rifles, throwing grenades and making booby trap. In Pune, the notable camp mates were Chindan from Madras, and C.N. Balan. Rajeswara Rao of the Communist Party visited the camp.

It is argued that the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle was a deliberate attempt made by the Communist Party to wipe out the bad name it acquired earlier by its stand taken during the Quit India movement. According to Naussiter (see his book *Communism in Kerala*) most often intellectuals in the Party were silent while more than 75 percent of comrades from Malabar were patently anti-British. However, circumstances forced the party to launch the armed revolt.

4.3.10 Some Questions

Several questions are raised about the Communist Party’s role in the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle:

- (i) Was the killing of hundreds of volunteers avoidable?
- (ii) Was the struggle the result of a long-term strategy or plan? Or was it just a spontaneous outburst by the oppressed classes?
- (iii) Why did the network of communications between the leaders and the camps fail even on the first day of action at Punnappa? Why did the Party not anticipate such a thing?
- (iv) Did not the top leadership show a sense of wavering from day one?

- (v) Did the leadership “optimistically” believe that once started, the Party would not be able to control the volunteers, and, therefore, it would be wise to wait and see its natural end?
- (vi) Did the leadership believe that the struggle initiated by the working class volunteers was enough to end the Dewan’s Rule?
- (vii) Why did the leadership in Alappuzha decide not to wait a little more as suggested by the leaders of the Kollam region? It was reported that K.C.S. Mani and G. Janardhana Kurup went from Kollam to meet K.V. Pathrose at Alappuzha. Pathrose asked them to tell N. Sreekantan Nair to take his own time and launch the struggle at Kollam side. Pathrose was reported to have said:

“I shall bring the area from Kayamkulam to Aroor under our control and let Sreekantan Nair bring the area from Kayamkulam to far south of Travancore”.

This plan did not materialize.

- (viii) While in Telengana, the Party mobilized all the anti-establishment forces for action, why did the Party unit in Alappuzha become content with just mobilization of working class alone?
- (ix) Did the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle lack a central leader from the ranks of the working class who felt their pulse?
- (x) Were Alappuzha and Cherthala the right places geographically for waging the armed revolt?

K.V. Pathrose was assigned the role of Dictator for the action at Alappuzha, while C.K. Kumara Panicker was given that role in Cherthala. The decision to attack the Police Reserve Camp at Punnappa was taken at a meeting held at S. Kumaran’s house at Aryad. After the first day’s action at Punnappa and the Dewan’s orders imposing Military Rule in the whole of Alappuzha, Ambalappuzha and Cherthala, the Action Council decided to call off the struggle abruptly, but the communication did not reach all the camps asking them to disband and go underground. In some camps where this communication reached, the volunteers protested and called the leaders ‘traitors’. Top leaders were not available for consultation or advice regarding what to do. K.V. Pathrose was moving around all over Alappuzha appealing to the volunteers not to withdraw the struggle abruptly.

K.C. George justified the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle and the decision to withdraw it abruptly. He said:

"The military strategy is like this. To counter the enemy, mobilize all the forces and attack. If it is not possible, at least try to resist the enemy and keep it at bay and take a few steps backwards and strengthen and renew the cadres and resources. When even this is not possible, the best strategy would be to surrender to the enemy".

K.C. George said that the leadership did not really disband the volunteer camps. M.T. Chandrasenan and K.K. Kunjan said that such a decision was indeed taken by the Action Council (See the former's article in the *Kerala Kaumudi* entitled "*Aa Kathu Ethiyirunnengil*" (Had that letter been reached). Though they could not disband the Vayalar camp, M.T. Chandrasenan moved around to set up camps at places between Alappuzha town and Vandananam. Indeed, T.V. Thomas and P.G. Padmanabhan were opposed to it.

4.3.11 The Post-script

During Yadukulakumar's field enquiries and extensive interviews with a number of actual players in the action drama, certain dark facts came out. After the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, the position of working class deteriorated. Mooppan, middlemen and labour contractors became strong turning the workers into mere slaves. At factory gates the mooppan used to take attendance and names of those who did not report for work were conveyed to the Police. Workers were forced to render at the factory gates "*Vanchissa Mangalam*", a song in praise of the Raja, besides shouting slogans like "*Sir C.P. Zindabad*", "*C.P. Bharanam Venam, Venam*"(We Want, We Want C.P.'s Rule) and "*Raja Vazhcha Neenal Vazhatte*"(Long Live Royal Rule). These were all in praise of the Dewan and the Raja, and the rendering had to be done in broad day light in front of the Alappuzha public. It was a shameful act thrust on the patriotic working class just to destroy their morale and force them to become anti-communist. T.V. Thomas used to watch this scene helplessly almost daily from his house situated opposite to the gates of Aspinwall Company's factory. It was at this point, that the Dewan ordered the arrest of T.V. Thomas.

According to N. Sreekantan Nair, who was also the Vice President of the TCFWU, both the Communists and the orthodox leaders of the State Congress cheated the working class, leaving the question wide open - why did these two groups fail to unite for a common cause? Was it the result of an ego clash among the leaders? (See his *Vanchikkappetta Venad*). These questions, however, remained convincingly unanswered.

Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, the Dewan knew that K.V. Pathrose was a central leader and so ordered his military and police to catch him alive or dead and bring him to Thiruvananthapuram. But Pathrose escaped. He had planned to move from Pathirapally to Changanacherry via Achan Kovil river and then to Kozhikode, but had to change his plan. He left Pathirapally, then moved on to Aryad, Kamalapuram, Kainakari, Changanacherry, Manimala, Pathanamthitta, Shencottah, and Palani and finally reached the *Desabhimani* office at Kozhikode. S. Damodaran had also reached Kozhikode via Changanacherry, Kollam, Madura, Dindigal and Olavakkote. Pathrose wanted his colleagues to revive the activities of the Party at Alappuzha.

After the sensational assault on the Dewan Sir C.P. by K.C.S. Mani, the former left Travancore. The B.T. Ranadive line in the Communist Party was to go in for armed revolt wherever possible and it was promoting sectarianism, which was opposed by S.A. Dange and P.C. Joshi. Travancore went for elections in 1948. P. Krishna Pillai was in full charge of the Party. It was EMS who suggested that the Party should come to an understanding with the State Congress. K.V. Pathrose opposed it. In the middle of August 1948, P. Krishna Pillai had an untimely death caused by snakebite. While the Calcutta Party Conference was in session, P. Krishna Pillai was organizing underground activities in Kerala. It inspired the attacks on the Police Stations at Sooranadu and Edappally, and also street battles between Party workers and police at Koothattukulam, Vaikom, Moovattupuzha, and, Thodupuzha as a response to Police brutality on the cadres. K.V. Pathrose was always a sectarian in every sense. He was a towering personality and was ready to lead others from the frontline. He had the uncanny power to detect cheaters and blacklegs in the movement.

In the 1948 elections, which came after the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt, even T.V. Thomas got defeated from Alappuzha at the hands of the State Congress candidate Kuttanad Ramakrishna Pillai. Pattom Thanu Pillai became the first Prime Minister. On the first anniversary day of Punnappa-Vayalar revolt, most of the action heroes were in Jail. They had planned to raise the Red Flag in the Poojappura Central Jail on that day. Naturally the authorities did not allow this and there was a confrontation. Muhamma Ayyappan was killed when jail wardens brutally handled him while he was attempting to raise the Red Flag.

Though K.V. Pathrose was considered by some people as the uncrowned leader of the Communist Party of Travancore, he was demoted from the position of Party Secretary in the State Committee to that of a member of the Arattuvazhi Cell unit. Even then as a loyal worker, he used to attend the branch committee meetings as a silent spectator. At the meeting of

the State Committee held at Aryad, many spoke against K.V. Pathrose. It was reported that only a few like N.C. Sekhar, E.K. Nayanar, and, K.C. George had shown some sympathy to him. Pathrose contested for the post of the Vice President of the TCFWU, but he was defeated.

By 1953, K.V. Pathrose had become a completely dejected man. He shifted his residence to a one-room shop, west of Kottaram hospital. His relationship with his wife Sarada got strained. His eldest son, Ajith Kumar, died of meningitis in the Thiruvananthapuram S.A.T Hospital. It was T.V. Thomas who sent his car to bring the boy to the S.A.T Hospital. When he had no more cash to support his son's treatment, Pathrose sought the help of K. Sukumaran, Chief Editor of *Kerala Kaumudi*.

The last days of K.V. Pathrose, the veteran of Punnappa-Vayalar revolt, were heart rending. He had been pushed into utter poverty and destitution. He shifted to a small hut on a monthly rent of Rs.6. He had to eke out a living by selling coir mats and also vending fish stacked in ice packs. Some days he ran a teashop and tried to handle Soviet Publications as an agent. He inculcated the Naxalite spirit and used to give his advice to Venu, the Naxalite leader, encouraging the latter to march forward. Pathrose could not exhibit softness, he was rock-hard both inside and outside. He was unwilling to act or speak against his conscience. When P. Bhaskaran, the poet, sang the revolutionary song "*Vayalar Garjikkunnu*" (Vayalar roars) Pathrose used to weep and shed tears. He was not happy when he was granted some land in Varandarappally near Thrissur, as an 'indigent gift'. Later he sold it.

Just before the Communist Party split in to the CPI and CPI (M), the Party in Kerala held a meeting on April 10, 1964 and it was presided over by P.G. Padmanabhan. M.N. Govindan Nair explained the decision of the Central Committee and there were strong ideological clashes among the participants. In the evening, there was a meeting at Kidangamparambu maidan organized by those who were planning to breakaway. EMS was in that group and he requested Pathrose to be present there and speak. Pathrose opened his heart and said that the Right-wing cadres in the Party were not communists and for his part he would always be "left of the left groups". Later after the split, the CPI (M) tried to bring Pathrose in to its fold.

K.V. Pathrose was a true Stalinist and Commady, the scene of his brave actions, used to be called a Stalinist territory. He was a pure hardcore fighter and not palatable to his party colleagues. He had inherited most of the traits of the great leader P. Krishna Pillai, excepting the latter's strategic vision as well as diplomatic and persuasive skills.

A few incidents relating to the last phase of K.V. Pathrose's life seem to be interesting. During the first Communist Ministry led by EMS, the government had organized an exhibition-cum-sale fair at Putharikandam Maidan in Thiruvananthapuram. N.S.P. Panikkar, a frontline fighter of Punnappa-Vayalar revolt had been made a member of the Khadi Board. With his help, Pathrose set up a small stall. EMS, after inaugurating the Fair, went through the Stalls. When he reached the stall run by Pathrose, it was reported that, EMS ignored Pathrose and moved away to deliberately slight him. When Sankaranarayanan Thampi visited the exhibition, he started weeping on seeing the sad plight of the Great Communist, Pathrose. On another day, N. Chandrasekharan Nair, retired Inspector General of Police, who had played an active role in brutally putting down the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt, visited the stalls and was surprised to see K.V. Pathrose there in a different role. They looked at each other for a few moments. Then Chandrasekharan Nair told K.V. Pathrose: "*Comrade, both of us have retired. I remember the day when we raided the Pandalam Palace used as a shelter by you. We could not find anyone there but we saw a large dump of egg shells and wondered why they were in a place like the Pandalam Place*". He also told Pathrose that he was now a Director of a Cooperative Bank and if Pathrose wanted a loan he could easily arrange it. Pathrose, true to his character, had no hesitation to refuse it. Other visitors to the exhibition like K. Balakrishnan of *Kaumudi Weekly*, P.T. Chacko, K.R. Gowri and T.V. Thomas did never fail to show their high regards to Pathrose.

During the days after the police firing at Chandanathoppu, K.V. Pathrose reacted strongly saying that a Government of the proletariat (referring to the EMS ministry) had done a wrong thing by firing at protesting workers. When he visited K.P. Gopalan, the Industry Minister, it was reported, that the Minister stood up from his seat as Pathrose entered his room. At this Pathrose chided Gopalan saying that he was a Minister and should not behave like this in future, so as to keep the dignity of the office he was holding.

K.V. Pathrose was bed ridden due to serious illness and was under the treatment of Drs. Shenoy and Abraham. One day, he summoned Vamadevan, who was looking after him, to instruct him that no wreaths should be allowed to be placed on his body when he breathed his last. He had also instructed that his body should not be taken to *Valiya Chudukad* where hundreds of his comrades killed in the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt had been laid to rest. Instead, his wish was that he should be buried at the SNDP burial ground. At last the sad end came. Though a large number of ordinary workers came to pay their homage to the great fighter, no prominent leader turned up for the burial.

4.3.12 A Shocking Revelation

Before concluding our narrative on the historic Punnappa-Vayalar revolt, we need to highlight an incident reported in the book on this revolt written by K.C. George. A few weeks after the revolt concluded, a stranger walked into K.C. George's room in the Party Office requesting him to read a certain marked portion in the November 20 issue of '*Yogakshemam*' weekly, which had reported a speech by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, delivered on October 25, 1946 at Padhiserry in Punnappa. In that speech, EMS did not make any mention about the revolt and the police massacre on 24 October 1946, the day when several persons were killed during the attack on the police camp at Punnappa. The stranger who brought this to the attention of K.C. George was in an angry mood. George also was shocked. The sad thing was that, when Punnappa was burning, several comrades were being killed and their dead bodies were being dumped into trucks to be brought to the *Valiya Chudukadu* for mass burning, EMS Namboodiripad was going round untouched and unabashed and appealing for reforms in the Namboodiri community and that too at a place closer to Punnappa.

4.4 THE DEVELOPMENTS AFTER THE PUNNAPPA-VAYALAR REVOLT

The Punnappa-Vayalar Revolt was no doubt an integral part of the freedom struggle in Travancore and the working class, which was mobilized by the communists, played a leading role in this. The revolt became inevitable, when the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer started becoming a self-made Hitler. He was bent on wiping out the Communists from Travancore, and, as a first step, he wanted to destroy the link between the trade unions and the communists. On October 19, 1946, the Government issued a Gazette Notification declaring the Communist Party and also the trade unions controlled by it as unlawful and strong action would be taken against subversion under the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act.

On the day the Gazette Notification came, R. Sankar, the Secretary of the SNDP Yogam convened an urgent meeting of it and resolved to depute a peace delegation led by Sankar himself to visit Ambalappuzha-Cherthala taluks and study the situation. Besides R. Sankar, the delegation consisted of P.K. Govindan, M. Madhavan and Karnara Gopala Panicker. The delegation, after their field visits, reported that the police was engaged only in making lawful enquiries and their personnel would never harm the workers. Another delegation consisting of V. Madhavan, A.P. Karunakara Thandar and R. Sankar visited Cherthala and some of the volunteer camps, trying to persuade

the members to take a conciliatory attitude. The District magistrate in Cherthala informed them the Government's stand that it would grant the working class all the trade union rights but would not accept any of their political demands. The delegation then went to meet T.V. Thomas and requested him to intervene in bringing about peace. Later they met the Dewan and were told that the workers should unilaterally withdraw the struggle and all criminals should immediately surrender to the authorities.

The SNDP delegation issued a statement saying that the workers had been misled by the Communists to believe that all their demands would be secured though the armed struggle, that farm lands would be divided equally among all and ownership of factories would be transferred to them and these were essentially unattainable dreams. The workers should, therefore, dissociate themselves from the struggle and then the Maharaja would shower his sympathies on them and forgive all their misdeeds¹⁴. It was after this statement appeared that the Communists were described as a group clamouring for "13 ½ cents of land" (*Pathimoonnara cent*).

On November 5, 1946, the Director Board of the SNDP Yogam met and passed two resolutions. One resolution praised the Government and military for restoring law and order in Alappuzha and Cherthala by putting down the unnecessary armed struggle initiated by the Communists who had used the working class as pawns to win their political goals. It also extended full support to Government in its efforts to bring back normalcy in the region and create peace between employers and workers and feudal landlords and farm workers and tenants.

The second resolution praised the great contribution made by the SNDP Yogam delegation led by R. Sankar in bringing about rapprochement between the Dewan and the Communists. Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai, however, felt that R. Sankar and the SNDP Yogam were acting like Intelligence Agency of the Dewan, collecting information on the mobilization of workers by Communists and handing over it to the Dewan¹⁵.

After the Dewan left Travancore, following the assault on him by K.C.S. Mani, P.G. N. Unnithan became officiating Dewan. On September 4, 1947, the Maharaja issued a Proclamation granting Adult Suffrage with Responsible Government for Travancore. Some leaders were released. One of them, R. Sugathan, visited all the places where the armed struggles had taken place and met families who lost their dear ones. An Ambalappuzha-Cherthala Relief Committee with Sankaranarayanan Thampi as President and R. Sugathan as Secretary was formed. It took up the task of taking up the processing of court cases against workers, extend medical aid to the needy, render help to the families of martyrs as well as those who were still in jail.

On the first anniversary of the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt, P.T. Punnoose led a march from south and R. Sugathan from north in Alappuzha, shouting slogans like “*Punnappa Blood - our Blood*”, “*Vayalar Blood - Our Blood*”, “*Down, Down lock up brutality*”, “*Release all political prisoners*” etc. About 50,000 people were reported to have participated in these marches. After the Royal Proclamation of 1947, the Officiating Dewan, P.G.N. Unnithan met the State Congress leaders. But many of the prominent leaders like Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai and C. Kesavan were still in Jail. Pattom Thanu Pillai never raised the issue of the release of political prisoners and was taking unilateral decisions on behalf of the State Congress. He let loose an angry tirade against the Communists and accused them for the bloody struggle that led to the loss of many innocent lives¹⁶.

4.4.1 Reforms Committee, 1947

On September 17, 1947 the Government appointed a Reforms Committee with Pattom Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese, C. Kesavan, A.J. John, P.S. Nataraja Pillai, M. Govindan, T.A. Abdulla, G. Ravi Varma, P. Vivekanandan, S. Krishna Iyer, E.P. Varghese, T.M. Chidambarathanu Pillai and Government Legal Remembrance N. Rama Krishna Pillai as members. Pattom was elected President of the Committee. R. Sankar was later nominated as a member. The composition of the Committee showed that most of them were anti-communists and soon the spirit of communalism and communal interests dominated the proceedings of the Committee. Thus communal poison was injected to the politics of the State. On November 11, 1947, the Committee submitted its report to the Maharaja. R. Sankar representing the SNDP Yogam, E.P. Varghese the Latin Catholics and T.A. Abdulla the Muslims submitted Dissenting Notes. The Majority Report recommended, among other things, adult suffrage, multi-legislative constituencies, plural voting system and protection of minorities.

Elections were announced to be held during February 2-16, 1948. The State Congress released its Election Manifesto. It allocated its seats based on the group strength of the SNDP Yogam, Nair Service Society, Latin Catholics, and Muslims, rather than based on social classes like farm workers, factory workers, peasants, traders, middle class, teachers, students and youth. In the elections, the Communists contested 17 seats and Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) 3 seats, but none of them got elected.

On March 21, 1948 a Constitution making body came into being. A.J. John was made the President. 96 out of 120 seats went to the Congress. On March 24, the Government issued a Royal Proclamation to make that body a

law making body. A three member Cabinet with Pattom Thanu Pillai as the Prime Minister, and C. Kesavan and T.M. Varghese as Ministers was sworn in. This ministry vigorously pursued its onslaught on the Communists much more intensively and brutally than the former Dewan Sir C.P. Pattom was bent on destroying all mass and popular movements and protests. He directed the arrest of T.V. Thomas, C.K. Velayudhan, V.A Simon and P.G. Padmanabhan. Fearing more arrests, many leaders went underground. But the working class did not remain passive onlookers. First they launched a struggle demanding bonus. Pattom agreed to convene a Conciliation Conference. C. Kesavan was the Labour Minister. Pattom ministry soon faced a crisis and to survive it, he expanded his ministry by accommodating dissidents. Political instability soon became a patent feature of State Politics. The Pattom Ministry lasted only 8 months. Pattom left State Congress and formed his own group. It became a part of the Indian Socialist Party (ISP).

Then came the Ministry led by Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai. In the matter of police repression, it was worse than both Pattom Ministry and the Dewan's Rule. Soon the integration of Travancore and Cochin States was effected. Lock-up deaths were reported from all over the State. Police entered factory premises and beat up workers. Many were dragged through the roads. Those wounded in the police raids and got admitted in the hospitals were forcibly discharged. Police attacked peasants, students and youth, government employees and progressives who had a soft corner for the Communists. During the first anniversary of Punnappra-Vayalar revolt, the Government allowed armed police to enter the jails and with the help of jail wardens they beat up the political detainees. It was in such an incident at Poojappura Central Jail that Muhamma Ayyappan was killed. Following this incident, all the political detainees joined in a struggle that lasted 24 days.

4.4.2 Sooranad Episode, 1950

On January 1, 1950, at Sooranad, police and farm workers clashed¹⁷. One Sub Inspector and a few constables were killed. This episode had a background. As mentioned elsewhere, the "popular" ministries of Pattom Thanu Pillai and later of Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai were competing to excel the Dewan in unleashing repression on people who were engaged in mass movements and agitations. The T.K. government unleashed an extensive man hunt in middle Travancore. Vaikom, Ullala and Koothattukulam were major centres of police repression. The police used to raid the houses of suspected persons and brutally attacked even women and children. In one incident Koothattukulam Mary was dragged through the main road and beaten up before taking her to jail lock up.

Ennakkat was another centre where police brutality reached its zenith. The police set up a camp at a palace there and started their repression, which was particularly directed at the scheduled caste farm workers. Soon the police started abusing the women folk in the palace that had bee taken for running the police camp. The police used to take farm workers in to custody, tie them up in pairs and took them to the market place for public flogging. The major left activists belonging to the Ennakkat family were, Dr. Ramakrishnan Thampi, Rajasekharan Thampi, Velyudhan Thampi, Subhadramma (later married to George Chadyamuri, a popular Communist and trade union leader) Radhamma and Sankaranarayanan Thampi. Most of them operated from the underground. They were the nephews and nieces of State Congress leader Pandavath Sankara Pillai. All of them were exposed to police brutality and torture on several occasions. Subhadramma was arrested along with her newborn baby and taken to the Poojappura Central Jail. Annie Mascrene, Accamma Cherian and Rosamma Cherian (who later married the top Communist leader P.T. Punnoose and became Rosamma Punnoose) were already there as women political detainees. The Thampis brothers and sisters were engaged in mobilizing farm workers mostly belonging to scheduled castes in their fight against the atrocities of feudal landlords. The Thampis belonged to Ennakkat Palace and their father Rama Varma Valiya Raja had provided safe shelter to many Communists in his palace. The police atrocities had spread to Adinad, Vallikkavu, Ayiramthengu, Puthuppally, Keerikkad, Pathiyoor and other centres.

At Vallikkunnu, a major target for the police was Thoppil Bhaskaran Pillai, better known as Thoppil Bhasi, the veteran novelist and dramatist and the chief force behind the K.P.A.C. Drama Troup, which used the drama medium to popularise Communism in Kerala. The police set up a camp forcibly at Bhasi's house itself, since they were hunting for him. He was reported to have gone underground. A sub camp was opened at Kambissery house belonging to Kambisserry Karunakaran, a veteran journalist and co-worker of Bhasi in the KPAC. When the police set up the camp, Kambisserry Karunakaran was in Thiruvananthapuram looking after his journalist work. The police organized a volunteer group of local citizens who had shown readiness to help the police to hunt for the Communists in hiding.

The police raided the houses of many comrades and destroyed whatever the latter had kept for their subsistence. The Party then decided to retaliate. Farm workers and other progressives were mobilized at Vallikkunnu, Thamarakkulam, Chunakkara, Bharanikkavu, Nooranad, Thazhava, and Madathikkarath and that gave the signal that feudal landlords would not be able to continue with their age-old practice of exploitation. Sooranad was at a boiling point. A unit of the Communist party was formed there with one

Paramu Nair as its first Secretary. At one stage, the Communists burnt the house of Sivarama Pillai, the leader of the volunteer *goonda* group that was assisting the police. This led to fierce retaliation by the police. Kesavan Potti (Potti Sir of the KPAC) sought the help of K.K. Chellappan Pillai to meet the Chief Minister T.K. Narayana Pillai and request him to call off police repression. But while he was with Chellappan Pillai at Thiruvananthapuram, Potti himself was arrested for a criminal offence executed at Vallikkunnu. Chellappan Pillai, however, did not clarify that Potti was with him when that offence took place at Vallikkunnu. After the arrest, Potti was taken to Alappuzha Sub Jail.

Comrade Kunjuraman was a star figure in the Sooranad episode. He was the leading light in the mobilization of farm workers of Sooranad. He used to organize small group meetings and spoke about Punnapra-Vayalar, Telengana, and, Kayyur struggles as well as the Kuttanad farm workers' movement in order to inspire his audience. These meetings and study classes brought a sense of solidarity and made the farm workers aware of their rights. They became bold to openly question the misdeeds of feudal landlords. At night even policemen did not dare to move about in that area in small groups.

On December 30, 1949, the Communist activists led the farm workers and cadres of the Party to a disputed *poromboke chal* (state-owned water body) to catch fish. This shocked the landlord who had been claiming the ownership of the said *chal*. A complaint against the intruders was filed with the police. This complaint mentioned the names of Thoppil Bhasi, Peroor Madhavan Pillai, Chelakkottethu Kunjuraman, Chalithara Kunjachan, Panathazha Raghavan and others as the culprits and they were described as terrorists and anti-social. Two carloads of policemen and an Inspector reached Sooranad and they took camp at the feudal lord's house. They did not even go to the disputed site or enquired about the whereabouts of the culprits, the so-called "terrorists". After dinner, the police force accompanied by the volunteer *goondas* proceeded to the disputed site. On the way, they raided some houses. In the absence of men folk, they abused the women. Some women were ordered to run around the houses several times until they fell down exhausted. The cries for help from women in these houses forced out the men from hiding, and they carried all kinds of weapons. On seeing them closer, the *goondas* fled the scene, leaving the small police force behind to face the situation.

Initially, there was a one to one fight between the police constables and the men who came to rescue their women. When the situation was getting out of control, Inspector Mathew, ordered his men to fire. But the enraged people had already snatched the firearms away from them. When the police ran

away, the people followed to attack them with their weapons. As a result, the Inspector and four constables fell dead. According to Puthuppally Raghavan, the attack on the police was spontaneous, as the men in the area got wild in seeing the brutal repression unleashed on their women by the police. He felt that this was comparable to certain other episodes like the Nadar Uprising of Southern Travancore, Pulaya Struggle at Venganoor, Nair-Ezhava Uprising that spread from Haripad to Paravur in Kollam, and also the Kallumala agitation at Perinad. The Communists were behind the mobilization of the downtrodden and repressed masses, but the Sooranad episode came spontaneously on the grave provocation of the police atrocities. Otherwise, such an episode would not have taken place in Sooranad.

There were many like Kalakkat Tharayil Parameswaran Nair, Thandassery Raghavan, Payikkalil Gopala Pillai, Madathil Bhaskaran Nair, and, Kanjurappally Vadakkethil Purushothama Kurup who were killed in police torture at the instance of cruel feudal lords. The police force was brought to Sooranad by Thennalathara Pillai who wanted to perpetuate the right of the landlord to do whatever he liked with the tenants and farm workers and keeps them in slavery and bondage. The Communists opposed such landlords and rightly mobilized the repressed classes to assert their rights boldly. Neither the police nor the Communists could be held responsible for the Sooranad episode. The responsibility for the episode must be totally put on the feudal landlords who refused to see the change of times.

On the next day after the Sooranad killings, January 1, 1950, the Government of T.K. Narayana Pillai ordered that all working class organizations, student, youth and women's associations and progressive mass movements would be treated unlawful. By morning, a large contingent of armed police led by the I.G. and senior officers reached Sooranad. Accompanied by them, the Chief Minister T.K. Narayana Pillai also reached Sooranad and declared that he was handing over the entire region to the police and military and he would see that if any one resisted his efforts to restore peace and order, there would be no Sooranad in the map of the State. This set in motion a brutal police raj. The first martyr was Thandassery Raghavan who was killed in police custody. The police raided houses, destroyed crops, cut down trees, abused women folk and beat up anyone who came their way. They did not spare even the elderly people and small babies to elicit information from women about the hiding places of their men. The police targeted women for the most reprehensible and indescribable acts of violence. This was worse than what the former Dewan's police did.

Thinking that the Communists of Sooranad had gone in to hiding in adjacent regions, police extended their network of combing operations in

Thazhava, Adinad, Changankulangara, Vallikkavu and Puthuppally. Soon wild manhunt was executed in these places and it was more intensive in Vallikkunnu. Thoppil Bhasi and his family constituted an important target. The police raided his house, abused and drove out Bhasi's mother and destroyed each and every article in the house and finally carried away all valuable durable items. Even the cattle in the house were driven out to the police station. The police brutally assaulted Bhasi's father, Thoppil Parameswaran Pillai, and also all the inmates of the house including the maidservants and farm hands attached to the house. Bhasi's father was ailing from respiratory problems and when he was released from jail, the ailment had reached its zenith. Luckily he got good treatment from Dr. Prasad who accommodated Bhasi's parents with him since they had virtually become homeless and dependents. Bhasi was in underground. Police reached the doctor's house and ordered him to let the aged parents of Thoppil Bhasi go to the streets. The police locked their room and they were forced out to find a resting place, for themselves. The old elderly couple walked towards the Padanilam at Oachira. Fearing police repression, no body came forward to provide shelter to them. At Ochira, a famous temple centre, a few devotees identified them and they built a small hut using coconut leaves for them. The couple lived there virtually as destitute for about six months.

While Sooranad episode was happening, about 200 tenants and farm workers of Malabar were rotting in Salem jail as they had agitated for their rights and risen in revolt against the landlords of Malabar. On February 11, 1950, there was police firing in Salem jail killing several heroic fighters of injustice like Koyiladan Narayanan Nambiar, Pullanjiyodan Kunhappa Nambiar, Govindan Nambiar, Azad Gopalan Nair, K. Gopalan Kutty, Ambady Asari, Thaliyan Raman Nambiar, N. Koran, Nakkaikannan, Mayilappravan Narayanan Nambiar, Koran Gurukkal, Andalode Kunhappa, V.C. Kunjuraman Nambiar, Njandady Kunhambu, N. Balan, N. Padmanabhan, Pilathudan Gopalan Nambiar, and Nilanjeri Narayanan Nambiar.

4.4.3 A.K.G's Writ Petition

It was during this time, that A.K. Gopalan moved a writ appeal against Section 14 of the Preventive Detention Act arguing that it was unconstitutional as it infringed on the fundamental rights. This came in handy and timely in getting the release of leaders like T.V. Thomas, R. Sugathan and others after a long period of detention lasting 3 years. Sooranad was even then witnessing police repression of the worst order. R. Sugathan visited Sooranad soon after he was released from jail. He held small group meetings to assess the situation.

In April 1951, a Travancore-Cochin Statewide Trade Union Conference was held at Alappuzha. Fifty-two trade unions sent delegates to it. They formed a Trade Union Workers' United Committee. It heralded a new dynamic force emerging in the State. One could say that this development was the spirit behind forming a left democratic front in the State constituting by the Communist Party, the Revolutionary Sociality Party and other left groups. Those who were released from jail were given a grand public reception at Kidangamparambu maidan at Alappuzha.

During 1947-51 progressive left forces had several confrontations with Congress Governments all over India, and, according to A.K. Gopalan, the record was horrifying. About 1982 police firings were reported in which the number of martyrs who sacrificed their lives came to 3784. More than 10,000 got wounded and at least 50,000 were put in jail¹⁸.

On July 10, 1951, workers in Alappuzha registered their protest against shortage of grain and also non-issue of ration, high price level, black-marketing and hoarding. The Government responded to this by issuing a Press Note declaring Satyagraha, picketing, strike etc. as unlawful. The workers in Alappuzha, however, flouted this prohibitory order and continued the agitations.

4.4.4 First General Elections, 1951

The first General Election based on adult suffrage was held in 1951. The Communists decided to fight the elections and prepared an Election manifesto. It promised, among other things, Bonus for the year 1950, withdrawal of all wage cuts, reinstatement of all workers who were thrown out of employment, increased ration and plugging of malpractices in the distribution of ration, abolishing all unjustified enhancement of taxes particularly Sales Tax, grant of registration to TCFWU and other trade unions (which had been banned by Government earlier), and, ensuring the Rule of Law.

The Congress Party feared that it might lose power. On August 13, 1951, the Communists and other left groups held a convention at Alappuzha Coastal Talkies to bring all progressive forces under one banner and fight the elections. The Congress got wild and the Government directed the police to arrest all Left leaders. In spite of that, in October 1951, the Communist Party, RSP, KSP and others formed the United Front. T.V. Thomas, and R. Sugathan were in jail, but they contested the elections. M.N. Govindan Nair and P.T. Punnoose were in underground. When the results of the Elections were declared, no Party or Front had majority to form a Government. While the

Congress secured 44 seats out of 102 contested, the United Front secured 32. Of this, the Communist had secured 25, RSP-6, and KSP-1. In the election to the Parliament, the Congress and the United Front secured 6 seats each.

4.4.5 A.J. John Ministry, 1952

The Congress secured the support of the Tamilnad Congress and formed the ministry with A.J. John as Chief Minister on March 2, 1952. During this ministry, the conditions of the working class did not register any improvement. Unemployment, poverty and hunger were widespread. Hoarding and black marketing were the order of the day. One comrade George, a worker of Goodacre Company was reported to have committed suicide by holding a placard in which was written, "*hereafter I feel no hunger*".

The Communist Party conducted a survey to assess the gravity of the situation in Alappuzha, ward by ward. It is interesting to cite some of the data revealed by the survey. In Kalarcode ward, there were 218 families with a total population of 1124. The average income of a family was very low as reflected in the per head figure of 2 annas 7 paise (around Rs.0.14)¹⁹. The Government led by A.J. John was totally insensitive to the deplorable socio-economic conditions of the masses. The Communists formed a committee with R. Sugathan as Convener to raise the demand for free ration or jobs to the poor. On March 8, 1952 the trade unions held a *Pattini Jatha* (hunger march) to Thiruvananthapuram and meet the legislators. Following this, a delegation of MLAs led by R. Sugathan met the Chief Minister. A.J. John agreed to visit Alappuzha. But after making the visit, he declared that all was well at Alappuzha. A.K. Gopalan, then a Member of Parliament came to Alappuzha. Later he raised this issue in the Parliament. The media also gave an excellent coverage of the situation.

On June 22, 1952, T.V., R. Sugathan, N. Sreekantan Nair, Parthasarathy Iyengar and Janab Sulaiman Sait convened a meeting at the Municipal Building at Alappuzha. They formed a Coastal Area Relief Committee to mobilize funds, food items, cloth and medicines from all over India for relief work. 12000 volunteers were involved in this commendable exercise. The A.J. John Government also announced a John Fund of Rs.3 lakhs, but nobody knew where that money went.

On March 24, 1952, the ban on the Communists was lifted. But the Registrar of Trade Unions on the plea cancelled the registration of the TCFWU that the Union had not filed its annual returns for some years. The authorities knew that the police had raided the TCFWU office, office records

had been destroyed, and, its leaders and officials were in police custody. Its office had also been sealed. Under these circumstances, how could the Union file the Returns? Government action really provoked the working class. Due to mass protest, the Government had to finally relent and the TCFWU got back their registration on May 28, 1952.

4.4.6 Renewal of Union Activity

From November 1, 1952, the TCFWU started an active campaign to renew union activities. R. Sugathan, T.V. Thomas and K.K. Kunjan formed a sub-committee. On November 16, a special meeting of the TCFWU was held and it turned out to be a kind of annual convention. T.V. was elected as President, and R. Sugathan, A. Yusuf, R. Sankaranarayanan Thampi, and V.A. Simon as Vice Presidents, K.K. Kunjan was the General Secretary. The Union Executive had 46 members. R. Sugathan functioned as the General Secretary of the Travancore Cochin Trade Union Council and Vice President of the All Kerala Trade Union Council.

4.4.7 Municipal Elections at Alappuzha

The United Front decided to fight the municipal elections in Alappuzha covering 34 wards. It won 19 out of 34 seats and this enabled T.V. Thomas to become the Chairman of the Municipal Council. Naturally, coir factory owners became unhappy and they tried to create a situation by stepping up their exploitation of workers. The TCFWU decided to counter it. The INTUC led by B.K. Nair and owing allegiance to the Congress openly supported the factory owners. The Government refused to convene the meeting of the Coir Industrial Relations Council (CIRC). But because of the collective strength of the TCFWU, the Communists and the RSP, the factory owners were forced to restore all the benefits to the workers and a decision to this effect was taken on January 7, 1953. But soon after that, the factory owners refused to implement the decisions as they got the support of the INTUC.

The dispute went on till May 4, 1953 when the TCFWU decided to launch a strike. A Committee with 104 members was formed. During the next two weeks, hundreds of meetings were held and notices were circulated stating clearly the circumstances behind the forthcoming strike. On May 20, picketing before the factory gates of Gangadhar and Co started. It was soon extended to other factories under Goodacre, Daragh Smail and other companies. As usual, police intervened and started brutal attacks on workers. The INTUC leaders went round asking workers to withdraw from the strike

and if possible walk over the bodies of picketers and enter the factory for work²⁰.

It was in this context that the U.F. MLAs and MPs came on the scene. They joined the workers in picketing factories. One day it was the turn of R. Sugathan and Changarappally Narayanan Potti to picket the Gangadhar and Company. The Manager had arranged to pour acid at the place where the picketers would sit. The time for picketing had arrived. There was no sign of Potti, but Sugathan was ready. He and his followers started walking to the factory gates. They put a number of gunny bags on the acid-soaked floor and stood on the gunny bags and started picketing. This struggle was epoch making and it got support from far and wide. At last on January 7, 1953 a settlement was reached.

4.4.8 General Elections, 1954

The A.J. John Ministry could not last long as the Tamil Nadu Congress withdrew its support. The ministry, after tenure for 18 months, fell on a no-confidence motion passed on September 23, 1953. A.J. John submitted his resignation and advised the *Raj Pramukh* (Governor) to dissolve the Assembly. This led to the General Elections in 1954. Pattom Thanu Pillai's Indian Socialist Party (ISP) joined the U.F. The re-demarcation of constituencies resulted in 118 seats instead of 108 in the earlier elections. U.F secured 54 seats (ISP-19, Communists-23, RSP-9 and KSP-3), while the Congress and Tamil Nadu Congress got 45 and 12 Seats and together they had 57 seats. Independents were 6 and 1 seat was held by the Anglo Indian Community. In the post-election scenario, Pattom played a cunning game. He cheated the U.F. and went seeking support of the Congress just to become the Chief Minister.

It was during the Pattom Ministry that the police opened fire at the striking employees of the State Road Transport at Marthandam. Marthandam had previously witnessed violent struggles led by Tamil Nadu Congress, which was pleading for the integration of southern taluks of Travancore with Shencottah, Devicolam and Peerumade with the Madras State. The Malayali spirit could not accept this because its belief was that Kerala created by Sage Parusurama extended from Gokarnam in the North to Kanyakumari in the South. During the Pattom's Government, the Tamil Nadu Congress held mass rallies and police had to intervene. Stone throwing and police lathi charge occurred at several places. At Marthandam the police resorted to firing and six persons were killed.

Just two weeks after this incident, the police used force against the striking State Transport employees. The Communists were controlling the employees' union and when they raised their demands, Pattom did not like it. He ordered the Police to handle the situation. The Marthandam firing and the police action against the Transport employees led to a split in the ISP. The Congress MLAs led by Panampally Govinda Menon supported a no-confidence motion moved by an ISP legislator, T.R. Ramaswamy Pillai, a true Gandhian socialist and Pattom's Ministry fell. After hectic negotiations, Panampally secured the support of two ISP MLAs and the MLAs of Tamil Nadu Congress to form a Ministry on February 14, 1955. This Government lasted only 10 months.

4.4.9 Formation of Kerala State, 1956

On November 1, 1956 the State of Kerala was formed by the integration of Travancore (minus the Kanyakumari District), Cochin and Malabar (former British Malabar) on the basis of the recommendations of the State Reorganization Commission.

Before his ministry fell, Pattom had made a last minute desperate call to T.V. Thomas to reach an understanding. But TV put down certain conditions like: (i) Release all political detainees and those arrested for the participation in Punnappa-Vayalar Struggle and withdraw all police cases against them, (ii) Release all State Transport employees who had been arrested during the Transport Strike and withdraw all cases against them, (iii) Provide State Transport buses to take the persons released from various jails back to their homes. In fact, Pattom who was power hungry agreed to all the conditions. But Pattom's calculations went wrong because of the calculated move by the more politically cunning Panampally Govinda Menon.

There were rumours that Panampally had colluded with the Tamil Nadu Congress to surrender the southern taluks of Kanyakumari to Madras and also if necessary hand over Devicolam and Peerumade on the ground that they had a significant share of Tamil speaking population. When the State Reorganization Commission took the linguistic criterion for reorganizing the States, the attitude of Panampally Government came handy to them. There was also a demand for *Aikya Keralam* (United Kerala). When several Congress MLAs like K.M. Kora, T.M. Varghese, Makkappuzha Vasudevan Pillai, G. Chandrasekhara Pillai and others gave, in writing, their loss of confidence in Panampally, he had no other alternative than submitting his resignation to the *Raj Pramukh*. It was then that P.S. Rao was appointed as

Advisor. On November 22, 1956, B. Ramakrishna Rao as the first Governor of Kerala State replaced him.

The period 1948-50 was a dark era in the history of the Communist Party of India. The Party's cadres were subjected to brutal treatment by the governments and police all over the country. The situation in Travancore-Cochin State was worse under popular elected government. The general elections held after the formation of Kerala State the CPI secured 60 seats out of 126 and with the support of 5 independents, the first democratically elected Communist Ministry in the world came to power under the Chief Ministership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad. Congress secured only 43 seats followed by 9 by PSP and 8 by Muslim League. EMS Ministry had C. Achutha Menon, T.V. Thomas, K.C. George, V.R. Krishna Iyer, Joseph Mundassery, Dr. A.R. Menon, K.P. Gopalan, T.A. Majeed, P.K. Chathan and K.R. Gowri as ministers.

4.4.10 Election Manifesto of CPI

The Election Manifesto of the CPI declared that the Party would strive to make Kerala a truly democratic progressive socialist state. Among the specific promises in the Manifesto, the following need special mention: (i) Demand the Central Government to raise State Plan outlay from Rs.870 million to Rs.2000 million, (ii) Using this, the State would start employment generating modern industries, (iii) Traditional industries like Coir, Handloom and Small industries would be developed. (iv) For all workers including those in plantations, the wages would be raised by 25 percent. (v) A minimum bonus of 12.5 percent of basic wages would be paid as bonus. (vi) Comprehensive land reforms would be implemented by abolishing intermediaries in land, by initiating tenancy reforms, fixing fair rent, imposing ceiling on land holdings, redistributing land to the landless and ensuring justice and equity in agrarian relations. Evictions of tenants would be stopped. (vii) Nationalization of foreign owned tea and coffee estates would be done. (viii) Increase food production and achieve food self-sufficiency. (ix) Restructuring and revamping of the entire education system so as to abolish malpractices and corruption indulged in by private managements. (x) Promote decentralization of administration, cut red tape and reduce administrative expenditure. (xi) Fundamental change in Police Policy would be brought about and as a part of it police intervention in agitations by working classes, students and youth and others would be stopped.

The Election manifesto was attractive to the electorate. The CPI used the Drama troupe of KPAC to involve in electioneering. They could mobilize

substantial support of the people through their stage dramas like *Ningaleenne Communist Aakki* (You made me a Communist). Throughout Kerala the CPI campaign and squad work went on smoothly.

4.4.11 E.M.S. Ministry, 1957

After the elections, the CPI decided to send EMS with the list of ministers to meet the Governor. The meeting with the Governor lasted nearly two hours. It was speculated that the Governor B. Ramakrishna Rao was trying his level best to create obstacles to the formation of the Communist Ministry as he himself was a Congressman and all the Congressmen, except Jawaharlal Nehru, were unhappy about the success of the CPI. Finally it was decided to hold the swearing in ceremony at 11.30 am on April 5, 1957. Surprisingly the time was shifted to 12.30. It was rumoured that this shift was to avoid the *Rahukalam*, an inauspicious time that extended up to 12 am on that day. Many wondered why the Communists revealed their faith in this cult.

4.5 AGITATION AGAINST E.M.S. MINISTRY

The swearing in ceremony was held at the lawns of the Raj Bhavan and public was allowed to witness the installation of the world's first Communist Party Government that came through the ballot box. Sankaranarayanan Thampi was elected as the Speaker. The Opposition leader was P.T. Chacko of the Congress Party. Within a few days of the formation of the Communist ministry, Shriman Narayan, General Secretary of the Indian National Congress issued a statement that Kerala had started witnessing breakdown of law and order and this was spreading fast throughout the State endangering the peace, security and livelihood of ordinary masses. He attributed this to the "Cell Rule" the Communists were establishing. Following this, the ex-Chief Minister of Kerala, Panampally Govinda Menon announced that the Communist Ministry would not last even six months. The Congress came out with written allegations against the Communist ministry. The Communists, on the other hand, were engaged in making a critical assessment of the poll results and trends to identify strong and weak spots and in mobilizing and networking Peasants, Farm Workers, Factory workers, Youth, Students and Workers belonging to unorganised sector.

It was reported, as mentioned earlier, that in the Congress Party all with the exception of Jawaharlal Nehru were totally opposed to the decision to permit the Communists to form a government in Kerala. Nehru and the then

President Dr. Rajendra Prasad stood firm saying that in democracy the Party which enjoyed a majority should be allowed to form the government. U.N. Dhebar, the Congress President, Shriman Narayan, the Congress General Secretary, Ashoka Mehta, the Socialist leader and many others could not resist the temptation of expressing their displeasure on the Communist Government in Kerala.

4.5.1 Andhra Rice Deal

Soon in the floor of the Assembly and outside, a number of allegations against the Ministers were raised. A major allegation was against the Food Minister, K.C. George, a veteran of the Punnappra-Vayalar Struggle. Kerala was well known as a food deficit state, hardly producing half of its requirements. When there was shortage of food grains, mainly rice, slogans like "*Ari tharatha, Thuni tharatha, Pany tharatha Sarkar thulayatte*" (Down Down the Government that does not give Rice, Cloth and Jobs") were raised. Shortages led to black marketing and hoarding by merchants. The Communist Government expanded the network of ration shops. The INTUC and the Congress conducted a Food March from Aroor to Thiruvananthapuram. The other parties like the PSP and RSP joined the agitation by holding marches and offering *Satyagraha* before the Government Secretariat. One prominent slogan of those days was "Ari evide, Thuni evide, Parayu Parayu Namboodiri" ("Where is the Rice and Cloth, Namboodiri ?").

K.C. George, the Food Minister, along with top party leaders like A.K. Gopalan, approached the Central government and represented Kerala's case and sought help from it to solve the acute food problem in the State. Since no help from the Central Government came to the rescue of the State, the EMS ministry decided to procure rice and wheat directly from Andhra, Tamil Nadu and Punjab and as a part of this entered into an agreement with one Sriramulu and Company. The Opposition parties used this to launch their attack against the Ministry. They alleged large-scale corruption saying that this procurement of rice through a company had brought considerable financial gains to the Communist Party and also to K.C. George, the Food Minister. He was thus accused in the so-called Andhra Rice Scandal and the opposition demanded action against him. EMS denied all charges of corruption and came forward to appoint an Enquiry Commission headed by Justice P.T. Raman Nair. The Report of the Commission gave a clean chit to K.C. George and the Government. The Andhra Rice Scandal was the first salvo fired by the opposition, which was determined to bring down the Communist Government by hook or crook.

4.5.2 Controversial Bills

The EMS Ministry being progressive was determined to go ahead with legislations on Land Reforms, Education and Industrial Relations and introduced the Land Reforms Bill, Education Bill and the Industrial Relations Bill. The Land Reforms Bill was meant to abolish intermediaries in land, protect tenancy rights, fix fair rent, impose ceiling on land holding, distribute surplus land to landless and also to confer ownership rights to *Kudikidappukars* (landless who were permitted to stay in landlord's land). K.R. Gowri introduced the Bill. The Education Bill introduced by Professor Joseph Mundassery was a bold piece of legislation meant to impose social control on private educational institutions, to unify school fees, and, also make direct payment of salaries to private school teachers. The Industrial Relations Bill introduced by T.V. Thomas gave importance to promotion of Trade Union rights, collective bargaining, voluntary arbitration, bipartite industrial relations and minimum bonus, treated as deferred wages and it envisaged curbing of discretionary rights of employers to shut down their units, declare lay off etc. without prior permission from the Government. These Bills sparked off bitter protests from the opposition parties, landlords, private school managements, communal organizations like the NSS and SNDP and also from Church leaders, employers, estate owners and Companies, and all the upper class elites. They alleged that the Communists and their Party Cells were putting the Kerala State and the people there under Stalinist dictatorial rule.

4.5.3 Inter-Union Rivalry (1950-57)

Division in the left movement, particularly among the left trade unions, was a source of inspiration for those dreaming to bring down the EMS ministry. The formation of Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) by N. Sreekanan Nair and later the emergence of Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) were aimed at fighting the Communists. Sreekanan Nair, who started his trade union work in Alappuzha, had been deputed to Kollam to mobilize the workers there. It was reported that he had differences with the top leaders of the Communist Party and for some time he was considered as a serious threat to T.V. Thomas for a top position. Then there emerged the group of radicals who took a different ideological line. Anyway after he reached Kollam, Sreekanan Nair started a direct fight with the Communists particularly when M.N. Govindan Nair came there to organize communist led trade unions. This led to open confrontation between the communists and the RSP groups in the industrial belt of Kollam, Chavara, Punalur, and, Kottarakkara, covering major industries like Cashew, Minerals, Cotton Mills, Paper Mill and others.

In this context, the INTUC unions also came on to the scene with giant leaders like C.M. Stephen.

Considering the big damage that inter-union rivalry among left unions would create on the working class, T.V. Thomas took the bold initiative to negotiate with N. Sreekantan Nair to arrive at a Unity Formula. This came to be known as the TV - Sreekantan formula.

4.5.4 TV - Sreekantan Formula

According to this formula, there would only be one union in an undertaking to represent the entire body of workmen there. The method of secret ballot would be used to find out the most representative union. Whenever an industrial dispute, irrespective of their affiliations or political leanings, would present a common united front. The sincere implementation of the TV-Sreekantan Formula would have marked a very significant turning point in the trade union development in the State. But that was not to be. Later Kerala acquired the bad reputation for inter-union rivalry.

There appeared blatant violation of the Formula from day one. Strong opposition also erupted between the Communists and the RSP workers in the trade union field in spite of their top two leaders formally agreeing to unity. This became apparent when the RSP formed a new union at Government Press, Thiruvananthapuram, where the AITUC led Thiruvananthapuram Press Workers' Union was under a ban. Contrary to the spirit of the Unity Formula, TV Thomas had formed a rival union, the Commercial Staff Union against the Mercantile Employees' Association, which was one of the oldest registered trade unions in the State. This trend grew and left parties the CPI and RSP began competing to form rival unions in many other undertakings and areas.

In 1952, even before the EMS Ministry came to power, the inter-union rivalry was spreading. For instance, in April 1952 N. Sreekantan Nair started a hunger strike before the Government Secretariat demanding an immediate settlement of many grievances of the working class. This was indeed a calculated move to boost the vitality of UTUC affiliated RSP controlled unions. Questions relating to Chavara Minerals, three to four months old strikes in cashew and raw husk industries, violation of industrial tribunal awards by employers, union repression and discharge and victimization etc. were raised by Sreekantan Nair as provocation for his hunger strike.

T.V. Thomas openly criticized the adoption of the style of "mass militancy" in trade unionism by RSP leadership to force settlement of industrial disputes, though personally he thought it could be used as a last

resort. There started a debate on “mass militancy” between T.V. and T.K. Divakaran. TV argued that mass militancy which was inevitable in the late forties and early fifties had no relevance in the late fifties. He felt that it was time that trade unions agreed to negotiate for settlement of disputes.

4.5.5 New Developments

The hunger strike of Sreekantan Nair lasted 10 days, but during it, new developments emerged in the trade union movement. The RSP was reported to have led an attack on the Communist led Central Travancore Stevedores Union. “*Pathal Rashtreeyam*” (“Baton Politics”) became the primary instrument of union activity. The Communists attempted to capture the Chavara based trade unions, which from their very inception had been led by the RSP. The leaders of RSP accused the Communists for starting rival paper unions while their top leader Sreekantan Nair was holding a hunger strike at the Secretariat gates and fighting for the legitimate rights of the working class.

4.5.6 Police Action at Pasumala

Following an attack on the European Manager of an estate at Pasumala by about 500 workers, police was forced to intervene and it made a lathi-charge and fired a few rounds to bring the situation under control. At that time Pasumala Estate Union was under the control of the INTUC. It threatened direct action, if the Government failed to order a judicial enquiry. The Pasumala Struggle was started largely for getting a guarantee on the supply of Rice to estate workers at least once a week. Police intervention in industrial disputes was considered as a bad precedent and soon it became an issue for debate in Kerala. It was alleged that the action at Pasumala was similar to the one taken by the Dewan’s regime.

There was general unrest among labour in the State during 1950-57. The employees of State Transport Department agitated for higher bonus. The slogan “Job or food” had given way to “Job or Jail”. The problem of unemployment in the State was acute. Traditional industries like coir and cashew were showing signs of decline, threatening the livelihood of hundreds and thousands of families. Police assaults on working class marches and agitations were reported. Legitimate trade union activity was not permitted in Mundakkayam plantations, Toddy Tapping centres of Bharanikkavu and Anthikkad, Textile centres of Balaramapuram and Cashew centres in Kollurvilai. At Anthikkad Communists were strong and they had even named the town as Vayalar. It was reported that these Communists at one point had

gone to the extent of imposing a fine on a shop contractor for anti-union activities.

4.5.7 The Kollam Convention

Taking stock of the worsening labour situation in the State, trade union leaders called for a state level convention at Kollam. This convention among other things demanded: (a) Alappuzha and Cherthala to be declared as famine areas, (b) Release of all political detainees, (c) reopening of all industrial establishments that had been closed. Delegates of 250 trade unions attended the Convention. The Convention took serious note of the collusion between the employers and the Police in handling industrial disputes and allegedly turning them into law and order issues. It asked the Government to withdraw all police cases involving industrial disputes and guarantee legitimate trade union rights. The Convention thus helped to revive trade union activity and also the spirit of leftist unity.

Following the Kollam Convention, a hunger march from Cherthala to Thiruvananthapuram was organized under the leadership of Sreekantan Nair. Many feared a Second Vayalar and the Government of the day threatened to take stringent action including arrest and lock up custody of prominent union leaders. Serious allegations were raised against the labour minister of the State for collecting bribes from employers for deploying police force to help them in dealing with workers. Due to labour troubles the Titanium Factory in Thiruvananthapuram was closed. In the Mundakkayam area the estate owners imported Tamil labour as substitutes for agitating native workers. *Goondas* were freely deployed and this invited retaliation by workers. In order to minimize the intervention of police in such matters, the need for a strong Labour Department was felt.

4.5.8 Mattancherry Firing

During the short lived PSP Ministry led by Pattom Thanu Pillai, there was a police firing on agitating workers at Mattancherry. Started as a dispute between the *Mattancherry Thuramukha Thozhilali Union* (Port Workers' Union) and Contractors, it resulted incidents of criminal assault. The police was ordered to intervene to bring the situation under control. A few suspects were arrested. Workers pelting stones and soda bottles at the police obstructed them. The police then used force and resorted to firing. There was no demand for judicial enquiry and the dispute came to an abrupt end, though the tension generated by it continued to prevail for a longer period.

During these days many industrial establishments like Kundara Aluminium Industries, Thrissur Sitaram Mills, Vanchi Textiles, Chavara Minerals and Travancore Titanium Products Ltd had been closed down. This was the background scenario when the EMS ministry came to power. Naturally, when it introduced its controversial legislative bills on land reforms, education and industrial relations and also a statement on Police Policy to the effect that they would not intervene in industrial disputes contrary to the past convention, opposition forces regrouped and revealed their determination to bring the downfall of the first elected Communist Government in the State.

4.5.9 Kilikollur Incident

On November 18, 1957 at Kilikollur, the cashew industry workers under the control of Communists were conducting a strike and there the police of the EMS Government came with their lathis/batons and rifles. The workers thought that the police would not intervene since it was an industrial strike and not a law and order issue. Police, however, did a lathi charge. A leading Communist, Polikarp was injured in it. The local Communists and the trade union leaders asked the EMS Government, considered as their Government, to suspend the police officers involved in the lathi charge. The EMS Government first ignored this, but even went to issue a press release saying that there was no lathi charge at Kilikollur as alleged. But the workers and their leaders stood firm and at the end the Government had to order an enquiry.

4.5.10 Chandanathoppu Firing

The next serious incident occurred at Chandanathoppu²¹. At the Hindustan Cashew Factory there the work force comprised of 42 male and 600 female workers and they were members of a UTUC led union. This union alleged that its legitimate demands had remained unfulfilled for a long time. The factory in question carried only tinning and packing operations while processed cashew nut kernels were brought there from their other branches. In July 1958, the workers went on strike and picketed the gates to prevent the transportation of packed tins from the factory. When the employer began to incur heavy losses on account of this, he sought police help. An attack on the factory manager was alleged. Finally, when the situation was out of control, the Revenue Divisional Officer (RDO) had to order the police to fire on the strikers that killed two workers.

The State Council of the CPI was in session when the news of the police firing at Chandanathoppu reached it. The Council members were shocked. Their immediate reaction was as follows (i) Condemn the police firing, (ii) Institute an immediate judicial enquiry, (iii) Extend financial support to the families of the brave martyrs, (iv) Publicly apologize for the misdeeds of the police, (v) Declare that while Communists were in power similar incidents would not be allowed to happen again. But unfortunately, after these immediate reactions, the State Council continued to deliberate on them and finally took an entirely different stand. According to this, the State Council described the Chandanathoppu incident as a sequel to the organized attempt by anti-communist forces in the State to denigrate the Communists and it accused the communal forces (NSS, SNDP and Catholic Church) for colluding with Left and Right Social Democrats belonging to the Socialist Party and the RSP. The State Council feared that if the Government took action against the Police, they would lose their spirit and that would indirectly strengthen anti-communist forces. This would pose a serious threat to the Communist Government. So the State Council of the CPI passed a resolution justifying police firing at Chandanathoppu.

K. Damodaran, the CPI leader, was deputed to Chandanathoppu to explain to the workers and clarify Government's stand on the issue and also to accuse the RSP for pushing the workers into an irresponsible strike and picketing at the factory gates. He was directed to highlight that it was the RSP, which was responsible for the killing of the two workers. Though Damodaran could not digest the Party's stand, as a loyal comrade he agreed to go to Chandanathoppu and execute the Party's wishes. It was reported that though Damodaran had the reputation of being an effective public speaker, his speech at Chandanathoppu was a poor replica, since he felt that he was performing a job against his conscience.

The Government instituted an enquiry by Justice Sankaran into the Chandanathoppu incident. In his report Justice Sankaran deprecated the general loss of respect to law and order on the part of students, workers and public. The incident naturally aggravated the confrontation between the CPI and RSP. Before the heat on the Chandanathoppu incident subsided, there was trouble in Munnar.

4.5.11 Munnar Firing

In October 1958, the INTUC union in the Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company had signed a Long Term Agreement with the management, covering a number of disputed issues. Those not settled were referred to adjudication.

Those unions that opposed this settlement clashed with loyal workers when the latter reported for work. Strike by non-INTUC unions spread like wild fire through out Munnar. On October 24, the police was forced to open fire. As a result of clashes, a few police personnel suffered serious injuries. Soon the strike spread to estates in Waynad in the North.

To protest against police action and also to safeguard the legitimate right to organize and conduct union activities, trade unions led by RSP, Congress and PSP initiated a general strike. About two and a half lakh workers in 500 estates struck work. Among others, the workers at Kannan Dewan Company had demand bonus that cost the company about Rs.2.5 lakhs. The Company naturally refused to pay it. But it soon found that due to the general strike, it was losing about Rs.40 lakhs a day.

The INTUC had a near monopoly in Munnar estates. Veterans like B.K. Nair and K. Karunakaran had mobilized the workers there. It was at a later stage that the AITUC attempted to enter the scene. This naturally led to frequent clashes. The AITUC activists were Rosamma Punnoose, M. Sankaran Kutty and C.A. Kurian. They had to counter stiff resistance and threats to their lives from the INTUC unions and their *goondas*. INTUC unions were always friendly to estate managements and willing to play the role of blacklegs when most other unions agitated for genuine rights.

A.K. Gopalan alleged that petty policemen were falling prey to the moneybags of employers. There was also an apparent lack of unity among unions so that issues of common interest to labour were viewed from divergent political angles. Another top Communist leader, M.N. Govindan Nair alleged that the Munnar Police action was a calculated move against the EMS ministry and claimed that the police and a few government officials were disloyal to the established elected Government of the day.

There was a strong demand for an immediate tripartite conciliation meeting to settle the issues involved in the general strike in the plantations. The State Labour Minister wanted labour and managements to sign a three-year negotiated peace settlement. As the failure of such a meeting became imminent, the INTUC suggested that the whole matter should be referred to a National Tribunal for adjudication. T.V, the Labour Minister was totally opposed to it. But as the prospects of a conciliation settlement became stronger, the general strike was called off. The strike had caused a loss of Rs.50 lakhs in wages and Rs.1.32 crores in tea and Rs.15 lakhs in rubber production.

4.5.12 Struggle against Education Reforms

Reforms in education sector were a contentious issue even before Independence. In the 1930s, most of the schools in Malabar were under private management and only a few were under the control of the District Board. The teachers in private schools were subjected to all kinds of exploitation. Some private managements treated them as their slaves. The managers diverted the government grant, meant for payment of teacher salaries, for other purposes. Teachers were asked to give signed receipts for the full salary but they were paid only a fraction of the amount and those who questioned this unlawful practice were dismissed from service. Job security was totally non-existent. Naturally this led to active mobilization of teachers and staged several epoch making struggles. In fact, the schoolteachers' movement went parallel with the tenants' movement and workers' movement each mutually reinforcing the other. The British administration and school managers in Malabar joined hands in destroying the teachers' movement. They charged false police cases against teacher activists and unleashed physical violence against them. But soon the teachers' movement became a mass movement and secured their legitimate rights and benefits through concerted struggles.

In the Cochin State, schools run by Christian managements, some directly by the Church, out numbered government schools. There also, the teaching and non-teaching employees were exploited by managements. Naturally, the teachers formed associations and started agitation for security of service, regulation of workload, payment of decent salary and the right to organize. A leading figure of the Cochin State Teachers' Movement was Professor Joseph Mundassery who later became the Education Minister in the EMS Ministry of 1957. He was instrumental in formulating the controversial Education Bill. Having worked in the St. Thomas College, Thrissur, he had first hand knowledge and experience of College Teachers who were underpaid and victimized by private management.

The situation in Travancore was not as worse as in Malabar and Cochin. The Church, communal organizations like NSS and SNDP and a few individuals controlled the bulk of educational institutions in Travancore. The Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer had introduced a Bill on September 12, 1945 to bring about some reforms in the education system. His objective was not sincere, since the Bill was to be used for destroying the State Congress. When the State Congress opposed the Dewan, Christians withdrew support to the Congress. The Dewan thus succeeded in creating a split in the State Congress. On October 8, 1945 the Dewan promulgated the Travancore Primary Education Act containing provisions for reforms in that sector. But it

could not be implemented as Sir C.P. was forced to leave the State after a physical assault on him.

The EMS Ministry succeeded in getting its Education Bill passed in the Assembly on July 7, 1957 and it was sent to the President of India for his signature. The President returned the Bill suggesting certain changes. With these changes, the Bill was again passed and it got the approval of the President in December 1958. The Act envisaged that the State Public Service Commission should hereafter do all appointments in Private Schools, since the Government was meeting all salary expenses. The Catholic Church and school managements reacted violently to this. Soon the NSS and the SNDP joined the issue. The CPI directed its leaders and activists to do counter propaganda among the people and highlight the benefits that might accrue to parents, teachers and students. By mid 1958, the struggle against the Education Act became strong. As early as June 1957 the Catholic Congress had held a convention at Changanacherry and passed a Resolution against the Bill. Cherian Kappan spoke at the convention and threatened the Government that Kerala would soon witness a re-enactment of the bloody Hungarian Revolution. On June 28, 1957 the all-Kerala Bishops Conference was held. On the day the President gave his assent to the Act passed by the State Assembly, *Deepika*, the leading Christian daily published its issue of July 13, 1957 carrying a blank editorial with only the title "Education Bill".

At the early stages, only the Catholic Church and school managements were in the front line of struggle. Later Mannath Padmanabhan, the leading light of the NSS extended full support to the struggle. Joseph Mundassery also had formulated a new Kerala University Bill that aimed at social control on private colleges. One reason for Mannam's enmity to the EMS Ministry was its unwillingness to oblige the NSS with sanction to start an Engineering College at Palakkad. The introduction of the Land Reforms Bill by K.R. Gowri brought strong reaction from Mannam. The announcement about setting up of an Administrative Reforms Committee headed by the Chief Minister created strong reaction from the SNDP Yogam. The committee had Prof. Joseph Mundassery, N.E.S. Raghavachari, Prof. V.K.N. Menon, P.S. Nataraja Pillai and G. Parameswara Pillai as members and H.D. Malaviya as Member Secretary. Since there was no member representing the Ezhava Community, the SNDP protested. The issue on economic criteria for reservation was raised and it was later blown into the controversy over "Creamy Layer".

4.5.13 The Liberation Struggle

Kerala polity was at a boiling point with the problems of food shortage, strikes by anti-communist students groups, particularly the Kerala Students Union (KSU), protest marches by Private School Managers and Catholic Bishops, division in the trade union movement and protests against police intervention, lathi charge and firing on the workers, and, marches and demonstrations by NSS, SNDP and Muslim organizations²². Two leading figures emerged on the scene. They were Brother Vadakkan (Later becoming Father Vadakkan) a priest and Mannath Padmanabhan, the NSS Leader.

The Anti-Communist Front (ACF) had started functioning in Kerala even in 1952 when the Communist Party won a few seats in the elections. The ACF was determined to wage a War of the Holy Cross against Communists. Brother Vadakkan was the fiery spirit behind it. He was not only a great organizer and orator but surprisingly had faith on “Class War” and “Bloody Revolution”. In his autobiography he had stated that when democratic methods failed to achieve economic independence, one should go for bloody revolution using force. He was running a controversial newspaper called “*Thozhilali*” (Worker). He organized study classes and summer camps for his followers as part of the ACF programmes. By 1954 Father Vadakkan had set up about 1700 regional units of ACF. The ACF had formed a regiment of yellow caps. Though the Church extended full support to Father Vadakkan, they discontinued that when the Father was giving equal importance to anti-communism and anti-capitalism. The anti-capitalist speeches of Father Vadakkan provoked the rich and upper classes including the merchant community and feudal landlords. The Church felt that Father Vadakkan could not be trusted in protecting the interests of the Church. He was both an anti-communist but also an anti-capitalist. He also opposed certain dictates of the Church too.

An attempt was made by the anti-communist lobby to buy Kattakkada Balakrishna Pillai, the MLA from Aryanad to their side. In this political game, a major role was played by Kulathinkkal Pothen, a former communist sympathizer and Secretary of Thiruvananthapuram Taluk Committee of the CPI. During the ministry of Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai, Pothen abandoned his links with the CPI. Kattakkada Balakrishna Pillai was a veteran who led single handedly a struggle against the malpractices in the Kattakkada market and he was in poor economic circumstances. Because of his popularity as a fighter for justice, he had won the elections in Aryanad. But now he was offered Rs.1 lakh to do floor crossing in the legislature (which was not illegal in those days), but Pillai did not oblige. The CPI had to launch a media campaign and

house visits to expose the strategies of the unholy alliance of anti-communists in the State.

4.5.14 Entry of Mannath Padmanabhan

The first trumpet of the *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle) was blown on December 15, 1958 when a meeting of private school managers at Kottayam Mammen Mappila Hall and presided over by Mannath Padmanabhan passed an unanimous Resolution registering strong protest against the passage of the Education Act. The meeting was attended by the old veteran of the State Congress, Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai. Soon the Anti-Communist Front expanded to include various elements and groups like Private School Managers, Bishops, Priests and Nuns, NSS, SNDP, Newspaper groups like *Malayala Manorama*, *Deepika*, *Deenabandhu*, *Desabandhu* and the weekly *Kerala*. It was alleged that the global Moral Rearmament Agency (MRA) and the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were supporting the anti-communist movement, since the Communist Party coming to power through the ballot box was unbelievable in a democratic system and it contained hidden threats to capitalism and landlordism. Bishop Parekkattil issued a directive to all faithful to get ready for a fight to save the Church and Schools from the stranglehold of the Communists. Democratic publications brought out a large number of booklets, 27 in Malayalam and 8 in English and the authors included T.O. Bava, M. Govindan, Sukumar Azhikode, M.K. Sanu, M.V. Devan, C.J. Thomas, Kalakkal Bhaskaran, N.J. Thankappan, K.G. Gopalakrishnan, Vayalar Ravi, George Tharakan, K.K. Madhavan etc²³. It is interesting to note that among the above, a few turned pro-communist in their later life and M.K. Sanu, a former professor of Malayalam in Government College service stood for elections and became an MLA with CPI (M) support.

4.5.15 One Anna Boat Agitation

Mannath Padmanabhan was unanimously chosen as the Captain to lead the Liberation Struggle to success. The PSP, Congress and Muslim League extended full support and a Joint Action Council was formed. It decided to stage picketing of Collectories from June 13 and Schools from June 15. The Congress supported Students Congress under the leadership of A.K. Antony picketed State Transport Buses and at Ernakulam he launched the famous “One Anna” boat agitation demanding that students should be allowed travel in boats at a standard rate of one anna per trip. The struggle soon became very violent in many places and police resorted to lathi charge. That was more than

enough for the anti-communist forces to highlight how brutal was the Communist Government of EMS while dealing with popular/mass movements and agitations. On March 18, 1959 the Catholic Bishops informed the Chief Minister in writing that they were going to close down all the schools under their management indefinitely. It was reported that in many church premises, armed drills and training were being arranged for the faithful to enable them to physically safeguard their churches and Schools from Communist backlash.

4.5.16 Demand for Central Intervention

Congress started demanding the intervention of the Central Government and appealed to Prime Minister Nehru and the President to dismiss the Communist Government in Kerala. R. Sankar was the President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC). But it was reported that Nehru was not impressed by the arguments made by the KPCC. But his daughter Indira Gandhi held a different view partly because she was made to believe the accusations raised by Congressmen from Kerala. On June 12, 1959 KPCC observed Black Day and submitted its charge sheet against the EMS Ministry. Archbishop Joseph Attipetti held a special prayer on that day calling for the end of Communist Rule. Wide publicity was given to the alleged breakdown of law and order in the State, police atrocities and loss of life and property of anti-communists. On June 29, 1959 the Central Congress Parliamentary Party discussed the Charge Sheet prepared by the KPCC and expressed grave concern on the situation in Kerala. The Chief Minister, EMS, addressed a Press Conference to say that the so-called Liberation Struggle was really a communal uprising and was against the interests of the masses who had their faith in democracy, equity and social justice and therefore the struggle would be put down by the State even if it meant use of utmost force. Even the RSP, a leftist party, joined the liberation struggle as evidenced by the speech made by its leader T.K. Divakaran at a meeting held at Edava on June 12, 1959. RSP was waiting for giving a strong blow to the communists, as it was not happy with the growth of the influence and popularity of the AITUC and CPI among the working class and trade unions not only in Kollam but also elsewhere.

The KPCC asked EMS to resign and go. If the EMS ministry continued after June 22, 1959, the KPCC declared, that it would see that this Government stopped functioning. On June 12 there was a statewide *hartal*. It was followed by a big confrontation with the police at Angamaly resulting in police firing, killing seven people and wounding more than thirty. According to one version, most of the toddy shops at Angamaly range were under the control of Taluk Toddy Tappers Cooperative Society and as a result the

Toddy shop contractors had turned supporters of Prohibition to defeat the former. Following an altercation between shop employees and a customer, toddy tapping trees and a shop were destroyed by a mob. The mob marched to the police station when the police arrested a few troublemakers. When the police failed to stem the violent mob, they had to use force and fire at them. The Congress President U.N. Dhebar visited Angamaly and issued a statement condemning the police action. But according to the version given by Father Vadakkan, the violent mob consisted of people engaged in the Liberation Struggle and most of them were drunk when they marched to the police station.

When the schools reopened on June 15, 1959 after the mid summer vacation, only government schools started functioning while private schools remained closed. Government was forced to close down the government schools soon due to picketing by anti-communists. Picketing of schools at Vettukad and Pulluvila in the coastal area of Thiruvananthapuram turned violent and police was forced to resort to lathi charge and firing, killing four persons namely John Fernandez, John Netto, Michael Yacob and Yajappan. On June 22, 1959 the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru reached Thiruvananthapuram to make an on the spot assessment of the situation in the State. The leaders of the Liberation Struggle were preparing to convince Nehru the rising anti-communist wave by organizing mass demonstrations, marches, placards etc. On June 23 Mannam, Kalathil Velayudhan Nair and M.P. Chandrasekhara Pillai met Nehru at Raj Bhavan and presented their case. Mannam demanded the Centre to dismiss the Communist Government. The Congress wanted the Centre to force the resignation of the government of the State, failing which the Centre should dismiss it and impose President's Rule. Nehru found the situation fluid but did not give any promise to any one who met him.

Police lathi charge and firing continued for several days. All the communal forces had come together for a final assault on the Communists. On July 8 K.M. Munshi reached Kerala to make a follow up assessment. He prepared a fourteen page document entitled "Notes on the Kerala Situation" a virulent indictment of the Communist Rule in Kerala. Before writing this he had met most leaders of the anti-communist Liberation Struggle but conveniently avoided in meeting any one from the Government side.

4.5.17 The Flory Episode

The situation got worse when police opened fire at a violent mob in the coastal hamlet of Cheriyathura in Thiruvananthapuram on July 3, killing two

men and one woman. The woman Flory was pregnant and a mother of five children. This was more than enough for the Liberation Struggle leaders to cry for the blood of Communists. They raised the popular slogan “*Thekku thekkoru deasthu, Arabikadalin theorathu, Flory ennoru garbhiniye, Ayyo, Ayyo ningal konnille, Ningal chuttu karichille*” (“In the south of the coast of Arabian Sea, did you not kill and burn Flory, the pregnant woman”). Thousands of women were drawn into the Liberation Struggle. Even Christian nuns took to the street along with priests and students from Seminaries.

On July 4 a huge gathering of women, mostly Christians, led by the wife of the ex-speaker and Congress Leader R.V. Thomas took out a march in Kottayam on their way to picket the Collectorate. The NSS leader Mannathu Padmanabhan and PSP President Pattom Thanu Pillai joined them. In most churches after the regular prayers, the priests used to deliver anti-communist speeches to instigate the faithful. Picketing was held before all the Collectorates. The Communists could not shut their eyes to this and remain silent. They also activated their propaganda machinery, held rallies and marches all over India and party leaders Ajoy Ghosh and S.A. Dange spoke to people to dispel the untruths that the anti-communists were circulating. The INTUC unions decided to oppose the Communist Government after their Mattancherry Convention. By end of June, the Muslim League declared that it was joining the Liberation Struggle. The SNDP, however, declared that its members could decide their stand freely.

4.5.18 The Final Assault

At the end of July 1959, the Action Council on the Liberation Struggle declared their final phase of assault saying that thousands would march towards the Secretariat to pull down the Communist Government. Torches were lit from the resting places of the martyrs at Angamaly, Cheriyathura, and Vettukad and thousands carrying them reached the grounds of the Mahatma Gandhi College (run by the NSS) in Thiruvananthapuram. A mass meeting was held under the presidency of Mannath Padmanabhan and leaders of various organizations addressed it. After this, they marched to Raj Bhavan demanding the dismissal of the Communist Ministry before August 9. If neither this nor the resignation of the ministry happened before the deadline, lakhs of marchers would storm the Government Secretariat. From July 1959, traders and merchants would be asked to shut down their shops. A delegation of the Muslim League led by C.H. Muhammed Koya met the President and the Prime Minister and demanded the dismissal of the Communist Government. Mannam and R. Sankar declared “Save India - Save Kerala from Communists”.

Mannath Padmanabhan accepted an invitation from the MRA and spoke at their headquarters near Geneva about his life mission to destroy the Communists in Kerala. By that time he had got the coveted award and citation “*Bharatha Kesari*”. Nehru was sympathetic to the EMS ministry, since it was an elected one and represented popular choice. He always wanted to protect, safeguard and respect democracy. But his daughter Indira Gandhi took a different view. She made a quick visit to Kerala to assess the situation and reported to the Central Government that there was total breakdown of law and order in the State that justified the use of Article 356 of the Constitution, dismiss the Government and impose President’s Rule in the State.

4.6 DISMISSAL OF E.M.S. MINISTRY

On July 31, 1959 the President of India dismissed the Communist Government as a sequel to the one and a half month long Liberation Struggle. What was the balance sheet? Police fired at seven places killing 17 persons. At 139 places police held lathi charges, injuring 332 seriously and leaving 1373 with minor injuries. About 1.5 lakhs including 40000 women were put in jail. Besides, there were a few political murders. Those who sang about the tragedy of Flory, the pregnant woman killed in police firing, soon forgot her five destitute children. There were fireworks and celebrations by the leaders and members of the Action Council of Liberation Struggle. What were the underlying compulsions for the dismissal of the EMS Government? Let us recount them here. The Communists decided to introduce reforms in the field of agrarian relations (ban evictions, impose ceiling on land holdings, redistribution of land to landless) education sector (restructuring Universities, guarantee job security to teachers in private schools and colleges, preparation and printing of text books by government and bring primary schools under government control), industrial relations (promote bipartism and tripartism, guarantee fair wages and minimum wages, promote conciliation and collective bargaining, ensure minimum bonus based on the principle of deferred wages), strengthen public distribution system to ensure food security (procure rice and wheat from other states) and promote toddy tappers’ cooperative societies to run toddy shops directly (something which the LDF government did in early 2001).

The Communist Government was also accused of causing a breakdown of law and order by promoting Party Cells and releasing a number of pro-communist jailbirds from prison. The Liberation Struggle unfortunately strengthened communal forces and their organizations by making them actively involved in the politics of the State. The Christian Church and Communal Organizations like the Nair Service Society (NSS), Sri Narayana

Dharma Parishad (SNDP) and the Muslim League began to emerge as major forces in determining who should rule Kerala. To this day they continue to dominate the outcome of elections and naturally all the political parties including the left parties cannot but play the communal card, if they wanted to win the elections.

4.6.1 The General Elections, 1960

Six months after the dismissal of the Communist Government, general elections were announced to take place on February 1, 1960. Talks on forming political alliances and on adjustment of seats had started as early as November 1959. Top all-India Congress leaders like U.N. Dhebar, Ashok Mehta, Suchetha Kripalani, Sriman Narayan, Sadiq Ali and others reached Thiruvananthapuram and they soon found that they had to encounter Pattom Thanan Pillai of the PSP and N. Sreekanth Nair of the RSP. The RSP promised that it would fight the Communists. Finally a compromise was arrived to form a Three-Party United Front of anti-communists and contest 125 of 126 seats in the elections. The share of seats was Congress-80, PSP-33, and, Muslim League-12. The CPI put up 126 of which 108 were party members and others, Independents, supported by them. In the election campaigns, the Congress-led United Front adopted strategies that were similar to the ones used by the CPI alliance. The Church and the priests actively campaigned for the United Front. Father Vadakkan was able to deploy, 6000 women volunteers for election work. Anticipating election violence large contingents of para-military forces were sent to the State.

The United Front Secured 94 seats, while CPI had to be content with 23. The RSP that contested independently without joining any alliance lost heavily, as it was nearly wiped out. Though the CPI faced one of its worst defeats between the 1957 and 1960 elections the total number of votes got by them was reported to have increased from 20.59 lakhs to 35.50 lakhs. The success of the United Front was obviously due to the support it received from the communal forces and naturally in ministry formation their influence could not be kept away. In the post-election bargaining, the Congress, the biggest party, was forced to allow Pattom Thanan Pillai of the PSP (which got only 20 seats) to become the Chief Minister, while remaining contended with having the Deputy Chief Minister ship for their leader R. Sankar. P.T. Chacko who received the support of the Church put up a good fight against R. Sankar to secure the position of the leader of legislature group of the Congress MLAs. The Muslim League was given the Speaker ship and it went to K.M. Seethi Sahib who passed away before completing his tenure and the position then went to C.H. Muhammed Koya.

Very soon after the formation of the ministry, there were dissensions within the P.S.P and opposition to Pattom for holding the post of the Chief minister as well as that of the President of the Party simultaneously, which was contrary to the Party Constitution. R. Sankar too was unhappy against the dictatorial posture of Pattom in the day today functioning of the UF Coalition Government. It was alleged that Pattom was bent on weakening the Congress and resorting to undemocratic means to achieve his aim. When the conflict between the PSP and the Congress became open, V.V. Giri, the Governor intervened. Kerala was going to the election to the Parliament in 1962. The Congress agreed to join PSP to form an alliance, but kept out the Muslim League from it. The Muslim League then withdrew from the United Front and decided to support the CPI. This was also a part of the impact created by the split in the All India unit of the Muslim League. The PSP faced a split with a faction emerging with B.D. Varghese as its leader. The visit of Lal Bahadur Sastry to Kerala was intended to bring about closer understanding between the Congress and the other United Front partners. An outcome of this was the offer of the post of Governor of Punjab to Pattom Thanu Pillai. Pattom, who in the past had described Governors as Rubber Stamps, fell for the offer and on his part created a jolt in Kerala politics by submitting his resignation that sounded the death knell of the PSP in the State. R. Sankar then took over as the new Chief Minister.

The scenario witnessed the PSP, RSP and Muslim League MLAs turning against R. Sankar. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the leader of Opposition moved a no-confidence motion against the Ministry on October 11, 1962. It was defeated. Following the Chinese attack on our northern borders in October 1962, the Government of India had to declare a National Emergency. A number of Communists were arrested as a precautionary measure. The Congress Party in Kerala began to see the emergence of petty groupism and the continuance of R. Sankar as the Chief Minister was questioned. C.K. Govindan Nair, the President of the KPCC, came out strongly against corruption by R. Sankar, the Chief Minister and K.A. Damodara Menon, the Industries Minister. The Ministers retaliated by raising allegations against C.K. Govindan Nair, which included the one that he was opening up the Congress Party for the infiltration by the Communists. These internal squabbles encouraged the CPI to table another motion of no-confidence, which also got defeated. Soon the Congress in Kerala split into two groups, the one led by R. Sankar (the Ezhava faction) and the other by C.K. Govindan Nair (the Nair faction). P.T. Chacko, however, decided to support R. Sankar. But P.T. Chacko who was made the Home Minister was forced to resign when his car that knocked down some people did not stop to take the injured to the hospital and this was raised as a serious issue of misconduct against him. Though Chacko wanted to take revenge on R. Sankar by fighting for the

Presidency of the Congress, K.C. Abraham defeated him in the contest. P.T. Chacko did not live long as he passed away on August 1, 1964.

The C.K. Govindan Nair group and R. Sankar group had several confrontations in Party meetings and outside. The newspapers controlled by the Communists brought out several allegations against Pattom, Sankar and K.A. Damodara Menon. Though the accused started legal actions against the papers, Pattom left for Punjab as Governor after withdrawing the cases filed by him. C.M. Stephen, a member of the C.K. Group and also the General Secretary came out openly against R. Sankar. The Central leaders were forced to intervene and suggested that K.P. Madhavan Nair was to be made the KPCC President. That did not work. Meanwhile, a large number of Congressmen like K.M. George, R. Balakrishna Pillai, K.R. Saraswathy Amma, C.M. Mathew, Kusumam Joseph, T.M. Dharma Raja Iyer, and, Vayala Idikkula expressed no confidence on R. Sankar. This prompted the CPI as well as the Muslim League to table separate motions of no-confidence in the Assembly. During the debate on the motions, charges and counter charges were hurled at each other by both ruling as well opposition parties. Those who backed K.M. George left the Congress and formed the Kerala Congress Party. When the no-confidence motion was passed, R. Sankar ministry resigned on September 10, 1964. Following this, as no one could prove a majority, Kerala once again came under President's Rule with R. Prasad as Advisor to the Governor.

4.6.2 Split in Political Parties

The mid 1960s witnessed a split emerging in most political parties in India and Kerala was no exception. The signs of a split in the CPI started appearing in mid 1960s and it was sparked off by the ideological differences among the leaders on the issue of intrusion of Chinese forces on the Indo-China border in 1958 and 1959. It was a time when the conflict between Soviet Union and China had come into the open. The Communists in India were a little confused about this. While some backed Moscow, others sided with Peking. The meeting of the Central Committee of the CPI met on September 26, 1959 to say that India should protect its territorial rights and at the same that the Party felt that the Chinese did not have imperialist ambitions. S.A. Dange made it clear that the CPI could not agree to the line taken by China and extended full support to the Central Government led by Jawaharlal Nehru. Though the National Council of the CPI approved the Dange line in its meeting held at Meerut on November 14, 1959, differences began to emerge by 1960. The Vijayawada meet of the 6th Party Congress held during April 7 - 10, 1961 discussed three important documents, namely

“Today’s Political Issues”, *“Draft Programme of the CPI”* and *“Radical Approach”*. The first was authored by Ajoy Ghosh, the second by S.A. Dange, P.C. Joshi and G. Adhikari, and the third by P. Ramamoorthy, and, Bhupesh Gupta. The third document was a radical piece and it promoted the theme “Sectarianism”. It was clear that a three-fold division within the CPI was inevitable. There were Rightists, Leftists and a few preferring to take a Middle Path.

On January 13, 1962 Ajoy Ghosh passed away and for the first time the Party decided to have a Chairman and chose S.A. Dange for that position. E.M.S. Namboodiripad became the General Secretary. It so happened that Dange had been the first and also the last Chairman. M.N. Govindan Nair from Kerala, also a leading trade unionist was elected to be a member of the Nine Member Secretariat. It was on October 25, 1962 that the President of India declared a National Emergency followed soon by the Defence of India Act. While the pro-Moscow members supported Government of India’s policy towards Chinese invasion, the pro-Peking group led by Jyothi Basu, P. Sudarayya and Harkishan Singh Surjeeth refused to accuse China for violation of India’s sovereignty. EMS and Bhupesh Gupta took the middle path. The Government of India did not like the stand taken by the pro-China Communists and ordered their arrest. In the process even EMS was not spared.

In the meeting of the National Council held during February 4 - 12, 1963, there was a major ideological battle between S.A. Dange and EMS. At the end, the EMS supporters called the Dange group revisionists. EMS resigned from the post of General Secretary. He also resigned his post of Editor of the party organ *New Age*. A.K. Gopalan was the leader of the Opposition in the Parliament and he strived his best to force the Government to release most of the political detainees belonging to the Party taken into custody during the Chinese episode. In the next meeting of the National council held during October 14 - 19, 1963, while one Resolution asked the Party to support Soviet Union and oppose China, EMS introduced another Resolution to ask the Party to remain neutral. The Resolution of EMS was defeated. The National Council, through another Resolution censured AKG for showing support to party cadres in West Bengal who had declared open war against the top Party functionaries on the Chinese issue. The pro-China group did not keep idle. They brought up the letter that S.A. Dange was reported to have written to British Government in 1924 requesting for pardon for his involvement in the historic Kanpur Conspiracy by the Communists and stating that he would be loyal to the British. This was a strong weapon to strike at Dange group. It was alleged that this letter was being raised now to bring about a split among the Communists and weaken them.

In the meeting of the National Council held in April 1964, the leftist group demanded that the issue of Dange's Letter should be discussed and for that Dange should leave the Hall though he was scheduled to preside over the meeting being the Chairman of the Party. When Dange refused to vacate, 32 members out of 96 present made a sensational walk out. This group included EMS and five others from Kerala. The above meeting dismissed 7 members from the National Council and suspended 25. But the next day the dismissal was revoked and these 7 members too were suspended. The Left group submitted a statement and made a few specific demands like (a) Reconstitute the Party Secretariat and Working Committee, (b) The letter allegedly to have been written by Dange should be subjected to an impartial enquiry, (c) Until the next meeting of the National Council, the disciplinary action taken against some members should be held in abeyance, (d) Membership of all should be subjected to close scrutiny and verification, (e) a newly constituted Control Commission should be entrusted with the task of preparing the documents to be tabled at the meeting of the National Council, (f) a Draft Programme of Action should be prepared and the same to be subjected to discussion at every level of the Party hierarchy.

The Left was preparing for a show down. Many among them resigned their membership of the Central Secretariat. They held a meeting presided over by Basavapunnaiah. It prepared the documents to be submitted for discussion. The main points were: (a) Bring the downfall of the Congress Government at the Centre, (b) Implement comprehensive agrarian reforms, (c) Kick out foreign monopolies and capitalist enterprises, and, (d) Implement democratic socialism. The participation of EMS in these exercises at the national level inspired the Kerala Unit of the Communist Party to speed up the split.

The first salvo was fired by Pramod Das Gupta of the West Bengal State Committee of the Party who declared that all the members in it were rejecting the National Council controlled by the Dange group. At this, the National Council appealed to the deserters to come back and strengthen the Party and for this it deputed G. Adhikari, C. Rajeswara Rao and Bhupesh Gupta to discuss a compromise with Harkishen Singh Surjeeth, Jyothi Basu, Pramod Das Gupta and EMS. After hectic discussions, no compromise was reached. The open split was going to be a concrete reality.

4.6.3 The Emergence of CPI (M)

The Left group met at Tenali during June 7 - 11, 1964. EMS, AKG, P. Ramamoorthy, Musafir Ahmed, Pramod Das Gupta, Harkishen Singh

Surjeeth, M.R. Venkataraman, P. Sundarayya, Harikrishna Konar, M. Basavapunniah were the prominent members of this group that claimed the support of 1 lakh among the 1.5 lakh members of the Party. The Convention decided to convene the 7th Party Congress in Calcutta in October 1964. In the light of this decision, AKG and eleven other party members decided to form a separate group in Parliament. Consequently AKG lost his position of the Leader of the Opposition. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), the CPI (M), began functioning from October 5, 1964. There was a debate over the question whether the Right group CPI or the Left group CPI (M) had the largest membership. The head count controversy interestingly continues even to this day. Following the split, capturing of members, getting control of party office premises, property and assets and mutual mud slinging became the main past time of both Parties and their functionaries. At many places physical clashes occurred.

In Kerala, the split caused a painful family episode. T.V. Thomas had married K.R. Gowri as early as 1957 with the blessings of the Party. Both of them were ministers in the EMS Ministry. But when the District Committee of the Party met in 1964, the Left group stood firm and K.R. Gowri was directed to vote against T.V. Thomas in the election to choose the President of the committee. The CPI (M) forcibly occupied the District Committee office and its property and assets and all these events led to the family breakdown of TV and Gowri.

A.V. Aryan who was sent out from the Communist Party had gone on record that the first informal meeting of the Politburo of CPI (M) was held at his residence near Thrissur and it was attended by EMS, Jyothi Basu, P. Ramamoorthy and other leaders. Later Aryan became a rebel and unacceptable to both CPI and CPI (M). The first official Politburo had 9 members, namely, AKG, EMS, P. Ramamoorthy, Basavapunniah, Jyothi Basu, Pramod Das Gupta, Harkishen Singh Surjeeth, B.T. Ranadive and P. Sundarayya. Following the formation of the CPI (M), a split in AITUC was also imminent.

A major setback to the progress of trade union movement came as a consequence of the split in the Communist Party. Following the split, the AITUC led unions began to split up. As happened in the Party, the Right and Left groups in the AITUC began to fight each other for dominance. Both groups began to fight to take control of union offices, property and assets. Resolutions were moved in union meetings to pull down the office bearers and install their own men. Open clashes and physical assaults were reported from several parts of the State. Formerly it used to be inter-union rivalry among the left unions led by CPI and RSP, but now it became a fight among

Communist unions led by CPI and CPI (M). For a short period, even after the formation of the CPI (M), no firm attempt was made to split the AITUC. But since the leaders of the AITUC had their politics, an open confrontation and split could not be avoided.

T.V. Thomas was President of the State Transport Employees Union since its early days. He was assisted by K.V. Surendranath (known as *Asan*) as General Secretary. The members of this Union belonging to the CPI (M) started strategies to oust both T.V. Thomas and Surendranath being CPI men and install their own men. O.J. Joseph a leading functionary of the AITUC union moved over to CPI (M) and he along with C. Kannan and O. Bharathan played an important role in splitting the AITUC union in the State Transport. At last, since they could neither capture nor eliminate the AITUC union, they formed a rival union, the State Transport Employees Association. This marked the beginning of an active trial of strength between the Left and Right factions. The Rightist leaders alleged that the Leftists held a secret meeting to decide to purge rival groups in all those trade unions in which they were a majority. What happened in the case of transport union needs to be elaborated in order to reveal the strategy employed by the Left group.

When the general body meeting of the Transport Employees Union affiliated to the AITUC, with T.V. Thomas as President, was held, the Left group made an attempt to create trouble and prevented T.V. from presiding. The Right group had no option but to call for "their" general body meeting at another place. Incidentally, it may be noted that a number of major veteran trade union leaders in the State were with the Right group being members of the CPI. Mention may be made, for instance, about P. Balachandra Menon, K.A. Rajan, K.C. Mathew, T.V. Thomas, P.A. Solomon, P. Ramalingam, K.V. Surendranath, P.S. Srinivasan, P. Bhaskaran, K. Chellappan, J. Chithranjan, C.K. Kesavan, C.A. Kurian, Rosamma Punnoose, K.C. Prabhakaran, and, K.P. Prabhakaran. On the other hand, the Left group had of such veterans like N.K. Madhavan, C. Kannan, O.J. Joseph, E. Balanandan, V. Viswanatha Menon, O. Bharathan, M.M. Lawrence, K.M. Abraham, E.K. Narayanan, Fakhir Khan, K. Padmanabhan, and, K.N. Ravindranath. One could imagine what would have been the consolidated strength of the trade union movement in Kerala if the above mentioned Right and Left group leaders were united and decided to work together for the betterment of the conditions of work and wages in the State.

It became an open secret that at the trade union level, the two factions were at each other's throat. Since the split in the Party, the Marxists had been sedulously and successfully making inroads into the ranks of the coir factory workers who had given their life and blood to build up the Communist Party

in Kerala. They, the Marxists, formed a rival trade union under the appellation of the *Alleppey Coir Thozhilali Union*. It accused T.V. Thomas, the President of the TCFWU for all the ills in the Coir industry and the distress of coir workers. Indeed, the coir factory workers were made a tool for testing the strength of the two rival groups. Similar drama was staged at many centres, industries and units and by 1967 the Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) had been formed.

Following this, Left groups formed rival unions and got them affiliated to the CITU. The aim of the Marxists was to enhance their political strength by organizing and building up an extremist, militant Marxist wing in the trade union movement. In order to further this aim, the Marxists in Kerala have adopted a strategy consisting mainly of two steps. Firstly, they tried to create divisions among the rank and file and whip up strong feelings of opposition against Rightist leadership in order to capture the union. No attempt was made at this stage to push forward the extremist Marxist ideology. If they failed to capture leadership in this way, the Marxists took recourse to their second step. They organized rival unions. By extending attractive baits in the form of submitting demand notices to employers asking for substantial hikes in wages, DA and bonus etc, they weaned workers from the Rightist Union to their side. They rejected settlements reached by the Rightists. Thus the Marxists attempted to capture membership from the CPI led unions. Thus union capturing and membership capturing became patented strategies of the Left groups. Soon the strength of the CITU affiliated unions outstripped that of the AITUC.

4.6.4 About K.R.Gowri

K.R. Gowri, lovingly called Gowri Amma, was born in July 1919 as the daughter of K.A.Raman of Pattanakkad.. From an early age she was attracted to the social and political movements in Cherthala and Alappuzha and began to involve in the movement of farm and factory workers in the region. This attracted her to the Communist Party. She was a born fighter against social and economic injustice and created an indelible mark in the social and political scenario in the State. She was instrumental in bringing about the revolutionary agrarian reforms bill as a minister in the Government led by EMS. This law made her a born enemy of the landlord class in the State and this class was crying for her blood. Gowri Amma withstood the violent campaign against agrarian reforms, but the murky politics prevailing in the State did not support her efforts.

As stated elsewhere, the CPI in the early 1960s started witnessing ideological clashes and faction fights. During the EMS ministry (1957-59), the Party had given green signal for the marriage of T.V.Thomas with Gowri Amma. The marriage was solemnised on May 30, 1957. Unfortunately the marital life of these leaders became turbulent due to the emerging divisions in the Party. Though both of them were staying in adjacent official bungalows in the same compound, rumours were set afloat in the media that the couples were not speaking terms and they were going to separate. Soon the CPI split and the CPI (M) emerged as a separate entity. This was a testing time for both TV and Gowri Amma. Finally they decided to separate both in the Party and also in marital life. TV continued in the CPI, while Gowri Amma opted to join the CPI (M).

Her ideological beliefs, personal traits and uncompromising postures on various issues soon forced the CPI (M) to blacklist Gowri Amma and virtually isolate her from the Party. Provoked by this she left the CPI (M) and formed the JSS Party. Presently in 2002, due to the confusing paradoxes and undercurrents of Kerala politics, she is serving the State as a Minister in the UDF ministry led by A.K.Antony.

During her long political and trade union career, she spent nearly seven years in prison. She has completed nearly five decades as a legislator and served as a minister in various governments for more than twelve years. Though past eighty-three years, old age has not weakened her spirits, vision, words and deeds and she goes about performing her duties as efficiently as possible. Unfortunately, she did not allow this author to meet her and record her reminiscences for unexplainable reasons. This indeed was a big loss to this documentation of the history of trade union movement in Kerala.

4.6.5 Rise of New Unions in Aluva

Aluva had the distinction of having a large number of independent unions, not affiliated to any trade union centre or political party²⁴. S.C.S. Menon was the main force in spearheading the movement for setting up such independent unions in the major industrial establishments like the FACT and Indian Aluminium Company at Udyogamandal, Aluva. In the beginning, Communists like N.K. Madhavan, K.C. Mathew and E. Balanandan played an important role in forming trade unions in the region but they saw to it that petty party politics did not interfere with their functioning. Another factor that stimulated the growth of independent unions was the attitude of the company managements. For instance, the management of the Indian Aluminium Company refused to recognize the unions of their workmen if outsiders led

them. But in the light of the Indian Trade Union Act that allows outsiders, to hold executive posts in unions, the attempt at promoting independent unionism was found to fail.

The Aluminium Factory Workers' Union (AFWU) offers an interesting and unique illustration. This Union had chosen both a Congress Leader and a Communist Leader as its President on different occasions, while an employee of the Company held the post of Secretary. This tradition is not found in many other regions of Kerala. The ability of the outside leader was the sole criteria for electing him as the President of the Union. In many establishments in the Aluva region a deliberate attempt was made to keep out politics from issues of industrial relations. But this could not go on for long after the split in the CPI and AITUC.

Soon Communist trade unions started appearing as rivals to the independent unions. This, to some extent, vitiated the industrial relations situation in the industrial establishments in the Aluva region. The nature of employees in these establishments was also fundamentally different from that of traditional industries like coir and cashew. The workers in Aluva region were mostly educated, technically skilled and "salaried" as distinct from wage earning workers. They were well informed about their establishments, technology, production and markets. Once mobilized, they learnt that they could manage their own affairs without outside help. As years passed, lot of internal leadership emerged prompting them to keep political leaders at a distance. The Marxists did not like this trend. They wanted to politically mobilize the industrial workers of the Aluva region so that it would benefit not only the CITU but also the CPI (M).

4.6.6 Promotion of “Gherao”

According to some, “*gherao*” first appeared in West Bengal as an instrument of industrial action. Since then it was used in many other regions of India. Kerala, perhaps, was a region where it was used extensively, causing a bad reputation about the State’s industrial climate and a sense of terror in the minds of prospective investors.

The CPI (M) and the CITU unions openly supported the ‘*gherao*’ as a legitimate trade union weapon. They believed that workers should not be deprived of their right to use the instrument of *gherao*. However, Basavapunnaiah, the CPI (M) leader was reported to have said:

"We now hear ministers being gheraoed by their staff, teachers by their students and parents by their children. It has now reached ludicrous lengths" (Statesman, 12.6.69).

This, however, was not the official view of the CPI (M).

Gherao really amounts to illegal and wrongful confinement of management personnel or employers to their workplaces or work spots, offices or homes without allowing them food or drink and normal movement with a view to force them to concede the demands of unions, however, unreasonable they may be. Marxists continued to claim that *gherao* is a legitimate union weapon and, therefore, the police should not intervene even if there was evidently a breakdown of law and order. In fact, this amounted to denying the employers and management personnel their right of protection. The Calcutta High Court had declared *gherao* as illegal. Other courts in the country had made similar decisions.

4.7 UNIQUE FEATURES OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN THE 1960s

The Unionism in the 1960s displayed features that were fundamentally different from those of the 1930s or the 1940s. In the earlier days, the leadership emerged from the working class itself. The best example was that of the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) and Kollam Labour Association (KLA). But by late 1930s and early 1940s, the working class was subjected to political mobilization by those outsiders who wanted to fight the British, the Dewan and the Raja. The working class was soon convinced that fighting employers and fighting the Ruling Establishment were complementary. This thinking spread through out Malabar, Cochin, and, Travancore. The networking of leaders from all the three regions with the common bond of communist ideology helped in organizing mass uprisings and struggles. In the process, the working class could not naturally distinguish between political issues and non-political issues. Politicisation of economic issues and industrial relations issues became a universal feature of trade union activity.

4.7.1 Politics of Unions

In India political involvement of trade unions has all along remained an undisputed fact³⁵. A five fold criteria have been suggested for analysing the nature of political involvement of trade unions. They are: (1) Patterns of initiation, (2) Pattern of affiliation (3) Pattern of financial flows, (4) Pattern and role of leadership, and (5) Pattern of policy decisions and actions.

In Kerala the union movement was initiated by two kinds of leaders, namely, the leaders with primary interest in the movement and the leaders with primary interest in politics. Among them, only a few have permanently confined their activity to the union movement while the rest have conveniently used the movement as a stepping stone to political leadership and self-advancement. They have come to adorn almost all the key executive posts in the movement as President, Vice President and General Secretary. They successfully carried on with their twin personality by simultaneously holding union leadership and political leadership. When the Communists were in political power in Kerala, there were occasions when the two personalities came to a direct conflict particularly when the question of police intervention in industrial strike activity became a heated issue. The police firing at Chandanathoppu and Munnar were cited as controversial.

Considering who was at the helm of the trade union and tracing down his political roots, one could easily identify the nature of political involvement. Almost all trade union leaders in Kerala have had apparently strong political connections. They not openly belonged to political parties but also deeply got involved in the conventional political games. It is indeed hardly possible to draw a line between union and political interests. It has been rightly said²⁶:

"The clay of unionism is possibly an effervescent industrial labour, but the sculptors chiselling it into shape have certainly been agents of political parties".

This observation seems to be valid to Kerala trade union movement.

In Kerala, the trade union movement has strengthened the left movement involving the CPI and the RSP and in turn these political parties have championed the cause of the working class. This two-way inter-relationship between political parties and the trade union movement has paradoxically brought strength as well as weakness to organized labour. Many extraneous political issues had been unnecessarily drawn into labour management relations. Union struggles had been used as a political tool and for political gains. The parties in the opposition had tried to mobilize their followers in the union movement to stage demonstrations against the party in power. For instance, as we have stated earlier, during the anti-communist Liberation Struggle of 1959, both the communists and anti-communists used trade union meetings as political platforms. In fact, the non-communists and their trade unions like the INTUC and HMS set up an Action Council to tour the State and hold delegates' conferences and public meetings for organizing working class struggle against the communists. Even during the Quit India Movement of 1942, and generally during the entire period of the struggle for

Independence, the trade unions had taken active part. In short, the political involvement of trade unions became a product of history.

Almost all parties had freely used the working class as well as the student community for political ends, as these sections formed the most volatile sections of the population. Once the Congress Government was elected to power, left unions entered the path of agitation. Unionism in Kerala had been largely mixed up with politics. Political parties had utilized trade unions not as institutions with an independent and integrated personality with an existence of their own, but as potential vehicles for power and aggrandizement.

In spite of unity talks (TV - Sreekantan formula), there was manoeuvring all the time for the control of trade unions in the belief that it would help secure leverage in the political field. In many cases, union leadership and power had provided a stepping-stone to political leadership. Political parties had even tried to assign trade unions pre-determined roles to play. But it appeared that the working class movement in Kerala was slowly slipping out of the grip of the political parties. This was particularly true when the union members realized the price they were paying for the leadership conflicts caused exclusively by political factors.

On the question of political involvement, a veteran trade unionist said that the working class should and could never abandon politics. But he preferred to confine this politics or political leanings to the level of the local. Without the immediate sacrifice of this politics in their life, this leader wanted to see the organization of central federations of trade unions at the industry level and of course rising above politics. He hoped that such industry unions comprising all existing federations would strengthen collective bargaining and would help to consolidate, the union movement in their role as workers' organizations in the workers' own interest. The industry unions would not attempt to interfere with the local. This arrangement, he argued, would be a reasonable and generally acceptable compromise to the earlier attempts at trade union unity.

In Kerala in the period 1947-65 irrespective of political uncertainties and splits in the union movement, the trade unions had come to adopt a common united stand whenever their broad interests were affected. Increasingly they had come to believe in the straightforward method of collective bargaining and as soon as that proved ineffective, they did not shy to fight out. Herein lies the source of strength of industrial relations in Kerala.

4.7.2 Affiliation

As in the rest of the country, the trade unions in Kerala also have sought affiliation to Central trade unions²⁷. It is generally recognized that these Central Unions, namely the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), United Trade Union Congress (UTUC), and Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) have close links with the Congress, CPI, CPI (M), RSP and Socialist Party. Almost all the political parties treated the trade unions under them for political mobilization also. The union members constituted important vote banks.

Many trade union leaders have claimed that their link with the political parties is flexible and the unions have enjoyed good deal of independence. Some have clarified that the political party leadership does not interfere in the day-to-day affairs of the trade unions. The members of a trade union may be subscribing to the ideology of the political party. The union leaders sometimes hold offices in political parties and this is almost unavoidable. There have been cases where the political party leadership would suggest who should be elected as office bearers of the trade union. This obviously amounted to interference in the trade union by political party. Some have stated that without the support of political parties, trade unions cannot function satisfactorily.

As per data for 1963-64, at the all-India level the INTUC had the largest number of members. But in Kerala the AITUC was the biggest center. The data on registered trade unions and membership is notoriously unreliable because most unions do not submit annual returns to the Registrar of Trade Unions. The system of verification and updating is also inadequate. But the spread of union movement had been spectacular, covering vital sectors like agriculture, plantations, manufacturing, construction, electricity, commerce, transport, communications and other services. The INTUC, AITUC, HMS and UTUC together controlled 71.8 per cent of reported membership in the affiliated unions.

4.7.3 Financial Flows

The pattern of financial flows between the union movement and political parties explain the degree of political involvement of organized labour²⁸. The surplus budget of the trade union is a regular source of political party expenditure. Such diversion of union funds is more evident in cases where union leaders themselves have their own political game to play. Union

interests then became subservient to political interests. In Kerala, from its very origin, union movement has grown hand in hand with the political movement and in the course of it both built up a close financial relationship. This is most evident in the case of the AITUC and the CPI, the CITU and the CPI (M) and the INTUC and the Congress. For instance, the Kerala State Trade Union Council (KSTUC), the Kerala branch of the AITUC has at many times initiated fund raising campaigns for the Party. In the 1960s, the KSTUC had raised a fund amounting to about Rs.3-4 lakhs in honour of their leader R. Sugathan and most of he gave to the Party. Today the CPI (M) and the CITU are reported to have amassed several crores of rupees worth of property, buildings, vehicles and other assets. Many innovative ways of fund raising including “bucket collection” are now used. The CPI (M) has even initiated substantial investment in a company called Malayalam Communications Ltd, with its flagship enterprise, the Kairali television channel.

4.7.4 Leadership Conflicts

Industrial strike activity, particularly in the traditional industries, called active centres, had displayed a cyclical behaviour in the period up to 1966. This is largely attributed to leadership conflicts and growing inter-union rivalry²⁹. The strike calls issued by active union leaders in the State were never ignored by the rank and file. Whether they be members of a union or not, the workers in Kerala had always shown a strong sense of enthusiasm for participating in agitations, marches and demonstrations of any sort. The observation that agitation is in the blood of a Malayalee is no exaggeration. In an agitation sponsored by one union, members of rival unions also participated incognito. This attitude of lending support to any kind of genuine working class struggles explained why the volume of strike activity had failed to wither away by the passage of time.

It is also significant to note that workers in Kerala lend great support to all kinds of political struggles. An observer could find the same set of workers shouting slogans and participating in political marches under different banners. Paying dues to a union did not mean that the workers held strong allegiance to that union or political party linked to it. Often workers paid dues and contributions to more than one union or political party. The membership also fluctuated according to the success or failure of union leaderships and the struggles sponsored by them. Those who were once the leaders of great standing suddenly found their personalities discredited and maligned and after a temporary eclipse they tactfully managed a re-emergence into active leadership. One finest example of this was that of T.V. Thomas. At the time of launching the Punnappa-Vayalar Revolt, he was the most respected leader

of the working class and held the top position in the All Travancore Trade Union Council (ATTUC). But after the revolt was put down by the Dewan, T.V. Thomas lost his eminence. In the elections held immediately after this episode, not only T.V. Thomas but many of the Communists who had led the struggle got miserably defeated. It was after the Communist Party regained its position, that T.V. Thomas was accepted as people's leader. As Chairman of Alappuzha Municipality, T.V. Thomas had become a popular figure.

The split in the Communist Party and the emergence of CPI (M) and the CITU had led to a division in the leadership of almost all trade unions affiliated to the AITUC. The personality cult was also profusely cultivated in the trade union movement in Kerala. As a result of all these, there emerged very intense leadership conflicts and union rivalries. But this did not spoil the spirit of mutual understanding, appreciation and goodwill that prevailed among the top leaders and union hierarchy. The illustrious unity formula, sponsored by T.V. Thomas and N. Sreekantan Nair, though breached several times, had to some extent helped to consolidate left-wing unionism in Kerala. The spirit of the formula had come to stay in the union movement. The AITUC, CITU, and, the UTUC, and all of they together held tremendous striking power in the State represented the left wing unionism.

Leadership conflicts within unions encouraged the growth of factionalism, internal indiscipline, and militancy in strike activity. To capture allegiance to his faction, one union leader would appeal to the rank and file and call for a strike to boost the morale of his followers and their fighting spirit. While a rival leader would dissuade the workers from jumping in to any direct action by describing the inappropriateness and inadvisability of such action at the particular time and under the prevailing circumstances. But soon after the strike sponsored by the former leader ended, the latter would be ready to sponsor another strike under his own leadership. This process sometimes resulted in mutual mud slinging and an attempt to malign personalities. As a result, the strike activity as such would become a long-drawn out affair and one and the same industry or undertaking came into the grip of long and very unfortunate work stoppages. Whether the strike was sectional or partial was no matter of concern. The employers usually exploited this leadership conflict to their advantage and denied workers their legitimate dues.

All along, the strikes sponsored by the AITUC, CITU, INTUC and UTUC had been formidable. While the Communists were in power, these strikes had been relatively small and infrequent. One of the top leaders of the AITUC, T.V. Thomas himself was the Labour Minister in the EMS Ministry. Besides Labour, he also had held the Transport portfolio. At the time of

becoming the Minister, he was the President of the powerful State Transport Employees Union. During the Communist rule, he was able to provide considerable improvement in the conditions of work and wages of transport employees. But CPI (M) cadres consisting of O.J. Joseph, Azheekodan Raghavan, Imbichi Bava and later by C. Kannan, O. Bharathan and V. Viswanatha Menon triggered off the leadership conflict in this Union. As reported earlier, the CITU formed the Kerala State Transport Corporation Employees Association as a strong rival to the CPI-AITUC union.

During the Communist rule (1957-59), industrial strike activity showed a general increase as the INTUC, HMS and other independent unions stepped up their involvement in it and directed it particularly against the policies pursued by the EMS Ministry.

Since the formation of the CITU, Marxist unions concentrated in enhancing their political clout by organizing and building up an extremist militant movement. But soon the militancy spread to other trade union centres as each tried to catch up on becoming more and more militant. This caused considerable damage to the reputation of the State.

4.7.5 Gap between Leadership and rank and file

Trade unionism in the 1960s was far different form what it was in the thirties and forties. There had emerged a growing gap between leadership and the rank and file³⁰. There was a time in old Travancore when workers considered membership in a trade union a duty as well as a privileged status. Allegiance to and membership in a union was more vital and sacred than being a member of a caste or community. However, the spirit of evangelism, sacrifice, and, service that the older generation of union leadership had shown was replaced by a measure of irresponsibility, disloyalty and petty graft of the younger generation.

The political misadventures of a few leaders had further harmed the interests of steady union growth. There was also moral degradation on the part of the working class. Respect for authority and conscious need for discipline were fast disappearing. Class-consciousness was not strong as it was a few years ago. This was particularly evident in the refusal by workers to participate even in organizational struggles. The younger generation of the working class did not fully realize that the fruits that they enjoy now as their legitimate rights were the outcome of years of struggles, interspersed with union strategy in negotiated settlements.

The spirit of irresponsibility on the part of the working class had even surprised top union leadership. They had begun to witness in abundance an increase in the number of non-union strike activities. Unfortunately, reliable statistics on this are not available. While union leadership was engaged in well-publicized direct negotiations with employers, the so-called irresponsible elements in the union movement would conduct strike activity upsetting the leadership sitting at the conference table. This spirit of irresponsibility on the part of a few unionists had even forced the lay public to consider trade union as a public nuisance.

Irresponsibility had been the cause of wavering union loyalty of the working class. As one veteran trade unionist said: "it is not common for one and the same worker to owe allegiance to more than one union by paying his subscription in rotation to different trade unions". This had further encouraged the practice of undercutting and open clashes between unions operating in the same undertaking. The multiplicity of trade unions and rivalry in leadership were not due to the extreme liberalism, literacy and union consciousness of workers as some people argued, but were largely due to the indiscipline in private life and irresponsibility in social behaviour that the working class was unfortunately cultivating in Kerala.

Multiplicity of unions in India had been acting as a great hindrance to the growth of collective bargaining. However, the Kerala experience had been different. Here despite multiplicity of unions, the leaders faced the employer as a single joint team. The absence of a law on union recognition had not weakened collective bargaining in Kerala. The employers had taken the initiative to recognize all the major unions and invite them to the negotiating table. Meeting with more than one union at a time was reported to moderate the extreme demands each union submit. Despite political and ideological differences, inter-union rivalry, politics of the union and leadership conflicts, a great degree of unity of goals and approaches used to be exhibited by the trade unions in the bargaining room. This clearly goes to demonstrate that the Kerala worker and his union leader knew how to distinguish between political issues and union issues. Multiplicity of trade unions had, in fact, resulted in low incidence of political strikes, though the situation prevailing in Kerala, and there could be occasion for making purely political issues a case of work stoppages.

4.7.6 Other Features

It is often alleged that the chief factor that inhibited the progress of industrialization in Kerala had been trade union militancy. But it had been

demonstrated that this constituted only a myth. The study of industrial relations in Kerala by this author covering the period up to 1966-67 had shown the rich diversity in the pattern and composition of labour management relations that prevailed in the State. [K. Ramachandran Nair [1974]. Political instability with ministry making and ministry breaking had been a patent feature of Kerala. During the two decades 1948-68, Kerala had about nine elected governments of almost all important political parties and their holy and unholy alliances and they were interspersed with the President's Rule from the Centre for more than three occasions.

With the progressive development of parliamentary democracy, the concept of class war lost its meaning in Kerala, though the CPI (M) and the CITU held that view. The freedom to organize and bargain collectively had mellowed communist militancy. Due to the self-imposed restraint in the most reasonable democratic framework, the distinction between the so-called free trade unions and communist unions made no sense. The unions have a common approach towards the problems affecting labour. They conduct themselves in the same fashion as that of any free trade union in the world. There is nothing unusual in their outlook.

Compared to other states in India, Kerala labour are more peaceful and less violent in their strike activity. The organized working class in Kerala, with the exception of the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle had not generally indulged in violent strike activity bordering on arson and physical assaults on employers or managers. There had been no reported cases of violence in the trade union struggle during the period 1950-65. It is worth remembering that the great Punnappa-Vayalar struggle was essentially an economic-cum-political struggle, involving violence on an unprecedented scale.

But the Kerala workers are, no doubt, very vocal. They may shout slogans and hit the air with their fists. They may conduct massive marches and demonstrations, but they are sober and modest. An understanding of the true character of Kerala labour would help to remove the misgivings about him and his union. The following comments are worth quoting:

B.R. MUNSHI formerly of the Tata Oil Mills, Tatapuram, Kochi wrote thus³¹:

"Kerala worker is literate and loquacious. He is proud of his literacy and his power to argue. He cannot take a statement by lying down. He wants every statement to be proved to his satisfaction. Experience has shown that if one can satisfy his curiosity, he is a loyal and disciplined worker. He is a very efficient technician and has tenacity for work. It is only when he is rubbed the

wrong way that the trouble starts... The busy bodies must revise their opinion about the valour and worth of the Kerala worker".

The National Commission on Labour (1969) had observed:

"The Kerala worker is painstaking and intelligent. He has no difficulty in moving anywhere... He has remarkable adaptability to any environment".

M.K.K. Nayar, while serving as the Managing Director of the FACT Limited, at Udyogamandal, Aluva had this to say³²:

"The Malayali whose individual characteristics are often typified by the coconut palm has no respect for others. Naturally, as a result of his misplaced ego and unwillingness to submit himself to any discipline, political, economic or social, leadership development became impossible in Kerala. Every one, high and low, lost himself daily in petty quarrels over piffles, while major developments were taking place elsewhere. Unbridled licence among labour actively formed by fire-eating leaders who had no sense of responsibility had created a fear of insecurity among entrepreneurs. Side by side with the deteriorating labour situation, some managements too resorted to methods to safeguard their interests, methods which were not always on the correct line. The result was disastrous. The very mention of Kerala brought before the mind of an outsider an image of constant struggle between labour and managements"³².

We may conclude that the trade union movement during 1920-67 exhibited a mixed bag of events and episodes running parallel to the freedom struggle in the first phase and the pangs of direct involvement in the socio-economic development of the State in the final phase. By 1967 the union movement reached a stage of maturity, but political instability continued to tarnish its image as a progressive force in building up a dynamic progressive society in Kerala.

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 13. *Ibid*, Chapter 5.
See also G. Yadukulakumar: *op.cit.*

14. See *Vivekodayam*, December 1946, pp. 31-38.
15. KUMBALATHU SANKU PILLAI: "Jeevitha Smaranakal", *Keralasabdam Weekly* October 9, 1965.
16. C. NARAYANA PILLAI: *Pattom Muthal Panamapally Vare*.
17. PUTHUPPALLY RAGHAVAN: *Viplava Smaranakal*, Vol. IV D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1992, pp. 50-120.
18. A.K. GOPALAN: *Ente Jeevitha Katha*, Chintha Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, 6th Edn. P. 170.
19. *Eighth Annual Report of TCFWU*, 1952, p. 92.
20. *Ibid*, pp. 123-124.
21. Puthuppally Raghavan has cited an interview given by K. Damodaran to Tarique Ali for a feature in New Left Review of London, about this episode.
22. For an exhaustive documentation of the Liberation Struggle see K.G. GOPALAKRISHNAN: *Vimochana Samaram Oru Padhanam*, Nakshtra Books, Attingal, 1994.
23. For details, See PUTHUPPALLY RAGHAVAN: *Viplava Smaranakal*, Vol. V, D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1992, pp.178-179.
24. See K. RAMACHANDRAN NAIR: *op.cit*
25. N. PATTABHIRAMAN: *Political Involvement of Trade Unions*, 1967.
26. *Ibid*, p. 160.
27. K. RAMACHANDRAN NAIR: *op.cit*, pp. 139-141.
28. *Ibid*, pp. 141-142.
29. *Ibid*, pp.142-145, pp. 188-192.
30. *Ibid* pp. 88-91
31. B.R. MUNSHI: "A Look into the Human Side of Kerala Worker", in the *Souvenir* of the Indian Institute of Personnel Management, 12th Annual Conference, pp. 26-29.
32. M.K.K. NAYAR: "Role of Public Sector in Kerala's Industrial Development", in the *Silver Jubilee Souvenir*, Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union, 1964, p. 38.

CHAPTER V

UNION MOVEMENT IN KOLLAM

Though the trade union movement in Travancore had its origins at Alappuzha, it did not take much time for it to spread to other centres in the State. Industrial development in early Travancore was located in Alappuzha and Kollam and so was the trade union movement. The early growth of the trade union movement in Kollam is also largely obscure as in Alappuzha. However, there are some sources that which some light on the movement in Kollam. There is reason to believe that the movement as well as the leaders in Alappuzha largely influenced the movement in Kollam.

Harrison and Crossfield (H & C) was one of the first companies that started workshops and factories in Kollam. Later Goodacre and Company also set up factories. In fact, Cashew factories for which Kollam is renowned came to be established at a later stage. Punalur, near Kollam, saw the establishment of a Paper Mill. Neendakara and Chavara in Kollam district emerged as centres for mining and processing of illiminite from beach sands.

5.1 EARLY PHASE

5.1.1 The Strike of 1915

The H & C Workshop in Kollam saw a spontaneous strike by its workers as early as 1915, when their demand for distribution of rice by the factory management as a protection from the increase in prices as well as shortages¹. They also demanded an increase in wages. As the management did not take a sympathetic stand, the strike became inevitable. This was perhaps one of the earliest collective actions by the working class in the country. The workers approached T.K. Narayanan, Editor of *Amritbharathi* who advised them to find a suitable person to lead them by helping them to organize a trade union. Thus the workers went to seek the help of Karunakara Menon, a leading advocate of the Kollam Bar and he agreed. On the third day of the strike, a big meeting was held at Cantonment Maidan. This put some pressure on the management and they agreed to settle the strike. But the management started disciplinary action against some workers. One of them Vakil Padmanabhan was dismissed and Oorampallil Nanoo and a few others were transferred to the estates that the company was running in the high ranges.

The workers decided to strengthen their union. While Karaunakara Menon continued as the President, T.K. Narayanan was appointed as the Secretary. A Register was opened and a membership fee of 4 *annas* (quarter rupee) was collected from every worker to set up a Union Fund. The H & C Company had workshops, Saw Mills and Tile factories and the workers from all these units joined the Fund that reached about Rs.1000/- and this was deposited in a bank.

5.1.2 Strike in Goodacre Company

During the First World War, Kollam also began to feel the impact of it. It was during this period that the workers of the Goodacre Company went on a strike. K.G. Shankar, the Gandhian, guided this. Management and Police colluded to break the strike. Workers were charge sheeted for criminal trespass and manhandling of managers. Many were arrested and beaten up in police lock-ups. Finally the management succeeded in forcing the workers to call off the strike.

5.1.3 Strike at H & C Tile Factory

There was a strike at Harrison Crossfields (H & C) Company's Tile Factory. It was reported that the management there did not even allow the workers to cook *Kanji* (rice gruel) in the factory premises. One day, the British manager destroyed the vessels used for cooking the *kanji*, accusing the workers that they had stolen the firewood from the factory². Later he agreed to allot some space in the factory premises for preparation of Kanji but that was found to be very close to the open pit latrine. Workers appealed that they should be given at least 10 minutes to drink the *Kanji* during lunchtime as the Company had not so far provided any lunch interval. Even this appeal was turned down. Following this, the workers were forced to register a collective protest. But there was no forum like trade union to help the workers.

Kola was one of the early progressive centres in Travancore, where many social, religious and political movements had its origins. A few people belonging to upper classes, but moved by the deplorable conditions of workers, came forward to help them. Govindan Nair, K.C. Kesavan, T.K. Madhavan, T.K. Narayanan and A.R. Madhava Iyer came together and convened a meeting of the workers of H & C Company at the Cantonment Maidan³. This meeting took the following decisions (a) Start a trade union named the Travancore Labour Union; (b) Working hours to be limited to 9 hours per day and working time should be from 7 am to 12 pm and from 1 pm

to 5 pm, with one hour for lunch interval; (c) On Saturdays, working hours should be limited to 7 hours, from 7 am to 12 am and 1 pm to 3 pm; (d) wages to be increased by 50 percent (e) Bonus at the rate of 20 per cent of basic wages; (f) If there is work during holidays, the company should pay double wages.

A deputation team, consisting of A.R. Madhava Iyer (then Chief Editor of *Malayali*), C. Mohammed Kunju and T.R. Narayanan, was constituted to meet the factory management and discuss these issues and secure a favourable decision. Meki, the Company Manager agreed to meet the deputationists and he offered to grant some of their demands excepting the wage increase. Meanwhile, the workers who had started the strike told their leaders that they were not satisfied with the settlement. They decided to continue the strike. Mike and Clayer, another manager, told the deputationists that they would meet the workers directly to settle the strike. K.G. Shankar, Damodaran Vakil and K.P. Narayanan were guiding the strike in the factory. The strike could have been called off if the management had permitted at least a brief lunch interval of 10 minutes to take *kanji*. Finally after some days the management had to grant some of the demands of workers.

5.1.4 Sunday Unionism

Even in 1925, people like Dr. M.R. Govinda Pillai and M.R. Madhava Warrier, a former Municipal chairman were always ready to get involved in resolving labour disputes in the region. Dr. Govinda Pillai used to attend the annual meetings of the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) at Alappuzha. K.C. Govindan used to visit Kollam and render some help in the mobilization of workers. They rendered help to workers in drafting memoranda and petitions on the problems facing them and submitting them to the employers. It was reported that Kollam offered a good model of "Sunday Unionism". The early union presidents and office bearers were drawn from the class of legal practitioners, known as *Vakils* who had little practice at local courts. The Office of the Labour union, however, provided a common meeting ground for active social and political activists, particularly from the State Congress in later years. The Office was being used as a secret rendezvous of most known leaders who were in the black list of the Dewan of Travancore⁴.

In the last week of January 1928, a workers' convention was held at the Cantonment Maidan and it was attended by a large number of workers employed in European owned factories. Dr. M.R. Govinda Pillai presided over this convention. He told the convention that workers in Kollam did not have a strong union and under this circumstance if workers resorted to strike

the employers would see that the strike was prolonged to make workers die of starvation. Therefore, each worker should become conscious about the need for a strong union and for this they should contribute a rupee each to build a large fund. K.G. Shankar, K.P. Kayyalakkal and others guided the convention and it was a great success⁵. Another meeting was held to bring together the workers employed in the South Indian Railway and H & C Engineering workshop in the month of 1928.

5.1.5 Meeting of Kollam Taluk Labour Union

A Labour Conference was held during the First Anniversary of the Kollam Taluk Labour Union at the Cantonment Maidan in 1929 under the presidentship of A.B. Saleas, an M.L.C. of Kochi. Besides workers, some employers, traders, police officials and correspondents of newspapers like *Madras Mail*, *Manorama*, *Prathidinam*, *Samadarshi* and *Malayali* attended this conference. The Labour Union President K.G. Shankar delivered the welcome speech. The conference expressed serious concern about the anti-labour policies of H & C and Thomas Stephen Company managements. It appealed to the members of the State Legislature and lawmakers to see that working hours were limited to 8 hours and working days to five in a week. It also sought representation for labour in legislature. An Action Committee was constituted with V. Achutha Menon, T.K. Narayana Pillai, C.Kuttan Nair, E.V. Krishna Pillai, C.V. Kunjuraman, Dr. M.R. Govinda Pillai, Pappu, Saradaprasad and K.C. Govindan.

5.1.6 Navika Thozhilali Union

The *All Travancore Navika Thozhilali Union* was a glorious milestone in the history of trade union movement in Kerala. The boat and catamaran workers were an exploited lot and were leading a miserable existence meted out to them by canal employers and *chowka* (inspection points / gates) agents. In those days, bulk commodities were carried in big barges and *Kettu Vallams* (large country boats) by most traders and companies. Once the barges became popular, the *vallam* / catamaran workers lost employment and they decided to collectively organize and submit memorandum on their plight to the Government. A meeting was held in 1930 at Ponmana Kattil Mekkathil temple premises under the presidentship of G. Raman Menon and Mannath Padmanabhan inaugurated the meeting⁶. Others who actively participated in the meeting were Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai, Dr. M.R. Govinda Pillai, Mullasserry Madhavan Pillai, Dr. V.V. Velukutty Arayan, K.P. Narayanan

and A.K. Narayanan. The organizers of the meeting later submitted the Memorandum to the then Dewan V.S. Subramonia Iyer.

The head office of the Union was located on the side of the canal passing through Ponmana. M.K. Raman, the Secretary was a major functionary of the Union. He used to stop all *vallams* near the Head Office and collect membership fee, monthly subscription and transmit notices and other communications to the authorities. The main demands of the Union included stoppage of toll collection, installation of signal lamps and deepening and widening of canals. The Union became a dynamic organization after Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair took over as its President. One important achievement of union activity was that representatives of workers began to be posted in the place of *vallam mooppan*s and agents. The Union also opened sub-offices / branches. The Union was also entrusted with the loading and unloading work in Chavara Mineral companies.

In July 1931 the Union held a mammoth meeting at Karunagappally presided over by Puthuppalli Krishna Pillai, M.L.C. The other leaders who attended this meeting were Dr. V.V. Velukutty Arayan, P. Paramu Pillai and M.K. Raman. A team was constituted with S. Krishna Pillai, Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai, P.S. Mohammed, P.K. Madhavan, K.N. Krishnan Vakil and O.A. Thomas. Most of them were MLCs⁷. The Third Annual Conference of the Union was held under the presidency of K. Kesavan. M.K. Raman continued as the Secretary. The Conference demanded a 50 per cent reduction in *Vallam Karam* (tax as Vallams) and a ban on the plying of big barges by trading firms like the Madura Company. It decided to open branch offices of the Union at Chirayinkeezhu and Kochi.

5.1.7 K.C. Govindan in Kollam

There was lot of opposition to K.C. Govindan at Alappuzha from his colleagues in the trade union movement and this arose from certain misunderstandings. It was in this context that K.C. Govindan put in his resignation. In the 12th Conference of the TLA, K.C. Govindan did not participate. It was this Conference at Alappuzha that brought P.K. Kunju as President, P.N. Krishna Pillai as Vice President and R. Sugathan as Secretary.

It was during this period that K.C. Govindan received an invitation from the veteran social and trade union worker K.G. Shankar of Kollam, requesting the former to take over the leadership of the union movement in Kollam of which Shankar himself was the guiding spirit. K.C. Govindan accepted this invitation and moved over to Kollam⁸. At the Special Conference of the Kollam Labour Union held on June 29, 1937, K.C.

Govindan was elected the Secretary. Ramavarma Thampan, Manager, *Malayala Rajyam* daily was made the President. Two leading lawyers of Kollam C.G. Kesavan and K.G. Govindan were elected Vice President and Treasure respectively. The Committee members included Pyneril T.K. Govindan, Thankassery Velu, Thekkethu Paramu, K. Kunajan Pillai, N. Krishna Pillai, Thevally Narayanan, Thevally Velu, K. Antony, K. Rama Dev and Uliyakkovil Karunakaran.

K.C. Govindan has stated that Kollam at that time was the second most important industrial centre of Travancore. Engineering workshops, saw mills, tile factories, cotton textile mills, and coir factories were the important units. H & C, William Goodacre and Thomas Stephen were the major British owned Companies. Besides, a large number of cashew factories were functioning there. It was in 1925 cashew processing became an organized industry. K.C. Govindan quotes a story. It was said that once a white man who happened to come to the market, asked a cashew nut vendor what the name of the nut was. The woman vendor replied "*Kasinettu*" meaning eight nuts for a *Kasuu* (smallest coin). The white man started calling the nut *Kasinettu* which later got transformed into cashewnut. It was one Rochi Victoria, an Anglo Indian (a relative of F.X. Periera, the proprietor of the Chavara Mineral Company) who started the first Cashew nut processing factory. Till then there was no commercial production and marketing of processed kernels, though in the countryside people used to sell home-roasted nuts in the local markets.

Soon cashew nut factories began to acquire modern boilers and roasters and furnaces. A Tamilian J.S. Naidu financed Rochi Victoria. K.C. Govindan had recorded that Rochi Victoria was assisted by Anthony Muthu Pillai as supervisor and Swaminathan of Tutocorin as Accountant. A brother of J.S. Naidu was in USA and it was through him that the company secured export orders for processed kernels. Swaminathan soon became partner. It was his entrepreneurship that led to rapid growth of the cashew nut processing industry in Kollam. He laid the foundation for the India Nut Company. It was found that Thangal Kunju Musaliar who later became the Cashew King of Kollam was initially only a sub-contractor of Swaminathan. Musaliar and Gangadharan Muthaliali used to supply raw nuts to Swaminathan Company on commission basis. Both of them became leading figures in the cashew nut industry.

K.C. Govindan narrated another interesting incident at H & C where there was a quick-tempered Manager who hit the Cashier for not addressing him "sir". The Cashier, a simple and quiet man, broke down and wept having been humiliated. Some of the staff and workers got furious at this and

surrounded the Manager. They administered a few blows at him. The Manager fled to his office room on the first floor and workers gave him a chase and threatened all the British staff there. Next day, workers of three factories of H & C Company in Kollam struck work and gathered at Cantonment Maidan for a demonstration and a meeting addressed by P.K. Damodaran, M.R. Madhava Warrier, K.G. Shankar, Dr. M.R. Govinda Pillai and T.K. Narayanan. According to K.C. Govindan, the Kollam Labour Union was formed at this meeting on February 10, 1927. P.K. Damodaran and Kayikkara K.P. Narayanan were elected as President and Secretary respectively. After a few weeks, K.G. Shankar took over as the President. The Union was very active till September 1932, when K.G. Shankar, struck by paralysis, had to vacate his office. The activities of the Union were at a low ebb till 1937. When V.V. Giri attended the 12th Annual Conference of the TLA in Alappuzha, he decided to visit Kollam and the Kollam Labour Union decided to felicitate him. Giri also stressed the need for a full time activist in the Union and it prompted K.G. Shankar to invite K.C. Govindan and take over the charge of the Union.

5.1.8 Entry of T.K. Divakaran

On July 5, 1937, K.C. Govindan took charge as the Secretary of the Kollam Labour Union and he was on the lookout for an office clerk to assist him. Kannan Maistry in a tile factory suggested the name of T.K. Divakaran for the post saying that he knew well Divakaran's grandmother working as a sweeper at his factory. Divakaran was a Matriculate and possessed good handwriting. K.C. Govindan appointed him as a clerk in the union office. It was this Divakaran who later became one of the most illustrious trade union leaders of Kerala. He played a major role in the trade union movement through his association with the RSP and the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC). He was a right hand man of N. Sreekantan Nair, another giant figure in the union movement. Later in his life T.K. Divakaran became a minister in the State. He was known for his versatile ability as a labour law expert and an efficient skilled union negotiator.

5.1.9 Expression of solidarity

Following a brutal lathi charge on striking coir factory workers in Alappuzha, the Union there held a one-day *hartal*. The Managing Committee of the Kollam Labour Union then decided to express its solidarity by observing a one-day *hartal* in Kollam also, though several members opposed this. The printing presses in Kollam were unwilling to print even the

notices on the *harthal*. T.K. Divakaran had to prepare 100 handwritten carbon copies of the notices and he and K.C. Govindan went round in bicycles to distribute them to workers in various factory locations. On the day of the *harthal*, March 28, workers struck work in most factories and came out to join a march and the *harthal*. They saluted martyr Baba of Alappuzha who had succumbed to injuries caused in police brutality. The strike and the solidarity *harthal* marked a turning point in the union movement at Kollam. Workers soon began to join the Union in large numbers.

The yard superintendent at H & C tile factory started victimising some workers for joining the strike and the *harthal*. He was forcing the workers to buy their requirements of rice, provisions, stationery, and, consumer goods from his shops. Union members were singled out for victimization and dismissal. The Union represented their case before the *Peshkar* (senior Revenue Official). He deputed a police officer to enquire but the yard superintendent duly bribed him. When the Union persisted, the *Peshkar* made an unannounced visit to the shops concerned to make an on the spot enquiry. He was then convinced that there was truth in the workers' complaints. *Peshkar* then asked the Company to take disciplinary action against the erring official and take back the dismissed workers.

5.1.10 Union at Chavara

K.C. Govindan, being an expert organizer of trade unions did not confine himself to the working class in Kollam factories. On being informed by a social worker, Pandit K. Nanu, about the pitiable conditions of workers in the Minerals factory at Chavara, Govindan went there. He interacted with influential local people like Pulimana Chellappan Pillai, Kochu Nanu and Kallada Kuttan Pillai and local workers and decided to form a trade union for mineral workers employed in the four companies namely, Travancore Minerals, F.X. Pereira & Sons, Hopkins and Williams, and Associated Minerals. These factories employed about 5000 permanent workers and about 1000 temporary workers. Most workers were forced to do household work at the residences of company managers without any remuneration. The Union started functioning from June 26, 1938 with Pulimana Chellappan Pillai as President, K.A. Mohammed as Vice President and Pandit K. Kochu Nanu as Secretary.

5.2 UNIONS IN CASHEW INDUSTRY

The conditions in the cashew nut factories were inhuman and deplorable; the work commencing at 5.30 am forcing the workers, mostly women, to leave their homes at 3 am. Most of the cashew factory workers were *Harijans* (scheduled castes). Women workers used to carry babies and small children when they went to work and keep the babies on their lap or lay them on a gunnysack nearby during work. The unhygienic conditions of the factories and exposure to cashew shell oil and fumes made many sick. Since wages were based on piece rates, they varied according to output of whole and unbroken kernels. No wages were paid for broken kernels. Workers used to be cheated by false weighing of output and low wages. The peeling and passing sections employed mostly Ezhavas. Toilet facilities, washing facilities, and drinking water were not made available in the factories. Several unauthorized deductions, some compulsory, were made from the wages. One was for meeting "water charges" even when no water was supplied. Another was the deduction of one *chakrom* ($1/28^{\text{th}}$ of a Travancore Rupee) as subscription to *chitty* (saving) with the promise that it would be returned during *Onam* festival. The worker would forfeit this amount if he ever tried to seek employment in another factory.

K.C.Govindan and his associates got 10,000 copies of printed leaflet for distribution to the workers in the cashew factories. The leaflet had laid down the workers' main demands like provision of toilet facilities, baby crèches, job security, ban on forced *chitty* collection, abolition of water charge collection, abolition of unremunerated work, ban on employment of children below the age of 14, shifting of commencement of work to 8 am, payment of wages for broken kernels too, maternity leave, free provision of fresh water, and, increase in wages. Following the distribution of the leaflets, a number of factory gate meetings were held. K.N.Gopalan Vaidyar, G.R. Krishnan Vaidyar (the secretary of SNDP union) and others spoke. Accompanied by them and T.K. Divakaran, extensive field trips were made by K.C. Govindan for mobilizing the cashew factory workers. Govindan also sought the help of P.N.Krishna Pillai, the then Vice President of TLA and requested him to come to Kollam and arrange a strike in 1937. The Strike Committee consisted of Kazhikkadathu Thekkethil Rajamma, Thazhuthala Kunnil Bhargavi, Parvathy Valiazhikkathu, Lekshmi Kozhikkadathu Vadakkethil, Chellamma Panthiyil Thekkethil, Johnson Sahayam, K.N. Gopalan Vaidyar, G.R. Krishnan Vaidyar, M.K. Kesavan Kavumbhagom, Veliyil Mathew, Veliyil Damodaran and P.G. Gopan.

Following the launching of the State Congress Struggle for adult suffrage, freedom from autocratic rule and establishment of responsible

government, the Dewan started repressive measures to suppress the movement. Rowdy gangs were deputed to beat up many leaders. On June 17, 1938, K.P. Neelakanta Pillai, a leading lawyer and General Secretary of the State Congress was attacked, while he was taking his morning walk near his residence in Thiruvananthapuram. The State Congress decided to defy the ban imposed by the authorities and take out a march from the Congress House at Van Ross Bungalow to the Railway Station. K.C. Govidan and Ponnara Sreedhar carried the banner in front of the march and Changanacherry Parameswaran Pillai, the old man of Travancore politics, joined them. C. Kesavan sang a revolutionary marching song. The police, though initially showing some resistance, decided to keep a low profile and the march ended in success. The authorities had issued ban orders in Kollam too.

K.C. Govindan returned to Kollam along with C. Kesavan, Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai and Thazhava Kesavan and they decided to defy the ban there and convene a huge march by workers at Cantonment maidan. T.K. Divakaran was deputed to lead the march of workers of A.D. Cotton Mill. Workers from different factories in Kollam took out the march and at the public meeting K.P. Neelakanta Pillai, M.G. Mathew, K.S. Thangal and Thazhava Kesavan spoke. All of them, with the exception of C. Kesavan were arrested and sent to the Central Jail in Thiruvananthapuram. A few days later, the attempt to defy the prohibitory order led to a clash between police and workers and heavy stone throwing. The agitated workers stopped a transport bus, forced out the passengers and set fire to it.

On September 7, C. Kesavan and Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai were arrested. K.C. Govindan was touring the working class centers to recruit volunteers and distribute State Congress membership. He was summoned to the Police Station. Since he sensed his imminent arrest, he handed over all his papers and money to a rickshaw puller who brought him to the Police Station and requested him to hand over the same to T.K. Divakaran at the Union Office at Chinnakkada. Govindan was arrested and when he was brought to the Kasba station, C. Kesavan and Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai had been already committed to the lock-up. Later R. Sankar was arrested while addressing a public meeting at Ochira. The First Class Magistrate sentenced all prisoners to one and half month's rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 1500. They were taken to the Central Jail at Thiruvananthapuram the next day itself under armed escort. The Jail was already crowded by those leaders arrested for joining the Civil Disobedience Movement. It was in this context, that the Great Palace March by Accamma Cherian was held on October 23. By this time working class agitation and State Congress agitation converged into a massive progressive popular movement.

5.2.1 Meeting with Thangal Kunju Musaliar

A large number of cashew nut processing factories had been set up in and around Kollam in such places like Pazhayattumkuzhi, Kilikollur, Palkulanagara, Randamkutti and Moonnamkutti. The Kollam Labour union conducted extensive campaigns among the workers and a large number of them shed their initial inhibitions and fear of repression by employers came forward and enthusiastically joined as members. In the T.K.M. factory owned by Thangal Kunju Musaliar, about 350 workers were dismissed on the ground that there was not enough work in the factory due to adverse trade conditions. C.G. Kesavan, and K.C. Govindan negotiated with Musaliar, but the latter was adamant. The Union served a Notice that if the workers were not reinstated within 15 days, the workers would strike. A copy of the Notice was sent to the Dewan, Chief Secretary, and Police authorities. The Government deputed the D.S.P. to meet the dismissed workers and collect evidence from them at the Government House. Musaliar sent his people to prevent them from reaching the Government House. In spite of that, 75 affected workers met the DSP. Musaliar entered into a secret arrangement with the DSP and submitted a memorandum saying that the workers had only been suspended and he was prepared to supply them with recommendation letters to other factories where they could seek employment. The Union did not agree to this compromise and insisted that all the dismissed workers should be reinstated. The Union then decided to launch an agitation against Musaliar by picketing the factory gates.

In spite of picketing none of the workers inside the factory came out to show their sympathy. The union people thought that if this continued, peaceful picketing would fail. They decided to use a trick. Polikarp was a popular activist and liked and respected by the majority of workers at the Musaliar factory. It was decided that Polikarp would picket the factory gate in the presence of police and *goondas*. When police started removing Polikarp, he would fall down and lie there as if he was dead. Selected volunteers were given training to beat their chests, weep and cry loudly that the police and goondas killed Polikarp. The trick was perfectly implemented. In a few minutes, workers hearing the “sad news” stopped work and started coming out of the factory. Though the watchman closed the gates, the agitated workers broke open the gate to see the dramatics of Polikarp doing his act of wriggling around in pain and gasping for breath.

Both the I.G. and the DSP rushed to the factory and assessed the situation and wanted the Manager to settle the issue. At the mediation talks held by the I.G, C.G. Kesavan and K.C. Govindan represented the Union and Thangal Kunju Musaliar and his legal advisor Kumaran were also present.

The I.G requested the Management and the Union to forget the past enmity and unhappy incidents. The Management agreed to reinstate the 75 workers who had given the evidence at the Government House. The Union decided to call off the agitation and picketing. K.C. Govindan was all praise for K.P. Nanu and S. Polikarp for their sincere work in the union movement. M.K. Raman, who later became the secretary of the *Navika Thozhilali Union* was a *Vallam* worker and Polikarp too was his colleague.

5.2.2 Union formed by Musaliar

The Trade Union Bill proposed to be presented to the Travancore Legislature had provided for the registration of industry-wise unions. Thangal Kunju Musaliar who owned a large number of cashew nut processing factories took inspiration from this and formed the All Travancore Cashew Workers Union in 1940. Though some workers joined this Union, they did not fall into Musaliar's trap. They held meetings and elected P.N.Krishna Pillai as President, A.V. Fernandez as General Secretary, M.S. Vilasini, S. Polikarp and K.P. Nanu as Organizing Secretaries. The Kollam Labour Union supported the formation and development of a separate trade union of cashew factory workers. Gradually within a few years, the trade union movement came under the control of Communists. Once the Kollam Labour Union got registration and became Kollam Factory Workers' Union, the struggle for control became heated, particularly between N. Sreekantan Nair, formerly of Youth League and later the central figure in the Kerala Socialist Party and the RSP and M.N. Govindan Nair of the Communist Party of India. By this time, the major trade unions in the Kollam area were the Navika Thozhilali Union, the Cashew nut Workers' Union, the Punalur Paper Mill Workers' Union, and, the Timber Workers' Union.

5.2.3 Union of Cashew workers

Before we conclude this section, we should narrate the development in the union movement relating exclusively to the cashew nut factory sector. Already mention had been made about the formation of All Travancore Cashew Workers Union by Thangalkunju Musaliar. We need to explain in detail the background to the emergence of the union movement in Kollam. P. Krishna Pillai was the central driving force in the mobilization of working class virtually all over the State of Kerala. He moved about from the North to the South, identified potential leaders and activists, conducted study classes, organized meetings, made speeches, and, inspired the working class by instilling in them class consciousness and class solidarity. He was preparing

the working class in the Marxist-Leninist line. During his visit to Alappuzha, he came to know about the conditions of the workers in Kollam. He was instrumental in deputing the activists of the Travancore Labour Association at Alappuzha to Kollam to do the groundwork. They included K.C. Govindan, and P.N. Krishna Pillai. We have already narrated the great work done by K.C. Govindan in strengthening the Kollam Labour Union which got registered as the Kollam Factory Workers' Union on August 13, 1938. Initially P.N. Krishna Pillai functioned as the President, and K.C. Govindan as the General Secretary. K. Chellappan of Kilikollur acted as the Secretary and T.K. Divakaran was the Union Office Clerk.

5.2.4 P. Krishna Pillai's Intervention

Unfortunately, the Kollam Factory Workers' Union had several ups and downs and during a short period the control of the union came into the hands of Gopala Pillai, the editor of the pro-Dewan *Malayala Rajyam*, Daily. The Union got transformed from a "Revolutionary Union" to an ordinary "Compromise Union". This came to the notice of P. Krishna Pillai and he deputed M.N. Govindan Nair to meet Gopala Pillai and request him to vacate his presidency in the Union. P. Krishna Pillai wanted N. Sreekantan Nair, who was in jail at that time, to take over as the President of the Union. Though Sreekantan Nair really wanted to become the President of the T.C.F.W.U. at Alappuzha, P. Krishna Pillai had already decided to put T.V. Thomas there and depose the former to Kollam. When P. Krishna Pillai was released from jail in March 1942, he decided to depose M.N. Govinda Nair to build up the Communist Party at Kollam and at the same time to popularise the Communist ideology among working class. In those days the activists of the State Congress, Youth League and the Communist Party actively worked together in the union movement.

In the Annual Conference of the Kollam Factory Workers' Union held on January 11, 1942, Sreekantan Nair was elected as the President, M. N. Govindan Nair, the Vice President and K. Chellappan as the Secretary. T. K. Divakaran continued as the Union office clerk. Following the 1942 invasion of Soviet Union by Hitler, the Communist Party took a controversial decision to support Britain and oppose the Congress call for Quit India agitation against Britain. Sreekantan Nair and his group as well as a good number of leaders of the All Travancore Trade Union Council (ATTUC) expressed their protest against the stand taken by the Communists who were branded conspirators.

Sreekantan Nair established links with the Socialist Party and declared an open war against the Communists. It was in this background that the Communist Party decided to revive the All Travancore Cashew Workers' Union. At that time, this Union had only just 15 members and the Union office functioned from Ayathil Junction. The debate following the failure of the strike of 1939 was serious and for the next three years, workers did not show any interest in the trade union. This enabled the employers to step up their brutal exploitation and repression. Though many other industries had been brought under the Factories Act, Cashew nut processing industry was somehow kept out. Since the bulk of the workers constituted women, grievances were never brought to the attention of union activists or management. The workers feared the *goondas* and factory supervisors and their abuses. The union then decided to put an end to this. P. Krishna Pillai, the great leader was reported to have made a visit to Kilikollur and that inspired the union activists.

During the Third Annual Conference of the Union in 1943, M. N. Govindan Nair was elected as the President and K. R. Nanu became the Secretary. A series of agitations conducted by the Union forced the employees to desist from making unauthorized deductions from wages. As the Union gained strength, the *goonda* gang was virtually withdrawn. This induced more and more workers to seek membership in the Union.

5.2.5 Demand for Wage increase

The Union's next move was to get an increase in wages and also being about uniformity in the rates for all cashew nut factories, Notices were circulated. Gate meetings in front of factories were held. There were media campaigns through press releases. The employers thought that the Union might call a total strike to paralyze the industry at any time as it had gathered full support from the working class. They therefore agreed to the following schedule of wage rates to avert a crisis..

Type of Work	Wage Rate
1. Roasting (<i>Varuppu</i>)	- 14.25 <i>chakram</i> per bag
2. Shelling (<i>Thallu</i>)	- 2.50 <i>chakram</i> per pound
3. Peeling	- 2 <i>chakram</i> per pound
4. Passing	- 21 <i>chakram</i> per day
5. Borma	- 32 <i>chakram</i> per day
6. Packing	- 32 <i>chakram</i> per day

(One Rupee = 28 *chakrams*)

Contrary to the expectations, the employers were determined to disturb the peace in the industry. They started victimization against party and union functionaries. C. M. Mytheen Kunju was dismissed from the Q.C.E.C factory at Ayathil.

5.2.6 Demand for inclusion in Factories Act

P. Kesavan Nair of the CITU had done a good piece of documentation of the cashew workers' union movement and revolutionary struggles in Kollam in the form of 29 articles serialized in the *C.I.T.U Sandesam*, the official organ of the Kerala Unit of the C.I.T.U.⁹ He narrates the deplorable condition of workers in these words. "Working hours extended to 13-14 hours. Roasting and *Mycaud* section workers were found to stay in the factory itself. Women who were engaged in Shelling and Peeling work had to leave their homes before sunrise and was able to return home only after sunset. Besides factory work, many had to render free service at the residence of factory supervisors, managers and owners. In short, most of the workers had a 20 hours day. The conditions in the factory were unhygienic and there was no facility for toilet or drinking water. The women workers carried their young children to the factory shed and kept them aside on gunny bags spread on the floor. Small babies were kept on their lap during work. The employees did not provide even essential drinking water. The workers did not enjoy any leave or holidays. From the meager wages paid, unauthorized deductions in the form of *Chittikasu*, *Vattikkasu*, and *Vellakkasu* were made. There was no job security."

"Ingenious ways were devised by employers to punish workers. Irrespective of sex or age "erring workers" were given a charcoal black paint on their face and then taken in a procession through streets accompanied by beating on empty tins improvised as drums. Workers who were singled out for punishment at the discretion of the employer and managers, were asked to walk through table bottoms, knocking heads against tables and walls and pillars. In some factories such workers were paraded in groups in the open, the cloth *mundu* (dhothi) raised from their behind and their buttocks were beaten up with bamboo canes. This was executed by the maistries. Women culprits, even if they were pregnant, were forced to stand up on tables from morning to evening at a stretch. During the discussion on Labour Laws in the Sri Chitra Legislative Council, Kochikkal Balakrishnan Thampi had raised the issues relating to these primitive inhuman acts of punishment meted out to the cashew factory workers in Kollam."

N. Sreekanthan Nair has narrated many incidents that were unbecoming of any civilized state. For instance he referred to the ill treatment of women workers in the cashew factories¹⁰. In the peeling section women workers hailed from lower middle class families and most of them in their teens. They were not allowed to wear a *Mel mundu* (upper cloth) to cover their breasts. They used to squat on the floor and do the peeling work. At that time the *maistries* and supervisors used to go in front of them, make vulgar remarks and use the sticks kept in their hands to touch and tickle the breasts of the woman workers. If any one protested, they would be singled out for some punishment. Only a few demonstrated their protest, knowing very well that it could lead to the loss of a livelihood. But such protests were very rare. The workers also did not dare even to inform the Union

Given the conditions, it was natural that union, political and social activists decided to mobilize the workers. Once the Kollam Factory workers' Union was formed, top priority was given to conduct struggles to bring the Cashew factories under the purview of the Factories Act.

5.2.7 Musaliar's short success

As mentioned elsewhere, Thangal Kunju Musaliar's attempt to form All Travancore Cashew Workers Union did not go the way he wished. In the first meeting of the union, its control was taken over by a team of devoted union leaders like Pulimana Chellappan Pillai (President), M.P. Fernandes (General Secretary) K.P. Nanu, M.S. Polikarp, M.S. Vilasini and others as Organizing Secretaries. Musaliar got wild at this development and he closed down all his factories to retaliate, pushing the workers into utter destitution. Musaliar had all the blessings of the Dewan. As days passed by, workers gradually withdrew from their agitational path as well as from their union. When Musaliar opened the factories, the workers had no hesitation in offering apologies to Musaliar and the latter found this a great opportunity to step up his exploitation.

According to P. Kesavan Nair, a star figure in the capture of the Musaliar Union was Kilikollur Alexander, a clerk in the Musaliar factory. Alexander was a loyal employee during the daytime office hours, but after that the rest of his time was spent for mobilizing workers. He was also an honest hard working State Congress volunteer. He used to assist M.N. Govindan Nair when the latter became the President of the Union.

5.2.8 Inclusion in Factories Act

Since the cashew factories were not under the purview of the Factories Act, a struggle for its inclusion in the Act became inevitable. Along with it the Union demanded maternity benefits to women workers. In those days, the union activists used to be a target of ridicule for demanding maternity benefits. It was publicized that factory owners had no liability for the pregnancy of their women workers as the latter should go and ask their husbands for legitimate assistance / benefits. Husbands of some women workers also protested to union leaders for making a demand that maternity benefits should be paid by factory owners.

The Fourth Annual Conference of the Union was held in 1944 at Kilikollur the venue at Palkulangara Maidan was named "*Thozhilali Nagar*". The Conference, which lasted three days, resolved to launch a struggle for bringing cashew factories under the purview of the Factories Act. It opened the eyes of the Government and in spite of the opposition by the factory owners, the Government granted the union's demand. Once the provisions of the Factories Act were implemented, gradually workers became enthusiastic in joining the Union and put their faith on the union and the union leadership. Of course, the implementation was not that much satisfactory. The factory owners bribed the officials and the latter shut their eyes to the violation of the Act. Naturally, the Union thought that there should be a separate Factory Inspector exclusively for cashew industry.

5.2.9 The First Bonus Struggle, 1945

Though workers in many industries like Saw Mills, Tiles, H&C etc. at Kollam, had started getting bonus because of the intervention of the Kollam Factory Workers Union, the workers in the cashew industry were denied that benefit. They also did not enjoy any maternity benefits or workmen's compensation. The Trade Disputes Act did not cover the cashew industry. The Cashew Workers' Union was determined to get these benefits through working class struggles.

Cashew factory owners had an Association with Thangal Kunju Musaliar as President and P.S. George as Secretary. The demand for bonus brought all factory owners under a single banner and they decided to ignore the Union. Since the factory owners and their Association showed no sign of sympathy, the union called for a Satyagraha in front of the head office of Musaliar factories at Kilikollur. The Satyagraha turned into a strike. The strike

spread to several factories and it lasted 11 days and during this period *goondas* and police were deployed to deal with the striking workers.

There was a controversy on the concept of bonus. Employers took the stand that workers had no right to bonus, and, if at all it were allowed, the amount would depend on the profit of the factory. The ATTUC from the beginning had held the view that bonus was a deferred wage and workers had a natural right to receive it. While this debate was going on, the Government found that the situation might go out of control and disturb law and order in Kollam. It deputed I.G. Parthasarathy Iyengar and Labour Commissioner V.K. Velayudhan to Kollam to bring about a settlement on the bonus issue. It may be noted that V.K. Velayudhan earlier was an important leader of the TLA in Alappuzha and he was offered this job by the Divan just to keep him away from union activities. It was thus that Velayudhan became a Government spokesman. The Dewan did a similar trick by inducting another great trade union activist, P.N. Krishna Pillai, to make him the Labour Commissioner of the State.

At the conciliation held by the I.G and the Labour Commissioner, the Union insisted on a minimum bonus of 4 percent to be paid irrespective of profit or loss as a condition for calling off the strike. The Association of factory owners stood firm saying that they could not pay any bonus due to huge losses incurred by them. However, after prolonged discussions, the Association was forced to sign a settlement, granting 4 per cent bonus.

In those days the major players in the cashew industry were Thangal Kunju Musaliar, Vendor Krishna Pillai, Eacham Veettil K. Mytheen Kunju, Shamugha Vilasam Kedangil Kesavan, Poyilakkada Parameswaran Pillai, N.A. Narayana Swamy Reddiar, M.M. Govindan, E.C. Govindanasan and M.P. Kesavan. They realized the solidarity and strength of the union and decided to come together and consolidate to counter the union. One may say that the formation of an Association of employers stimulated the growth of industry-wide joint consultation, conciliation and collective bargaining and this attitude brought about significant positive changes in the character of industrial relations in cashew factory sector.

5.2.10 Ban on Unions

In Alappuzha and at other centres, agitation against the Dewan's misrule and his proposal for American Model Reforms in Travancore had been going on and on October 22, 1946, the General Strike called by the ATTUC had started. Following it, the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt put the entire State of Travancore at the center stage of freedom struggle and national

politics. The authorities imposed a ban on trade unions. The offices of the All Travancore Cashew Workers' Union were raided by police and records were burnt as happened in the case of the T.C.F.W.U in Alappuzha. The cashew factory owners became happy and they started their old tactics, scaled down wages and other benefits and refused to pay bonus that was agreed under the tripartite settlement. After Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan, left the State, the Raja of Travancore granted responsible government and lifted the ban on trade unions. The ban on the Cashew Workers' Union was lifted in October 1947 and the workers observed, with reverence, the first anniversary of the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle on October 24, 1947.

5.2.11 Arbitration on Bonus

The cashew factory owners refused to implement the bonus settlement. The Labour Department did not take any action. The Union submitted a memorandum to the Government on the issue. The workers were threatened with mass dismissal. The factory owners were very powerful as they had close links with caste and religious groups and agencies. When the Union started campaigns and public meetings, the District Collector prohibited them. Factory owners deployed *goondas* to spoil the campaigns. Union activists like S. Paramu, C.P. Mohammed Kunju Lebba, C.M. Mytheen Kunju and several others got injured. At last the Government decided to appoint Satyanesan, Sessions Judge of Nagercoil as the Arbitrator. The Union called off its agitation and most cashew factories started functioning. Even after 1947, trade unions were not allowed to run smoothly.

5.2.12 Formation of Ad-hoc Committee

Following the decision of the Central Government to impose a ban on the CPI and AITUC unions immediately after the Calcutta Congress of the CPI, most union leaders and party members went underground. In Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, the police was let loose to hunt the leaders. Police Vans (called *Idi Vandis*) went round to capture them. The police told people that if they gave drinking water to any communist their bones would be broken. At Kollam, those leaders who were in the underground secretly met and constituted an ad-hoc committee with N. Gopinathan Nair as President. He was formerly working as editor of *Prabhatham* daily owned by Thangalkunju Musaliar, but had turned a true communist and became the editor of *Janayugom*, the newspaper of the CPI. Since, then, he was known as *Janayugam Gopi*. People like C.M. Mytheen Kunju, K.R. Nanu and K. Chellappan, union activists, in reviving trade union activities, assisted him.

5.2.13 Formation of new Unions

The INTUC was formed in 1947 and very soon it formed a union for Cashew factory workers at Kollam. This Union highlighted the importance of labour-management co-operation and started campaigning that labour-management confrontation, the ideology of the communists and leftists would block national reconstruction in post independent India, which the Congress Government at the Centre was leading. The INTUC Union tried their best to discourage the workers from resorting to direct action. Meanwhile anti-communist feelings of some of the socialists led by N. Sreekantan Nair had reached its zenith. At the all-India level, this got reflected in the trade union movement also. Thus the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) was formed as another Central Trade Union. In Travancore, particularly in Kollam, the UTUC emerged as an alternative to Communist- led unions and such a great stalwart like N. Sreekantan Nair was there to lead it. In a sense both the INTUC and the UTUC exploited the situation in which the CPI supported AITUC unions were under a ban and their leaders had gone underground. INTUC was led by B.K. Nair and young and promising activist C.M. Stephen.

5.2.14 Sympathetic Strike

When the first anniversary of the Punnappra-Vayalar Struggle was being observed, as reported in an earlier chapter, there occurred a jail mutiny following the hoisting of the Red Flag on the mast of the Poojappura Central Jail in Thiruvananthapuram. It was in this incident that Muhamma Ayyappan had become a martyr. The cashew workers felt sad and agitated over this incident and they wanted to register their feelings of anger. T.V. Thomas, R. Sugathan, Kottayam Bhasi, C.S. Gopala Pillai, Ulloor Gopi, V.N. Thomas, C.K. Kumara Panicker, Dr. P.K. Sukumaran, K.S. Anandan, M.T. Chandrasenan and others were in jail and they commenced a hunger strike to protest against brutal attack by the police in their cells. On the 11th day of the hunger strike, the conditions of many of them became serious. The AITUC issued a call for a general strike. Workers of Kollam came out of their factories, and in terms of strength, the cashew factory workers constituted the largest number among them. They defied the ban orders and police used force to disperse the mob by launching brutal lathi charges injuring many seriously.

December 30, 1949 saw the Sooranad Episode, where there was loss of life to five policemen and five comrades. It was reported that the Government of Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai was excelling Dewan's Rule in executing police repression on those engaged in progressive popular mass movements. On January 1, 1950 the police raided union offices and hideouts of leaders. Police

forced themselves into the homes of cashew workers to search for union activists and communists.

5.2.15 Kottathala Surendran's Martyrdom

During 1948-52 it was really a police raj in Travancore-Cochin State. Surendran of Kottathala after his education got a job in Sub-Registrar's Office but soon resigned it, as he could not accept the misdeeds and corruption seen in the office. Later he got a job as Conductor in the State Transport. One day he witnessed police brutality inside his bus, which carried communist prisoners. This scene broke his heart and he resigned that job and returned home. He became a Communist and started to mobilize workers in handloom, cashew and agriculture. He was instrumental in organizing the first anniversary of the Punnappra-Vayalar struggle at Kottarakkara. On September 3, 1950 Surendran was accompanying Veliyam Damodaran, M.A. Joseph and other comrades, when Joseph broke his leg. He was then taken to Kottathala, the hometown of Surendran for treatment by an Ayurvedic physician. While at Kottathala, he wanted to see his wife. From their hide out, a message was sent out. She came and spent some time with her husband. Damodaran and Joseph were taking *Kanji* (rice gruel) and they found some policemen fast approaching towards them. Finding that Joseph could not run away with his broken leg, Surendran directed Damodaran and Joseph to leave as quickly as possible at Joseph's pace. He promised that he would tackle the policemen single-handed. Though Surendran tried to buy time by running in several directions to confuse the policemen, he could not do it for long. Once he was face to face with the policemen, he had no alternative other than take a dagger and stab a policeman when the latter gave him a severe blow with a lathi. Damodaran and Joseph were not far away but they were hiding behind a bush.

As soon as Surendran stabbed the policeman, others started running away. He dropped the dagger and then thrusting both his hands forward, shouted at the policemen to tie him up and take him into custody. The policemen came back and tied up Surendran. He was brutally tortured until he was handed over to the Kottarakkara police lock-up. By the evening, Kottathala Surendran had become a revolutionary martyr. The post-mortem report had said that his body was in a pulp form, hands alone had been broken at six places, all the ribs had been broken and the liver had been totally damaged. It was reported that when, after a round of brutality, Surendran got so exhausted that he asked for some water to drink. The police in their traditional style gave him urine to drink. In spite of all this cruelty, Surendran did not tell the police who were the two comrades found with him at

Kottathala hide out. The police buried his body at Kollam burial ground with the same easiness and contempt as they would bury a dead dog.

5.2.16 Formation of A.K.C.F.W. Federation

Mention had been made earlier about the formation of INTUC and UTUC unions in Kollam, largely when the AITUC unions were not being allowed to function openly due to the legal ban on them. During 1950-51, two federations of cashew workers' unions were formed almost simultaneously. While the AITUC formed the Travancore-Cochin Cashew Workers' Council (hereafter called the Council) on December 11, 1950, the UTUC formed the All Kerala Cashewnut Factory Workers' Federation (hereafter called the Federation) in 1950. We shall first narrate some developments connected with this Federation affiliated to the UTUC.

The leaders who worked for founding this Federation were N. Sreekantan Nair, T.K. Divakaran (who had acted earlier as the Office clerk of the AITUC led Kollam Factory Workers Union), Baby John, R.S. Unni, K.P. Raghavan Pillai, G. Karunakaran, M.K. Sankara Pillai, D. Sridharan, Bhaskara Kurup, T.M. Prabha, Sundaresan, R.K. Yasodharan, Anirudhan, N. Madahvan, P. Raghavan Pillai, K.V. Kumaran, R. Ravindran, P.K. Nair, T.P. Gopalan, M.M. Joseph and C.A. Antony.

The Federation knew about the plans of the AITUC led Council to launch an agitation in Kollam. The latter was reported to have an eleven member Negotiating Committee. The Council had been denied registration, as most of the leaders in it were Communists. The Council had served a Memorandum to Government and Cashew factory owners. Sensing this, the UTUC led Federation suddenly announced a general strike on August 23, 1951. On hearing this, the Council also declared a strike. Inter-union rivalry was gradually emerging in the trade union movement in Kollam. Unfortunately, both the AITUC and UTUC leaders were loyal to leftist ideology, but the problem was confusion regarding the specific brand of it.

5.2.17 The General Strike of 1951

This General Strike brought the AITUC and UTUC unions in to an open confrontation. Though the AITUC led Council was the first to announce a general strike, the UTUC led Federation could not wait for long. They also announced a general strike on August 23, 1951 to outwit the AITUC and gain popularity. Both sides got engaged in a publicity campaign to claim that they were the first to launch the General Strike to safeguard the interests of the

working class in the cashew industry. The UTUC told the workers that the AITUC had initially taken a stand that the workers should not go for a general strike and that was a part of the grand strategy of the Communists. The UTUC leaders, N. Sreekantan Nair and T.K. Divakaran were spearheading the attack on the Communists. Most of the prominent Communists and AITUC leaders like M.N. Govindan Nair could not counter this criticism satisfactorily since they were in the under ground and legally not permitted to enter into open debate or action.

The General Strike forced the closure of most factories. At many factories, police made lathi charges against workers who picketed the factory gates to prevent entry of black legs. Scores of striking workers were arrested and put up in lock ups. After a week, C. Kesavan, the then Chief Minister called a tripartite conciliation conference. K.S. Anandan represented the AITUC Council. This tripartite conference reached the following settlements: (a) 4 per cent bonus for 1948-49, and 1949-50, (b) set up a Minimum Wages Committee to fix minimum wages, (c) Other demands would be subjected to negotiation, and, if it fails, they would be referred to adjudication. Following this settlement, the Government declared the General Strike as illegal. The strike was withdrawn on September 1, 1951.

Since the AITUC Union had been banned, the Government took the view that the Council could not be recognized as a representative body of workers, and as such, it could not sign the settlement. So from the workers' side, N. Sreekantan Nair and T.K. Divakaran, both from the UTUC Federation, signed the settlement. Taking this, the UTUC stepped up the publicity campaign that they had initiated and led the strike and they could bring about a creditable win for the workers in the form of a settlement.

Even before the ink on the settlement document got dried, the employers began flouting it. Bonus was paid only at 2 per cent instead of at 4 per cent as agreed. Workers who had participated in the strike were singled out for victimization. Those workers, who settled as *Kudikidappukars* in the lands owned by the cashew factory owners, were forcibly evicted. While the AITUC leaders could not come out openly to resist or counter these actions of the employers due to the ban on them, the UTUC leaders did not take any positive steps to counter the employers. The INTUC also could not do any thing to help the affected workers. The employers had succumbed to the pressure executed by C. Kesavan, the Chief Minister to reach a settlement and they were just looking for an occasion to give a blow to him. During the 1952 general elections, C. Kesavan contested from the Eravipuram constituency. The employers decided to put Vendor Krishna Pillai as a rival candidate. Vendor Krishna Pillai was one of the biggest employers in the cashew

industry. Lot of money was circulated in the campaign with a view to defeat C. Kesavan. A vilification campaign was held against C. Kesavan, but in spite of all this, he won the election.

5.2.18 Withdrawal of the Ban on AITUC

In the general elections of 1952, several trade union leaders were elected to the Assembly as well as the Indian Parliament. While A.K. Gopalan, P.T. Punnoose and N. Sreekantan Nair were elected to the Lok Sabha, T.V. Thomas, R. Sugathan and M.N. Govindan Nair became MLAs in the Travancore-Cochin Assembly with thumbing majority though some of them were in jail during the elections. The period 1952-60 saw an important growth phase in the trade union movement in the cashew industry. The new Government that took charge after the elections lifted the ban on the AITUC union. Since all the records of the Union had been destroyed during the police raid at its offices, the Union had to re-register. The leaders took stock of the situation and decided that the Council, which they had formed as a temporary measure during the ban, could be retained as such. Thus the Council applied for registration and got it on March 4, 1952. Immediately after that, the Council demanded that the settlement reached earlier should be implemented without delay. It also demanded that pending the fixation of minimum wages, the cashew factory workers should be given an interim wage increase. It also submitted a memorandum demanding an enhancement of maternity benefit by Rs.90.

Though the AITUC Council wanted a joint agitation, the UTUC led Federation took a negative stand. When the Council started hunger strikes before factories, the Federation condemned the strike and asked its members to raise counter slogans like “we don’t want interim relief”, “We don’t want increase in maternity benefit” and the like. While the AITUC wanted the workers to agitate, the UTUC stood firm that all the issues should be settled through adjudication.

5.2.19 Crisis in the Industry

In 1953 the Cashew Industry was passing through a serious crisis. Many factories were closed for more than 8 months. Employers complained that they had one and a half lakh cases of processed Kernels in the go-down, which could not find a market. Kernel prices in global markets were declining. The native cashew employers had another shock when Pierce Leslie Company and Swasthik Ganesh Nayak Company refused to make available

shipping space for their kernel stocks. The native employers, in spite of their associations, were also engaged in cutthroat competition among themselves. For the first time, the trade unions in the cashew industry began to throw some attention to the basic problems confronting the Industry and they realized that the material and economic prosperity of their members largely depended on the industry's prospects.

At the instance of the AITUC, A.K. Gopalan and V.P. Nair, MPs, met the Industry Minister at the Centre, T.T. Krishnamachari, and following that, the Central Government appointed a Committee headed by C. Sankar to make a comprehensive study on the problems facing the Cashew Industry.

5.2.20 Tripartite Conference, 1954

After the 1954 general elections, Pattom Thanu Pillai took over as the Chief Minister of the P.S.P. led coalition. Under the pressure from the United Front MLAs, he called a Tripartite Conference, which was held on April 5, 1954. One important outcome of it was the re-opening of cashew factories bringing considerable relief to the workers. Since 1954 issues concerning the working class of Kerala received top priority in Assembly proceedings.

The year 1954 also saw the great struggle by employees of the State Transport led by the AITUC. The Government of Pattom Thanu Pillai tried all means to break the struggle. All over the State, AITUC unions extended their support to the transport employees and cashew factory workers were not behind in expressing their solidarity. Workers of small industry units also came forward to extend their support. In short, the Transport Employees' Strike was not a general strike confined to the State Transport Undertaking. It had instilled a sense of oneness among the working class of Kerala. Unfortunately, soon forces of fragmentation began to appear in the AITUC led Council due to inter-personal rivalry among its leaders at the regional levels.

5.2.21 First Minimum Wages Notification

Though fixation of minimum wages for cashew factory workers was one of the decisions reached in the tripartite settlement under the initiative of C. Kesavan, his Government could not take any concrete action in that direction. Later, there was a demand for interim wage relief. Meanwhile, the factory owners started saying that the industry was a cottage industry and also a seasonal one and as such it could not be included in the Schedule of Employments under the Minimum Wages Act. After 1952 general elections,

the Government rejected the contention of the factory owners and appointed the A.P. Udayabhanu Committee to fix minimum wages. This Committee had Thangal Kunju Musaliar, Vendor P. Krishna Pillai, and R.J. Thorn of Pierce Leslie representing employers and M.N. Govindan Nair, T.K. Divakaran and Father Zachariahs representing workers. The Committee made a detailed study, visited 21 factories and conducted a family budget survey of 150 cashew workers' families. Finally, after over ruling the objections raised by employers, the Committee recommended the following wage rates and they may be compared with the rates prevailing earlier.

MINIMUM WAGES IN CASHEW NUT PROCESSING INDUSTRY

Type of Work	Wages in 1951	Wages
Recommended in 1953		
Shelling (1 lbs)	1 Anna 1 ½ Paise	1 Anna 3 Paise
Peeling (1 lbs)	do	do
Shelling piece (1 lbs)	6 Paise	1 Anna 6 Paise
Peeling Kattal (1 lbs)	1 Anna 50 Paise	2 Annas
Grading (100 lbs)	14 Annas	1 Rupee 4 Annas

One Rupee = 16 Annas; One Anna = 12 Paise

At a glance it became clear that workers were not given any notable enhancement over prevailing wage rates. Even the rates notified in December 10, 1953 were not implemented and this led to incessant strikes in the industry. The year 1954 saw 27 strikes and 1955 about 30 strikes and none of the Governments in power came forward to implement the revised rates.

After Pattom Thanu Pillai's Government fell, came that of Panampally Govinda Menon on Septemebr 14, 1955. This Government was forced to vacate on March 23, 1956 and following that the President of India appointed P.S. Rao as Adviser to the Raja Pramukh. There was a big march towards the Residence of the Adviser. Workers demanded immediate re-opening of cashew factories and implementation of issues already settled in the tripartite conference and minimum wages as notified by the Government.

5.2.22 The CPI in power (1957-59)

When the Communists were elected to power in 1957, a few leading trade unionists like T.V. Thomas and M.N. Govindan Nair joined the Ministry. This was a great solace to the working class of the State, particularly

the workers of the cashew industry since this Government had a positive policy of saving the industry. The Government led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad allowed full freedom of organization to workers. It declared that police would no longer interfere in industrial disputes. It would also promote direct negotiations, collective bargaining, tripartite conciliation and also mediation and arbitration to prevent and settle industrial disputes. One major contribution of the Communist Government was the setting up of voluntary bodies called Industrial Relations Committee (IRCs).

The Government issued directives to the Labour Department to see that the minimum wages notified for cashew industry in 1953 were implemented and erring employers punished as per the Law. The maternity benefits were also enhanced. The above measures and the decision not to allow the police to intervene in industrial disputes really provoked the employers. In the general elections, the RSP and the UTUC had taken a strong anti-communist position and as a result it failed to win even a single seat in the Assembly. They then made a vow to fight the Communists at all fronts. Their activists made an attempt to attack V.R. Krishna Iyer, the Law Minister during his visit to Kollam. Another attempt to tarnish the image of the Communist Government by the RSP and the UTUC leaders was said to have resulted in the police firing at Chandanathoppu near Kollam on July 26, 1958. Workers attacked the police party and in the resulting firing two workers, Sulaiman and Raman were killed. It was alleged that some senior officers in the Police did not like the new policy of the Government, which was putting some control over it, and they wanted to generate public opinion against it. The Chandanathoppu firing was used by the RSP as a justification for joining the Liberation Struggle against the EMS Ministry. Another incident of lathi charge on striking workers at the MPG Cashew Factory at Palkulangara in 1958 was also used by both the UTUC and the INTUC against the Government. Some argued that had the EMS Ministry been permitted to complete its full term, the working class of Kerala and particularly that in the cashew industry would have gained a lot. All the anti-communists came together under the banner of Liberation Struggle, and, they tried to divide the working class and destroy the class solidarity that was growing in the State.

5.2.23 The Historic Cashew Award, 1957

Following the general strike in the cashew industry in 1951, C. Kesavan had convened a tripartite conciliation conference and as mentioned earlier all the unresolved issues were left to adjudication¹¹. The adjudication of the industrial dispute was notified as No. 15/1951 and was taken up by the

Industrial Tribunal, Thiruvananthapuram, presided over by K. Purushothaman Nair. The major issues raised before the Tribunal were the following:

- (a) The reduction in wages consequent on the reduction in working hours from 9 hours to 8 hours and the demand for an increase in piece rated wages by 12 ½ per cent and that too with retrospective effect.
- (b) Eligibility to get bonus at a higher rate for 1949-50 and 1950-51 than the rates already granted by the employers.
- (c) Eligibility to get paid leave at 1 day for every 20 days of service without any pre-conditions.
- (d) Should employers supply the tools free of charge to all workers?
- (e) Are there steps adopted by employers to cheat workers at the time of weighing or measuring their output? Are the tins used for measurement duly standardized and if not how to standardize them?
- (f) At the time of weighing and measuring of output of workers, do the workers have a right to post a representative there to prevent cheating?
- (g) Given the peculiarities of work, should the workers in roasting, shelling, peeling and borma sections be provided with uniforms/dress or in lieu of that a uniform/dress allowance?
- (h) Eligibility to get medical leave with wages and also festival holidays.
- (i) Eligibility to get free medical aid to all workers and members of their families.
- (j) Should the employers provide for building houses for workers?
- (k) Eligibility of workers to get attendance bonus.
- (l) Eligibility to get compensation if factory is closed on account of reasons/factors beyond the control of management.

The factory owners and their associations in the High Court questioned the reference to the adjudication by the Industrial Tribunal. They succeeded in prolonging the case for nearly four years. P. Balagangadhara Menon, a leading labour law practitioner and a known pro-CPI man argued the case on

behalf of the cashew industry workers in the High Court. On June 16, 1956 the Court directed the Industrial Tribunal to proceed with the adjudication. The Tribunal gave the Award on July 29, 1957. The employers then filed a writ petition against the Award in the High Court. The Court struck down one part of the Award relating to the granting of compensation to workers during the time of closure of factories. The Court, however, accepted the other points in the Award.

While N. Pappu (Kollam), P. Govindan Nair and K.V.R. Shenoy (Menon and Pai, Ernakulam) represented the employers, the RSP and UTUC leader, T.K. Divakaran represented the workers in the case before the Tribunal. T.K. Divakaran was leading the All Kerala Cashewnut Workers' Federation affiliated to the UTUC. It was a heroic as well as a brilliant effort on his part in bringing about substantial benefits to the cashew workers through the Award. The AITUC could not join the case as a party since at the time of the reference to the Tribunal there was a legal ban on it and all its affiliated unions including the *Travancore-Cochin Cashewnut Workers' Council*.

The Award of the Tribunal had given a graphic description of the deplorable conditions of work and wages in the cashew industry, besides suggesting ways of restructuring the industry with assistance from the Central and State Governments. The main decisions of the Award were the following:

- (a) One day of paid leave for every 20 days worked.
- (b) Standardization of the Tins used for the weighing of Kernel output given by the workers.
- (c) Workers in Roasting and Borma sections made eligible for a pair of half trouser and *baniyan* (vest) once in every three months or in lieu of it a uniform/dress allowance of Rs.3 per worker.
- (d) Paid holiday for *Thiru Onam* and leave without wages on days of illness.
- (e) Establishment of a Labour Welfare Fund on the basis of contributions linked to the value of export of cashew kernels.
- (f) Government should formulate a housing scheme for cashew workers.
- (g) Workers made eligible to an Unemployment Allowance at the rate of one-day wages for every 4-day shortfall in 245 working days a year. This should be paid by taking the daily wage for time rated

workers and Rs.1 as. 4 for piece rated workers and it should be disbursed from the 1957 season.

- (h) For the years 1949-50 and 1950-51, besides the 4 per cent bonus already agreed to be paid, an additional amount of 2 ½ per cent should be paid as bonus

5.2.24 Struggle for Minimum Wages

After the Liberation Struggle and the dismissal of the Communist Ministry led by EMS Namboodiripad, the fresh elections brought into power an anti-communist coalition Government headed by Pattom Thanu Pillai as Chief Minister and R. Sankar as the Deputy Chief Minister. This Government was not keen in implementing the Award of the Industrial Tribunal, as it did not want to hurt the cashew industrialists. The Congress, the PSP and the Muslim League always cherished the whole-hearted support of the industrialists. Sensing the mood of the Government, the cashew factory owners began to close down their factories, alleging shortage of raw nuts and loss incurred in running the factories. Though the factories were closed, the owners used the innovative method of "*Kudivarappu*" by shifting operations to remote hinterlands, putting temporary work sheds and employing workers at very low wages and no other benefits. *Kudivarappu* was indeed a kind of decentralized cottage production promoted through middlemen contractors so as to ensure production at the least cost by denying statutory benefits to workers.

In the 1953 Minimum Wage Notification the Government had not made any provision for DA. The ever-increasing trend in prices had reduced the real wages of cashew workers and so all the unions started demanding a variable DA along with basic wages. On April 26, due to continued pressure from the unions, and, fearing a backlash, the Government issued a revised notification on granting higher minimum wage and DA. Naturally, the factory owners refused to implement it. Both the AITUC and UTUC unions started a struggle. Finding that factory owners were showing no signs of implementing the revised rates, they issued a call for a General Strike on July 10, 1960.

Pattom Thanu Pillai had already acquired a bad name because during his first stint in leading a Government earlier, his rule had been considered worse than that of the Dewan, especially in the use of repressive measures. But this time Pattom's policy was positively different. Within 12 hours of being informed about the commencement of the General Strike, Pattom convened a conciliation conference at his residence, the Cliff House, in the evening of July 10. J. Chitharanjan and P. Bhaskaran represented the AITUC.

The INTUC was represented by C.M. Stephen and UTUC by T.K. Divakaran and R.S. Unni. Pattom carefully listened to the views of all and the conference went on till past mid-night. At one stage, Pattom held consultations separately with the union leaders. He told them that he was fully convinced about their demands and so if they agreed to withdraw the strike, he would see that the factory owners conceded their demands. He asked for a week's time to do it. The union leaders asked him what would happen if he failed in his promise. At this Pattom assured them that in such an eventuality, he would be with them to protect their interests. The union leaders formally agreed, went back to Kollam, convinced their ranks and announced the temporary suspension of the General Strike. One section of workers did not like this and in front of many cashew factories workers belonging to different sections clashed with each other. Some employers circulated the propaganda that the union leaders accepted huge sums of money for suspending the General Strike.

Pattom tried his best to bring around the cashew factory employers to an amicable settlement, but he failed. After a week, the union leaders met Pattom and reminded him about his promise. He told them to go ahead with the strike. Soon, in many factories the workers caused direct confrontations with factory owners and managers. The managers called for police protection. Though the police arrived, they asked the managements to reach a speedy settlement. Some managers were ordered to leave factory premises. That sent a danger signal to factory owners and they rushed to Thiruvananthapuram to meet Pattom and request him to call a conference immediately. Thus on July 21, 1960 a second tripartite conference was held in the presence of the Chief Minister. This conference became fruitful as the employers agreed to implement the Minimum Wages Notification. The workers secured minimum wages, besides DA on a sliding scale at the rate of one paisa per day for three-point increase above Cost of Living Index of 400 at Kollam.

5.2.25 Freezing of D.A

Due to various under-currents in Kerala politics, Pattom Thanu Pillai accepted the appointment as Governor of Punjab in September 1962 and he left Kerala to take up the assignment after giving the Chief Minister ship to R. Sankar. The PSP and Muslim League decided to leave the anti-communist United Front, as they did not like the Congress. The ministry of R. Sankar lasted nearly two years. This period was not favourable to the working class in Kerala and their trade unions. During this period, the Central Government had put out the theory that one major reason for the rise in price level in the country was the grant of DA to workers and therefore the DA had to be

temporarily freezed. When action on this line was taken by Central Government, Kerala also followed suit. The cashew workers who had just started enjoying the DA suddenly found that they were being deprived of this benefit. Following the DA freeze, there was spontaneous protest all over the State. In the cashew industry the AITUC led Cashewnut Workers' Council held a big campaign to mobilize the workers against the DA freeze.

The Council also took this opportunity to demand the implementation of Employees' State Insurance (ESI) Act in all cashew factories. The other demands raised were starting of cashew factories in the public sector, entrusting the import of raw nuts and export of processed kernels with the State Trading Corporation (STC), and, passage of a Gratuity Act. The struggles led by the AITUC unions did not have the rigour or vigour of their earlier years. By 1962 a crisis was brewing in the Communist Party of India, as there was a clear division between the Rightists and the Leftists. On October 20, 1962 the Chinese forces had attacked India and this made the crisis in the CPI serious. The crisis had started since 1957.

The Cashewnut Workers' Council concentrated on holding campaigns and showed an inclination for launching direct action. On January 4, 1964 the Government issued a Notification revising the minimum wages for cashew workers. But this did not give the workers any increase in wages or DA. Further, it had fixed a ceiling of 475 points for calculating DA.

5.2.26 Split in AITUC

The crisis in the CPI had started since 1957 when the Party celebrated its Silver Jubilee during the Conference held in Ernakulam. S.A. Dange's Report, placed before the Conference, pressed for class-cooperation instead of class-confrontation. The leftist group criticized Dange for promoting cooperation with the bourgeoisie and the ruling class. This got reflected in the trade union movement too. In the earlier years, the Cashewnut Workers' Council was a highly revolutionary organization. Those leftists who opposed the policies of the Central Government stand at the time of the 1962 Chinese invasion on India's borders now stood marginalized and branded anti-national and pro-Chinese by the Rightist leaders. By 1964, the split in the CPI became a concrete reality. The CPI (Marxists), after the split, held the view that the split should not come into the AITUC and affiliated unions.

In December 1964 several leaders who had joined the CPI (M) were arrested under the Defence of India Rules (DIR) and sent to jail. They included C.P. Karunakaran Pillai, Dr. P.K. Sukumaran, N. Padmalochanan, C.M. Mytheen Kunju, K.C. Nanu, A.R. Kutty, Pattazhi Kesavan Nair, P.

Karunakaran Pillai and George Thomas. Among them C.P. Karunakaran Pillai, C.M. Mytheen Kunju and K.C. Nanu were important leaders of the Workers Council. It was alleged by CPI (M) that the CPI and Rightist leaders of the AITUC did not come out with even a statement of protest against the arrest of these leaders due to their blind opposition to the CPI (M). Workers had just started thinking about having a truly revolutionary trade union, since they lost their faith in the AITUC leadership. That was a time when the "*Kudivarappu*" system was at its zenith and registered factories were being closed. The Cashew industry had also started migrating to Kanyakumari District in Tamil Nadu, where the employers from Kollam had set up new cashew factories.

5.2.27 The emergence of Cashew Workers' Center: Background

The year 1964 was an important turning point in Kerala politics. There was a split in the Congress Party and Kerala Congress was born. With 15 MLAs under his control, the Kerala Congress founder K.M. George withdrew support to the R. Sankar Ministry. Kerala thus came under another spell of President's Rule. During the period of President's Rule there were food riots in the State on account of acute shortage of food grains, breakdown of the public distribution system and rising prices. In the Kollam region the Musaliar Industries closed down all its factories throwing about 30000 workers out of employment. But *Kudivarappu* was spreading. In the interim elections held in 1965, CPI (M) came out as the largest party in the legislature. But 20 of their MLAs then were in jail. The election results caused considerable damage to the image of both the AITUC and UTUC unions. Though CPI (M) was the largest single party, it was not allowed to form a government and stating that no group could prove its majority the President dismissed the legislature on March 25, 1965. Kerala again came under President's Rule with the State Governor taking charge of administration.

It was in this context that a kind of purification started in the AITUC to drive out those who were closer to the CPI (M). It was widely alleged that the local/regional leaders of the CPI and AITUC were supporting the *Kudivarappu* System as a matter of pleasing the cashew capitalists. In protest against this, workers with CPI (M) support formed the Kollam District Cashew Workers Union in 1965 under the leadership of P.K. Sukumaran of Kilikollur. While P.K. Sukumaran served as Secretary, Advocate Jillarioz was the President. In the annual general body meeting of the union held in May 1966, Jillarioz was elected President and the office bearers of the Union were Chellappan (Secretary) Pallath Sreedharan and Mandakini (Vice Presidents),

P.K. Sukumaran and M.D. Pasupalan (Joint Secretaries) and Pathrose (Treasurer).

5.2.28 Some important struggles

The Union mentioned above led some important struggles in the cashew industry. One of this was in the Shanmughavilasam factory of Kidangan at Kilikollur. The management there had denied all the statutory benefits to its workers. Other unions had shut their eyes to this exploitation. But the new District Cashew Workers' Union protested. The Union submitted a charter of demands on decasualisation and guarantee of permanency, extension of ESI benefits, stoppage of malpractices in weighing and DA disbursement and ensuring better conditions of work. The union served a Notice to the Management. It was alleged that with the connivance of other unions in the factory, the management declared a lock out. The District Cashew Workers' Union started direct action with Satyagraha for an indefinite period. The union tried to mobilize the support of the general public of Kilikollur. Public meetings were held at several places for strengthening the campaign. Ultimately the management was forced to yield and it lifted the lock out. This struggle raised the prestige of the Union. Following this the Union also tasted success in the struggles in the Karingannur Shamsudeen Company and Paripally Shanmughavilasam Factory.

The workers of the Roasting Sections in the Lakshmanan Company at Kilikollur took membership in the District Cashew Workers' Union. At that time the biggest unions, having a virtual monopoly in the company, were under INTUC and AITUC. It was alleged that under pressure from these unions, the management terminated the services of those who had joined the District Workers' Union. The Union leadership then started a relay hunger strike in front of the company gates. P.K. Sukumaran and Chellan were leading the agitation. When they were holding a protest meeting, the company's *goondas* with the support of rival unions attempted to destroy the Satyagraha shed and attack the union workers. But the latter retaliated in strength to drive them away.

Mathai Manjooran was the then Labour Minister. He intervened in the dispute. On reaching Kollam he called the company management and directed them to reinstate all the discharged workers. At the tripartite conference held at Kollam Government House, the management had no alternative other than accept the Ministers' wish. This success brought a good reputation to the Union and it was encouraged to extend its activities to other cashew centres.

At Kottarakkara the Taluk Cashew Workers' Union was formed with Mylam Pappachan as President, Kadakkat Sukumaran as Secretary, Siromani Chellappan Pillai as Vice President, and Seyed Mohammed as Joint Secretary and C.K. Sivadasan as Treasurer. This union led an important workers' struggle in Avannur Cashew Factory owned by Kidangan Soman Muthalali. Most of the workers in this factory had not been given cards and this had led to malpractices in recording output and calculating wages. When the union called a strike the management closed the factory. The workers then marched from Kottarakkara all the way to Kilikollur to stage a Satyagraha in front of the owner's house. The owner, Kidangan Soman Muthalali (Somasundaram) became furious and let out his Alsatian dogs to attack the workers. Workers retaliated and beat the dogs to death. CPI (M) leaders rushed to the spot and before more ugly incidents started, the owner agreed to a settlement. That was victory to the Kottarakkara Taluk Cashew Workers' Union. The Union also successfully conducted struggles in V.L.C. Company, Urban Stansilas Company at Chirattakonam and in the L.B.B.S. Company.

5.2.29 Formation of Cashew Workers' Center

The Karunagappally Taluk Cashewnut Workers' Union and the Cashew Workers' Councils in Mukhathala and Mavelikkara and also the Pierce Leslie Cashew Workers' Union at Kozhikode (Kollam) were affiliated to the AITUC. But those who had left the CPI to join the CPI (M) had controlled these unions and naturally they did not like to continue the affiliation with the AITUC's Central Council. This later led to the affiliation with the CITU. In 1970 the Kerala Cashew Workers' Centre (KCWC) was formed under the CITU.

In the General Elections of 1967, the CPI (M) in its election agenda had declared some important policy initiatives relating to cashew industry. In the elections, the Left Front had a sweeping victory by winning 117 seats out of 133. On March 6, 1967 the LDF Ministry under E.M.S. Namboodiripad took charge. At that time in the Kollam Cashew Sector, all the factories of Musaliar Industries had been remaining closed. The *Kudivarappu* System was endemic and spreading rapidly with the moral support of the Labour Department Officers and Inspectors. The conditions of work and wages in the *Kudivarappu* sheds were worse than those that prevented when cashew processing started in Kollam in the 1930s. When a *Kudivarappu* shed collapsed, two workers were killed and about 150 were injured. The Labour Minister, Mathai Manjooran visited the spot and ordered action against the erring offices. On June 19, 1967 the Government issued an Ordinance legally prohibiting the *Kudivarappu* system in the cashew industry. It was alleged

that due to the inter-union rivalry prevailing in the industry C.M. Stephen and R. Balakrishna Pillai sided with the cashew capitalists and submitted a Memorandum to the President of India. R. Balakrishna Pillai was at that time functioning as the President of the Small Scale Cashew Manufacturers' Association.

5.2.30 Controversy on Minimum Wages

The 1960 Minimum Wage Notification was adverse to the cashew workers. In 1964 the Government had freezed the DA and the workers had gone on a long struggle against it. Following this, the Government appointed a Minimum Wages Committee under the Chairmanship of Prof. Mathew Tharakan of S.N. College, Kollam. T.K. Divakaran, J. Chitharanjan and C.M. Stephen represented workers and P.G. Varghese, John Irinjalakuda and P. Gangadharan Pillai represented employers in the Committee. When there was a delay in submission of the Committee's report, the Governor ordered the issue of a Draft Notification on Minimum Wages Revision. However, no attempt was made to implement the revision during the President's Rule. But by the time the LDF ministry under E.M.S. Namboodiripad took charge, the report of the Mathew Tharakan Committee had been submitted and the new government did not lose any time in notifying the minimum wage rates recommended by the committee to come into effect from May 25, 1967. The Cashew workers thus secured a substantial increase in minimum wages, besides DA based on sliding scale linked to the cost of living index, guaranteed minimum time rate etc. According to many observers, this Report of the Minimum Wages Committee was a reference document for any exercise of minimum wage fixation. However, there were a few critics. Workers had expected DA based on attendance, but the committee had linked it with workload for determining eligibility for receiving DA. This was disadvantageous to workers, since employers could deny DA by showing workload as falling below the minimum norm fixed. The workers felt that the task of ensuring minimum workload to enable workers to get DA was the responsibility of the employer. Only after some agitations that the employers agreed to pay the DA based on the criterion of attendance and this system came into operation in cashew industry only with effect from 1975.

5.2.31 Employers' Threat

The cashew factory owners and their association stated that they were not going to implement the minimum wages notified in 1967, and, if compelled, they would close down their factories. On July 12, 1967 the

workers commenced a general strike. Musaliar Industries closed down their 26 factories saying that it did not have the funds to run them. Government then offered government guarantee to bank loans that it might take and any other assistance it might require. Since there was no positive response from it to the government offer, the workers continued their struggle, and, at one stage, J. Chitharanjan, Chandrasekhara Sastri and C.N. Mytheen Kunju, union leaders, started a hunger strike in front of the Head Office of Musaliar Industries.

The Government took the matter seriously and gave an ultimatum to the Musaliar Industries that if they failed to reopen the factories, the Government would take over the factories. A copy of this ultimatum was given to the trade unions. The government had also stated that it would appoint a Special Tribunal to enable the workers to get all the benefits due to them. The government also had mentioned about its intention to initiate prosecution proceedings against Musaliar Industries. When Musaliar Industries did not relent, the idea of a public sector in the cashew industry emerged as an alternative.

Following the action by the Musaliar Industries, other employers also started closing down their factories and went to the Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu to open cashew factories there. They diverted the raw cashew nuts procured in Kerala and also the imported raw nuts to their factories in Kanyakumari. All the trade unions, irrespective of their political affiliation and leadership rivalries, jointly started a struggle demanding government intervention in the matter. They requested the government to take action against the anti-national and anti-worker stand of employers, and take over of closed factories, direct the Central Government to take over import of raw nuts and export of processed kernels, payment of DA to workers, enact a gratuity scheme and render relief to workers who remained unemployed.

5.2.32 Impact of Cashew Workers' Center

The political situation was always turbulent leading to many experiments in forging alliances among political parties and some parties were splitting into factions and groups. The CPI and CPI (M) continued to be arch rivals. In the interim general elections held in September 1970, the CPI was compelled to form a government with C. Achutha Menon as the Chief Minister with outside support given by the Congress. But on September 25 1971, the Congress decided to join the Ministry and K. Karunakaran was entrusted with the Home Portfolio. It was a time when the Central Government declared National Emergency and started curtailing freedom of

speech and associations. The Kerala Government too was forced to adopt repressive measures against popular struggles including working class agitations. The Government had a clear anti CPI (M) policy.

The Cashew Workers' Centre, affiliated to the CITU, had become an important force in the 1970s. The CPI (M) had initiated a struggle all over Kerala to forcibly acquire lands declared or found surplus under the land reforms legislation. This was known as the "*Micha Bhoomi samaram*" (Struggle for Surplus Land). The CITU and cashew Workers Centre launched several struggles in the Kollam region. The CITU alleged that cashew factories were being closed and the owners were leaving Kollam to take pleasure holidays in hill stations. They were diverting raw nuts to their new factories in Kanyakumari. The trade unions decided to counter this by raiding godowns and closed factories of the cashew capitalists and started stay-in-strikes inside the factories. They blocked movements of raw nuts and stocks of processed kernels. Police and *goondas* attacked striking workers and there was tension everywhere.

Among specific episodes of trade union action in the cashew industry, the following needs special mention. General Walter was a non-Keralite who had closed down his factory at Asramom, Kollam. The CITU union led a struggle there but Walter refused to talk to the union leaders to bring about a settlement. On February 25, 1971 the Union started a strike that lasted three months. During this long period other friendly unions and their members came with help including financial aid to the striking workers and that was a sign of working class solidarity.

In the Uliyakkovil factory belonging to Musaliar group, the management unilaterally cut down many benefits that workers were enjoying for a long period. The agitated workers blocked the movement of processed kernels and started a stay-in-strike. Police was summoned. The striking workers were told that, if they did not end the strike and disperse, the police would be constrained to use force and even resort to firing. One of the women workers jumped out from the group of strikers, tore her blouse and shouted at the police to fire at her open chest. Police suddenly withdrew from the scene.

In Kilikollur Urban Stansilas Factory, the management resorted to cheating the workers on DA payment and also wages through malpractices in weighing kernel output. The Union there resorted to the same standard practice of blocking movement of kernels and conducting a stay-in-strike in the factory. Since most of the women strikers failed to reach their homes even after late in the night, their husbands and male relatives reached the factory. One of them asked his striking wife to return home but it was reported that she not only refused to go home but also said that she would continue to be

there with her colleagues until the struggle ended. When the husband scolded her, she told him that if he felt any difficulties on her not returning home, he would be free to take another wife. Such was the commitment of ordinary cashew workers to struggles.

The struggles held in Avanoor Kesava Cashew Factory, Umayanallur, N.N.C. Factory, Chirattakkonam Urban Stansilas factory, Kuzhiyam Vinod Cashew Factory, Kadakkal M.B.B.S. Factory and Karingannur Shamsuddin Factory were epoch making ones. But for want of time and space, we are making only a mention about them. All these struggles were spear headed by Cashew Workers' Center affiliated to the CITU.

5.2.33 Raman Committee Report

The Left Front Government of 1967-69 had requested the Central Government to establish state monopoly and control over import of raw nuts and export of cashew kernels through a policy decision on nationalization to save the industry as well as protect the interests of the working class. The Kerala Cashew Workers' Centre and the left party MPs continued to exert pressure on the Central Government. As a result, on September 1, 1970 the State Trading Corporation of India set up a subsidiary, the Cashew Corporation of India (CCI). In the early stages, the CCI failed to do justice in the distribution of raw nuts, since they gave an undue preference to the cashew factories in Tamil Nadu including those in the Kanyakumari district. This helped the cashew capitalists of Kollam who had started factories there after closing their factories in Kollam. Even the stocks of raw nuts allotted to the Kerala factories, determined on the basis of the number of workers they employed, were allowed to be moved over to Kanyakumari factories and CCI did not take action even when the trade unions brought this to their notice. The purpose behind the whole scheme of Central Government Control over raw nuts was thus defeated. The Cashew Workers' Center submitted a memorandum to the Central and State Governments on this issue. It made the following demands:

- (a) 80 per cent of all imported nuts should be exclusively allotted to Kerala,
- (b) The raw nuts should be distributed on the basis of the number of registered factories and workers in Kerala,
- (c) The Government should ensure that such raw nuts released to factories in Kerala were processed here itself,
- (d) workers should be given relief until the factories are reopened,
- (e) For cashew industry workers, a national minimum wage should be fixed.

The Workers' Centre later started a campaign and held factory gate meetings to make the workers aware of these demands. On February 1, 1971, the CITU unions started holding *dharnas* and picketing in front of Taluk Offices of Government. The ruling parties and trade unions affiliated to them described this direct action by the CITU as a political stunt.

Due to constant demand from the opposition led by CPI (M), the Achutha Menon Ministry agreed to a debate in the Assembly, and, consequently on April 13, 1971 the Assembly passed a resolution on the issues and a decision was taken to send a delegation consisting of the Chief Minister and the Opposition Leader to New Delhi to meet the Prime Minister. The resolution passed by the Assembly contained the details of the problems faced by the industry and workers and it requested the Central Government for an immediate action on them.

It was an all-party delegation that went to meet the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Meanwhile, the Kerala MPs led by A.K. Gopalan had already raised these issues on the floor of the Parliament. The Prime Minister promised to appoint a committee to enquire into all the issues. Thus R.V. Raman, Adviser to the Planning Commission was appointed to head a committee. The report of the Raman Committee turned out to be a historic document on the cashew industry even to this day. On May 17-19, 1971 the Committee reached Kerala and visited one factory under the Kerala Cashew Development Corporation (KCDC), one private factory, one *Kudivarappu* unit and 4 factories that had remained closed for a long period. It conducted several sittings to collect evidence from interested parties. Finally the Raman Committee submitted its report and its chief recommendations were:

(a) Ensure the elimination of the *Kudivarappu* system and practice and prevent violation of existing laws, (b) Stop the migration of cashew industry to Tamil Nadu, (c) Restructure the hitherto unorganised cashew industry into an organized one, and, (d) State and Central Government should give the prime leadership in developing this industry and protecting the interests of workers in it. The committee asked the Governments to initiate criminal proceedings against those factory owners, who diverted their quota of nuts to other factories outside the State. Another recommendation was that the cashew industry should be excluded from the purview of the Industrial Development Regulation Act. Besides, the Committee indicated the role to be played by the KCDC, CCI and commercial banks for saving the industry from ruin.

Unfortunately, as alleged by the CITU and CPI (M), the AITUC, UTUC and the INTUC leadership did not show much enthusiasm on the outcome of the Raman Committee Report. When C.M. Stephen became a

Minister in the Central Government, it was alleged that he was instrumental in the dissolution of the Cashew Corporation of India (CCI), which used to act as the monopoly canalising agency for the imported raw nuts.

5.2.34 Inter-Union Rivalry

In the general elections to the Look Samba, the AICC had a big success. The CPI had extended its support to it. While the all India RSP opposed the Congress at the Centre, its Karalla Unit had decided to support the Congress in the State. CPI (M) expressed its opposition to the Congress-CPI-RSP front in Karalla and Congress-CPI front in West Bengal and Tripper. In West Bengal, the CPI (M) and CITU cadres were forced to face repression at the hands of Congress-CPI led government. In Karalla too, it was alleged that the ruling parties were colluding to attack CPI (M) and CITU and eliminate them. Naturally this led to the opening of the floodgates of inter-party and inter-union conflicts and physical clashes. The Cashew Industry witnessed such large number of incidents among different groups of workers.

In many cashew factories forceful monthly levies from workers were made to finance activities of *gonads* controlled by non-CITU unions. N. Padmalochanan, in his reminiscences before this author, had described the *goonda* attack on him, while moving on the road at Ayathil. He was at that time working as the Secretary of the Kerala Cashew Workers' Centre. The Ayathil factory belonged to the Kerala State Cashewnut Development Corporation (KSCDC) and there was a *goonda* leader, Abdul Rehman who attacked Sivarama Pillai, a CITU activist engaged in the collection of union dues from workers and when Pillai protested he was beaten up and cash in his possession was taken away. The matter was reported to the union leader Padmalochanan who was returning from a union meeting. On seeing this, the *goonda* chief rushed to the spot and attacked Padmalochanan. The news on this incident spread like wild fire after Padmalochanan was removed to hospital. CPI (M) and CITU took a vow to end the *goonda rowdyism* in Ayathil. They organized a protest demonstration and meeting. CPI (M) leader Azheekodan Raghavan inaugurated the meeting attended by thousands of workers and sympathizers. One of the *goondas* tried to create trouble at the meeting place. The workers handled him but they turned violent when they knew that some of the shopkeepers in the vicinity were supporting the *goondas*. The workers turned to them and started destroying their shops. At last, the *goonda* gang apologized to the CPI (M) and CITU leaders after surrendering before the latter. It was interesting to note that some of these *goondas* later got transformed into CITU activists.

5.2.35 Protest against inaction by Government

Though there was optimistic expectation by workers and their trade unions in Kollam, the Government was lethargic on the implementation of the recommendations of the Raman Committee Report and they were forced to resort to the path of agitation. The Government even ignored one major recommendation of the Committee and granted licences to 16 *Kudivarappu* units. On October 12, 1971 the Cashew Workers' Centre staged a one-day strike. The CITU leaders were doubtful, their position being not strong and deep in the cashew industry, whether their strike would get support from others. But surprisingly workers belonging to other unions too joined the strike. But the Government continued its policy of inaction. On March 22, 1972 the CITU again called for a one-day strike and *hartal*. The AITUC and UTUC refused to join hands with the CITU. The INTUC did oppose the strike. The CITU and CPI (M) were accused for attempting to gain political mileage from the strike. But after this and up to the starting of the Emergency period, the AITUC and UTUC agreed to cooperate with the CITU in all working class struggles in the Kollam Cashew Sector.

5.2.36 Struggle for Minimum Wage Revision

Since the eligibility for getting DA was linked to the delivery of a minimum quantity of kernel output, the factory managements saw to it, through manipulations, that no worker secured the minimum quantity of output in a day's work. The factory inspectors were bribed and weighing scales manipulated. The inspectors were assured of a certain percentage of the DA amount saved by the managements. The CITU demanded that DA should be linked to attendance and not workload or output as the latter was a measure to cheat workers of their legitimate dues. The AITUC and UTUC unions did not agree with the views of the CITU. They argued that if DA were delinked from workload or minimum output, the productivity in the industry would decline.

On June 5, 1975 the CITU decided to launch a one-day token strike and on July 15, 1975 an indefinite strike was announced. On June 26, 1975 the Central Government had declared National Emergency, but the CITU continued to go ahead with the strike decision. Police banned all marches, demonstrations, meetings and campaigns by unions. When the State Government realized that the strike would definitely be launched, and to prevent it, it issued a Gazette Notification revising the minimum wages of cashew workers on July 14, 1975. The CITU then withdrew the strike call. But the factory owners tried to use the Emergency situation to avoid

implementation of the new rates. They went to the High Court but deliberately kept out the Kerala Cashew Workers' Centre affiliated to the CITU from the list of parties to the case. But the AITUC, UTUC and INTUC and State Government were listed as parties to the case. But the CITU took up the challenge, and, through their lawyer G. Janardhana Kurup, joined the case. Kurup was also then functioning as the President of the Kollam Taluk CITU union. On December 4, 1975, Justice P. Govindan Nair dismissed the writ petition of the factory managements. Even after this, the managements refused to implement the revised minimum wages.

5.2.37 Struggle for saving Monopoly Procurement

In the 1977 elections to the Lok Sabha, the Congress was miserably defeated. Indira Gandhi, the creator of Emergency Rule paid a price for it through her defeat. Morarji Desai became the Prime Minister. But in Kerala the anti-Marxist front led by Congress (I) leader K. Karunakaran became the Chief Minister. He couldn't continue for long as the backlash of Rajan murder case (a student activist who was alleged to have been killed by Police) and A.K. Antony took over as Chief minister. The divisions in the Congress led to the resignation of A.K. Antony. It was then that a new ministry was formed with P.K. Vasudevan Nair, the CPI leader as the Chief Minister. Such was the turbulent political situation in the post-Emergency period in Kerala.

Both the Janatha Government in the Centre and the Congress Government in Kerala were not serious about protecting the workers' interests. The Kerala Government in 1976 had introduced monopoly procurement of raw cashew nuts. The Central Government led by Morarji Desai was attempting to put an end to raw nut imports by the State Trading Corporation. The Central Trade Unions and their affiliated unions decided to launch a struggle against these, particularly when they found the signals from the Kerala Government on abolishing monopoly procurement of raw nuts. The unions argued that it was their duty to protect monopoly procurement, the public sector employing about 30000 workers and a large number of small scale manufacturers, and also to ensure just price for cashew growers. The cashew factory owners were simultaneously exploiting the workers as well as cashew growers. They were alleged to have cheated the State several hundred crores of rupees in tax evasion and converted the same into black money and kept them in Swiss banks. For instance, Rajan Pillai, son of cashew capitalist N.N.C. Janardhanan Pillai was alleged to have built his Singapore based biscuit empire with such money.

In 1977, private cashew factories were again closed. The KSCDC had little resources and infrastructure to provide alternate employment to those who had been rendered unemployed. The cashew factory owners entered into collusion with some of the governments of neighbouring states to torpedo the system of monopoly procurement, monopoly import and canalisation of raw nut controlled by government agencies like the STC and CCI. The Central trade unions met the Minister of Industrial Development in New Delhi and demanded the status quo and the delegation of MPs pressed for government control to continue. Finally the Janatha Government relented and State Control continued till 1980 when the government of Indira Gandhi decided to abandon it.

5.2.38 Joint Struggle of 1978

During the 1978 season, the cashew factories in the private sector in Kerala declined to take over the raw nuts mobilized through monopoly procurement alleging that the spread between price of raw nuts and price of kernels caused them losses. The trade unions under all affiliations decided to launch a joint struggle and a *bundh* in Kollam on May 12, 1978 and for this a Joint Action Council was formed. On the day of the *bundh* police and striking workers clashed at different places. At Kottarakkara and Parippally, police resorted to brutal lathi charge. Several workers and leaders were arrested. The Government intervened and announced the take over of about 99 factories as an interim measure.

5.2.39 Formation of New Left Front

After the Bhatinda Congress of 1978, the CPI adopted certain changes in their political approach and it decided to join a truly strong Left Front and work in cooperation with the CPI (M) and the RSP and other left parties. By 1979, significant changes appeared in Kerala politics. CPI, RSP and Kerala Congress (Mani Group) left the anti-CPI (M) front in Kerala and along with CPI (M) fought the general elections in January 1980. After the elections, the LDF formed a government with E.K. Nayanar as the Chief Minister. During his government measures were taken to protect the system of monopoly procurement and allocation of raw nuts according to the number of workers employed. The CITU and CPI (M) and its youth cadres set up check posts to prevent diversion of raw nuts by factory owners who were bent on defeating State controls on them.

5.2.40 Martyrs in the Struggle

The check posts created widespread resentment among the factory owners who alleged that the CPI (M) cadres were taking law in to their hands. On March 1, 1980, S.R. Ponnappan (son of Ambalamkunnu Damodaran and Panchami), a member and activist of the CPI (M) was informed by his colleagues that a big load of raw nuts was being diverted by a factory owner at about 7 pm. Immediately Ponnappan and his trusted colleagues rushed to Ambalamkunnu junction and they succeeded in blocking the movement of the truck. The *goonda* gang accompanying the truck clashed with them, and, during this encounter, Ponnappan got stab injuries. Though he was rushed to the hospital, doctors could not save his life. Ponnappan became a martyr in the struggle to protect the system of state control on cashew industry. He died on March 25, 1980 at the age of 24. Respecting the spirit of working class struggles, the Nayanar Government took several measures to stabilize the cashew industry. It strengthened the KSCDC, promoted the expansion of cashew cultivation and introduced a Cashew Workers' Welfare Scheme.

Before concrete action on these could be taken, the Kerala political situation turned upside down. Kerala Congress (M) and Congress (A) group decided to join hands with Congress (I) group. N. Sreekantan Nair brought about a split in the RSP. He and Kadavur Sivadasan succeeded in delivering an RSP group to the Congress fold. On December 28, 1981 a Congress dominated ministry was formed led by K. Karunakaran that survived for a short period with the help of casting vote of the Speaker. This ministry had to resign on March 17, 1982 when it lost its majority. In May 1982, Kerala went to polls again. The United Front led by Congress (I) leader K. Karunakaran secured a majority and he formed a government. There were signals that this government would be patently pro-employer. In this Ministry, Kadavur Sivadasan, who had left the Left Front, was offered a cabinet position. He took an anti-labour stand. He became a spokesman of cashew capitalists. He helped them to promote *Kudivarappu* system by granting licences for 84 such units. In 1983, 64 old factories were closed, throwing about 45000 workers into destitution. A majority of them were forced to work in *Kudivarappu* units for their subsistence.

5.2.41 Jail Filling Struggle

In several centres the trade unions took up the cause of workers. They resorted to direct action like picketing, Satyagraha, marches and demonstrations, stay-in-strike and blocking movement of raw nuts and kernels from *Kudivarappu* units. The INTUC unions were docile as if they appeared

to support the factory owners. The left unions decided to launch an innovative struggle. They announced that workers would court arrest and fill the jails. They blocked roads and vehicles and got themselves arrested. The police removed them and allowed to go but they refused to leave the police stations. The police was forced to take them to court and the magistrate, after hearing the charges, let them free. When the workers were asked why they refused to go, they told the Magistrate that if they go to their homes they would starve, but if they were sent to jail they could at least subsist on the “rice balls” given to the inmates. Thus the Magistrate was compelled to remand them into custody.

5.2.42 The DA Struggle, 1986

The trade unions also directed the workers to surround District Collectorate at Kollam on March 29, 1983, and, in spite of deployment of a large contingent of police, the workers could bring the Collectorate to a stand still. Kadavur Sivadasan was the Labour Minister and during his rule the cashew workers were denied the DA that they had earned through long struggles. The factory managements resorted to several malpractices such as getting the signatures/thump impression in wage registers that showed that the workers had received their DA in full along with wages. This went unnoticed and through it the cashew capitalists amassed crores of rupees of black money. When the unions finally got smell of this practice, they asked the workers to strike. This provoked factory managements to close down factories. The misery caused by this forced some workers to work for low wages.

It was difficult to mobilize workers and keep them committed to participate in long struggles since the cashew industry in the 1980s hardly offered on an average 50-60 days of employment a year. A strike would mean that even this short period of employment and wages thereof they would lose. On May 28, 1986 the CPI (M) held two conventions in Kollam and Kottarakkara and V.S. Achuthanandan who inaugurated them announced that the CPI (M) was going to take over the working class struggle in the cashew industry. On June 16, 1986 Satyagraha *pandals* were set up in front of 138 cashew factories and the struggle spread to the entire industry in the private sector. The AITUC and UTUC and several popular and progressive organizations joined the CITU in the conduct of this struggle at various centres. As the struggle went on, the joint action council called the workers to adopt non-cooperation and refuse to receive wages. This phase of the strike lasted two weeks but even the managements refused to initiate talks for a settlement. The action council then directed the workers to block the

movement of processed kernels from the factories. In the Yunus Company's cashew factory at Kavanad near Kollam, *goondas* were employed to counter the blockage and take out kernels. When the workers intervened the company management approached the High Court seeking police protection. Yunus Kunju had started his career as a petty orange vendor in Kollam town and later became a trader of cashew kernels. Soon he rose to become one of the richest cashew capitalists. He also became a Muslim League leader and got elected as an MLA in the State Assembly. The High Court in its judgement stated that unless the workers were paid the statutory minimum wages, the petitioner had no right to take the kernels outside the factory. It directed the Kollam District Labour Officer to see that workers were paid their eligible minimum wages and DA. But the factory owners were not willing to obey the Court. They threatened to close down their factories and move the stocks of finished kernels out of the factories. The Chief Minister K. Karunakaran issued orders granting the factory owners police protection to their deeds. This prompted the Joint Action Council to file a petition before the High Court. Though the Court gave a judgement in favour of the Action Council, the cashew factory owners openly defied it on the strength of the support they received from the Government.

The Action Council had no other alternative than using force to block movement of kernels. Police help was extended to factory owners to move kernels. In one incident of counter action at the Vinod Cashew Factory in Chakkuvally in Kunnathur Taluk in Kollam District, two union activists, Parameswaran and Antony were arrested and beaten up by the police in the police van as well as in the lock-up. Parameswaran succumbed to injuries and September 13 the day of his martyrdom had been observed every year with great devotion and reverence. K. Viswanathan was another martyr who died on August 27, 1986 due to serious illness caused by hunger strike before Punnakkode Chengulam Vijayalekshmy Cashew Factory. Ultimately, the factory owners realized that they had to bow before the consistent working class struggle and they agreed to a settlement by which they implemented statutory minimum wages.

5.2.43 Government of the Working Class

In the General Elections held in March 1987, the United Front Government led by the Congress (I) was defeated and the Left Democratic Front came to power with E.K. Nayanar once again as the Chief Minister. In the Kollam District the LDF won 11 out of 12 Assembly seats. The new government, being more sensitive to the problems of cashew workers, adopted many measures to strengthen government control on the industry. It also

established check posts to prevent illegal movement of raw nuts across State borders. Monopoly procurement was re-established. The cashew capitalists tried their level best to defeat the government's efforts in monopoly procurement during the 1989 raw nut season. They got assistance from Central Government and UDF partners. The commercial banks started denying finance to support monopoly procurement of raw nuts. At this juncture, the Government directed the State Cooperative Bank to step in and with their financial assistance, the State procured 65000 tonnes of raw nuts. When this was available for distribution, the private sector factory managements informed the Government that their funds position did not afford them to take delivery of the raw nuts. They closed down their factories. In spite of the Government's directive, closure of factories continued. The LDF then asked the Government to take over the private cashew factories. Thus the Government took over 36 such factories and entrusted them with the KSCDC and the CAPEX, which came under the cooperative sector. According to a report of the Cashew Special Officer, this helped 243 out of 245 licensed cashew factories to function satisfactorily.

The State Government reactivated the Cashew Workers' Welfare Scheme. The workers were granted the benefit of Pension. The government appointed a Minimum Wages Committee under the Chairmanship of K.H. Balasubramonian to revise the minimum wage rates fixed as early as 1975. In this Committee P.K. Gurudasan, E. Kasim, J. Chitharanjan, K.P. Chandran, N. Sreedharan Pillai, V.K. Hassankutty, R.S. Unni and A.A. Azeez represented workers and P. Gangadharan Pillai, N. Sundareswaran, K. Padmanabhan Nair, M. Abdul Rehman, K. Gopinathan Nair, L. Kunju Kunju, N. Krishnan (Private Sector), N. Padmalochanan (KSCDC) and Kaladharan (CAPEX) represented the employers. This Committee completed its work within six months and submitted its report on January 1, 1991.

5.2.44 Neglect of Cashew Industry

Though the Cashew industry earned Rs.1,240 Crores in 1994 and Rs.2,081 Crores during the Seventh Plan as foreign exchange, the plan allocation was a pittance of Rs.7 Crores set apart for the development of the cashew industry. The industry unfortunately continues to be a neglected one and in spite of growing prosperity of the factory owners, the conditions of workers continue to be moving from bad to worse due to various under currents.

Since 1991, India started implementing the IMF-World Bank sponsored New Economic Policy founded on the pillars of Liberalization,

Privatisation and Globalisation. Since then, most of the traditional indigenous industries like Cashew nut processing began to witness new problems that continue to threaten their very existence. In the New Economic Policy there has emerged the need to bring about labour market flexibility and under its cover the Central Government seems to be bent on abolishing social protection hitherto enjoyed by the working class. Due to the opening up of market and lifting of controls, production has shown a tendency to shift from the formal organized sector to the informal unorganised sector. What will be the implications on the cashew nut processing industry could well be imagined, and, all the trade unions operating in this sector, despite their rivalry caused by political affiliations, are seriously worried about the possible outcomes on the life of the working class.

In 1993 even the KSCDC violated the settlement by cutting bonus payments and failing to give adequate employment in the post-Onam period. Therefore, the left trade unions started agitation from the very beginning of the 1994 season. One of the demands was of course to save the KSCDC and implement the terms of settlement. On February 15, 1994, workers started an indefinite hunger strike before the KSCDC factories. Even after the issue was raised in the floor of the Assembly, the Government did not give a positive response. Then 12 LDF MLAs commenced a hunger Satyagraha in front of the Assembly Hall. The Government then gave a clear undertaking to the MLAs on the issues and unions agreed to withdraw their struggle. But the UDF Government did not keep the word. To protest against this, the Left Front unions started an agitation by surrounding village offices and declared May 2, 1994 as "Day of Cheating" and on May 10 a *bundh* was observed in the Kollam District in which the entire working class in the region belonging to several industries participated. In spite of this struggle, the Government directed the KSCDC to entrust its stocks of raw nuts to private sector factories to get them processed on commission basis. This was a highly retrograde step and naturally the trade unions had to register their strong protest.

5.2.45 Bonus Struggle of 1994

On September 9, 1994 the Industries Minister and the Labour Minister called a tripartite conference to settle the bonus dispute in the cashew industry. As the settlement, the workers were to get 20 per cent bonus and an advance of Rs.935, besides they were to get an additional advance refundable at Rs.70 per month and also two day's leave with wages. The Chairman and the Managing Director of the KSCDC were signatories to this settlement. But the KSCDC did not implement the settlement. The Left Unions then had to launch a struggle. On the *Thiru Onam* day the joint action council of trade

unions directed the workers to hold a mass hunger satyagraha and INTUC also joined. From September 10 onwards, the workers started an indefinite hunger Satyagraha in front of the KSCDC factories. Workers of other industries in the district also offered sympathetic strikes. Subsequently, a "Poverty March" was taken from Kollam to the Secretariat gates in Thiruvananthapuram. The march reached its destination on October 11. The 2000 strong marches, mostly women stated that they would return home only after getting their legitimate dues as per the settlement reached in the tripartite conference held on September 9, 1994. The marchers had a difficult time because of incessant rains. E.M.S. Namboodiripad inaugurated their Satyagraha. But, soon after witnessing the hardships of workers, the leaders asked them to return home and in their place the leaders offered to undertake the hunger Satyagraha. But the workers refused. On October 15, the Government called a tripartite conference in the presence of the Chief Minister and in that the KSDC promised to disburse the full bonus to workers.

We may conclude this section by stating that the story of the working class in the cashew industry is sufficient to reflect the course of trade union movement in the Kollam region since, the cashew industry even to this date constitutes the main source of employment to the working class here. The working class in the cashew industry had its origins from the days of pauperisation of agriculture and the agricultural labour class. With the growth of capitalism the process of pauperisation continued with greater force. When the cashew factories emerged, the unemployed girls of the pauperised agricultural labour classes offered themselves to sell their labour power for whatever wages fixed by factories. In those early days, they were attracted to take up factory work because it paid them slightly better wages than they used to get occasionally from agricultural work. Work inside the factory was found to be much more congenial than working in agricultural fields. The factories offered a new division of labour, but also common burdens, and hardships. But collective work offered them the opportunity to think about dimensions of class identity and class character. Class mobilization and unionisation became inevitable and the political and social activists did a wonderful job in instilling class-consciousness in the minds of the workers who belonged to different religions and communities.

5.3 OTHER HISTORIC STRUGGLES

Though till now we had been narrating the developments in the trade union movement among cashew industry workers in greater detail, we are not going to ignore other major historic struggles in various other centres and industries in the Kollam region. Here we attempt to bring together the story of

such struggles among various sections of working class. But before we do that, we thought it appropriate to look into the auto- biography of M.N. Govindan Nair, the veteran trade union leader who belonged to the Communist Party of India (CPI) and who worked actively to bring the AITUC a strong presence in the trade union movement in the State¹².

5.3.1 M.N. Govindan Nair

M.N. Govindan Nair was one of the first leaders who argued for forming a Left group in the Travancore State Congress as early as 1939 and he had close association with the inimitable veteran leader P. Krishna Pillai. The latter had fully endorsed the arguments of M.N. He was instrumental in making MN the Secretary of the Radical group. A team consisting of P. Narayanan Nair and Sarmaji, P.T. Punnoose and Pathanamthitta P.C. George assisted him. MN remembers that as soon as Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer manipulated to get himself conferred the title of *Sachivothama*, the Working Committee decided not only to boycott CP's celebrations but also to observe every 8th day of the month as Day of Citizens' Rights, 16th day as Day of Responsible Government and 24th day as Day of Political Prisoners. When the Dewan started repressive measures, the head quarters of the State Congress was shifted to Ernakulam and several leaders were arrested. MN went under ground. In the Ernakulam Camp, MN remembers two figures Kunju Pillai and N. Sreekantan Nair, who, according to him, were like the Rama and Hanuman of Ramayana. In 1939 the Congress Socialist Party split into two groups, namely, the Communists and the Socialists. On December 31, 1939 MN decided to join the communist group.

5.3.2 Entry of MN into trade union movement

According to MN Govindan Nair, the Kollam Factory Workers' Union led by K.C. Govindan and Malayala Rajyam Gopala Pillai was just a petition submitting organization. P. Krishna Pillai was in Kollam in overseeing and guiding trade union activity there. He suggested the replacement of Gopala Pillai by N. Sreekantan Nair and MN was assigned the task to achieve it. MN and another activist Kilikollur Alex went to Gopala Pillai and Gopala Pillai without hesitation agreed to vacate the Presidentship of the Union.

N. Sreekantan Nair who was then working in Alappuzha had no intention to come to Kollam, since he was alleged to have an eye on the Presidentship of the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union (TCFWU). But P. Krishna Pillai preferred T.V. Thomas for that position, hence he requested

Sreekantan Nair to go over to Kollam and assist K.C. Govindan who was already there doing work on building up a strong trade union. This led to some heartburn and misunderstanding in Sreekantan Nair. Sreekantan Nair and MN decided to work together and during their discussions, the former expressed serious reservations on the Malabar group of comrades including P. Krishna Pillai and E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

In 1941 P. Krishna Pillai got married and came down to Pandalam and instructed MN to do party work and Sreekantan Nair to do trade union work. Sreekantan Nair was closely associated with Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair in trade union work. Ulluruppil Karunakaran, Chandran, Lakshmanan, Bhargavan, Vidyadharan of Kadappakada, Kilikollur Alex, Kuzhithura Sreedhar and Achuthan Pillai were the activists who closely associated with MN in organizing volunteer camps and conducting party work. During his participation in organizing food committees in Kollam along with a volunteer group of workers, a case was registered against MN on charges of alleged militant activities. Following this, the workers struck work and held protest marches all over Kollam Town.

5.3.3 Declining hold of the Communists

When he was released from Central Jail, MN returned to Kollam Factory Workers' Union to see his colleagues and found to his surprise that Sreekantan Nair had left the Union after entrusting all responsibilities on K. Chellappan. He learnt that many of the union activists were unhappy at the stand taken by the CPI on the Quit India Movement. Only a few like M. Paramu, S. Paramu, George Joseph, Manuel, Pathrose, and Sivanandan were there with them. Finding that the hold of the Communist Party on the working class in Kollam was on the decline, the leadership decided to send a few top party functionaries to reactivate the Party. They included V.S. Achuthanandan, V.K. Karunakaran, Varghese Vaidyan, his brother Alex and Chengannur K.E. Koshy.

Room No. 19 at Krishna Bhavan in Chinnakkada, Kollam was the centre of activity of CPI workers. K.C. George had been elected the Secretary of the Travancore State Unit of the Party. MN, P.T. Punnoose, C.S. Gopala Pillai and Pathrose were also made members of the Committee. MN was given additional charge of Punalur too. N. Sreekantan Nair had declared an open war with the CPI and he became the founding leader of the Indian Socialist Party (ISP).

During 1943-46, P.T. Punnoose was made the Secretary of the Travancore Communist Party and Jivanandam assisted him. In Kollam, MN

and K. Chellappan and seven others who constituted the communist group had to struggle hard to counter the threat created by Sreekantan Nair and his ISP who brought majority of workers in Kollam to support him. MN and his colleagues faced the challenge and went to factories and held gate meetings, but got little support from workers. When M.K. Kumaran assumed charge as the Vice President of the Kollam F.W.U., the Sreekantan Nair group did not allow him to function.

The cashew factory workers of Kilikollur wanted MN to take charge of their union and revitalize it. Kilikollur Alex, K.P. Nanu and K.R. Nanu who came especially from Alappuzha assisted MN. In those days the women workers were reluctant to visit union office but after an incident in which trade union activists protected a female worker from physical abuse by a fish vendor, the respectability of the union was enhanced. The workers felt that they could approach the union leaders whenever they had any problem or grievance. The Factory Workers' Union put out a demand that the cashew factories should be brought under the Factories Act. In those days any one who owned or possessed a shed and ten *Varappu Chatties* (roasting drums) could start a cashew-processing unit.

5.3.4 Rising credibility of the Union

Madhavan Vaidyan of Randamkutti had constructed a thatched theatre shed and a few H& C workers hired it to stage a drama there. But since they did not seek prior permission of Thuruthel Karunakaran, a *goonda* of Thangal Kunju Musaliar, the drama could not be staged. At this, the help of the union was sought. The Union held Karunakaran, as a hostage till the drama was finished. This encouraged the workers of Musaliar Industries to join the Union since they realized that the union would protect their interests. Soon the Union gathered strength in Mulluvila, Ayathil, Palkulangara, Kilikollur and other cashew centres.

Employers started a counter propaganda/campaign that if cashew nut processing were brought under the Factories Act, a large number of workers would lose their employment. When the trade unions demanded maternity benefits to women workers, the employers instigated their men folk to assert that it was their duty as husbands to take care of their wives' maternity and in this the Union had no business. The Union at that time had invited Mrs. Subbarayan from Madras to visit Kollam to study the conditions of work and wages in the region. On knowing this, the local Factory Inspector issued a warning to the Union that its decision to invite Mrs. Subbarayan to make a study would not be approved by the Government and advised the Union to

cancel her trip. Mrs. Subbarayan, the mother of Mohan Kumaramangalam and Parvathy Krishnan, was a known political and social activist. After a week, the Factory Inspector came to the Union office and informed MN that the Dewan wished to meet him and discuss certain urgent matters concerning cashew nut workers. MN decided to meet the Dewan and during the meeting the Dewan went through the Memorandum submitted to him and issued orders bringing the cashew processing industry under the purview of the Factories Act. This caused a severe shock on the cashew capitalists who had done a campaign against this.

5.3.5 Spread of Communist Unions

The Communists started mobilizing the workers in the Punalur Paper Mill and in the plantation estates. P.A.Solomon, who had lot of work experience in working class mobilization among coir factory workers in Aroor, was specially deputed to the plantation areas. Vattapparambil Raman Pillai was deputed to Punalur along with V.K. Karunakaran and C.O. Mathew of Alappuzha to mobilize workers in Punalur region. Anti-Communist feelings were still strong in Kollam Town. There were rumours that Congressmen were planning to push out communists from the union, though a few felt that it would be suicidal. On March 1, 1944 when Sir C.P. the Dewan announced elections, the Congress Working Committee met, and, in a decision, it co-opted MN as member of the Central Election Committee. This demonstrated to the Dewan and others that there was no rift between the Congress and Communist leaders. The Dewan saw to it that the communal organizations like the NSS, SNDP, Travancore Muslim League and Muslim Majlis openly went out against the Congress. The attempt by the convention of the Catholic Congress held at Kainakari to oppose the Congress was defeated by the timely intervention of K.C. George, MN, Accamma, Rosamma and K.J. Thomas.

N. Sreekantan Nair found that he could not push through the anti-communist feelings among the working class in Kollam to further his plans any more. The success of the communists in Alappuzha gave a boost to the communist popularity in Kollam.

5.3.6 Case of Handloom Workers

Handloom workers were in great hardships due to acute shortage of yarn and difficulty in getting even small quantities of yarn at controlled prices. V. Gangadharan requested MN to become a member of the People's Committee for Yarn Distribution. In this context, V. Gangadharan, MN and

C. Kesavan decided to work together for helping the handloom workers. Work was initiated for data collection relating to looms, number of workers, demand and supply of yarn, identification of centres from where yarn could be distributed to the convenience of handloom workers etc. The Committee was aiming at just distribution of yarn at controlled prices.

After a month or so, the credentials of the Committee were questioned, particularly the right of Nairs (V. Gangadharan and MN Govindan Nair) to take up the cause of handloom workers of whom the majority belonged to the Ezhava community. To this C. Kesavan, an Ezahva himself, gave a fitting reply. The Committee succeeded in going ahead. It distributed yarn at eight annas (half a rupee) less per bundle and that too at the workers' work spot. The committee also gave the workers the right to inspect the quality of the yearn so distributed and also the related accounts. The handloom workers feeling thankful offered to pay one *anna* per loom per month to raise funds to meet the expenditure of the committee. In fact, the Collector appreciated the work of the Peoples' Committee and suggested similar work for the fishermen. It was in this connection that MN came into contact with Henry Austin.

5.3.7 Cashew Bonus Struggle

Though the visit of Mrs. Subbarayan to Kollam was cancelled, the Union led by Communists decided to hold its annual convention in 1945 at the Palkulangara Maidan. Uniformed male and female volunteers representing various Factory Committees marched along the roads to the venue. Bharathi Udayabhanu presided over the convention. In those days since the public address system with micro phone and loud speakers were not available, the speeches had to be conveyed to the large audience with the help of a chain of volunteers who passed on the speech from one table to another so that everybody could know what was being spoken in the meeting.

After the Union convention, MN was elected as the President of the Union with K.R. Nanu and C.M. Mytheen Kunju as Secretaries and K. Chellappan as Organizing Secretary. The factory at the head quarters of Musaliar Industries was a major centre of trade union activities. In late 1945, the Union raised the demand for Bonus and started Satyagraha before the factory gates from the second day. M.O. Varghese, the Labour Commissioner, while resting at Musaliar's house, sent for MN. Accompanied by Prakkulam Kumaran, MN went to Musaliar's house. Musaliar started using harsh words and made it clear that he did not recognize cashew workers as industrial workers under the Factories Act. The Labour Commissioner tried his level

best to mediate. Musaliar showed the union leaders the muscles in his hand and told them that even if he was forced to close down his factories due to workers' strike, he could live and earn subsistence with his hands, which the union leaders might not be able to.

MN suddenly left the place saying that being sensible the union leaders hoped that some good sense would prevail on Musaliar. The strike began to spread to other factories. The Labour Commissioner also left Kollam. Finally the District Collector Kazim came forward to mediate. At that time the employers in the cashew industry had only one Association and its Secretary was P.S. George. In the conference called by the District Collector, MN represented workers and P.S. George and Thangal Kunju Musaliar represented the employers. The Union insisted that if the employers accepted payment of bonus in principle, they would call off the strike and the rates could be negotiated later. The right to get bonus was more important than the amount of money given to workers. The question whether the bonus could be considered as the right of workers was left to a committee consisting of two representatives each of employers and workers. MN insisted that V.K. Velayudhan should chair the committee and the Government agreed to it. But this was not acceptable to Musaliar. Strike continued to spread and there arose tension in many centres and police had to be deployed in large numbers.

MN suspected that the Government was anti-labour. The strike committee was convened and those who were willing to picket factory gates and get arrested were short-listed. N. Sreekantan Nair, Chellappan and T.K. Divakaran who started picketing were immediately arrested and removed. The employers then attempted to move processed kernels out of factories with police help. Every day 20,000 workers used to participate in the strike and picketing. MN leading the struggle used to appear and disappear on the scene and so he could not be arrested. MN received a message from K.C. George saying that the Government was willing to go for a settlement if MN came out of hiding in the under ground. Accordingly, MN reported himself at the government Travellers' Bungalow and was informed that the next day Inspector General of Police, Parthasarathy Iyengar would come to Kollam and commence negotiations.

It was a time when a hot debate was going on the very concept of bonus. While employers argued that it was a share in available profits, the unions insisted that it was a deferred wage. That was the main issue of contention. MN brought T.V. Thomas from Alappuzha as the latter was more experienced in holding negotiations with employers. At the Conference, the I.G. wanted MN to give in writing the demands of the Union. MN was surprised but he willingly wrote in a piece of paper that the demand was for

bonus treated as deferred wage and the right of the workers to earn it should be recognized. The I.G. promised to take this paper to the employers. At 4 p.m. the IG informed MN that the employers had agreed. Thus for the first time in the history of trade union movement, bonus as deferred wages and as a right of the workers had been accepted by employers. This indeed was a great victory for the trade union movement.

5.3.8 Closure of Musaliar's Factories and its aftermath

A few weeks later, K. Chellappan informed the top union leaders that Musaliar had closed down his headquarters factory allegedly on the issue that a few who were loyal to him had been assaulted by union workers. The leaders decided to get the factory re-opened, but they realized that a long-term struggle was out of question since the embers of the just concluded bonus strike had not fully died out. Therefore, they decided to approach Government for its intervention and help in re-opening the factory after referring the issue to arbitration. The Union started printing leaflets and notices and holding campaign meetings on the issue. The Collector then ordered a ban on such activities.

Musaliar was unlike other employers. In fact, some companies having tile works and engineering works had European Management. The A.D. Cotton Mill was owned by a Gujarathi in the beginning and later by a Tamilian Chettiar. Musaliar was a typical business minded native employer striving to acquire a prominent position in the society, since he started his career from very low levels. He had authored a book on his faith and philosophy. He founded a Malayalam News Paper *Prabhatham* and put that under the charge of his close relative A.A. Rahim who later became a Minister in the Central Government. However, the editors were Gopinathan Nair, Pankajakshan Nair and Constantine who had close association with the State Congress.

The Communist Party convened a public meeting at Uliyakkovil near Kilikollur. A few pro-Musaliar men had reached the venue well in advance with plans to spoil the meeting. But due to the large presence of workers and leaders, they could not execute their plan. The next meeting was at Kottamkara. There also the plan to spoil the meeting failed. The success of the Union to hold meetings provoked Musaliar. At Kottiyam, the Union Secretary, C.M. Mytheen Kunju was assaulted by his *goondas*. The Union organized a meeting to register its protest. Rumours spread that the workers were planning to resort to violence. MN reached Kottiyam and when he alighted from the bus, he was greeted with black flags and "MN Go Back"

banners. At that point union activists Gopinathan Nair and Punthalavila Madhavan Nair came forward to shield MN from the pro-Musaliar group. Kottiyam saw a sea of workers coming from Kollam town, Kadappakada, Kilikollur, Mangad, Mulluvila and Kottamkara. Most of them carried lethal weapons in their hands meant for both defence as well as offence.

Police was also there in large numbers. Karunakaran Nair, the Police Inspector of Paravur informed MN that the police was prepared fully to deal with the situation and requested him for his full cooperation in controlling his union members from resorting to any unilateral action against the Musaliar *goondas*. MN started the meeting and it was completed without any untoward incidents. Government as well as Musaliar then had a taste of the power and unity of working class who were prepared to wage a struggle for justice. The Government announced the appointment of Judge Satyanesam as the Arbitrator for resolving the pending issue. Musaliar hired the services of Nesamani, a leading lawyer of Nagercoil to argue his case before the Arbitrator, while MN, by himself, argued the case for workers.

5.3.9 Punalur Paper Mill Strike, 1946

Punalur was famous for its Paper Mill and Travancore Plywoods, besides a few estates in the vicinity. Along with Kollam, unionisation was initiated in Punalur first among the Paper Mill Workers. The Punalur Paper Mill Workers' Union (PMWU) was one of the oldest trade unions in this region. In 1941 this Union had Vaisyanazhikom Narayana Pillai as President, K. Gopala Pillai of *Malayala Rajyam* daily as Vice President and P.A. Abraham as Secretary¹³. B. Jonos, Easpen, Mammachan, Kochu Kunju, Y. Pathrose and Abraham were leading union activists. The Union was originally founded by S. Polikarp, a Gandhian turned socialist and he guided the unions' activities closely though he had to spend much time with the trade union movement in the cashew industry.

On March 29, 1941 the Union in Punalur Paper Mills called a strike. The background to the strike was as follows: Chempakakutty, her mother Kalyani Amma and father Kesavan Nair were workers in the Mills. One day Chempakakutty met with an accident. She fell under big bales of paper and lost consciousness. The company management refused to provide even first aid. The workers got furious and after extracting her body from under the paper bales, she was rushed to hospital. The workers then went on a lighting strike led by union activist P.O. Spencer. Two women activists, namely Maria Chettathy and Pathumma Thatha played a leading role in this strike. Later the Police summoned these activists to the station and arrested them.

The Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union (TCFWU) in Alappuzha deputed the union activist and leader N.K. Madhavan to Punalur to guide the activities of union there. Madhavan had been charge-sheeted in the Thalassery case and was in underground when this assignment came to him. On reaching Punalur, he assumed the name John and guided the union activists. T.V. Thomas was the President of the Travancore Estate Workers' Union, which had its office in Punalur. In that capacity, TV also made frequent visits to Punalur and this inspired workers greatly. At TV's suggestion several unions in Kollam supported the Paper Mill Workers' Strike. The ATTUC formed an Action Council with TV as convener and P.N. Krishna Pillai, K.A. Mohammed, Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair and P.O. Spencer as members. The incessant efforts by the Action Council forced the management to reinstate all the workers whose services had been terminated. In later years, P.G. Padmanabhan, K.V. Pathrose, V.L. Thomas, Simon Asan, and V.K. Karunakaran, leaders from Alappuzha had also associated in one way or other with the Punalur Mill Union.

1946 saw another major struggle in the Punalur Paper Mills. The Union started struggle for settlement of legitimate demands of workers. R. Sugathan was camping at Punalur. The management took an anti-labour stand and refused to meet union leaders. The Union decided to hold a march and demonstration before the Assembly at Thiruvananthapuram. Kottavattathu Krishnan Potti was the Punalur MLA. The union leaders approached him. He informed the I.G. Parthasarathy Iyengar, who was holding additional charge of the Labour Commissioner and requested him to take steps to settle the dispute before the marchers led by Phillipose and M.K. Habib reached Thiruvananthapuram. I.G. refused the MLA's request on August 13, 1946. Then K.K. Chellappan Pillai, another MLA, raised the issue in the Assembly. J. Chitharanjan (presently a top AITUC and CPI leader) was then a student of the Law College. Four workers participating in the march approached Chitharanjan at his room in the Cooperative Home lodgings, behind the Government Secretariat. They hatched a highly risky plan of protest. Chitharanjan secured four entry passes for attending the Assembly proceedings from the visitors' gallery. The gang of five entered the visitor's gallery secretly hiding red flags under their shirts and fooling the security staff. They had decided to raise the red flags and shout anti-Dewan slogans, if the Dewan failed to pass any remarks on the Paper Mill Strike. Chitharanjan, the leader of the gang, had agreed to give the signal for the risky adventure. When the Dewan did not mention anything about the Paper Mill agitation, Chitharanjan gave the signal and the Dewan and all the members of the Assembly were stunned in seeing the Red Flags and hearing the shouting of anti-Dewan slogans by the gang. The Dewan chided the watch and ward/security staff and the police for not preventing this incident. However,

sensing the seriousness of the situation, he announced that he would initiate steps to settle the dispute.

M.N. Govindan Nair was at Kollam and he was informed by the D.S.P. that he should go over to Thiruvananthapuram the next day itself to meet the I.G. Parthasarathy Iyengar to discuss the issues of the Paper Mill. He even volunteered to arrange transport to MN, which the latter declined. It was from the DSP that MN knew the details of what happened in the Assembly the previous day. MN was received at the Thiruvananthapuram railway station by the DSP there. During his meeting with the IG, MN informed him that the issue being a labour dispute, it should be left to be discussed by the parties to it, the management and the Union, and, promised to send C.O. Mathew, an union leader of Punalur Paper Mills for a meeting with the management. Thus after direct negotiations, the Paper Mills dispute was amicably settled.

This settlement came just before the Punnappra-Vayalar struggle. The Dewan was getting ready to destroy the communists. He made a statement in the Assembly that the working class was trying to question the authority of the Government and disrupt law and order. He made a reference to the forthcoming Railway Strike and even the refusal of barbers to serve Britishers. He appealed to the public to come forward and counter such subversive activities.

5.3.10 The Kollam Convention of State Congress

The State Congress was having some inner divisions pulling in different directions. When the Dewan announced his American model of reforms, the Communists in the State Congress opposed it outright raising the slogan "*American Model, Arabikkadil*" (Throw the American Model in Arabian Sea). To bring about unity among different groups, a convention of the State Congress was called at Kollam during October 14-16, 1945. Gokubai Karamchand Gandhi, sister of Gandhiji, inaugurated it. A Ratha Yatra (chariot march) was arranged for Pattom, T.M. Varghese and C. Kesavan and uniformed volunteers led by their captain N. Sreekantan Nair accompanying the Yatra. At this convention, the State Congress rejected the Dewan's Reforms.

The British Prime Minister had sent a Parliamentary delegation and the Dewan had invited them to visit Travancore. No opportunity was given to the Travancore political leaders to meet the delegation and offer their views. It was rumoured that K.A. Mathew, leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party and K.C. George, the Communist leader, made a futile attempt to sneak into the Cliff House where the delegation members were staying to have a meeting

with them. However, Sreekantan Nair luckily got a chance to meet them when the car carrying the delegation broke down near Aroorkutty.

5.3.11 Rising popularity of Communists under threat

After the visit of Captain Lekshmy to Travancore, the popularity of communists was rising. This was so in Kollam, Kottarakkara and Pathanapuram taluks too as in Alappuzha and other centres. MN always used to raise the fundamental question to those who had faith in Marxist-Leninist ideology, why should there be different and some time rival organizations of workers. In Kollam town and Chavara, Sreekantan Nair and Baby John had established control over unions. In the Kollam town the communists had only one major union, the Press Workers' Union.

N. Sreekantan Nair was trying to convert his followers into staunch anti-Marxists/Communists by highlighting the stand taken by the CPI on the Quit India Movement and denigrating the communists. But the communists stood for trade union unity. It was this stand that prompted them to invite R. Sugathan and Jeevanandam to the annual conference of the H & C Company's union and M.G. Koshy to take up the leadership of the A.D. Cotton Mill Union. The tactics used by N. Sreekantan Nair to prevent Captain Lekshmy from sticking to her original schedule of travel in Travancore forced her to dislike him greatly though this made Nair thoroughly unhappy. But he succeeded in bringing Aruna Asaf Ali to visit Travancore and inaugurate the Convention of the Travancore Socialist Party headed by him. But Aruna Asaf Ali did not say anything about the communists.

Following the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, the Dewan ordered police raids into communist party offices and communist led trade unions and took repressive measures against communists at Kottayam, Koothattukulam, Kollam, Punalur, Balaramapuram, Marthandam and Poonjar, besides traditional strongholds of Ambalappuzha and Cherthala. Kottayam Bhasi (Kottayam), K.T. Jacob (Koothattukulam), Fakkir Khan, Narayanan Nair and Sainuddin (Balaramapuram), G.S. Mani, Gopi, Kuzhithura Suthan, Achuthan Pillai and Parameswaran Nair (Marthandam) and Joseph Thelly (Poonjar) were singled out for mention by MN in this context as having subjected to the Dewan's repression. Many escaped the Dewan's forces and went underground. Some left to Cochin and Malabar. Some met at the Vettikkavala Union office and resolved that party work had to be continued at any cost and identified the centres where they would go and take up party work. MN was arrested by DSP Maria Artputham and taken to Alappuzha sub-jail. T.V. Thomas, Varghese Vaidyan, C.K. Velayudhan and Kumaran Vakkil were

there in a room. In an adjacent room T.K. Divakaran and P.A. Solomon were put up.

Police unleashed inhuman and indescribable brutality on the political detainees, mostly communists, but excluded top leaders from it. While seeing no respite on this brutality, MN threatened to go on an indefinite fast. Many of his colleagues warned him to desist from it. But he stood firm and this forced Inspector Khader to stop the brutality and repression. During this period, the Dewan was negotiating with some of the native princes about the stand to be taken if the British actually decided to grant independence to India in 1947 as scheduled.

The conditions of the detainees in jail were deteriorating alarmingly. They were being served with half cooked rotten rice containing live worms. The leaders protested and started a hunger strike but the police retaliated by taking some of them for special exercise of brutality. Even M.N. Govindan Nair was not spared from this and was beaten up mercilessly. Soon the news reached the detainees that the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer had been attacked by K.C.S. Mani and the former had decided to bid goodbye to Travancore to save himself. Travancore Maharaja then signed the treaty of integration with the Indian Union without any hesitation but with a high sense of relief from the autocratic control of the Dewan on him. Pattom Thanu Pillai became the first Prime Minister of Independent Travancore as already stated elsewhere. Though he ordered the release of 58 political detainees, his list did not include the elder leaders C. Kesavan and Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai and most of the communists. Pattom openly said that these leaders were potential threats to him as well as the peace loving people of the State. The Congress leadership also did not show any sympathy to Sreekantan Nair.

5.3.12 A.D. Cotton Mill Struggle

The heart of Kollam town was the seat of the A.D. Cotton Mill, now called the Parvathy Mills, one of the oldest mills in South India. Even in 1936, the workers in the Spinning Department were paid only four *chuckroms* (one seventh of a rupee) as wages. The Mill was being operated with the help of a giant steam boiler. Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair, N. Sreekantan Nair, Malayala Rajyam Gopala Pillai, T.K. Divakaran, T.P. Gopalan, E.V. Kesavan and K. Chellappan mobilized the workers in this Mill. All of them were originally Congress activists¹⁴. In 1939 during the month of *Chingom*, the first month in the Malayalam Calendar, the workers took out a march through Chinnakkada to reach the Cantonment maidan for attending a meeting organized by the State Congress there. The police near the Reserve Camp

stopped them and a lathi charge was held. Workers retaliated by pelting stones at the police.

One of the injured policemen ran to the Railway quarters for safety and hid him in a bathroom there. The workers reached the spot and caught him and his headgear was kicked up and down, as it was a football. At 5 pm, the enraged workers stopped a transport bus and set it on fire. On the western side of the road, a contingent of military force had taken their position. Clashes, stone throwing, lathi charge and firing followed. Lakshmanan, a worker was wounded on the thigh and he could not run. He fell and died on the spot. Several workers were seriously injured in this incident. The union issued a call for a day's hartal in Kollam to register their protest.

Another strike occurred in 1942 in the A.D. Cotton Mill. Lasting for 13 days and involving about 805 workers, this strike was for resolving issues like Sunday Work and Onam Holiday¹⁵. Mill management declared a lockout that lasted 33 days. These strikes were spearheaded by the Kollam Factory Workers' Union.

There was one celebrated case that rocked the early days of the United States of Travancore-Cochin¹⁶. It was related to an incident in the A.D. Cotton Mill. Started as a union-led agitation in which the hands of R.S.P. workers were suspected, the strike led to physical assaults on an Assistant Superintendent of Police, destruction of company property and intimidation of the company manager. Many were prosecuted and sent to jail. By this time the group led by Sreekantan Nair had taken control over the A.D. Cotton Mill Workers' Union keeping the communist activists away. Inter-union rivalry began to grow among the left party unions in almost all industries in the Kollam region. In the A.D. Cotton Mill, one day the manager and a few of his colleagues were confined to the factory premises and they were not allowed to move out, while some workers picketed the factory gates. This was perhaps one of the earliest cases of *gherao* in the State.

The struggle of 1949 was the most thrilling in the A.D. Cotton Mill's long history. Incidentally the year 1949 also witnessed several important struggles all over the state like the State Transport Employees' Strike. N. Ramachandran had given a graphic account of that thrilling struggle in the A.D. Cotton Mill¹⁷. He was at that time functioning as the Acting President of A.D. Cotton Mill Workers' Union. In those days a beginning had been made to form trade unions of workers based on individual trades in each factory and the union committees used to have one or two members from outside, elected by the Union's annual conventions. Ramachandran being an outsider was thus made a member of the Cotton Mill Union in 1949. On account of his involvement in political struggles in Travancore, the regular President of the

Union, Sreekantan Nair had been arrested and Vice President, T.K. Divakaran had gone underground to escape arrest. It was in this context, on directions from T.K. Divakaran, that the Union elected N. Ramachandran as the Acting President. Ramachandran used to adore T.P. Gopalan, a top activist of the Union and consult him for advice.

The Mill owner was a Seth and a tough capitalist to deal with. He used to grant any increase in wages only after the union staged agitation or conducted a strike. Only twice, the Seth had given an enhancement, during the period when M.G. Koshy and N. Sreekantan Nair were functioning as President of the Union. It was described as "*M.G. Koshy's half anna*" and "*N. Sreekantan Nair's half anna*". Seth talked only to top leaders and did not want to meet members of the union factory committees. Labour Commissioner and Ministers used to call him "Sethji" with all respects. Without knowing this background, one day N. Ramachandran called the Seth on the telephone and wanted him a time to discuss the issue of termination of service of D. Sreedharan, convener of the factory committee. The Seth refused either to talk or meet. The Seth noted that the letters sent by the Union to him had now got a different tone than what was before. This was so because the Acting President N. Ramachandran was new to the job. Of course, he used to consult T.P. Gopalan, Krishna Pillai and Thengazhikam Balakrishna Pillai, the experienced hands in the Union Committee.

The Union submitted a charter of demands on increase in wages. V.K. Velayudhan, the Labour Commissioner, held a conciliation conference. In the first few rounds, Seth did not care to talk to N. Ramamchandran. At the intervention of V.K. Velayudhan, both of them started talking. Seth offered to raise wages by half an *anna* and agreed to reinstate D. Sreedharan. T.P. Gopalan was adept in raising innovative arguments to resolve any complex disputes.

On another occasion in 1949 itself, a conciliation conference on some demands of the Union was held but it could not resolve the issues. The Union launched a strike and it was followed by some violent incidents, which had been described as the Kollam-Chavara incidents. As a part of this, there was a brutal police lathi charge against the Cotton Mill workers. The enraged workers clashed with the police and several persons got injured. When the news of the first round of lathi charge and clashes reached N. Sreekantan Nair, he was beginning to take his lunch in the Joly Hotel at Chinnakkada. Suddenly he got up, washed his hands, raised his dhoti and tied it above his knees and rushed to the Mill gates along with a few union activists. On reaching the gates, Sreekantan Nair found the Assistant Superintendent of Police, Usman and straightaway raised his hands and caught the latter by his

neck. IG Sreenivasa Iyer stood there like a rock and blocked Sreekantan Nair from moving inside the Mills. G. Karunakaran, union activist present there, had collected some stones for pelting them at the police. M.K. Sankara Pillai, the volunteer captain and Malabar Venu created a safety ring around their leader "*Sreekantan Chettan*". The leader had told the IG that if any more harm were done to his workers, he would see that the Mill was burnt down to ashes. At this, the police abandoned its militant mood and tactfully arrested Sreekantan Nair, promising him that no more untoward incidents would be created there. Among those arrested during this episode, mention may be made about Bhargavi Amma, Kunjukutty, Mary and Easwari who were later released on bail. Leaders like T.K. Divakaran, R.S. Unni, T.P. Gopalan, K.P. Raghavan Pillai and N. Madhavan were also arrested and taken to the Kollam Kasba Police Station. Some of them were later remanded to the Thiruvananthapuram Central Jail. The A.D. Cotton Mill incident had its repercussions in Chavara. Before we discuss them, let us pursue the narrative of struggles that were staged by the workers in A.D. Cotton Mill.

In December 1948, there was a strike in the Cotton Mill, since neither the Government nor the Management resolved the Union's demand before a suggested deadline. The strike affected all sections of the Mill¹⁸. In the conference held in the presence of the Labour Minister, the dispute in the Mill was referred to conciliation. N.Sreekanthan Nair represented the workers¹⁹. The Mill management declared a lockout, stating that there was shortage of cotton and also the stocks of made up cloth were remaining unsold. The Union volunteered to wait patiently for two weeks but demanded that if the lockout continued, the workers should be paid an allowance in lieu of wages. But subsequently the Union agreed to withdraw their struggle when it realized that there was a real shortage of cotton. The Union thus had no hesitation to express their sympathy to Mill management, which was facing critical shortage of a raw material.

In May 1949, however, on false charges, union leaders, N. Sreekanthan Nair and Venugopalan were arrested. The workers of not only the AD Cotton Mill but the workers of Kollam as a whole registered their protest by observing a *hartal*. A large number of women workers had also participated in picketing the Mill gates. They were arrested, but let free²⁰. Once peace returned and normal work started, the management distributed the workers into two shifts and gave work to them turn by turn on alternative shifts. In September 1949, the Management revealed their plan to lock out the company on account of unsold stocks accumulating rapidly. The Union could not prevent this. In February 1950, the Government held a meeting in which Panampally Govinda Menon, Labour Minister, N. Sreekanthan Nair and Kunju Krishnan (representing labour) and Seth (Management) participated. The

Labour Minister suggested that during the period of the lockout of the Mill, the Management should pay workers Rs.15 per day²¹. The Mill, however, started working from April 13, 1951.

The closure or threat of closure of AD Cotton Mills became a regular feature since 1950 and it was always followed by picketing and Satyagraha. Some times the picketing and Satyagraha preceded the lockout or closure. In June 1952, the Government referred an industrial dispute in the Mills to an Arbitration Board headed by C.S. Lakshmanan Pillai and M.P.G. Nair and T.K. Divakaran as members²². In June 1957 also a dispute in the Mills was referred to the Arbitration by P.N. Krishna Pillai, a veteran of the trade union movement in the State who was serving as Personnel Manager of the Indian Aluminium Company Ltd at Calcutta²³. This was unique, since both the Union and the management had mutually reached an agreement to refer their dispute to arbitration. Meanwhile in 1957, the ownership of the AD Cotton Mill changed hands with Sri. Meenakshi Mills of Madura taking over the Mills. But it was agreed to pay the bonus for the period 1949-50 to 1951052 before legally the ownership change was effected²⁴.

5.3.13 The Chavara Mineral Workers' Struggle

Chavara had several sand mining mineral companies like F.X. Periera and Sons, Hopkins and Williams, T.M.P., and A.M Companies employing a large number of workers in mining, loading, and other related works. As early as 1938, the Travancore Mineral Workers' Union had been registered with Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair as its President. This Union had also tried to mobilize the workers to join the mainstream political struggle in the State. After the death of Janardhanan Nair at a young age, N. Sreekanth Nair took over as President of the Union. Manoharan, V.K. Purushothaman (both from Alappuzha), K.K. Chari and O.P. Bhaskaran Pillai were the senior activists of the Union in the early phase. In 1941, the Union had conducted a strike when a few workers were served with notices of termination of their services.

In 1948 there was a strike in the Hopkins and Williams Company. The workers blocked the loading operations in a ship that came to transport mineral sand and soon workers of nearby mineral companies held a sympathetic strike²⁵. Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai, the Chief Minister, called a conference where the issues behind the strike were thoroughly discussed and the same were resolved. The issues were related to fixation of basic wage, DA, Bonus and stoppage of the Sub-contracting system. The Government also promised that a part of the profits of the companies would be utilized to provide basic facilities like drinking water to the local community²⁶. But soon

the union was forced to commence another strike when police arrested a few workers who prevented loading of mineral sand on the ships for the Hopkins and Williams Company. Sreekantan Nair and Baby John told the workers that the leaders were behind them. They initiated conciliation talks, which were held by N. Kunjuraman, the Labour Commissioner, in the presence of the Labour Minister. It was decided that the issue relating to discharge of certain workers would be referred to mediation later. However, those who had been discharged numbering about 75 workers would be given 15 days wages²⁷. After mediation, if it were found that the company had made a mistake, it would pay them full wages. Another batch of 80 piece-rated workers who had been served with notice of termination of service would be taken back.

Another dispute that arose in the Mineral Companies in Chavara were referred to adjudication and the Award went in favour of workers. Bonus at 16.33 per cent was awarded for 1947, 1948 and 1949. N. Sreekantan Nair represented workers while the companies were represented by P.A. George and C.S. Sankara Menon²⁸.

Reference had been made earlier about the police lathi charge and clash between the police and workers in the A.D. Cotton Mills and subsequent arrest of leaders like N. Sreekantan Nair, T.K. Divakaran and others. To register their protest against this, the workers belonging to the Travancore Mineral Workers' Union in Chavara struck work. They defied the prohibitory orders and held a march to Kollam. The workers in thousands from such centres as Chavara, Ponmana, Anchumanakkal and Vellanathuruthu, marched form the Union Office towards the AMC Company, which had remained closed for some time. The company compound had a large contingent of police. The AMC workers also joined the march to Kollam. At Puthenthura, the police force under Inspector Hassan ordered the marchers to stop. M.S. Neelakantan, and Haridas, who were in the front line, were arrested and put them on a jeep. An appeal was made to the marchers to disburse peacefully since there was a prohibitory order in force. The marchers refused to disburse and sat on the road. This provoked the police who resorted to a brutal lathi charge, seriously injuring many. The roads had been blocked. The workers regrouped and marched to the site of the Norwegian Foundation. Paruvathotty Madhavan led the workers. More Police arrived on the scene and held another round of lathi charge to disburse the marchers²⁹.

The police registered criminal charges against leaders including Baby John, O.P. Bhaskaran Pillai and A.P. Pillai. They also raided the houses of workers and abused the women folk. Chavara was turned into a large police camp. More arrests followed. C.P. Karunakaran Pillai, Puthen Veettill Ramakrishna Pillai, Sankara Pillai, Nerinji Karunakaran Pillai, Chellappan

Pillai, Kochu Pillai Chettiar, Thankappan Chettiar, Paruvathottu Madahvan, Mampuzha Kesava Pillai, Chavara Viswambharan and K.N. Madhavan Sastri were the other important union activists who were arrested and many of them were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for varying periods of 6 months to 3 years in the Thiruvananthapuram Central Jail. Among them, Kochu Pillai Chettiar died of injuries sustained in the lock up. The Mineral Workers' Union in Chavara could be revived only after a year under the efforts of S. Raghavan Pillai and P.K. Divakaran.

The Chavara Mineral Companies in 1950 started cutting wages and other benefits which workers were enjoying hitherto. They also promoted the contract work system and gave work on sub-contract to cheat workers. The Union protested against this. Most of the Sub-contractors were Congressmen and they joined the companies to exploit the workers. T.K. Divakaran was invited by the Union to come to Chavara and guide the workers. Anti-Union campaigns alleged that the union leaders were getting a share of workers' wages and they were subsisting on the hard labour of the workers and so the campaigns appealed to the workers to throw away their leaders. When the protesting workers held a march to Ponmana seacoast, the venue fixed for a meeting, a gang of *goondas* attacked them causing injury to many. In spite of this intimidation, T.K. Divakaran addressed the meeting. He countered the points raised by the anti-union campaigns.

In 1954, the local Congressmen and their *goondas* demanded that the companies should provide employment to their men in the place of the existing workers of the companies. The *goondas* of the Congress assembled at Anchumanakkal seacoast and threatened the workers and union activists. This led the Union to launch a long struggle demanding permanency of service in the companies. Frequent clashes between the Union activists and the *goondas* of Congress arose. In one such a clash, Thayyil Krishna Pillai was injured and to register protest he himself started a hunger Satyagraha in front of Ponmanakattil temple. Several workers and activists were arrested. After a few days, some of the union activities on returning after union work decided to take rest in the H.N.W. Company's car shed on the way. Only a little later they discovered Thayyil Krishna Pillai and his colleagues hiding there. He was a loving person and always went out of his way to help union activists.

5.3.14 RSP - led Cashewnut Workers' Federation

The Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) was formed in Kerala in 1950 and its main centre of activity was, of course, Kollam and Chavara³⁰. In the trade union movement in Kollam, the pioneer was the Kollam Labour Union,

which was, renamed the Kollam Factory Workers' Union. It had set up factory committees in cashew factories, tile factories, sawmills and later extending to the mineral companies in Chavara. As the influence of the Communists in the union movement expanded, people like N. Sreekantan Nair did not like it, and, at his initiative, an attempt was made to wrest control of some unions by his anti-communists group. Subsequently, the rift between the communists and anti-communists led to the formation of the RSP by the latter. This trend was repeated in the union movement too.

In the cashew industry, the RSP leaders helped to form the All Kerala Cashew nut Workers' Federation (AKCWF) as a Central Organization with N. Sreekantan Nair as President and T.K. Divakaran as Secretary. These leaders had conducted and led from the front line many historic struggles in the cashew industry. In his autobiographical work, "*Kazhinjakala Chitram*" (Picture of Yester years), Sreekantan Nair had mentioned about a struggle in the cashew industry, which was conducted in February, 1946. On 5th of February, Sreekantan Nair was arrested and remanded to custody. Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair had formed the Parippally Cashewnut Workers' Union. In 1951 K.P. Raghavan Pillai was actively engaged in unionisation activity with the Pierce Leslie Company as the main centre. By late 1951, there were eight trade unions owing allegiance to N. Sreekantan Nair group and these unions formed a Federation. Its main rival was the Travancore-Cochin Cashewnut Workers' Council led by the communists like M.N. Govindan Nair, K. Chellappan and K.S. Anandan. We had already narrated the details of the Charter of Demands submitted by the Federation to the employers in 1951 and the opposition it encountered from its archrival, the Council led by the communists. The latter was not prepared for a joint action though the issues raised by the Federation were vital to all cashew workers. On the first day of the struggle initiated by the Federation, the members of the Council functioned as black legs, but from the second day they also joined, forgetting about their differences in political ideology. By the fifth day, the entire cashew industry became paralysed. The struggle lasted eleven days until C. Kesavan, the Chief Minister, agreed to refer the dispute to adjudication. T.K. Divakaran, the Secretary of the Federation single handily argued the workers' case and secured a magnificent award, which even today was being considered as a *Magnacarta* of the working class. The Communist led Council and the Congress led INTUC did not join the dispute as a party.

5.3.15 Chandanathoppu Firing

Though already this incident of police firing at Chandanathoppu cashew factory during the EMS ministry had been mentioned elsewhere, we

wish to present here the perspective from the anti-communist RSP's angle. The workers in the Hindusthan Cashew Factory at Chandanathoppu near Kollam had been on strike demanding disbursement of maternity benefits to the eligible women workers and they were being led by their Union affiliated to the Federation. Pappu, a union activist started a hunger Satyagraha in front of the factory gates on July 14, 1958 and on the eleventh day, he was arrested and removed. Following this, another activist Damodaran Pillai started hunger Satyagraha. Soon the cashewnut Employers' Association alleged that the union and RSP workers were causing violence and if this continued they would be forced to close down all their factories. The Government also issued a Press Note on the matter advising workers to desist from violence. It told the Employers' Association that they should, if necessary, to lock out the affected factory, but should not collectively lock out all their factories.

In July 1958 the Hindusthan Cashew Factory, owned by Ramachandra Naik (now functioning there as Abbas Cashew factory) was confronting a strike by workers belonging to the U.T.U.C. controlled Kundara Kasuvandi Thozhilali Union. The Union's Joint Secretary, Pappu had started an indefinite fast before the factory gates. On the ninth day of the fast his conditions deteriorated and another worker, M. Damodaran Pillai, replaced him. The company then declared lockout and along with that the management attempted to move the stocks of processed kernels from the factory. The workers immediately started picketing to defeat this. Police arrived on the scene and directed the picketing workers to allow the employer to take out the stocks of kernels, which they refused. The RDO and a strong contingent of police arrived on the scene. Union top leaders like T.M.Prabha, K.Chandrasekhara Sastri and Ayyan who were guiding the picketing were arrested and taken inside the factory. With police protection, the management tried to transport kernels in two lorries and a few women workers who laid themselves down in front of the vehicles prevented this. The police constables used their lathis on the women workers and some of them were caught by their hair and kicked before throwing them away. Sulaiman, a worker in the factory canteen got furious and shouted at the constables not to touch the women. In the ensuing clash between him and the Dy S.P., the latter used his bayonet to kill Sulaiman on the spot. This happened on July 26. Workers who had assembled there in large numbers got wild and started pelting stones and attacking the police. The police then resorted to firing tear gas shells and at the end bullets into the crowd. It was reported that the police fired 27 rounds and in this Raman, a union activist was killed on the spot and several others were injured seriously. The police brutally attacked the leaders, T.M. Prabha, Chandrasekhara Sastry and Ayyan when they were removed in the police van to the lock up. Later at the Reserve Camp also, they were given violent treatment and in this T.M. Prabha's hands were broken.

The police refused to release the dead bodies of Sulaiman and Raman to the Union for holding a funeral march by workers, largely because the police anticipated further violence. At this stage, N. Sreekantan Nair gave an ultimatum to the I.G of police that if the dead bodies were not released at the hospital itself, they would take back the bodies by force. T.K. Divakaran, K. Balakrishnan and R.S. Unni intervened and reminded the IG the true character of "*Sreekantan Chettan*" that he would definitely execute what he said. Then the IG ordered the release of the bodies of the two martyrs and the funeral march was attended by thousands of workers. The Government declared prohibitory orders under section 144 in Kollam as soon as the funeral march commenced. July 26 every year is now being observed as Martyr's Day. Some of the veterans of that Chandanathoppu struggle like R. Pappu, Kumiliyil Chellamma, K. Chandrasekhara Sastry and Iyer (Union's Joint Secretary) are not alive today. But Sankara Pillai, the Union's Treasurer at that time and a severely wounded Sivarama Pillai are still alive. On July 26 all those who have memories of the Chandanathoppu police firing assemble at the martyr's column to pay their tributes to Sulaiman and Raman.

5.3.16 Memorandum to Indira Gandhi

N. Sreekantan Nair, T.K. Divakaran, R.S. Unni and T.M. Prabha controlled the destinies of the Cashewnut Workers' Federation for a long time. In 1970 when Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi visited Thiruvananthapuram, the Federation submitted a memorandum demanding early implementation of the State monopoly of imports of raw nuts and its canalisation. Since T.M. Prabha was taking medical treatment in Vellur Christian Medical College Hospital, M.K. Sankara Pillai, assisted by A.A. Azeez and M.M. Ismail, represented the Federation. It was decided that the Federation would take out a march to the Chandrasekharan Nair Stadium under the command of N. Sreekantan Nair and R.S. Unni and submit the memorandum to the Prime Minister who was scheduled to address a public meeting there being organized by the Congress. When the marchers with Red Flags in their hands entered the stadium Indira Gandhi had already reached the Dais. People in the stadium were stunned. The police did not know what to do. The Congress workers started throwing sand and stones at the marchers. At the intervention of India Gandhi, Vakkom Purushothaman announced through the public address system that Congressmen should allow N. Sreekantan Nair to reach the Dias and present his memorandum to the Prime Minister. A Sub Inspector rushed to Sreekantan Nair and safely escorted him to the dais, where Nair presented the Federation's memorandum to Indira Gandhi. As soon as the Prime Minister returned to New Delhi, she directed

the concerned ministry to issue orders on canalisation of raw nuts by State Agencies.

5.3.17 Federation and its clash with Rivals

N. Sreekantan Nair was a member of the Board of Directors of the Kerala State Cashew Development Corporation (KSCDC) whose Chairman Raman Pillai was a Communist. In 1975, as per the decision of the Executive Committee of the Federation, Sreekantan Nair was to address factory gate meetings. At one such meeting held at KSCDC's factory No. 27, at Eravipuram, Sreekantan Nair spoke about some of the drawbacks in the functioning of KSCDC. The Chairman being a Communist did not like this as he was made to misunderstand by his own colleagues. This prompted him to write an article in the CPI Party newspaper *Janayugom* casting certain critical aspersions on Sreekantan Nair. The Pro-CPI Managing Director at that time was also manipulating such things so as to prevent take-over of those cashew factories, where the Federation had an upper hand among the workers. Sensing all these under currents, Sreekantan Nair directed about 200 Federation activists to march to the venue where the KSCDC Board was meeting and *gherao* the Board Members. This made an impact as the Board unanimously decided to take over such factories also at the earliest. Sreekantan Nair then told the Chairman that he was always straightforward and honest and he put in his resignation from the KSCDC Board.

In 1977, the UTUC held a struggle on its own and rival AITUC, CITU and INTUC unions tried to defeat it. When M.K. Raghavan was Labour Minister, the Federation had demanded the establishment of a labour welfare fund or scheme for cashew workers. R.S. Unni had also raised this issue in the Liaison Committee of the left parties. Since there was delay on this matter, Unni moved a private bill in the Assembly. Later the Liaison Committee decided to accept Unni's demand and as suggested he withdrew his private bill. The Government then moved the same bill as an official bill and passed it. Though it was sent for the President's assent in 1977 itself, due to various under currents, considerable delay was caused. Finally only when the RSP leader K. Pankajakshan became the Labour Minister in 1987 that the Bill with suitable amendments was passed and it became an Act. This was an excellent example to show how political rivalries could stand in the way of fulfilling common interests of the working class.

When the cashew capitalists tried to defeat monopoly procurement scheme of the State by closing down their factories, R.S. Unni had made a famous speech appealing to the KSCDC to put up sheds in front of such

factories and conduct processing of nuts with the help of workers. In 1980 July, Sreekantan Nair held a *Pattini jatha* (hunger march) from Kollam to the Raj Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram. There arose a major split in the RSP. As a result, Sreekantan Nair was removed from the Presidentship of the Federation and R.S. Unni was elected to that position. This was a painful event. Kadavur Sivadasan who had left the party along with Sreekantan Nair started a rival union and called it All Kerala Cashewnut Factory Workers' Federation and applied for registration. Kadavur Sivadasan was then functioning as the Labour Minister in Kerala and using his official position tried to get support to his Federation by misleading his own leader Sreekantan Nair who was made the President of this "pocket federation". Through Sreekantan Nair an attempt was made to win leaders like K.P. Raghavan Pillai to his side. The diehards of the original Federation conducted a big campaign during November 17-27, 1981 to clear the confusion in the minds of cashew workers so that they could easily identify the real Federation and reject the newborn pocket federation of Sivadasan. On September 25, 1983 a special convention of the Federation was held and it elected R.S. Unni as the President and A.A. Azeez as the General Secretary.

When the Government led by K. Karunakaran abandoned monopoly procurement of raw nuts, about 70 factories were forced to close down. The Federation leaders led by R.S. Unni then observed a day's hunger strike before the Secretariat gates on February 8, 1984. Labour Minister Kadavur Sivadasan was colluding with cashew employers and allowed them to reduce wages. To protest against this, the Federation organized a struggle and hundreds of workers and union activists surrounded the Minister's official residence and the latter then initiated a counter move by hiring truck loads of people to stage a demonstration in front of R.S. Unni's house as well as the head office of the COMOS, the cooperative of motor service workers at Ramankulangara. In February 1986, the Federation discovered that there was disunity in the union movement and therefore, it had to wage a struggle single handily. On April 27, 1986 at a meeting held at Kottarakkara, the Federation announced that thousands of workers and activities of the Federation would picket the Government Secretariat on May 15, 1986 for getting minimum wages. R.S. Unni was the main inspiring force behind this move. On that scheduled date, R.S. Unni and K. Pankajakshan led the picketing, resulting in a violent clash with the police. The police had been given clear instruction to use force and disburse the agitators, but the patient and deft handling of the tense situation by Yusuf, the then Assistant Police Commissioner minimized the impact. In spite of all the well planned attempts by rival unions, political parties and leaders, the RSP-UTUC affiliated All Kerala Cashewnut Workers' Federation which was founded by the late T.K. Divakaran continued to grow from strength to strength and today stands in comparison with the other

central federations affiliated to the AITUC, CITU and INTUC. But the net result was general weakening of workers' ultimate interests whenever there emerged a disunity among these organizations and they started pulling in different and some times in opposite direction. Unfortunately, this became a patented feature of trade union movement in the State and got reflected in all sectors of employment.

5.3.18 Disunity and Rivalry

The Cashewnut Workers' Federation enjoyed considerable influence in such centres as Kundara, Parippally, Kollam, Karunagappally, Kunnathur and Kottarakkara and this was the outcome of selfless work and sacrifice of leaders like N. Sreekantan Nair, T.K. Divakaran, Baby John, R.S. Unni, K.P. Raghavan Pillai, G. Karunakaran, M.K. Sankara Pillai, D. Sreedharan, Bhaskara Kurup, T.M. Prabha, Sundareswaran, Anirudhan, P.K. Yasodharan, N. Madhavan, P. Raghavan Pillai, K.V. Kumaran, K. Sankaran Nair, G. Chandrasekharan Nair, R. Ravindran, P.K. Nanu, T.P. Gopalan, M.M. John and C.A. Antony.

Besides the struggles mentioned above, some struggles at a few more centres need mention. During the struggle of 1951, the workers of ATKM factory at Ezhukone were staging the picketing at the gates. *Goondas* were deployed and one of them caught hold of a young woman worker and physically threw her aside. Meanwhile, on the request of the management, a police force led by Circle Inspector had reached the spot and they tried to use their batons to drive away the workers. At this, a few women workers came to the front line and showed their hands damaged by cashew shell oil and the Inspector, Hassan, was shocked to see that the hands looked similar to those of lepers. The workers also told him that during the long working hours, they were not served with even drinking water and the supervisors used to beat them physically with long lashes when they asked for full wages for the work done. The Inspector was stunned and he immediately withdrew his men and left the place.

At the ATKM factory in Karipra also a similar picketing was staged. But there the Communists worked as black legs. The workers planned to picket the car of C.P. Divakaran, who was engaged to work as checker in this factory and he was very obedient to his employer who was none other than Thangal Kunju Musaliar. When the workers executed their plan, Circle Inspector Hassan who was travelling in the car jumped out. A big party of reserve police was following the car. They also jumped into action against the

workers. Many were injured in the lathi charge and about 15 of them were arrested. During the next few days the police had a field day.

The RSP was a party that made strong demand to Government to lift the ban on the Communists and their party. In fact, N. Sreekantan Nair who was well known for his anti-communist feelings found time and took high risk to meet the communist leaders who had gone underground when the Party was banned in the State. In spite of this, after the ban was lifted the communists saw to it that the RSP was wiped out. They started rival unions wherever the RSP affiliated unions existed. The misunderstanding between the CPI and RSP and among their leaders considerably weakened the left movement in general and trade union movement in particular.

5.3.19 Kollam Convention: Unity Talks

Taking stock of the labour situation in the State, trade union leaders called for a State Convention of all trade unions in Kollam³¹. It was the first State Convention in the history of trade union movement in Kerala. The Kollam Convention of 1952 among other things, demanded: (a) the declaration of Alappuzha and Cherthala as famine areas, (b) the release of all political detainees, and (c) the reopening of all industrial establishments that had been closed previously. About 250 trade unions and 590 representatives attended the Convention. It also discussed the problem of collusion between employers and police in the handling of industrial disputes in the State. It demanded from the Government the withdrawal of all police cases involving industrial disputes and guarantee legitimate trade union rights. The Convention helped to revive trade union unity as well as left unity.

Following the Kollam Convention, a hunger march from Cherthala to Thiruvananthapuram was organized under the leadership of N. Sreekantan Nair. There was a fear all around that there might arise another Punnappara-Vayalar type revolt and the Government of the day threatened to arrest and prosecute prominent leaders. Serious allegations were raised against the Labour Minister of the State for collecting bribes from employers, extending them the hope that he would call up the police and deploy them against agitating workers. In order to minimize the intervention of the police, the need for a strong and efficient Labour Department was felt. The demand for the elevation of the existing Labour Department from a minor department to a major one was almost unanimous. The decisions taken at the Kollam Convention were announced at a Press conference held in Thiruvananthapuram by the leaders, N. Sreekantan Nair, T.V. Thomas, T.K. Divakaran and P.T. Punnoose³².

5.4 NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Kollam was well known as a centre of tile factories and saw mills. A few miles away from Kollam was another industrial centre located in Kundara. Kundara was famous for its ceramics factory and in the late 1950s, Aluminium Industries Limited (ALIND) and Laxmi Starch Factory also brought considerable attention to Kundara. In the following pages we attempt to narrate the trade union activities in these areas.

In April 1951, the Kundara Ceramics had been remaining closed though the management was giving some hopes to workers regarding its reopening³³. The closure was a sequel to a strike in which the unions demanded reinstatement of 197 workers whose services had been terminated. Negotiations were held with the unions and they had agreed to the termination of services of 120 workers out of the total. A settlement was reached in which the management agreed to pay 14 days' wages for every completed year of service rendered by them.

In June 1951, there was a dispute in the tile factories in Kollam and nearby areas. As negotiations between the managements and the trade unions failed, the Government referred the dispute to adjudication. After hearing both sides, the Court gave an Award, which raised the minimum wage from Rs.1 as.2 to Rs.1 as.8. Women workers and adolescents were to get an increase of two *annas* in their existing wages.

5.4.1 Emergence of INTUC in Kollam

The Punalur Paper Mills initially had only one union led by communists as we had seen earlier. But subsequently with the changes in the character of State Politics, new unions arose there, bringing down the popularity of the communist union. In 1955 it was reported that about 300 workers suddenly left the communist union in the context of a 40-day strike, which failed to give any sign of ending. C.M. Stephen, a big orator and organizer, was leading the Congress Union (INTUC)³⁴. This union explained to the workers the dangers involved in continuing the strike called by the AITUC union. However, when AITUC leader Rajagopalan Nair met the Chief Minister, the latter assured him to bring about a settlement within two or three days. The Chief Minister made an appeal to all trade unions in the State that the workers should protect the interests of the people and ensure continuity of production and any issue that might arise could be subjected to the due process of law and until this process was completed the workers should not resort to direct action.

By 1956 the INTUC had become a major force in the trade union movement in Kollam. This was evidenced by the submission of a Memorandum duly signed by 12,900 workers belonging to INTUC. The memorandum was submitted to Dr. B. Ramakrishna Rao, the then Governor of the State by A.P. Udayabhanu, Kalathil Velayudhan Nair, C.M. Stephen and T.A. Abdullah³⁵. In 1959, the INTUC held a big rally at Kollam as a part of the District Convention organized by C.M. Stephen, R. Balakrishna Pillai, and M. Sreedharan Pillai. G. Ramanujam, the all India President of the INTUC, inaugurated the Convention. The rally was attended by about 25,000. Ramanujam advised the workers to see that no Russian type dictatorial regime should be allowed to come up in Kerala³⁶.

There was a 41 daylong strike in the H & C tile factories involving 200 members of staff. Both the INTUC and UTUC unions were involved in this strike³⁷. The major issue was the bonus for 1956-57 and 1957-58. Since the staff went on strike, the workers also joined them in support. C.M. Stephen led the Staff Association, while T.K. Divakaran led another union. They jointly negotiated with the management. The management agreed to pay one and half month's salary as advance to the striking staff to be adjusted to the bonus due to them. A settlement was reached and the strike ended.

In the Conference held in July 1960 to resolve a dispute that arose in the cashew industry, the INTUC, UTUC and AITUC participated. C.M. Stephen, Prakkulam Bhasi, and J. Chitharanjan and P. Bhaskaran represented them. The conference was held in the presence of the Chief Minister, Pattom Thanu Pillai, Deputy Chief Minister R. Sankar, Industry Minister K.A. Damodara Menon and Labour Minister K.T. Achuthan, besides, the Labour Commissioner, A. Kunjukrishna Pillai. Indeed, it was a high level conference and following a settlement, the strike was called off and the employers agreed to withdraw the cases filed before the High Court³⁸. In April 1961, the INTUC held a State Convention of unions affiliated to it. P.T. Chacko, K.T. Achuthan, Kunhambu, C.M. Stephen and R. Balakrishna Pillai attended it.

In the Kollam region, in the 1960s the conciliation conferences held to resolve most industrial disputes witnessed the presence of such stalwarts in the trade union movement like C.M. Stephen, J. Chitharanjan, C.M. Mytheenkunju, T.M. Prabha, R.S. Unni, M. Sreedharan Pillai and V.K. Hassankutty. The understanding and cooperation among them were a decisive factor in bringing about amicable settlement on even very complex issues. But when this was not ensured, disputes continued as unresolved for longer periods.

Kollam saw the holding of the National Convention of the INTUC in 1969. The all- India President of the INTUC, V.V. Dravid and the General

Secretary G. Ramanujam attended the Convention. Gulzarilal Nanda inaugurated the Convention. The main speakers at the Convention were K. Karunakaran, C.M. Stephen, G.S. Dhara Singh, T.O. Bava, and A.K. Antony, (the then Youth Congress President). The Convention appealed to workers to work hard to safeguard democracy and reject the anti-congress alliances.

Mention may be made about the attempt made by Kadavur Sivadasan in August 1984 to form the Kerala Trade Union Federation as a central organization of all trade unions having close affinity to the political parties belonging to the United Front led by the Congress. Kadavur Sivadasan was at that time serving as the Labour Minister of the State. He was also leading a faction of the UTUC and had called it as the UTUC (S). He appointed himself as the Convener of the new Federation, but it could not take-off and soon it became non-existent.

5.4.2 Death of Leaders

T.K. Divakaran, one of the most outstanding trade union leaders Kerala had ever seen, passed away on January 19, 1976, while he was serving the State as the P.W.D Minister³⁹. Starting his career as humble clerk in the office of the Kollam Factory Workers' Union and as a devoted activist of the Travancore State Congress, he soon turned to the Left Movement and became one of its brilliant leaders. He joined a galaxy of front line trade union leaders like R. Sugathan, T.V. Thomas, N. Sreekantan Nair and M.N. Govindan Nair. In his later career he had to part company with N. Sreekantan Nair with whom he had worked for long, when ideological conflicts and to some extend personal likes and dislikes were raised. The body of T.K. Divakaran was enclosed in the specially built tomb in the Nehru Park just opposite the Kollam Municipal Stadium in the presence of M.N. Govindan Nair, K.M. George, John Manjooran, N. Sreekantan Nair, K.K. Kumara Pillai, K. Balakrishnan, K.R. Gowri, P. Viswambharan and thousands of workers who loved their leader who lived like one among them and who felt the pulse of the toiling masses.

On July 20, 1983 Kerala heard the news about the sad demise of N. Sreekantan Nair, a giant in the left socialist movement and a trade union leader of unimaginable power who was willing to take any risk including physical injury to execute a decision he took. This was seen in the A.D. Cotton Mill Struggle where he was reported to have caught the I.G of Police by his neck, when he was not allowed to move forward to reach the striking workers inside the factory compound. He died at the age of 68. A founder member of Travancore Youth League, he worked closely with Ponnara

Sreedhar, N.P. Kurikkal and K.C. George, the radicals. Nair soon became the volunteer captain of the Travancore State Congress and opposed moderates in the organization. Later he worked in the TCFWU in Alappuzha from where he was deputed to Kollam by P. Krishna Pillai who was coordinating the left and progressive forces in the State. Thus Sreekantan Nair concentrated his activities in Kollam and Chavara region and built up trade unions. Subsequently, he became anti-communist and founded the Indian Socialist Party. This forced him to part with the RSP and UTUC unions. When he was serving jail term, his mother passed away and this was the greatest shock he ever faced in life. His end came when he was attending an important conference at the Rubber Board at Kottayam, which had just concluded a settlement giving substantial benefits to workers whom he was representing.

The year 1984 saw the demise of two other stalwarts of the trade union movement in Kollam. M.N. Govindan Nair passed away at the age of 74 on November 27, 1984⁴⁰. Starting his career as a true Gandhian and a resident of Wardha Ashram of Gandhiji, MN soon became a communist and a leading trade unionist. He chose Kollam as the main centre of activity and built up both the communist party as well as the AITUC unions in various industries in the district. Being a top leader of the Party, he had to undergo police brutality and repression in jails and had been to underground to escape arrest several times. When the Party split in 1964, he stood with the CPI, but till his last days he was trying to bring about unity between CPI and CPI (M) and also to close the division between AITUC and CITU. His efforts saw results when the CPI and CPI (M) fought the elections together which led to the formation of the EMS ministry in 1967. MN became the Minister for Electricity. Later MN's work contributed to the formation of a CPI led ministry. In this MN was assisted by T.V. Thomas. In this ministry also MN became a Minister. When MN married Devaki Panicker, daughter of Sardar K.M. Panicker, many criticized him. But MN continued to be a strong and devoted communist and an affable person to both friends and foes. Some say that MN had no enemies and he was acceptable even to his archrivals. The CPI head quarters in Thiruvananthapuram is named the M.N. Memorial. It was he who took the initiative to bring the ailing leader R. Sugathan from his abode, the office of the TCFWU in Alappuzha, to Thiruvananthapuram for medical treatment. R. Sugathan had his end on February 14, 1970 and his body was taken from Thiruvananthapuram to Punnapra for cremation. MN and TV had accompanied the body of their close ally.

C.M. Stephen was another great leader who had chosen Kollam for his trade union activities. He was responsible for creating strong presence of the INTUC in Kollam District. He passed away at the age of 66 on January 16, 1984. Born on December 23, 1918 he was educated in Government Arts

College, Thiruvananthapuram and became actively involved in the student's movement⁴¹. He started practice as a lawyer in Kollam and along with it got actively involved in the Indian National Congress as well as single-handedly promoted the growth of INTUC unions in Kollam. His experience in working as the Secretary of Travancore Student's Federation (TSF) had given him excellent oratorical skills and organizational expertise. He was elected member in the State Assembly and later to the Lok Sabha. He also served as the Union Minister for Communications and during the Emergency period he became the right hand confidant of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He had also served as the Vice President and President of the Kerala State Unit of the INTUC and had worked with senior leaders like B.K. Nair, G.S. Dhara Singh, K. Karunakaran and I.P. Krishnan in stimulating the growth of the INTUC in Kerala. One of his close and trusted associates was R. Varadarajan Nair of Thiruvananthapuram.

In the death of R.S. Unni, the RSP and the UTUC and the union movement in Kollam had suffered a huge loss. He passed away on February 17, 1999 at the age of 75. He was one of the founders of the UTUC and had served as an MLA, Dy. Speaker, Speaker and Minister besides guiding well over 20 trade unions in the Kollam region. In November 1992 after a serious illness one of his legs had to be amputated but in spite of this physical handicap he was active in the union movement. After T.K. Divakaran, R.S. Unni was the greatest solace for the cashew workers of Kollam. He had exhibited considerable organizational skills during his work in Cashew sector and the Parvathy Mills (former A.D. Cotton Mill). He was attracted to the movement by Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair and N. Sreekantan Nair. The sudden demise of T.K. Divakaran had shocked R.S. Unni deeply. Unni organized workers in Tiles, Press, and Saw mills beside cashew factories. During 1944-46 he was in full charge of the Travancore State Congress activities in Kollam. He worked for a short period in the Parvathy Mills. He had attended the Alappuzha Trade Union Conference along with T.P. Gopalan. Unni had several jail terms and suffered lock up brutality which gave him T.B. in his last days besides high blood sugar. It was unfortunate that the end of R.S. Unni came just a day after the conclusion of the 15th National Convention of the all-India RSP at Kollam. It was after this Convention, which elected K. Pankajakshan as the National General Secretary, that the Kerala unit of the RSP split into RSP (Baby John group) and RSP (official) unit. This led to a split in UTUC also, further dividing the left union movement.

5.5 CONCLUSION

After Alappuzha, Kollam had been considered as the second most important centre of trade union movement in the Travancore State. The Travancore Labour Association (TLA) in Alappuzha and the Kollam Labour Union were the oldest trade unions in the State. The TLA got transformed into the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union and the Kollam Labour Union became the Kollam Factory Workers' Union. Both these organizations inspired working class mobilization in their respective areas. There used to be regular interaction and exchange of leaders between Alappuzha and Kollam. For instance, K.C. Govindan, P.N. Krishna Pillai, and V.K. Purushothaman had come from Alappuzha to Kollam for organizational work. N. Sreekantan Nair was later deputed to work in Kollam along with M.N. Govindan Nair. The Kollam leaders like Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair had gone to Alappuzha to establish links with union leaders. Subsequently, the party was given an upper hand in leading trade unions. Under the influence of P. Krishna Pillai, the uncrowned leader and coordinator, a close link was established among Kollam, Alappuzha, Kochi, Thrissur, Kozhikode and Kannur centres for building up the communist party as well as the units of the AITUC. Soon, internal divisions based on ideology and leadership personalities led to the emergence of splits in the movement. Thus CPI split into CPI and CPI (M). The AITUC split into AITUC and CITU. The Revolutionary Socialists became anti-communist and they formed the RSP and the UTUC. The feud between groups in the RSP forced Sreekantan Nair to found the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP). Soon he parted ways with his former colleague T.K. Divakaran and came back to RSP, which split into two groups, one led by N. Sreekantan Nair and the other by Baby John. All these episodes of splits in the political parties naturally got reflected in the trade union movement.

The trade union movement in Kollam since the 1960s had the presence of AITUC, UTUC and the INTUC. More than one faction of each of it had been working and pulling in different and some times in opposite direction. The passing away of T.K. Divakaran, N. Sreekantan Nair, M.N. Govindan Nair and C.M. Stephen was indeed a great irreparable loss to the working class in Kollam, because they were the leading lights, which instilled in them a strong sense of consciousness about their legitimate rights and the merits of standing united and upholding class solidarity. Whatever benefits that the present day workers enjoy in Kollam are, no doubt, the result of the collective leadership and concern of these giant self-less leaders to the down trodden. As long as they stood united the working class benefited. But when they quarrelled and fought each other, the working class lost. This was a great lesson that the study of trade union movement in Kollam gives to us.

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1. “*Kollathe Thozhilali Prasithanam 27 Varshangalkku Munpu, T.P. Gopalante Drishtiyil*” (The Trade Union Movement of Kollam 27 years ago in the eyes of T.P. Gopalan). Article in the RSP *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, 1990, p. 101.

In Chapter III, we quoted a report of the *Malayala Manorama* of 30-01-1920 on a strike in the H & C Company.

2. K.C. Govindan had stated that the workers got furious at the humiliation and refused to work. They sought the help of T.K. Narayanan. A meeting held at the Cantonment condemned the incident.

See K.C. GOVINDAN: *Memories of an Early Trade Unionist*, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986, p.60.

3. *Malayala Manorama*, 30-01-1920.
4. K. RAMACHANDRAN NAIR: *Industrial Relations in Kerala*, Sterling Publications Pvt. Ltd., N. Delhi, 1973, p.98.
5. *Malayala Manorama*, 25-01-1928.
6. R. PRAKASAM: *Keralathile Trade Union Prasthanathinte Charithram*, Prabhat Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1979, p.43.

Malayala Manorama, 25-01-1928.

According to M.K. Raman, who later became the Secretary of the *Navika Thozhilali Sanghom* (later renamed as Union), he first contacted Dr. Velukutty Arayan and discussed the problems created by the introduction of motor barges by the British companies. Both of them then decided to request G. Raman Menon to chair a meeting. They also informed Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai who said that the NSS leader, Mannath Padmanabhan was in Chavara and he could also be invited. It was Dr. Arayan who suggested the name “*Navika Thozhilali Sanghom*”. Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai agreed to become the Vice President.

See M.K. RAMAN: “*Navika Thozhilali Sanghavum Dr. Velukutty Arayanum*” (Navika Thozhilali Sanghom and Dr. Velukutty Arayan) in *Dr. V.V. Velukutty Arayan Smaranika*, Karunagappally, 1994, pp. 173-175.

7. *Malayala Manorama*, 14-07-1931, p.3.
8. K.C. GOVINDAN: *op.cit*, pp.57-71.
9. P. KESAVAN NAIR: “*Kasuvandi Thozhilalikalude Samara Charithram*” (History of the Struggles of Cashewnut Workers) articles serialized in various issues of *CITU Sandesam*, 1995.
10. N. SREEKANTAN NAIR: “*Kasuvandi Rangam*”, in *Cashew Bullettin Souvenir*, 1976, pp. 3-4.
11. According to him, pregnant women workers used to be abused and beaten by supervisors after accusing them of stealthy eating cashew kernels during their work. The supervisors used one of the women workers to do a physical check on other women workers for any theft of kernels when they left for home after work. Sometimes, these women were asked to face the walls and untie their dhotis and underclothes and shake them to prove that they had not committed any theft during work and only then they were allowed to return home.
12. See *Cashew Bullettin Souvenir*, 1976 for a full text of the Award.
13. M.N. GOVINDAN NAIR: *Autobiography*, Prabhat Book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1984
14. R. PRAKASAM: *op.cit*.
15. G. SUKUMARAN's article in the *RSP Kanaka Jubilee Souvenir*, 1990, p. 173.
16. K. RAMACHANDRAN NAIR: *op.cit*, p.100. In this strike, both N. Sreekantan Nair and K. Chellappan were arrested.
17. *Ibid*, p. 116
18. See *RSP Kanaka Jubilee Souvenir*, *op.cit*, pp. 89-92.
19. *Malayala Manorama*, 02-12-1948, p.1
20. *Malayala Manorama*, 29-04-1949, p.2
21. *Malayala Manorama*, 20-05-1949, p.3
22. *Malayala Manorama*, 24-02-1950, p.4

23. *Malayala Manorama*, 23.06.1952, p.3
24. *Malayala Manorama*, 01-06-1957, p.1
25. *Malayala Manorama*, 14-06-1957, p.1
26. *Malayala Manorama*, 09-11-1948, p.2
27. *Malayala Manorama*, 10-11-1948, p.2
28. *Malayala Manorama*, 18-11-1948, p.1
29. *Malayala Manorama*, 20-04-1949, p.3
30. See *RSP Kanaka Jubilee Souvenir, op.cit*, pp. 179-183.
In this piece, Thankappan Chettiyar, a participant in the struggle, shares his experience and reminiscences.
31. *Ibid*, See Article by A.A. Azeez, pp. 107-114.
32. K. RAMACHANDRAN NAIR: *op.cit*, pp. 124-126.
33. *Malayala Manorama*, 07-10-1952, p.1
34. *Malayala Manorama*, 14-04-1951.
35. *Malayala Manorama*, 14-06-1955, p.5
36. *Malayala Manorama*, 18-12-1956, p.1
37. *Malayala Manorama*, 04-03-1959, p.4
38. *Malayala Manorama*, 17-09-1959, p.1
39. *Malayala Manorama*, 02-07-1960, p.1 and 23-07-1960, p.1
40. *Malayala Manorama*, 20/21-01-1976.

CHAPTER VI

UNION MOVEMENT IN COCHIN

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Even a decade before Independence, trade unionism appeared in Cochin¹. However, according to R. Prakasam, in 1928 the boat workers of Kochi had started a spontaneous strike when the shipping agents made a unilateral cut in the wages of loading and unloading workers employed in the ships that were berthed in mid sea. The wage rates were Rs.3 ½ for 100 bags and this was cut to Rs.1 ¾. Workers used to be paid a bata of 4 annas for doing night work. The strike in protest against the wage cut lasted 6 days. The employers tried all means to defeat the strike and on failing which they agreed to restore the wages to the original level. This success prompted the workers to form a trade union. Thus was born the Cochin Port Labour Association. Its President was an advocate attached to Gujarathi traders and its Secretary was the brother of a leading stevedore in the Port.

6.1.1 The Beginnings

The working class in the Cochin State was mainly concentrated in Ernakulam and consisted of workers employed in the Petroleum (Oil) installations belonging to Burma Shell and Standard Vacuum Companies, Cochin Port, Ferry Service, Coir Factories, Engineering Units, Electricity supply undertaking and Tata Oil Mill Company (TOMCO). In the 1940s the TOMCO alone employed 3000 workers. Thus Ernakulam (Kochi) became the hub of industrial and commercial activity and the heavy concentration of workers there provided inspiration for working class mobilization.

Though the Tata Oil Mill Company (TOMCO) started functioning in 1917, a trade union for its employees could be formed only in 1939. As the formation of a trade union would only invite victimization and repression from the management and the government authorities, the pioneers decided to call their organization “*Deenanivarana Sanghom*”(Association for Redressal). They said that this body aimed at redressal of individual and social disadvantages through mutual help and cooperation. Behind it, the idea was to mobilize the workers and instil in them a spirit of class-consciousness.

A meeting was held under the presidentship of V.K. Kutty Sahib on January 28, 1939 to pass the constitution and byelaws of the *Sanghom*, and, subsequently they secured registration from the Directorate of Industries, Government of Cochin. This organization, though not the first of its kind in Kerala, was reported to have inspired the formation of similar organizations of workers/employees in the other units of the Tata Oil Mill Company (TOMCO) in other parts of India. Chowara Parameswaran, P.K. Deewar, M.I. Paul and M.K. Menon were the pioneers in the trade union movement in Kochi. The *Kochi Praja Mandalam* had also played a pioneering role in promoting the trade union movement there.

6.1.2 Kochi Praja Mandalam

V.R. Krishnan Ezhuthachan has given a graphic account about the formation of Kochi Praja Mandalam². On January 21, 1941 at Padinjare Nadakkavil, Thrissur, about 25-30 young people met at the office of the District Congress Committee. S. Neelakanta Iyer, President of the DCC and C. Kuttan Nair, had called the meeting. V.R. Krishnan Ezhuthacahan presided over the meeting, which discussed several issues like the following: Was there a need for a new political party in Cochin? Or was it sufficient to improve the functioning of one of the existing parties? Finally it was resolved that they should form a new party called *Kochi Praja Mandalam*. This Party was opposed to the idea of the Maharaja's sovereignty. Its aim was not merely to acquire responsible government, but to ensure equality, social justice and welfare to all. The Party would destroy feudal landlordism, capitalism and their respective instruments of exploitation. Respect for minorities and a strong stand against communal disharmony would be the hallmark of the Party. Unless and until the *Praja Mandalam* became a democratic, popular and mass based party, it would not contest any elections.

At that time in Cochin, there existed the Cochin State Congress and Cochin Congress and people were not happy with them and the youth believed that both these organizations were polluting the political environment. In 1941, the heavy monsoons in the Cochin State had caused considerable hardships to people. The workers of the *Praja Mandalam* went round and did extensive relief work that brought solace to the suffering people. On December 30, 1941, A.F.W. Dixon, the Dewan of Cochin, called the President and Secretary of the *Praja Mandalam* to his residence in Ernakulam and warned them of the consequences if they went ahead with their plan to convene the Annual Conference of the *Praja Mandalam* on January 9-10, 1942 at Irinjalakkuda. The Working Committee of the *Mandalam*, after a detailed debate over the Dewan's warning decided to go

ahead with the Conference as scheduled. The Dewan was informed of this decision. As scheduled, the conference was held and the Dewan met it with repressive measures like taking the workers into custody and turning Irinjalakkuda into a police fortress. About 40 among the people attending the conference were taken into custody and sent to Viyyur Central jail. No political party in Cochin came out to condemn the Dewan's action.

When Gandhiji made a call for the Quit India Movement, it was the *Praja Mandalam* that first took the initiative to spread this message to the people of Cochin. At the meeting of representatives of Native States held at Birla House on August 5, 1942, Cochin was represented by the President and General Secretary of the *Praja Mandalam*. At the political block of the Viyyur Central Jail, slogans relating to the Quit India Movement were raised. Ikkanda Warrier and Panampally Govinda Menon of the Cochin Congress and Puthur Achutha Menon of the Legislative Progressive Party extended their cooperation to the *Praja Mandalam* and decided to work with it. Both the Cochin Congress and the Progressive Party were liquidated and their leaders and workers joined the *Praja Mandalam*. In 1943, Ikkanda Warrier was elected the President of the *Mandalam*.

At the *Kochi Grama Seva Sanghom* Office near Poonkunnu, Thrissur, the *Praja Mandalam* started functioning. The workers of the *Mandalam* decided to engage themselves in constructive social activities like rendering relief work during the Cholera and Small Pox epidemics in the Cochin State, promote khadi and also Hindi among the people. Initially the *Mandalam* functioned through an agency called "South India Satyagraha Samithi". On January 26, 1945 about 150 *Praja Mandalam* representatives assembled at Menacherry Buildings, Thrissur with Neelakanta Iyer in the chair. The main issue discussed was whether the *Mandalam* should contest the ensuing elections to the Cochin Legislature. Though the youth delegates opposed the idea, by a majority vote it was decided to put up a few candidates for election but on the condition that if any one was elected he should resign from the Working Committee and should not attempt to become a Minister. By that time, the *Praja Mandalam* had about 100 branches and over 10,000 members. The *Mandalam* put up 20 candidates of which one broke the conditions stipulated. Of the remaining 19 who contested the elections, 12 were elected. When the Legislature met in July 1945 at Rama Varma Town Hall, Ernakulam, these 12 *Praja Mandalam* members caught the attention of all and they were wearing Gandhi Caps.

In July 1946 (*Karkitakom* 13,1121 ME) all over Cochin there were celebrations and demonstrations demanding Responsible Government and this made a deep impact on the Maharaja and the ruling establishment. On

Chingom 1, 1122, the first day of the Malayalam Era, the Dewan read out a message from the Maharaja declaring complete responsible government to the people of Cochin. The *Praja Mandalam* thus achieved its mandate.

Mention may be made about the major activists of the *Praja Mandalam* in this context. The list is not claimed as exhaustive, but in such documentation like the present, inadvertently some names may have been missed. See the list in the Annexure.

Among the activists of the *Kochi Praja Mandalam*, a few had played a pioneering role in the trade union movement in the State. Mention may be made about K. Karunakaran, Panampally Govinda Menon, Chowara Parameswaran, Mathai Manjooran, P.R. Lonappan, K.P. Menon, P. Sankarankutty, K.M.K. Muhammed, G.S. Dhara Singh, A.A. Kochunny, M.K. Prabhakaran, A.K. Bhaskaran, P.K. Deewar, M.A. Kakku, P.R. Francis, M.P. Menon and P. Balagangadharan Menon.

6.2 THE EARLY PHASE

6.2.1 Conditions of Work and Wages

In the early phase employers formed the trade unions in Cochin as a matter of compulsion, when the workers and those who had sympathy in them could no longer remain silent observers at the mounting exploitation of workers and denial of human treatment. Reference was made above to unilateral cut in wages of workers engaged in loading and unloading of merchandise from ships. The assignment of work in the port was crude and primitive. Under the *Chappa* System, all workers were treated as casual and they were under the mercy of stevedores and shipping agents. *Chappa* was a kind of Token, the possession of which makes a worker eligible to work. Each day at about 4 am, the workers were asked to assemble and a certain number of tokens, depending on the number of workers required, would be thrown into the crowd of workers. Those who could get or grab the token alone were allowed to work. Indeed this was a kind of hit and run struggle and the mighty and cunning would alone succeed. To reach the site of distribution of *Chappa* most workers were forced to start from their houses by 2 or 2.30 am. The system was crude, primitive and inhuman.

Those who worked in the ship day and night had to carry their food with them. No regular interval was provided to workers to enable them to take food and water. The food was to be taken in thoroughly unhygienic conditions of the ship's deck. Many workers used to suffer from diarrhoea and

vomiting. This forced some to permanently abandon their work. It was reported that some day in 1930, these workers assembled in the open courtyard of the residence of K.C. Raman Kunju. P.S. Mohammed, a leader of the Travancore Labour Association from Alappuzha, presided over the meeting and it was decided to open a branch office of TLA near the Cochin Port. P.K. Padmanabhan, and K.K. Kunjan also attended the meeting. The only demand raised by workers who attended the meeting was that they should be allowed to take rest and sleep for a short time during the long hours of continuous work in the ship.

Kochi and Palluruthy had lot of *oil chucks*, where the workers were forced to work for about 14 hours at a stretch. *Mooppans* (jobbers) brought workers from such areas like Poochackal, Vaduthala, Edakochi and Palluruthy and forced them to stay at the *Mooppan's laayams*/sheds. They were served tapioca and rice gruel. T.M. Aboo cites an incident. When a worker got killed in an *oil chuck* during its operation, a petition was submitted to the Cochin Maharaja praying for some compensation. The Raja was said to have replied saying that the existing laws did not allow for payment of any compensation or assistance in such cases!!

In the toddy-tapping sector, workers were virtually living like slaves³. They had to bear savage punishments at the hands of shop contractors as well as excise officials. Contractors had many tricks up their sleeves to cheat the toddy-tapping workers when the latter measured the toddy they had produced. Accusing them that the toddy brought by them contained water and the contractors cut wages as they liked. Those who protested were tied to coconut trees and beaten by the *goondas* of contractors. Some were punished by forcing them to parade on the roads carrying their tapping tools on their head.

The conditions of workers in shops and commercial establishments were also bad. They had to work long hours from 8 am to midnight without rest. On special occasions like festival days they had to work for 24 hours, as the shops did not close. While the shop owners went out for taking food, the workers were not given any facility to take food, as they were not allowed to leave the establishment.

In the Sitaram Mills and Kunnathu Textiles, though wages were fixed about one rupee (16 *annas*), workers used to be paid only 14 *annas*. The Mill management used to deduct 2 *annas* from wages saying that it was to compensate for the wear and tear of the machinery installed in the mills.

6.2.2 Red Flag demonstration

Thoppumpadi in Palluruthy, Kochi, had a Tin Factory where the workers had been organized into a union and a strike committee with P.S. Namboodiri as Convener. The strike committee consisted of George Chadyanmury, P. Gangadharan, Kesava Dev and Cherian Manjooran. They were communists. The leaders of the TLA from Alappuzha were trying to establish links in the Cochin State. The Tin Factory Workers were organized as a part of that effort. P.S. Namboodiri mobilized the workers to hold a Red Flag demonstration and raise slogans indicating their demands. The Management agreed to meet the leaders for reaching a settlement. P.S. Namboodiri was told that the management could not raise wages as demanded. It tried to show him the company's account books, but P.S. Namboodiri was not convinced. When he started leaving, the Police had arrived and started a brutal lathi charge. Inspector Sankarankutty Menon led the police party. He kicked Namboodiri on his chest, followed with a few blows. The Inspector dragged him through the floor and threw him outside the factory. This incident raised protest demonstrations in many parts of Cochin State. C.R. Iyyunni, who was leading a struggle of Electricity workers in Thrissur, led a protest march. Following this Shammugham Shetty, the Dewan of Cochin ordered the arrest of both P.S. Namboodiri and C.R. Iyyunni.

6.2.3 Thrissur Labour Brotherhood

The conditions of workers in the Thrissur market were deplorable. One day, due to serious illness, a worker died, but his family did not have means even to arrange a burial for the diseased. This provoked the conscience of the shop workers (*Peedika Thozhilalikal*) and they decided to make a collection and took up the responsibility to arrange the burial and give financial help to the family of the diseased. As a similar contingency might happen in the lives of any other worker, a few like-minded workers decided to form an organization called Labour Brotherhood. This body did not have any politics. It concentrated on social service among the workers in Thrissur. In the late 1930s, there was a smallpox epidemic in Mala and many were dying. The volunteers of the Thrissur Labour Brotherhood went around and collected homeo medicines from the homeo doctors in the area. They later reached Mala and started visiting the houses to distribute the homeo medicines among the infected.

But as days passed by, the members of the Labour Brotherhood felt the need for a leader to guide them. They decided to approach K.K. Warrier, who was running a Khadi store. Warrier (known as *Keeran* among his well wishers) had just returned from Malaya and was a confirmed socialist. Soon the attraction of socialist ideology brought together a group of dedicated

activists. Besides K.K. Warrier, this group had M.A. Kaku, P.M. Thomas, Kadavi Vareed, T.V. Andrews, K.P. Paul (who later founded the Popular Automobiles firm), T.O. Varkey, Francis Panakkalal Vareed, K.M. Joseph, M.P. Bhattacharipad, and Professor M.P. Paul (who became a great literary figure in Malayalam). Gradually, the Thrissur Labour Brotherhood took up trade union activity and it inspired the formation of trade unions for shop workers, rickshaw pullers, motor and bus workers, general workers, engineering workers and press workers. One may say that the Thrissur Labour Brotherhood was the nucleus agency in the development of trade unions in Thrissur region.

6.2.4 Unions at Amballur and Chalakkudy

Besides the Thrissur Centre, a number of suburban areas like Amabllur, Chalakkudy and Mukundapuram had some industrial activity such as Knitting, Potteries, Tiles, Sawmills and Bidi making. During the period 1935-37, the bidi workers working for Kandamkulathy contractor was reported to have initiated a struggle against low wages and inhuman treatment by the employer. There were frequent disturbances and agitations by workers in the Sitaram Mills, Kochin Potteries, Chalakkudy Sawmills, and Amballur Textiles. Alagappa Chettiar owned the Amballur Textile Mill and he had brought a number of Tamil Workers to work in the Mill. Initially there was harmony between the Tamil and local Malayali workers, though the Tamil workers were paid a lesser wage. When the trade union activists of the Thrissur Labour Brotherhood spoke for the Tamil workers, Chettiar cunningly manipulated the situation to create disharmony and misunderstanding between the two groups of workers and this occasionally ended in several incidents of physical clashes. But careful handling of the situation by the trade union activists of the Labour Brotherhood defeated the Chettiar's plans.

6.2.5 Stencilling Workers' Union

Once the Kochi Trade Unions Act was enacted, many workers' organizations in Kochi and Thrissur applied for registration. The Stencilling Workers' Union of Azhikkal was one of the first trade unions to get registration. George Chadayanmury led it. Then followed the Union in the Alagappa Mills. In Kochi Port, a union with Panampally Govinda Menon as President secured registration but soon the port workers lost confidence in him and they elected M.B.K. Menon in his place.

6.2.6 Troubled days of 1930s

On May 1, 1938, port workers observed the May Day. The employers, stevedores and shipping agents spread rumours that most of trade union leaders there were agents of Soviet Union and they were getting a lot of illegal money for financing subversive activities. Leaders like P.S. Namboodiri, already a targeted man, were taken into police custody. He was at that time leading the “*batha*” workers in the port. The boat workers had formed a union under the leadership of P.A. Sainudin, a Congressman, at a time when the Cochin State Congress was not devoting much attention to forming trade unions. The Congress was focusing on such activities like promotion of khadi and propagation of Hindi as a part of the mobilization of cadres for the freedom struggle.

In December 1938, a struggle by *alaathupiri* workers was reported. Most of them belonged to the Catholic Church. The employer was a Gujarati. When the priest in the local church was giving his sermon on peace and piety, a worker attending the sermon waved a piece of Red cloth shouting that they were not interested in the sermons but wanted food for their belly.

In 1938, following a strike in the Amballur Textile Mill, P.S. Namboodiri and George Chadayanmury were arrested, though the employer agreed to a settlement. In February 1938, the toddy tappers in Mukundapuram led a struggle against the exploitation by shop contractors. At Anthikkad, George Chadayanmury mobilized toddy tappers and his colleagues like T.D. Gopi Master, Kochathu Ramankutty, Tatla Kochu, T.R. Ramankutty, Paris Ravunni, N.C. Sankaran and K.G. Kelan assisted him. The toddy workers were forced to live under slave labour conditions and always under the threat of brutality by shop contractors and police and excise officials. Among the bidi workers, E. Gopalakrishna Menon was a major organizer.

It was in December 1938, that Suresh Chandra Bannerji, President of the AITUC made a visit to Kochi and Thrissur. This gave a big boost to the trade union movement in the Cochin State, but at the same time, strengthening the hold of Communists and the Congress Socialists in the movement.

The *Malayala Manorama* reported the holding of an All Kochi Labour Conference at the Madrassa School Hall, Palace Road in June 1936⁴. It was chaired by Barrister A.K. Pillai. Mrs. L.G. BEranad (a Britisher and the Chairperson of Kochi Municipality), E.V. Bhaskara Menon and Babu Sampurnandan were the main speakers. The Conference demanded representation for Labour in the legislature and also adult suffrage.

William Goodacre had a woolen knitting unit in Kochi. The British management was paying wages at the rate of 4 ½ annas per pound of output. One day in September 1936, the management unilaterally reduced the wages

to 1 ¼ anna. The bulk of the work force in this unit consisted of women. In protest against this reduction in wages, about 200 women workers spontaneously struck work and went out declaring that they would return only after wages were restored to the original level⁵.

There was a strike in October 1936 at the Coir Matting Unit of the Jeevan Das Purushotham Company at Palluruthy⁶. About 100 workers employed in the manufacture of coir mats struck work when the management unilaterally reduced the wages from Rs. 8 to Rs. 3.

As early as 1938 a Handloom Workers' Union had been formed in Kunmathupalam, near Chittur. This union later grew into the Chittur Taluk Handloom Workers' Union under the leadership of A. Subramonia Mudaliar, a *Praja Mandalam* activist.

6.2.7 The 1940s

Reference had been made earlier about the formation of the Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union (TOMWU) in the Tata Oil Mill Company (TOMCO) in Kochi. In the 1940s, industrial strike activity in Cochin State was largely confined to the Port, the TOMCO and a few tile factories in Aluva. On the very day of its inauguration, the TOMWU conducted a sit down strike in the soap plant of the Mills at Tatapuram against the Manager's decision on the discharge of a workman for a day's non-attendance in the plant. The strike soon spread to the entire factory and a settlement was reached that the plant superintendent would no longer take disciplinary actions and such powers would vest exclusively with the General Manager of the factory.

In the early 1940s, the TOMWU held a one-week strike for the cause of temporary workmen. The Union's demand for DA was also settled peacefully. It brought to the workers the conviction that their legitimate demands could be satisfied without resort to violent strike activity and intimidation. Since then, contrary to the established characteristics of infant unionism, the TOMWU cooperated with the management in building up a strong collective bargaining system at Tatapuram. However, this did not keep the union away from direct action like peaceful strikes and picketing when they were found really inevitable.

The month of August 1942 saw the industrial workers all over India in the grip of the historic Quit India agitation. In Kochi, Panampally Govinda Menon was the President of the TOMWU and under him the Union was involved in the freedom struggle. To protest against the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru and the police brutality against Congress

Volunteers in many parts of India, the members of the TOMWU joined hands with other groups. Panampally was arrested and kept in jail, and, during this time, he was re-elected the President of the Union for two more terms.

The Cochin Government further provoked strong agitations when it promulgated the Criminal Law Amendment. Under it, the Government prohibited organized movements and collective associations and this measure was apparently intended for infringement of the fundamental rights of freedom of speech and free association. To protest against this measure, a demonstration was held, led by Mathai Manjooran and M.P. Menon. They marched to the Cochin legislature and virtually took control of it. Manjooran took the chair of the Prime Minister in the hall and declared the dismissal of the Cochin Government and the establishment of a popular government of which he himself was made the Prime Minister. This historic episode took the Dewan and the Maharaja by surprise, but they had no courage to arrest the leaders. The Government later issued arrest warrants against them.

This development had its reflections in the trade union movement. In 1944, the TOMWU conducted a sit down strike to agitate against the victimization and transfer of its Vice President. Following the discharge of 32 workmen, another strike was held in February 1946. It lasted 9 days. Soon the working class in Cochin was fully mobilized to join the struggle for responsible government. It had established close links with the working class movement in Travancore. Leaders of the movement in Travancore closely interacted with those in Cochin. The arrival of P. Krishna Pillai from Malabar helped to integrate the movements in various parts of Kerala and drive it in a pre-determined direction.

In June 1947, Mathai Manjooran was elected the President of the TOMWU. He succeeded in negotiating a settlement over the discharge of 600 workers at Tatapuram. But the company, TOMCO, refused to implement the terms of settlement. The union decided to hold an all-Cochin propaganda *jatha/march* to create public opinion and support. The political atmosphere was so tense and explosive that public protest against the Government had reached its zenith. State Congress leaders of Travancore used to make regular visits to Kochi. The presence of Communists, Congress Socialists, Travancore State Congress, working class leaders and Kochi *Praja Mandalam* activists made Kochi reverberate with political debates.

Certain moves by the Cochin Government forced Mathai Manjooran to go underground. Government framed many charges against him and issued an arrest warrant on him. While remaining in underground, Mathai Manjooran was elected the President of the TOMWU in 1948. A token strike held by the Union also raised a few demands. Soon a settlement was reached on wage

increase, weightage, shift allowance, uniforms, sick leave and recognition of the union as the bargaining agent. Mathai Manjooran was reported to have held the presidency of the TOMWU for more than 15 years.

6.2.8 Thattil Estate Union

In the 1940s, in the Thrissur region, two trade unions had played a leading role. They were the Vellanikkara Thattil Estate Union (VTEU) and the Sitaram Labour Congress (SLC). The Congress leader K. Karunakaran led both these unions. In the Thrissur region at that time most trade unions had come under the control of Communists and this was not liked by the congress cadres. They decided to start rival unions and used all kinds of tactics to win the support of workers. It was in this context that the communists started branding K. Karunakaran as "*karinkali*" (black leg).

The VTEU had a chequered history in the fight for the rights of plantation/estate workers. For instance, in 1946 the union demanded that plantations should be declared an industry so that workers in them could be brought under the purview of the then Trade Disputes Act. For a long time, the Government as well as the estate owners and plantation companies had held the view that plantation activity was agricultural in character. The Union therefore had to launch a strike lasting 36 days. It was a test of its strength and the cause it held was high. The issue was referred to an industrial tribunal and its decision was against the stand taken by the Union. Fortunately for labour, the Congress leader Panampally Govinda Menon was then the Labour Minister in the popular ministry in Cochin State. Under his pressure, the Government issued an ordinance declaring the plantations as an industry. However, when, after independence, the Industrial Disputes Act was extended to Cochin State in 1947, it did not recognize the plantations as an industry. Determined to carry on a relentless battle for a just cause, however long that might be, the Union appealed to the Labour Appellate Tribunal (LAT). It gave a favourable decision, and, thus for the first time in India, the plantations were declared an industry⁷.

6.2.9 Sitaram Labour Congress

The Sitaram Mills workers under the leadership of K. Karunakaran formed the Sitaram Labour Congress (SLC) in early 1940s. Its main rival was the Union led by communists like K.K. Warrier. Due to inter-union rivalry, the SLC had to wage incessant struggles including the use of black legs to defeat the communist union. But in the process of these struggles, the SLC

could secure for its members higher wages, DA, bonus and even gratuity. Since the economic collapse of the mills, a major fire that destroyed most of the equipments in the Mills, and failure to revive it even after government take-over, the Sitaram Labour Congress ceased to be a strong force in the field of trade union movement in Thrissur.

6.2.10 The emergence of Congress-led Unions

G.S. Dhara Singh was one of the founders of the State unit of the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) in Kerala⁸. He was also one of the founders of the Kochi *Praja Mandalam*. In his *Praja Mandalam* reminiscences he had given a graphic account of the emergence of Congress-led trade unions in the Cochin State. Dhara Singh at a young age started as a Seva Dal worker and had spent some days with Mahatma Gandhi at Sevagram. On his return to Mattancherry, he came into close contacts with Congress Committee leaders like Vakil H.D. Kamat, Dr. J.V. Kamat, P. Gagadharan, George Chadyanmury (who later became a communist) and P.A. Sainudin. He soon became an office bearer of the Cochin District Congress Committee and began to concentrate his attention on the promotion of Khadi, Hindi, Harijan welfare, village development, Hindu-Muslim harmony, and Temple Entry and working class mobilization. He was elected President of the Cochin Student's Congress and was assisted by P. Balagangadhara Menon as Vice President. It was in 1941, that the *Praja Mandalam* was set up by those who were not satisfied with the way that the Cochin State Congress was functioning. The communist stand on the Quit India movement caused a split in the Students Congress, and, as a result, a new organization of students called Students' National Organization (SNO) was set up with K. Bhagyanath, as President and Dhara Singh became a working committee member in it.

6.2.11 Deseeya Thozhilali Congress

In November 1945 the all-Kerala Deseeya Thozhilali Congress was formed with Pamban Madhavan as President, and C.E. Bharathan and K. Karunakaran as Vice Presidents. Dhara Singh and K. Kumaran acted as General Secretaries. K.P. Kutty Krishnan Nair was the Treasurer. It was decided that K. Karunakaran would be in charge of trade union movement in north Cochin region and Dhara Singh would look after the development and organizational work in South Cochin region. Soon in a short period a number of trade unions were formed. Among them most prominent ones were the Kochi Ferry Workers' Union, South India Workers' Union, All Kerala Postmen and Lower Grade Staff Union, South Indian Engineering Workers'

Union and Vakkan Company Coir Factory Workers' Union. P.T. Jacob, L.G. Pai, E.J. Joseph, Jacob Elanjikkal and N.N. Kamath in the trade union field assisted Dhara Singh.

The Second World War brought untold misery to the common people. Shortage of food and essential articles, unemployment, poverty, rising prices and spread of epidemics were reported particularly from coastal regions. The *Praja Mandalam* and trade union cadres concentrated in rendering relief work.

K.P. Menon in his reminiscences had said that *Praja Mandalam* in 1941 spent most of its time in rendering relief work⁹. One could work on a *Charkha* and earn as much as 2-4 annas a day. The *Charkha* used to cost Rs. 3 and this was a constraint to the poor people. So the *Praja Mandalam* volunteers fabricated a "Dhanush Thakli" costing just half that of a *Charkha*. They also formed an *All India Charkha Sanghom* to extend financial help to people who registered with it. The *Praja Mandalam* leaders could not accept the anti-national and pro-British stand taken by communist-led trade unions in Cochin. So they decided to bring about a positive change in the attitude of the working class and bring them to the mainstream nationalist movement. R.M. Manakkalath, Mathai Manjooran, P. Sankarankutty, Kanavally Balakrishnan and K.P. Menon worked hard to wean the workers away from the communist-led trade unions. They succeeded in forming nationalist pro-Congress unions in Cochin Harbour, Tata Company, Burma Shell and Standard Vacuum Oil establishments, Madura Company's Boat yard, and Water Transport, besides motor and tile sectors. Obviously, this invited counter action from the communists.

The *Kochi Praja Mandalam* could also successfully accommodate a number of brilliant people who cultivated and practised socialist ideology without sacrificing their nationalist perspective. Mention may be made of such people like Mathai Manjooran, R.M. Manakkalath, M.P. Menon, T. Chandrasekhara Menon, P. Balagangadhara Menon, Kunju Muhammad Mather, John Manjooran, C. Kochaniyan and M.T. Lazar.

The leaders of the Cochin Students' Congress had close relation with the Cochin State Congress, *Praja Mandalam* and the Travancore State Congress leaders. During the Punnappra-Vayalar revolt, a team led by K.N. Nair, K. Prabhakaran and M.V. Joseph was deputed by the Students Congress to make an on the spot study. During their field visits they were identified by a C.I.D. officer and they were taken into custody and produced before Police Commander, Rajagopala Menon at the Cherthala T.B. They were, however, left free after a severe warning. M.V. Joseph felt sad that the Report, which

they submitted to the Travancore State Congress leaders camping at Ernakulam, did not see the light of the day.

6.2.12 P.K. Deewar and Chowara Parameswaran

Before we end this discussion of *Kochi Praja Mandalam* and its activities, we need to highlight the contributions made by two of its distinguished activists, P.K. Deewar and Chowara Parameswaran, to the trade union movement in the Cochin State. P.K. Deewar was first and last a fully committed trade unionist, always saying that he would live and die as a trade unionist. However, he edited *Veerakesari*, a reputed paper of Cochin. When the Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union (TOMWU) was formed in January 1939, he was the first Secretary of that Union and V.K. Kutty Sahib and M.I. Paul, both Congress men were his colleagues. Deewar firmly believed that trade union, being a working class organization, should not play with party politics. He had close association with Panampally Govinda Menon, Chowara Parameswaran, P. Balagangadhara Menon, P. Gangadharan and N. Ramankutty Achan. When as a part of administration reforms, labour was granted representation, it was V.K. Kutty Sahib who went to the Legislature. Later P.K. Deewar also became a member representing labour. At that time the two major political parties in the legislature were *Praja Mandalam* led by Panampally Govinda Menon and the Socialist Party led by Sahodaran Ayyappan. It was when Panampally became the Labour Minister in 1945 that the Minimum Wages Bill was passed in Cochin. Just before that the Government had referred a labour dispute in Burma Shell Company for adjudication. P.K. Deewar had also functioned as the Secretary of the Temple Entry Action Committee, which was formed jointly by *Praja Mandalam*, SNDP and the Communist Party.

Chowara Parameswaran was responsible for the entry of Panampally Govinda Menon into the trade union movement. By profession Chowara Parameswaran was a journalist serving *Mathrubhoomi* daily over three decades. But he was also a great trade unionist, brilliant speaker, social reformer and a rationalist. When the debate over the Minimum Wages Bill commenced in Cochin State Legislature, Parameswaran was specially nominated as an expert member. He was adventurous in every sense and this came to light when he succeeded in getting classified information from the Kottayam DSP, Rajaraja Varma Thampuran, in whose house he clandestinely worked as a servant. The information he collected during this risky adventure inspired the strike by Cochin Police personnel later.

Born and brought up in an orthodox high caste Hindu Menon family, Parameswaran soon found the family environment suffocating. He strongly reacted to ill treatment of harijans and lower castes particularly to the practice of untouchability. He was attracted to Gandhism, and being adventurous in nature, he ventured to travel to Ahmedabad by foot to attend the annual conference of the Indian National Congress. He could not bear the news about the notorious Wagon tragedy and the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 and became an anti-British crusader. He concentrated his attention on anti-untouchability movement and promotion of Khadi and Hindi. He dropped the tail "Menon" from his name. He was greatly inspired by the teachings of Sree Narayana Guru. Parameswaran participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha as a volunteer and courted arrest. In the Guruvayoor Satyagraha too he participated actively. He had great capacity to translate the public speeches of national leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Thakar Bapa, Satyamoorthy and J.M. Sen Gupta into chaste Malayalam and the audience liked it. The way he dressed had some similarity with that of Mahatma Gandhi and this similarity earned Parameswaran the nick name "*Chowara Gandhi*". Parampally Govinda Menon, R.M. Manakkalath and Mathai Manjooran gave him the title "Captain" and always called him captain.

When Parameswaran was arrested for making a "seditious speech", a case was registered against him. During the court proceedings he told the Special Magistrate that he had spoken only what he had intended to speak. In the judgement, Puthezhathu Raman Menon raised the pertinent question "If intentions are also offences, where will be the end". Finally he sentenced Parameswaran to six months' imprisonment. The judgement showered praise on the character of the convict and that was unusual in that period when the Government was taking an anti-people posture.

During the Second World War, Cochin had Dixon, a Britisher as Dewan and he had imposed martial law in Kochi. At that time Kochi port used to be visited by naval ships and soldiers used to land in Kochi and spend their time in merriment. During such visits, they used to abuse women folk even on public roads. In such one instance, a few drunken soldiers from Australia followed a *rickshaw* (hand-pulled carriage) in which a respectable lady headmistress was travelling. The soldiers attacked the *rickshaw* in front of the St. Teresa's College near Broadway and the Dewan's Bungalow. The lady fell on the road as the Rickshaw had been overturned. When the drunken soldiers started laying their hands on the lady, three men appeared on the scene and encountered the soldiers and beat them up severely at which they ran away. When informed of this incident, what the Dewan did was to order the arrest of the three saviours who helped the lady. Parameswaran and Vittappa Prabhu were two of them. The issue was raised in the Legislature,

but the Dewan's reply was that it was customary to give good welcome and treatment to such soldiers returning from the battlefield.

Chowara Parameswaran actively worked to make the Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union (TOMWU) dynamic and popular. He was instrumental in getting Panampally Govinda Menon elected to the leadership of the trade unions in many companies in Cochin, particularly in Burma Shell and Tatas. Parameswaran used his influence to establish a Medical Relief Fund for workers. He wanted to give instructions and training to the children of workers to make cloth through handloom work. On July 29, 1946 Parameswaran could make the working class of Cochin State to observe that day as the Day for Responsible Government and this turned out to be a total *bundh*. He never wanted to take any leadership position in trade unions. When Panampally became a Minister, Parameswaran was forced to take up the assignment as the President of the Union Working committee in the TOMCO. When the TOMWU celebrated its silver jubilee in 1964, Chowara Parameswaran, their leader, was compelled to receive a memento, an easy chair and a writing pad to be put on it.

P. Balagangadhara Menon described Chowara Parameswaran as the leader who secured "bonus" for the working class in Cochin State through a court judgement. He had prepared the Memorandum of Demands and submitted them to the managements of both the Burma Shell and Esso Companies. These managements just ignored the demands and refused to meet the union leaders. The leaders then called for a strike. When the strike was imminent, the managements agreed to talk. Since Panampally was engaged other wise, the Union was represented by Chowara Parameswaran and P. Balagangadhara Menon. The management took a tough stand and was unwilling to consider various alternatives proposed by the Union for a settlement. At the end, Parameswaran declared categorically that if the management agreed that Bonus was a legitimate right of workers, the rest of the issues could be discussed and settled conveniently. The British manager stood up and said that this demand on bonus could not be accepted and if you secured bonus, it would be after treading over our dead body and then threatened to call off the meeting. At this outburst of the Manager, Parameswaran in a cool voice replied that if that was the case the Manager could get ready for what he had indicated. The manager was stunned and he went into his room. The workers got the Bonus and the credit of course went to the commitment and boldness of Chowara Parameswaran.

During the Second World War, there was a political strike, a rare phenomenon. Parameswaran, who had taken the risk of working as a servant in the house of Kottayam DSP Thampuran, inspired this. The police personnel

utilized the information collected by Parameswaran in their strike, which, however, was defeated by authorities. The Cochin Police had three distinctive groups like (a) those who had a slave mentality and obeyed the orders of the superiors, (b) those that wanted the British sovereignty to continue and they respected the Raja and his family and the British superiors. Both these groups clashed in 1921, which caused the Thrissur rebellion. (c) This third group consisted of police personnel including a few senior officers who did not agree to the practice of charging fake cases against freedom fighters and social and trade union activists. Most of the times these officers were forced to keep quiet but they were disgruntled and at the point of exploding at any time. The conditions of the lower level functionaries were pitiable. They were witnessing a situation when their conditions of living deteriorating while those of even the ordinary working class were registering steady improvement through collective action. This was the underlying cause for the police strike.

Chowara Parameswaran is also remembered by working journalists, for he was responsible for unionising them. When M.K. Devassy was Labour Commissioner in Kerala, Chowara Parameswaran, P.R. John, P. Viswambharan and Perunna K.N. Nair and four others came together and registered the first union for Working Journalists in the State.

6.2.13 Anthikkad Tappers' Strike, 1942

Anthikkad, near Thrissur, had a heavy concentration of toddy tappers from early times. Their conditions of work and wages were deplorable beyond description. The workers were at the mercy of shop contractors, as well as police and excise officials. The communists took the initiative in mobilizing the toddy tappers, and, in 1942 they launched a major strike. Police brutality followed. Criminal cases were registered against the union leaders like George Chadayanmury and they were taken into custody and subjected to brutal violence in lock-ups. Trade union offices were raided but union volunteers resisted it and kept the offices open. Government then banned all trade union activities, the communist party, *Karshaka Sanghom* (peasants' organization) and even *Balasanghoms* (children's organizations) and youth clubs. In the police brutality, George Chadayanmury was singled out and four of his ribs were broken¹⁰.

Though following the Quit India Movement, the Government imposed a ban on public meetings, marches and demonstrations throughout the Cochin State, trade union activists continued to be agile and kept up their work on working class mobilization. In spite of this ban, the Cochin Port workers could secure a small hike in wages for the *Thoni* (Boat) and *Batha* workers. In

1945 George Chadayanmury and P.K. Deewar, the former acting as the President of the Union, guided the Cochin Port Cargo Labour Union. They prepared a Trade Union Demand Charter. P.S. Namboodiri led the Amballur Yarn Unit Workers' Union and George Chadaynmury guided its 1946 strike, while remaining underground. He was also instrumental in organizing a volunteer corps to fight and prevent malpractices like hoarding and black-marketing in the Mattancherry area. They un-earthed hoarded stocks of essential goods and arranged to get them distributed among the poor at low prices. The strategy was to investigate and un-earth the hoarded stocks and inform the police. Only after the police reached the spot and a case was registered that they arranged for the distribution of the stocks in the presence of the volunteers. Rice, Cloth and Sugar were the articles thus distributed. The trade union volunteers also pasted notices on the quantity and price of the commodities at select union-controlled vantage points for the information of workers as well as the public at large¹¹.

In 1942, Kunnamkulam saw the emergence of *Aani Thozhilali Union* (Union of workers engaged in the production of iron nails). On account of war, iron nails could not be imported to meet the local demand and so several local manufacturing units emerged to produce iron nails. It was exploitation and in-human conditions of work and wages that forced the workers to form a trade union in such units. In Thrissur, M.A. Kaku, a former founder member of the Labour Brotherhood took the initiative to mobilize the workers in the shops and commercial establishments in the region. R.M. Manakkalath and K.K. Warrier assisted him. As a result of intense trade union struggle, the Government enacted the Shops and Commercial Establishments Act, fixing 6-day week for the employees beside granting one day paid holiday to all registered persons¹².

After the Second World War, the Government of Cochin stepped up its repressive measures to counter trade union struggles. The Chief Secretary issued orders that lock-outs in factories would be lifted and workers offered employment if they disbanded their trade unions. At Anthikkad this order was resisted and toddy tappers struck work and contractors locked out toddy shops. This lasted nearly three months. Finally the contractors decided to open their shops and began to bring toddy from other regions. The agitated Anthikkad toddy tappers went on a warpath. They decided to cut and destroy all Coconut flower bunches that yielded toddy when tapped in a unique way. The operation was to be completed in a single night and it was aimed at as a measure of retaliation against the contractors' action. Government clamped down prohibitory orders under Section 144 and also a curfew in twelve villages. Large contingents of police and army platoons were deployed to hunt out striking toddy tappers. The militiamen raided tappers' houses dragged out

women and a few of them were subjected to abuse and rape. For about three months, under the cover of Curfew, inhuman brutality and repression were unleashed in Anthikkad.

Toddy tappers had strong class-consciousness and class solidarity. In spite of the on going repression, they continued to picket the toddy shops in batches, raising the red flag and shouting revolutionary slogans. The Government declared trade unions illegal and this ban lasted five years. K.P. Prabhakaran, a leading figure in this Anthikkad struggle managed to send a report to the *Express* and *Prajamithram* dailies in Thrissur about incidents of rape and atrocities caused by the police. Since the Government did not like media publicity for this ugly incident, it ordered the closure of these newspapers.

6.2.14 Other Developments

On July 29, 1946 the struggle for responsible government in Cochin reached its zenith because the leaders and the cadres of *Kochi Praja Mandalam*, the Communist Party and the AITUC decided to join hands for a common cause. No work was done in the Kochi port as a result of a strike called by the Port Cargo Labour Union and Kochi Harbour Workers' Union. Even the *Thoni* (Boat) workers joined the struggle. It turned out to be a grand political strike. Panampally Govinda Menon led the Harbour Workers' Union and later M.B.K. Menon took over from him as the President. A.N. Thacho and A.G. Velayudhan were their close colleagues.

Though work was available during wartime, wage rates were low. As soon as the war came to an end about 16,000 workers were retrenched. The union leaders decided to revive the All Kochi Trade Union Council and launch a struggle to tackle the situation, but it did not succeed. In the first All Kochi Trade Union Convention the main issue discussed was how to find jobs for the retrenched workers. Besides, the retrenchment of 16,000 workers from Kochi Harbour alone, 1500 were retrenched from Brunton Company, 2000 from quarry work, 750 from Madura Company, 600 from Chalakkudy Herbert Saw Mills and Standard Furniture Company, and 250 tailoring workers in Irinjalakkuda created a critical situation. A number of workers who had gone to Assam to work in road building had also returned. Post-war demobilization of a large number of soldiers brought idle ex-servicemen looking for jobs. Those who were lucky to retain their jobs found their money wages static while real wages declining due to high inflation and rising cost of living. Taking stock of the situation, the employers started cutting wages and denying other benefits. The Government Supply Department itself started cutting

wages to its workers employed in the Central Depot in Thrissur. A trade union meeting was held with P.K. Deewar in the chair. It was resolved to observe October 15, 1945 as Protest Day. On October 23, the Government imposed a ban on strikes and lockouts. The Kochi Trade Union Council leaders were P.K. Deewar (President), George Chadayanmury (Secretary), M. Gopala Pillai, C.O. Paul, Chowara Parameswaran, Abraham Pullan, P. Gangadharan, P.S. Gangadharan and C.L. Varkey.

6.2.15 Palluruthy Convention

On January 13, 1946 a public meeting was held. R.M. Manakkalath and his Kerala Labour Congress did not cooperate. In spite of this disunity, 58 delegates attended the Palluruthy Convention of Trade Unions from about 32 trade unions. The Convention adopted a Charter of Demands consisting of (a) Trade union recognition, (b) a Minimum Wage of Rs.40 per month, (c) Working hours should be reduced to 48, a week and subsequently it should be reduced to 40 hours, (d) Bonus at the rate of three months' wages, (e) Introduction of Health Insurance Scheme as suggested by the Adarkar Committee Report, (f) Unemployment insurance, (g) Units employing 10 or more workers should be brought under the purview of the Factories Act, (h) 14 days leave with wages a year and not less than 10 days as paid festival and public holidays, (i) Day shift should not go beyond 8 hours while evening shift should never exceed 7 hours and night shift to be limited to 6 hours, (j) Spread over based on relay principle should be stopped, (k) one hour rest interval should be provided in each shift, (l) Equal wages/remuneration for equal work should be applied to male and female workers, (m) three month's maternity leave with wages, (n) employment of children below 16 years should be prohibited, (o) Workers should be provided with healthy and hygienic housing facilities, and (p) issue a proclamation prohibiting dismissal of workers and unilateral reduction of wages. The Convention also passed resolutions on DA with retrospective effect from January 1945 and three months' wages as bonus, Resolutions on low wages in Sitaram Mills, Thattil Estate, TOMCO and Handlooms were also passed. A separate Charter of Demands of P.W.D. employees and Anthikkad toddy tappers was also released. The Convention also demanded the withdrawal of lockouts in bidi-cigar units in Malabar and implementation of demands of South Indian Railway employees. It registered its protest to the Central Government for not nominating N.M. Joshi, General Secretary of AITUC as the Labour Member in the Parliament. The Convention reflected trade union solidarity.

6.2.16 Government's Positive Initiatives

After the Thattil Estate Union's legal battle to secure the Industry status for Plantations, the Cochin Government decided to take some positive initiatives. It set up a Conciliation Board to deal with the labour issues in Manali, Amballur and Ollur areas. It brought about a speedy settlement of a dispute led by the Daily Workers' Union in the Thrissur Foodgrains Depot.

But the most epoch making initiative by the Cochin Government was the establishment of the Labour Court in Kochi, the first of its kind in South India. This was prompted by a dispute in the Burma Shell Oil Company, where the management retrenched a few Gurkha watchmen. The Government referred the dispute to the new Labour Court for adjudication. P.K. Deewar took up the case of the *gurkhas*. At that time he was also editing *Veerakesari*.

In promoting the early growth of trade union movement, the Cochin Government had also taken some constructive steps. In 1945, it convened a conference of representatives of employers and trade unions in order to devise ways and means of lessening labour unrest in Cochin¹³. The conference resolved to appoint a Labour Enquiry Committee to report on the labour problems of the State and to recommend "such further measures, legislative or executive as may be necessary to secure for the employees suitable conditions of living and occupation"¹⁴. The Committee, headed by B.V.K. Menon, submitted its report in November 1947. It noted that the general demand for the increased wages was mostly met by the grant of D.A., and therefore, agitation for wage revision was unjustified. The DA was also not uniform. The Committee suggested the early fixation of minimum wages, a compulsory contributory provident fund, sick leave of a minimum of seven days, grant of permanency to workmen who had put in six months of continuous service, promotion based on efficiency and seniority and higher rates of maternity benefits. Besides, the Committee noted that compulsory recognition of trade unions as provided under the Cochin Trade Unions (Amendment) Act was found to be a factor stimulating union growth and promoting industrial peace.

6.2.17 The First Strike Ballot

Amballur created a sort of landmark in the history of trade union movement in the Cochin State. The textile workers there were planning to launch a strike but finding that the opinion on it was divided, the leaders suggested the democratic method of taking a secret ballot. When it was finally conducted, of the 1667 workers, 1038 cast their ballots. It was discovered that only just one worker voted against the strike.

Before we proceed with our narration of the trade union movement in other regions of Cochin like Aluva, we need to discuss the Paliyam Struggle in which working class played an important role.

6.3 THE PALIYAM STRUGGLE

In Chapter II, we had discussed some of the important struggles that took place in the State before Independence. While the Vaikom Satyagraha was staged in Travancore region, the Guruvayur Satyagraha was staged near Thrissur region banked by both the Cochin State and British Malabar. However, both these struggles attracted the participation of the masses and their leaders from all over the State of Kerala. The Paliyam Struggle was staged during 1946-1947 mainly at Chendamangalam, which was the seat of Paliyath Achan family having close royal connections. Chendamangalam was part of the Cochin State, but it was accessible by road through North Parur located in Travancore, a few kilometres from Aluva or by waterways through Kodungallur (Crangannore). Due to these geographical proximities, people from all these regions had converged on Chendamangalam to participate in the Paliyam Struggle.

6.3.1 Similarity of Struggles

In a sense there was some similarity between Paliyam, Guruvayur and Vaikom struggles. All of them were popular struggles against the evil of untouchability. While the Guruvayur and Vaikom struggles were initiated and led by the progressive sections among the upper caste Hindus, the Paliyam struggle was unique since it was initiated by the Dalits and backward classes against the ban imposed by upper caste sections on the movement of Dalits on the Paliyam roads. Unlike the other two struggles, many leading communist activists were involved in the Paliyam struggle, which made it very unique. The working class and their unions also played an important role in it.

Payyappilly Balan, a confirmed leftist and literary writer had given a graphic account of the Paliyam struggle in his works¹⁵. After giving an account of the origin of the caste system and the practice of untouchability, he cited the Travancore Census Report of 1875 to show that there were 420 castes and sub-castes in the State of Travancore and even among Nair community the 1901 census had mentioned the existence of 116 sub-caste Nairs. P.K. Balakrishnan, in his brilliant work *Jathi Vyavasthayum Kerala Charithravum* (Caste System and Kerala History) had also recorded the rapid spread of the caste system in the State. In Chapter II we had made reference to

the various Renaissance Movements in Kerala and also the various Memorials.

Large scale demobilization after the Second World War, rising prices, shortage of food grains and denial of civil and democratic rights set in motion a series of marches, demonstrations and public meetings. In Travancore, the Dewan, Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer was indulging in a reign of terror. When, during a visit to Cochin State, he reached Ernakulam he was greeted with black flags and the police beat up the crowd of protestors. In the Koodalmanikkam Temple at Irinjalakkuda, lower castes were denied entry from early times and there were signs of small protest against this but they had not fully surfaced into the open. When India attained Independence, in the princely state of Cochin, the students hoisted the National Flag at the Maharajas College on August 15, 1947 but the authorities ordered and the police pulled it down and raised the Cochin Raja's flag. Several students involved in the incident were dismissed from the College. The students held a protest meeting at the nearby Rajendra Maidan. Meanwhile, there was some political change with the resignation of *Praja Mandalam* ministers and following that T.K. Nair assumed charge as the Prime Minister of Cochin and he started a reign of terror in the same mould as Pattom and T.K. Narayana Pillai did in the post 1947 ministries in Travancore.

6.3.2 The Paliyam Struggle begins

On December 17, 1947 the Paliyam struggle commenced. Before that some efforts were made to avoid a struggle. On August 26, 1945 itself, the *Praja Mandalam* Working Committee met at Mala and decided to submit a memorandum to the Cochin Raja and set up a committee for launching direct action, if the Raja did not act. But no action was taken. On May 18, 1946 a delegation led by Kurur Nilakantan Namboodiripad met the Raja and submitted a fresh memorandum. The Raja explained the difficulties in getting the temples opened for all castes, though personally he was not against the idea of temple entry for them. The delegation then announced that they would be constrained to initiate a mass agitation. Meanwhile, some of the temples controlled by progressive Namboodiris belonging to the *Yogakshema Sabha* were thrown open to all Hindus. In the *Desabhimani* daily of February 4, 1946 P. Krishna Pillai had issued a statement saying that the fight against untouchability could help the people to kick out the British. He announced that he would organize a Rally at Kannur to be held on February 24, 1946.

During the second half of 1940s, Cochin had two sets of laws. According to them, in licensed establishments like hotels and restaurants,

teashops, boarding and lodging houses, and, laundries, the practice of untouchability was illegal. However, this practically applied only to such establishments in major towns. The people in these towns had, over time, naturally over come the untouchability evil mostly due to the spread of urbanization. Untouchability was allowed in other establishments and places. Various units of the SNDP *Yogam* had registered their protests in several places. The Kochi SNDP *Yogam* submitted a Memorandum signed by one lakh people to the Raja. The Communists submitted another memorandum signed by 60,000 people.

6.3.3 Declaration of Rights

In November 1946, various groups agitating against untouchability came out with a Declaration of Rights covering such areas like political, social, economic, educational and employment. Political rights demanded included full responsible government, representation according to population and rightful share for all castes in government jobs as well as in the *Dewasoms*. Freedom of worship and movement and legal ban on untouchability and making it a punishable offence were the social demands. Under the other categories the main demands included compulsory education for all till the age of 16, ending of feudalism and landlordism, grant of permanency of tenure, fixation of fair rent, debt relief with government aid, and, guarantee of fair price for agricultural produce.

The Declaration of Rights gave great prominence to some of the outstanding demands of the working class. They included, among other things, fixation and enforcement of minimum wages, limiting working hours to 40 per week, equal remuneration for equal work, unemployment allowance, maternity benefits, old age pension, workmen's compensation, paid holidays, creation of a mechanism for prosecution and settlement of labour disputes, promotion of small scale industries and state take over of large industrial establishments and public transport. Though the Declaration of Rights was made in the name of the SNDP *Yogam*, its contents revealed the hands of the Communists.

6.3.4 Irinjalakkuda Convention

On June 1, 1946 the *Cochin Pulaya Mahasabha*, an organization of dalits, held its annual convention at Irinjalakkuda. Pulaya girls came in large numbers to attend the convention and all of them had broken the established tradition and wore blouses to cover their chests. The upper caste elements did

not like this and started openly abusing them and a clash followed between the lower castes and upper castes. The authorities imposed a ban order. M.K. Kattuparamban led a protest march the next day but *Kochi Praja Mandalam* leaders, Sahodaran Ayyappan and K.P. Madhavan Nair intervened and appealed to the marchers not to aggravate the situation by breaking the ban. Police registered false criminal charges. It may be noted that M.K. Kattuparamban was one of the accused in the famous Pariyaram Case.

6.3.5 Move by Kerala Trade Union Congress

On June 30, 1946, the Kerala Trade Union Congress called for observing a Protest Day. A march was initiated from Kozhikode on July 12 and Kelappan, K.A. Damodara Menon, Varghese Kalathil and Keraleeyan led it. A protest meeting was held at Ayyankavu Maidan in Irinjalakkuda. The main speakers at this meeting were Puthur Achutha Menon, P. Gangadharan and Chathan Master. After the meeting, those gathered there led a march to Koottamkulam Road and the police in the presence of the Magistrate stopped them. A wordy duel between the Magistrate and P. Gangadharan reached a high point, when the sub-inspector physically pushed the leader away. The crowd lost control and clashed with the police. At the end, the police arrested P. Gangadharan and another activist K.V. Unni and tied their hands to their back and took them to the lock-up.

6.3.6 Action Committee

On July 14, 1946, the SNDP *Yogam* took the initiative to hold an all-Party Convention at Thrissur. Ikkanda Warrier and K.P. Madhavan Nair represented the Kochi Praja Mandalam. K. Ayyappan, T.K. Kunjayyappan, and P. Gangadharan represented the SNDP *Yogam*. The Dalit representatives were K.K. Kannan, K. Kochukuttan and K.K. Madhavan. Besides the SNDP *Yogam* and *Praja Mandalam*, other organizations represented in the convention were the Communist Party of India, Youth Congress, *Pulaya Mahasabha*, *Vettuva Mahasabha*, *Kanakka Mahasabha*, *Vaathi Samajam* and *Sambava Mahasabha*. P.K. Deewar presided over the convention, which decided to set up an Action Committee consisting of Ikkanda Warrier, K. Ayyappan, P. Gangadharan, P.K. Deewar, C. Achutha Menon and K.K. Kannan. It was decided to hold Taluk Conventions, set up action committees and volunteer corps and raise funds to meet the expenses.

6.3.7 Views of Paliath Achan's Family

Paliath Achan had served as the Chief Minister of Cochin. He too like Velu Thampi Dalawa of Travancore, had provoked and irritated Macaulay, the British Resident. Velu Thampi had chalked out a common plan of action in consultation with the Paliath Achan¹⁶. The British forces stationed at Kochi and Kollam were to be attacked simultaneously. The attack on the Bolghatty Residency by the Achan's forces failed to achieve the desired objectives. Though this was the background of Paliath Achan, the subsequent generations of Achans did not possess the qualities of their illustrious ancestors. The Achan family of the second half of the 1940s was dead against any mass uprising or popular struggle against untouchability, since they believed that it was such evils as untouchability that had sustained them in power. The members of the Paliath family argued that certain roads leading to their residences were private roads, and, therefore they had the right to make them designated roads where they could ban movement of dalits and backward classes. In those days Namoodiris used to marry women from the Paliyam family. Venmony Narayanan Namoodiri, though thus connected with the Paliyam family, was a different person. He had attended and agreed to preside over joint meeting of the *Yogakshema Sabha*, SNDP *Yogam*, *Pulaya Mahasabha* and the Communist Party of India and expressed solidarity to the Paliyam struggle. A few like Sukumaran Achan, Kochukuttan Achan and Satyapalan Achan though belonging to the Paliyam family, being progressive minded, openly questioned the ban on the movement of dalits in the so-called designated roads, which according to them were really public roads.

6.3.8 Organization of Handloom and Bidi Workers

The Paliyam struggle was unique because besides dalits, different sections of the working class had also joined the struggle. In this context, mention must be made about A.I. Jaleel who was considered as the first communist of Chendamangalam. He came into prominence when he mobilized the handloom workers in Aravinda Industries owned by Nediyapurathu Narayana Menon and also the Pioneer Company and Victory Company owned by K.R. Kumaran. Most of the workforce were females who were subjected to many abuses and their wages were a pittance. A union was organized by A.I. Jaleel with T.E. Balan as its Secretary. In the historic Paliyam march, the women members of this union were in the front line.

An attempt was made to mobilize the bidi workers of Chendamangalam and Gothuruthu. In those days, the wage rate was one rupee for 1000 bidis. The union demanded an increase in the wage rate to two rupees. The intervention by the Factory Inspector helped the workers to get the higher wages. The bidi workers abandoned their fear and held Red Flags and

participated in demonstrations and marches. Jaleel was reported to have sold a portion of his share in ancestral property and contributed Rs. 12,000 to the CPI requesting the party to publish a translation of the book "Communist Party of the Soviet Union" in Malayalam. In those days Rs.12,000 was an unusually big amount. Such was Jaleel's commitment to the Party. Jaleel used to mobilize enough number of volunteers for daily picketing. He went about in helping the workers in every way including giving them protection from the police. After the Paliyam struggle, Jaleel was forced to go underground, and, during the police hunt after the Edappally Police Station incident, he was arrested and remanded to lock-up. While in lock-up, he attempted to jump into a well in the jail compound, and in the process he got injured.

When the news about bayonet attack on Jawaharlal Nehru in Kashmir in 1946 reached Chendamangalam, the workers and students in the area took out a demonstration. But the *goondas* of Paliath Achan led by Thandiath Kochu Govinda Menon and Karunappa Menon attacked Alla Bakshi, the younger brother of Jaleel and stabbed him. This was stunning and unbearable to Jaleel.

Meanwhile, Kelappanasan, founder of *Chendamangalam-Vadakkumpuram Ezhavodayam Sabha* was joining the Paliyam struggle. K. Purushothaman was made the volunteer captain of the *Samara Samithi* (action council). A march was taken out on November 13, 1946 led by T.E. Balan. At Mattappadam maidan, the Paliyam *goondas* attacked injuring many. T.N. Kumaran, communist and Secretary of SNDP *Yogam* Unit at Kodungallur, K.I. Jaleel, Andavan Vaidyar, T.E. Raghavan, E. Gopalakrishna Menon (the CPI leader), and several others came together. They set up an Action Committee with Vadakkumpuram Kalathingal Veettil V.K. Narayanan as President, T.E. Balan as Secretary and K.M. Kuttan as Treasurer. Vallattuthara K. Purushothaman was made the volunteer captain. Valiyaparambil V.C. Janardhanan was to be the Vice Captain and Pullarkat P.K. Prabhakaran, the camp manager. The members of the Action Committee included Makkaparambil Kochu Velayudhan, Paathrakadavil Kumaran, Thaipparambil T.E. Sudhakaran, Vazheparambil Viswanathan and Kalluprath Jayadevan.

A delegation consisting of T.E. Bablan, Andavan Vaidyan and K.M. Kuttan made a representation to the Valiya Achan Raja who did not give any positive response. The Action Committee sent a team to mobilize popular support in Travancore and Malabar. The Malabar Temple Entry Samithi and the Malabar unit of the SNDP *Yogam* extended their wholehearted support. The theme slogan of the Paliyam struggle was "**Open Paliyam Roads**".

6.3.9 Direct Action starts

On November 26, 1947 the Action Committee declared an ultimatum to the effect that they would start direct action from December 3 and the *Satyagrahis* would start moving on the so-called designated roads. C. Kesavan, who had made a speech a few days earlier at Kidangamparambu Maidan, near Alappuzha and had described Marx as “*Bhagavan Karl Marx*”, (Lord Karl Marx) was invited to speak at Maattapadathu maidan in Chendamangalam. T.N. Sundarayyan, an advocate of Kodungallur, chaired the meeting. C. Kesavan, in his speech, reminded the audience about the successful Vaikom Satyagraha a few years ago and asserted that communism and socialism had already taken deep roots in many parts of the world and they would do so in this soil also. With this, feudalism, landlordism, untouchability, casteism and bondage of man by man would be wiped out. We were to fight not just for opening up roads to dalits but fight for destroying all kinds of social and economic evils and thereby heralding an egalitarian society. The direct action of the Paliyam struggle thus started on December 4, 1947 and lasted 97 days ending on March 9, 1948.

Adakkathara Ittyathi and Vellayi Narayanan were the first *Satyagrahis* (volunteers) on the first day of the struggle. From the second day onwards, the police started arresting the *satyagrahis*. Pappalippambil P.N. Raman of Thrissur was one of the *Satyagrahis* on the last day. He was a handloom worker and had successfully mobilized the handloom workers of Thrissur. The *satyagrahis* wore Gandhi caps and the struggle was on Gandhian non-violent lines. The Paliyam Estate Manager told a press conference that the roads under reference were private roads and others had no right to use them.

A unique feature of the Paliyam struggle was the scale and variety of participation. For instance, groups of women from Ernakulam, members and activists of SNDP *Yogam*, Bidi Workers’ Trade Union, *Yukthi Vada Sanghom* (Rationalist group) *Arya Mahajanasabha*, *Kochi Praja Mandalam*, CPI unit of Anthikkad, Socialist Party of Mala, Tile Workers’ Union of Panamkulam, *V.K.M. Mahasabha*, Christian Youth Movement, Kerala Socialist Party and RSP participated in the struggle. A Namboodiri Jatha was also held in which very progressive men like V.T. Bhattacharjee, O.M.C. Narayanan Namboodiri, Akkithat Achuthan Namboodiri, M.R. Bhattacharjee and others participated. K. Balakrishnan, the fearless journalist and KSP leader also made his presence felt at Chendamangalam, the venue of Paliyam struggle.

6.3.10 Unfriendly Press

The Press, however, took an unfriendly attitude to the struggle. They justified the closure of Paliyam Roads, as they were privately owned. On one side of the main road men of the Paliyam family lived and on the other side the houses had been assigned to their spouses. Already Christians, Muslims and Jews had been permitted to use the roads selectively for rendering trade and commercial services. But by tradition and to protect the privacy of the family members, the roads had been closed to dalits. The Press tried to inform the public that the Ernakulam District Court had decreed the right of Paliyam family to decide on the use of their private roads. The public was warned by *Malabar Mail* of January 9, 1948, that the communists were behind the struggle and they had ulterior political motives. Further the *Praja Mandalam* and the SNDP *Yogam* had not officially endorsed the support to the Paliyam struggle.

However, a team consisting of K. Krishnan, Editor of *Express*, Annie Joseph, Editor of *Prajamithram*, R. Krishnan Kutty Nair representative of *Mathrubhoomi* and A.P. Nambiar, Joint Editor of *Express*, after a visit to Chendamangalam reported a different view. According to them, Paliyath Valiya Achan was flexible but his manager and Settlement Officer, Kurup, was adamant. The struggle was not the making of the Communists. The press reports to the contrary were wrong and misleading. Road, by definition, was a public way. Already on the sides of the so-called designated roads, ration shops, teashops, tobacco shops, goldsmith shops and one High School were located. Therefore the roads could be treated as private roads. Now to defeat the struggle the Paliyam Manager was trying to construct walls to block the roads to users. The allegations that the movement on the roads would disturb the ladies of the house, pollute the sanctity of the temple in the vicinity and the struggle was inspired by the communists were wrong.

The Estate Manager of the Paliyam family was the son of a raja from the Cochin royalty. He used that influence and brought a big contingent of police and they were allowed to open a police camp at *Thekke Madhom* (the present Jubilee Hall). On December 7, 1947, a special Magistrate and armed police arrived from Kodungallur and a District Court started functioning from the same venue. A few recalcitrant elements started a counter agitation to create confusion among the public. From the fifth day of the struggle, the police started beating up the *satyagraha* volunteers who were strictly following a Gandhian non-violent struggle. The police used elephants and cars and threatened to over run the *satyagrahis* offering peaceful picketing. Some volunteers were caught by their ears and dragged through the road to be thrown into waiting police vans. The Cochin Government issued a Press Notification warning of police intervention to protect law and order.

On March 3, 1948 a batch of Namboodiri women offered *Satyagraha* and they were subjected to a brutal lathi charge. Though there was no martial law in force, the police freely raided houses of not only the suspected but even those of ordinary people to create a sense of terror. On the 85th day, the Action Committee held a big rally and the Government clamped down a ban order under the Police Act. K.M. Kumaran was arrested and beaten up and was suspected to have been thrown out from a police van some where at Kalamassery. At the later stages of the struggle, the *Praja Mandalam*, Malabar unit of SNDP, KPCC, Travancore State Congress activists and leaders did not come out to give their support to the struggle. Most of them just expressed their protest and the police brutality and there it ended. This was indeed most unfortunate.

6.3.11 Entry of A.K.G. on the Scene

It was in this context that A.K. Gopalan came on the scene. Being informed that the Paliyam struggle might fizzle out, he decided to visit North Parur, near Chendamangalam. North Parur was in Travancore State. The Cochin Government banned AKG from entering Kochi. AKG was given a reception at Andipallikkavu near the Travancore-Cochin border. The Action Committee met on March 9 and decided to offer a mass *Satyagraha* to break the ban order. It decided to depute a group of volunteers to defy the ban and move on the road towards the temple along with a group of upper castes and dalits. But on March 6 itself, AKG had been arrested in Kozhikode, while he was waiting at the railway station platform. On March 9, a large group of volunteers belonging to CPI, trade unions, *Karshaka Sanghom*, Students' Federation, SNDP, *Pulaya Mahasabha*, *Yogakshema Sabha* and consisting of a number of Namboodiri women and women from the royal families of Kodungallur Kovilakom (palace) and Thrippunithura Palace joined the Paliyam struggle and offered Satyagraha.

6.3.12 Revolutionary Namboodiri Women

We must make a special mention about those revolutionary women from royal families as well as from Namboodiri *Illams* (houses) who came out to fight for the cause of dalits. P. Priyadatha (29 years), I.C. Priyadatha (17), E.S. Saraswathy (17) and Arya Pallam, the President of the *Antharjana samajam* (organization of namboodiri women) did a yeoman service¹⁷. P. Priyadatha was the daughter of the elder brother of MRB and M.P. Bhattachari, and, her husband P. Nethran Bhattachari had started a handloom-weaving centre for Namboodiri women. It was AKG who took them to Kodungallur on the way to Chendamangalam. When P. Priyadatha and Chendamangalam Sujatha offered *Satyagraha*, the police personnel belonging

to the Nair Caste refused orders of superiors to beat them saying that they were *Antharjanams* and they could not touch them even with a lathi or baton. But the Divisional Inspector Ummer took up the task himself.

Another batch, consisting of E.S. Saraswathy and Nandini, was rounded by a posse of 12 policemen to be beaten up. Sujatha, Prabala and Nandini were volunteers hailing from working class families. N.K. Bhanumathi, Haridas, Santhoshavalli and Satyabhama sang the national anthem and offered *Satyagraha*. Indira and Rema, princesses of Kodungallur *Kovilakam* left their *Kovilakam* at 2 a.m. accompanied by an escort, T.N. Kumaran, sent by the Communist Party. They travelled in a *Vallam* (country boat) to reach Chendamangalam. These ladies had once issued a Press Release saying that their conditions of life in the *Kovilakam* were worse than that of poor dalits. On March 7 this group along with the princesses of the Thrippunithura *Kovilakam*, and, Yuvaraja Rama Varma Kuttappan Thampuram (K.T.R. Varma), Kerala Varma Kelappan Thampuram (P.K. Varma) and others offered the *Satyagraha*. The police inspector, after beating them with his lathi, asked for their names and identity. He was stunned by their reply. The *satyagrahis* then rushed forward to defy the ban. They later issued a press release saying that though belong to the royal family they were like virtual prisoners in their palaces and they appealed to other members of the royal family to come out and participate in the Paliyam struggle. The Police was directed to arrest them from the *Satyagraha* site, but before they could do it, the princes had vanished. Newspapers reported that they were missing. In fact what they did was to go to the office of the Communist Party where C. Achutha Menon advised them to go back to their palaces. It was reported that after this incident, the Raja of Cochin ordered to put them under tight security and they were denied pocket money too. P.K. Varma's aide was Narasimhan, a communist and through him the members of the royal family in Cochin got in touch with E.S. Goapalan, N.V. Sankarankutty Warrier, and P. Kesavan, all communists, and they read communist literature and virtually set up a secret party cell in their palace, *Kovilakam*. Some of the inmates took to the study of Hindi and started wearing khadi. Those among them, who were studying at Maharajas College, came in close contacts with K.K. Warrier and C. Janardhanan.

Some of the members of the Cochin royalty escaped from their residences overcoming the tight security and escorted by A.I. Ibrahim, the brother of A.I. Jaleel, whom we had described as the first communist of Chendamangalam, to the residence of his classmate Sukumaran (who later became Justice Sukumaran in the highest level of judiciary). Later they went to Aluva and North Parur and took instructions from N.K. Madhavan, the

great communist leader who was the centre of focus in the Edappally Police Station episode.

P.K. Kumaran led the North Kochi march from Thrissur to Irinjalakkuda. From Irinjalakkuda K.V. Unni led the march to Kodungallur and from there it was led by Advocate K.A. Subramanian until it reached Chendamangalam. Mrs. A.V. Aryan was a member of the march from Thrissur and that too only after a few days of her marriage with A.V. Aryan, another great communist. There was M.N. Nair who always used to wear a Bhagat Singh type cap on his head and a Khakhi half trouser. He was called “*Bhagat Singh Nair*” by his followers and admirers. When Inspector Ummer raised his lathi to beat M.N. Nair, the latter used the megaphone in his hand to counter it. When Ummer tried to beat him again, Nair stopped it with his bare hands. Seeing this M.S. Kumaran, Kali and others on the spot charged forward. Kumaran was beaten down, but Kali, heroically rushed to the inner sanctum of the temple shouting “Down Down Untouchability”. Soon *goondas* caught Kali and dragged him out. Meanwhile, the police had attacked M.N. Nair with a bayonet on the forehead and he fell down unconscious. The body of Kali who had also fallen unconscious was dragged away and no medical aid was given to him. The Action Committee had stationed the first aid team led by R.K. Kuttan at the site of Satyagraha. After the police withdrew, they removed M.S. Kumaran, M.N. Nair, Kali and E.K. Velayudhan (Chalakkudy) who had been seriously injured to the government hospital in Kodungallur.

6.3.13 Final Phase

On March 9, which turned out to be the final day of the Paliyam struggle, the police camp had taken full preparations including arranging a few elephants to be used against the *satyagrahis*. On that day, the Thrippunithura *Jatha* (demonstration) and Vypeen *Jatha* came together as the South Kochi *Jatha* and E.K. Narayanan, one of the first communists of Palluruthi, Eda Kochi, led it. They started from Eda Kochi, and, enroute to Chendamangalam, many volunteers joined the march. At Elamkunnappuzha a large number of *harijan* women joined the march. After passing through Cherai and Wadakkekara, they reached Chendamangalam. Police beat them up and many including M.S. Krishnankutty, A.S. Purushothaman, T.V. Prabhakaran, P.S. Velayudhan, A.K. Sankaran, Viswanathan and A.G. Velayudhan were severely injured. The police called for reinforcements from Ernakulam. The additional forces coming towards Chendamangalam were stopped by an agitating crowd at North Parur, which was in Travancore State.

That day happened to be the day of *Sivarathri* (the day devoted to Lord Siva). A large crowd had gathered at the Parur-Chendamangalam road junction. When the police reinforcements came, K.C. Mathew, a communist, stood in front of a van and blocked it. P.K. Kunjachan, A. Krishnan Nair, N.K. Madhavan, Parur N. Sivan Pillai and others backed K.C. Mathew. Sivan Pillai shouted saying that Cochin Police would not be allowed to pass through Travancore soil, Parur. Then K.C. Mathew asked Issac Thomas to make a speech and after that A.I. Samad, another brother of A.I. Jaleel spoke. Local Congress leaders, K.P. Gopala Menon and I. Das of Parur Taluk Committee arrived on the scene and appealed to the mob to disperse peacefully and follow Gandhian methods of protest.

Velu Pillai, the Sanitary Inspector of the Parur Municipality, was in his official Khaki uniform and he spontaneously intervened followed by the Excise Inspector, Chandrasekharan Nair shouting at the mob to disperse. Inspector Pappaly, who was present there at the spot, suddenly blew his whistle and ordered the police to do a lathi charge. They beat up any one who came their way. A rowdy motor mechanic of Parur, Thankappan Pillai, beat up N.K. Madhavan, the communist leader. News spread like wild fire that police had attacked communists. When the mob dispersed, the Aluva A.S.P. Sarma came on the scene. Parur Sivan Pillai and K.C. Mathew registered a complaint with him about the atrocities of Cochin police on Travancore soil. It may be good to remember that N. Sivan Pillai and Chandrasekhara Kurup were the first communists of North Parur and the former had led a *jatha* of six communists openly in 1946. N.K. Madhavan was the communist deputed by the Party to organize trade unions in Aluva and Parur among coir workers and toddy tappers. In 1997 N.K. Madhavan was demoted to the lowest level of party hierarchy, when, being a true communist, he tried to question some misdeeds of the Party top leadership and expressed his concern about the erosion of inner party democracy. He had also questioned the Party's attempt to interfere with the independence and democratic functioning of the CITU.

Thampi Menon and V.G. Ramachandran were two police officers who had participated in the attack on the *satyagrahis* of Paliyam struggle. In their reminiscences they had said that the lords of the Paliyath establishment had given excellent treatment to the police officials and lavished on them whatever was needed to please them. When the struggle was over, the police force was ordered to leave Chendamangalam. When they left they ransacked houses and looted coconuts, rice, banana, vessels and whatever material movable property they could lay their hands on.

During the final phase of the Paliyam struggle, many leaders kept away from the action scene on the advice of Sahodaran K. Ayyappan, P.K. Deewar,

the convener of the Action Council himself was one among them. Some sections tried to link the Paliyam struggle with the Calcutta Thesis of the Communist Party. The Calcutta Party Congress was held during February 8 to March 6, 1948. But the Paliyam struggle was conducted during December 4, 1947 to March 9, 1948. T.K. Ramakrishnan was a delegate to the Party Congress. When he returned to Aluva, he came to know about the martyrdom of A.G. Velayudhan. Since there was an arrest warrant against him, Ramakrishnan straight away went underground.

Paliyam struggle was really a part of the national freedom struggle. It could be considered as a continuation of the Vaikom and Guruvayur *Satyagrahas*/struggles. Though started and continued in the Gandhian tradition, the last phase of the Paliyam struggle ended in violence committed by the police. In the Vaikom and Guruvayoor struggles the major players were upper caste Hindus. But in the Paliyam struggle the lower castes played a major role. However, many wondered why the great historian Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon did not make any prominent mention about the Paliyam struggle in his writings.

6.4 THE UNION MOVEMENT AT ALUVA

During our search for documentary sources on the trade union movement in Cochin, we were faced with inadequacy of materials as compared to that in the Travancore region. Cochin State, before Independence, was sandwiched between Travancore and British controlled Malabar, which was part of the Madras State. The major industrial centres of Cochin State were Kochi, Mattancherry and the Harbour, Palluruthy, Amballur, Anthikkad, Ollur, Chalakkudy and Thrissur. Geographically, if one travelled from Kochi to Thrissur either by road or rail, one would have to pass through Aluva, which was in the Travancore State. Aluva from early days was a major centre of industries like the FACT, Indian Aluminium Company, Textiles, Glass Manufacturers, Tiles, Bidi and Safety Matches. For ease and convenience, we are including the developments in the trade union movement in Aluva also under Chapter VI. After we cover Aluva, we would supplement our historical narration by materials drawn from the reminiscences of some important leaders who had close involvement and experience in the trade union movement. Some of these reminiscences were gathered and audio recorded during our fieldwork.

By late 1940s Aluva had emerged into a fast growing industrial town. It did not take much time for unionism to appear there¹⁸. In contrast to the working class in Alappuzha and Kollam centres, that in Aluva enjoyed a

number of advantages. Firstly, most of them had their employment in entirely new and highly sophisticated industries using better technology like the Fertilizers And Chemicals, Travancore Limited (FACT) and the Indian Aluminium Company Limited. And they enjoyed relatively higher earnings. Secondly, they did not have to fear employment insecurity as the products they helped to produce had a steady and substantial market. Thirdly, the new class of workers, in contrast to those engaged in traditional industries like tiles, pottery and cashew in the same area, were more educated, technically trained and qualified or skilled. Besides ordinary workers, a number of staff with higher qualification was employed in these modern factories. As a result of these unique characteristics, unionism appeared for both workers and staff and it operated on an entirely new line, which in later years came to be known as independent unionism.

The basic philosophy of independent unionism that emerged in Aluva was two fold (a) non-affiliation to any central trade union and non-involvement in politics, and, (b) one industry, one union. In Aluva K.N.Gopala Pillai and S.C.S. Menon, two veterans in the union movement, guided independent unionism. While the former had retired from the field, the latter continues to be active after completing half a century of union work. An attempt was also made to organize an Aluva Trade Union Council. It initially checked the growing strength of the AITUC and pro-communist trade unions in Aluva. But the Council did not last long. In the early years, the Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union had extended its support, but as years passed by, it became evident that the idea of independent unionism could no longer survive in the highly complex situation in the State politics in general, and among the politically conscious working class in the state in particular.

6.4.1 The Early Phase

Six decades ago Eloor-Kalamassery-Edayar-Aluva region was most backward. Majority of people belonged to the deprived sections of lower and middle peasantry. According to Payyappilli Balan, there were very few who could be called rich and caste and communal divisions remained deep rooted¹⁹. Even in the Aluva town, hotels were designated as Nair, Christian or Brahmin hotels. Even barber shops (hairdressing saloons) displayed such caste name boards indicating that they would serve only people of a particular caste. In the Union Christian College Aluva, there was a Nair Mess and a Brahmin Mess. The situation in the villages could only be worse. Absolute loyalty to the Maharaja of Travancore was the only politics of the times.

Industrialization of the area took place against the backdrop of the Second World War. The establishment of modern commodity producing factories changed feudal relations and the existing pattern of social relations. When the people of mutually insulated communities began to rub shoulders with each other and work on the same machines, it was inevitable for them to turn mutually dependent as well. They ate from the same canteen and wore the same factory uniform. When they felt that they were not getting the rightful share due for their labour, they came together under the same flag. Naturally the caste-communal divisions weakened and the process of new class formation began.

6.4.2 Union at Sri Chitra Mills

According to Payyappilli Balan, the first attempt to bring together the workers into a collective, took place at the Sri Chitra Mills at Kalamassery, whose original name was E.D. Samson and Company. This was the third factory in the Aluva region, the first two being Standard Pottery Works at Choornikkara and Union Tile Works at Chengamanad. Workers at the beginning were treated like cattle. They were subjected to every conceivable indignity and made to work like carthorses. The Second World War changed the entire texture of social life. As prices of essential commodities shot up, the life of the poor workers became miserable. The average daily wage was around four *annas* or quarter of a Rupee and it proved to be grossly inadequate to support a family.

6.4.3 The Aluva Factory Labour Union

The first agitation of the workers was thus a natural response to the difficult conditions. It was neither provoked by external forces nor pre-planned. Abstaining from work for a day, the workers trooped to the local police station and presented their grievances to the Police Inspector. This provoked the factory management to take vindictive measures against the workers. The workers, along with the local police, presented a mass petition to the Dewan and in response, some corrective measures were taken. This greatly enhanced the self-confidence of the workers and led them to realize the necessity of registering a Union. With the help of Joseph T. Kayanat, the local reporter of the *Mathrubhoomi* daily, the Aluva Factory Labour Union (AFLU) was formally registered in 1941 (*Thulam* 3, 1116 Malayalam Era).

However, Kayanat was compelled to relinquish the leadership of the Union before long because of religious fanaticism of some members. Those

who subsequently came to the helm of the Union could not lead the movement in the right direction. Police interferences and the CID menace at the Union meetings compounded the problems. Further, there was the stricture that the Minutes of the Union meetings had to be presented to the local police station for the ratification by the Inspector. These constraints virtually made the Union ineffectual.

6.4.4 Assistance from Alappuzha leaders

Considering the difficulties of the working class in Aluva, the trade union leaders of Alappuzha sent a cadre of trained union activists to Aluva, as they used to send similar cadres to different parts of the State in disseminating the philosophy of working class revolution. P.G. Raghavan was specifically assigned to Aluva and he was successful in mobilizing bidi workers to form the Aluva Bidi Workers' Union. He also had success in securing for the workers some minor gains. The bidi employers (capitalists or *muthalalis*) were provoked by this and they deployed their hired *goondas* and the police on Raghavan. He was tortured and beaten to death. Thus P.G. Raghavan became the first martyr in the trade union movement in Aluva.

The more seasoned N.K. Madhavan was the next replacement for Raghavan. K.C. Mathew, a university graduate and well trained in the TCFWU at Alappuzha also came to Aluva. N.K. Madhavan, K.C. Mathew and J.T. Kayanat worked closely to form the first communist party cell at Aluva. They received considerable help from Cherian Kattakkayam and John Petta, a Gandhian and left-leaning Congressman in organizing trade union activities in Aluva.

6.4.5 Initial Constraints

The early phase of the trade union movement in Aluva witnessed several initial constraints. The residual of feudal slavish mentality and attitude was still influencing workers. They also feared the police, *goondas* of employers and state government officials. Attacks on workers and their leaders were a regular feature and police kept silent on them. There was strong resistance from caste, religions and communal organizations, institutions and leaders. For instance, Rev. Jerome was reported to have taken the initiative to organize even the North Travancore Labour Association to curb the flow of workers to the communist led unions. There were also instances of Muslim *Moulavis* (religious leaders) discouraging the workers from joining unions.

6.4.6 Moscow Moulavi

But the ever-vigilant union leadership countered these constraints through house-to-house campaigns. They succeeded in imparting the imperative need to fight injustice. There were also rare instances of highly religious leaders like the *Moulavi* of Kunnamthur Masjid in Choornikkara declaring their solidarity with the working class. This was indeed unique and the *Moulavi* was nick named *Moscow Moulavi*, a name held in great regard and respect by the working class of Aluva. The Travancore State Congress was hardly interested in promoting working class interests and trade union activity. They regarded union activities as inferior to political activities.

6.4.7 Functioning of Trade Unions

The trade unions in Aluva were being guided by the experienced union activists from Alappuzha. Workers held elections to the Management Committees of trade unions regularly and democratically with good participation. After every such meeting, the unions used to hold public meetings to explain the decisions and to seek support from the local people. The fund for union activities came from monthly subscriptions from workers. The Accounts of the unions used to be maintained meticulously. The Aluva Factory Labour Union had units in every important factory and it had a Central Managing Committee elected by the representatives of units.

At the beginning, the workers had no clarity about the approaches to be adopted for the redressal of their grievances. But a clear programme began to evolve once the union activities picked up momentum. The dismissal of E. Balanandan from the Indian Aluminium Company in the early 1950, and his reinstatement after a prolonged struggle must be cited as a grand victory of the working class. The unions became mature and constructive with the full support of the rural populace of the region. The unions did not eschew the path of negotiations and conciliation. Industrial relations committees helped in the settlement of industrial disputes. Major changes came after the formation of ATTUC with T.V. Thomas as President.

Towards the middle of the 1940s, the trade unions in Aluva too began to espouse the issues of broader political relevance. In the context of Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, the trade union in Aluva also raised political demands like the end of Dewan's misrule and rejection of the American Model of Reforms. During the Second World War, the unions in Aluva organized effective resistance against black marketing and hoarding of essential commodities. Youth and Students' Organizations and Karshaka

Sanghom supported them. Inspired by Kuttipuzha Krishna Pillai, the great Malayalam literary writer, and Ponjikkara Rafi, the great Novelist, the trade unions took active interest in cultural activities. The annual meetings of the trade unions provided a forum for artistic and cultural expression.

6.5 UNIONS IN F.A.C.T. LTD., UDYOGAMANDAL

6.5.1 The Beginning

The trade union movement in Aluva may perhaps be described as the story of the trade unions in the two large industrial undertakings, the Indian Aluminium Company and the FACT Ltd. The unions in these undertakings have exerted their influence on the movement in the Aluva-Kalamassery industrial belt. K.N. Gopala Pillai was one of the pioneers in promoting unionism in the region. He joined the Indian Aluminium Company during its construction phase as a mechanical draughtsman and worked there till March 1943 under G. Krishna Pillai, an Engineer on deputation. Since the cost of living was increasing, Gopala Pillai asked for an increase in his salary by Rs.40 a month. In not getting any increase, he left for Bombay and worked in General Motors plant there for one year at a salary of Rs.150 plus war allowance. There was a Czechoslovakian Manager in the Indian Aluminium Company and he wrote to Gopala Pillai to go and join a Bauxite Refining Factory in Bihar with his posting in Calcutta. His salary there was Rs.250 and he worked there for six months but could not continue there for long because Williams, his boss, a Scottish, did not behave decently to him, he being an Indian. Ganapathy, son of Manjeri Rama Iyer, then helped Gopala Pillai. Ganapathy was a Civil Engineer who had first left the Military Engineering Science. Ganapathy got Pillai a job in the Jai Engineering works. After a short stint there, Gopala Pillai returned to Aluva and found a job in the FACT's construction phase being undertaken by an American Company. Gopala Pillai produced an Experience Certificate signed by Venghat, a close friend of McCarthy of the American company. On seeing that certificate, McCarthy immediately directed his Indian colleague Kasturirangan to fix Pillai in any suitable job. Thus in 1945, K.N. Gopala Pillai joined the FACT Ltd., at a salary of Rs.100, while engineering graduates employed in the company were being paid only Rs.75. The Managing Agency firm Seshasayee Brothers established the FACT. There were at that time about 1500 workers engaged in the construction phase. In September 1947, the company started commercial production and it announced its plan to terminate the services of a large number of workers on the plea that construction phase was over.

K.N. Gopala Pillai was then designated as Supervisor. The workers who feared that their services were going to be terminated met in the residential quarters of Seshan, a Foreman of the Company. M.G. Menon, who had involved in the freedom movement, Kandathil K.M. Varghese, an employee of the Finance Department of the FACT and a few others were present. They discussed forming an Association of all including workers and supervisors and wanted to get it registered under the Trade Union Act. The meeting decided to form a Committee and it could secure registration easily. A membership campaign was started. In the elections conducted for office bearers, K.A. Menon, Chief Mechanical Engineer, M.C. Varghese, a Chemical Engineering Graduate of the MIT, USA and Superintendent of the Ammonia Plant and P.N. Menon contested for the Presidentship of the Association. At the end, P.N. Menon was elected. K.V. Antony, Chemical Engineer, and Foreman in the company was elected the Secretary. K.V. Antony was working under K.N. Gopala Pillai who was in charge of pipeline erection. Gopala Pillai was elected unopposed as the Joint Secretary of the Association and Varghese was the Treasurer.

K.N. Gopala Pillai was inspired by the spirit of Indian nationalism and was eager to participate in the freedom struggle and struggle for responsible government. He used to visit Alappuzha to learn more about trade union activity. In 1948, the Association decided to fight for the cause of the workers who were being threatened by termination of their services in the FACT. In 1948, Gopala Pillai was elected as the President and E.M. Appukuttan Nair, a communist, as the General Secretary. P.N. Krishna Pillai who by that time had been appointed as the Labour Commissioner of the State helped Gopala Pillai.

6.5.2 Strike and Lockout in FACT, 1949

In January 1949 a strike started in FACT²⁰. E.M. Appukuttan Nair, though soft spoken, had engineered it tactfully. Gopala Pillai was staying in the bachelor's quarters provided by the company. He used to reach the company gates at 7 am and start addressing the workers who reach there waiting for the company siren at 8 am. It was at this time, S.C.S. Menon, who later became a veteran in the union movement, came to assist Gopala Pillai by taking charge of the handheld paper-made megaphone to speak. The management retaliated with a lockout and started using pressure tactics. It was unwilling to negotiate with the Association. The company suspended Appukuttan Nair, Secretary of the FACT Employees' Association, and, another twelve members of the Association including Gopala Pillai and S.C.S. Menon. Appukuttan Nair was arrested and sent to jail. After a month, the

company lifted the lockout and reinstated all those who were suspended earlier.

In the next elections to the office bearers of the FACT Employees Association, K.N. Gopala Pillai and S.C.S. Menon were elected as President and Secretary. Ravindran and Veerankutty were the other office bearers. Since S.C.S. Menon's brother -in-law Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai was the Chief Minister of the State, for all talks K.N. Gopala Pillai used to represent the Association. One day, there arose an issue of a woman head load worker being subjected to an alleged molestation by a policeman. The Association gave a call for a demonstration inside the factory. Seshasayee, the chief of the Managing Agency firm was in his office. He sent for three vans of police force from Ernakulam. K.N. Gopala Pillai and other union activists were arrested.

6.5.3 Strike in FACT, 1950

In 1950 the FACT management retrenched 600 workers²¹. K.N. Gopala Pillai was in Parur police lock-up. Pattom Thanu Pillai who enquired about the situation and got the details from Gopala Pillai visited him. But Pattom, who was not in the ministry then, was not allowed to visit the FACT. Pattom's visit to Gopala Pillai was only a political stunt, since his rival Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai was the Chief Minister²². The Association, however, succeeded in launching the strike as scheduled and this lasted 50 days. The strike failed as the company completed the retrenchment as planned. S.C.S. Menon was arrested. Though his brother-in-law Parur T.K. was the Chief minister, nothing could be done to stop the company from going ahead with the retrenchment. The Association had argued that as the company was in the process of expansion, the retrenchment was not justified. An attempt was made to refer the dispute to adjudication by Lakshmanan Pillai. But this attempt failed. In this strike, out of 2250 employees, 2000 had workers picketed the factory gates²³. M. Velayudhan, Secretary of the Kodungallur Socialist Party and his colleague Vasudevan were arrested for defying the ban order. Workers of Ogale Glass Factory, Chithra Mills, Lakshmivilasom and Victory Factories also struck work in sympathy of FACT employees.

K.N. Gopala Pillai, President of the Association, and, S.C.S. Menon and Janardhanan Pillai were released on bail. Picketing of factory gates continued and a large number of women employees joined the agitation. Chandrasekharan and Chandrahasan, two union activists defied the ban and got arrested on November 3, 1950. On November 5, K.N. Gopala Pillai commenced a hunger strike protesting against the unfriendly attitude of the

company management and the Government. On the sixth day of the hunger strike, the conditions of Gopala Pillai became worse. It was then that the company informed the Association that they were ready for a settlement. The Association called off its strike unconditionally and the company lifted the lockout unconditionally. The Management agreed to reinstate all those who had joined the strike, and to withdraw all cases. The Government promised to give necessary instructions to the management on the issue of back wages during the period of strike. The employees were requested to joint duty within five days. Following this settlement, 14 senior personnel of the company including two representatives of Management submitted their resignation to register their protest against the settlement. The Director Board held an emergency meeting to tackle the issues²⁴. The settlement was, however, not favourable to the Association. It made it very clear that the company would not consult the Association when it made recruitment of employees and enforced discipline on employees.

6.5.4 Demand for Bonus and other benefits

In 1951 the Company gave a part of their premises to the Association for holding union meetings. It also agreed to consider the demand for increments for the temporary daily-rated workers and reasonable promotions for them. In 1951 the Association placed a demand for bonus for the year 1949²⁵. Industrial concerns in Aluva like the Ogale Glass Manufacturing Company, the Indian Aluminium Company and the Sri Chitra Mills were paying bonus to their workers and the FACT Employees Association argued that their demand for bonus was only legitimate. However, the management did not agree saying that the year's profit was just sufficient to set off losses incurred in previous years and even dividend to share holders could not be paid.

The failure to get bonus did not let the Association down. Instead, it put forward a wide-range of demands including, among other things, a provident fund-cum-insurance benefit, additional leave, reduction of working hours for office staff, revision of pay of *maistries*, and supervisors on the super phosphate plant and also a rest room for workers on duty. The Management obviously considered some of them "unnecessary, unreasonable and unjustifiable". It put out a stern warning to the Association for sending its demand notices directly to the Board of Directors of the Company, insisting that in future such notices and letters should be submitted only to the executive personnel of the Managing Agents at the factory.

It was at this stage that the Association requested for the establishment of a permanent channel of communications and for evolving a procedure by which the management could consult the Association before disciplinary action on workers was taken by it. The request was rejected. The disciplinary action for misconduct as provided in the FACT Standing Orders of 1950 was one of the severest. According to it, a worker could be fined up to 2 per cent of his wages for every act of misconduct. A worker could be suspended or even dismissed without notice, though the management at its discretion might give a chance for representation or the conduct of an enquiry. In no case the Standing Orders permitted the representation of a workers' case by an office bearer of the Association.

The year 1952 was relatively a bad year for labour management relations in the FACT. The management took disciplinary action against a workman for playing cards during the night shift. The night shift supervisor reported the matter to K.N. Gopala Pillai, his superior, and the latter ordered action because he was strict on discipline. Gopala Pillai, though he was one of the founders of the Association, asked the worker to accept the penal action on him. The worker did not like this. In another case, a lady sweeper was caught for theft of a valve costing Rs.10-15. Even in this case, Gopala Pillai stood firm and the Association did not intervene, when disciplinary action was taken against that worker. Some workers indulged in indiscipline by not wearing the uniforms. In such cases also the Association did not support the culprits.

6.5.5 Lay off, 1952

In May 1952, the FACT Ltd., was forced to declare a lay-off for want of electricity. This lasted 43 days. Considering the gravity of the problem of power shortage, the company gave notice of retrenchment to 600 workers. This drew loud protests from the Association. The Chief Minister of Travancore-Cochin State called a tripartite conference in Thiruvananthapuram. A settlement was reached under which the Association was asked to undertake contract work offered by the company. The company agreed to adopt a three-stage scheme of re-employment of about 300 workers. This could, in no way, be considered a victory for the Association.

This development more or less synchronized with the arrest of two workmen by the police inside company premises while on duty. The Association alleged that the management had a hand in it. When it protested, the Management agreed to allow the concerned workers casual leave for two days. As the workers were not released from custody even after two days, the

Association submitted a Petition for the extension of casual leave. The Management, however, decided to terminate their services rather than grant them an extension of leave, even though the Association cited cases where the management had given leave for a period of one year on medical grounds and appealed for the extension of the same concession to the workers in police custody. The Association considered the issue as one of victimization. However, the police case was registered on a matter that had no connection with the company or the duty of the workers. The management gave the Association a stern rebuttal by stating: "what we propose to do is well within our own rights". And the matter ended there.

6.5.6 Bonus dispute

When the Association raised the demand for bonus, the matter was referred to a tripartite conference. The Association held the view that the presence of the Government directors in the Board of Management had kept the Labour Department away from promoting a settlement. The President of the Association had rightly summed up his views in these words: "the role of the State Labour Department in FACT's industrial relations is a big zero right from 1949". Soon the Association started preferring bipartite negotiations for settling all outstanding issues. The bonus dispute led to the company agreeing to share information on its balance sheets with the Association.

6.5.7 Troubled Period 1953-58

The period 1953-58 was one of strained relations in the FACT involving pre-meditated acts of indiscipline and victimization. In 1953, the Company had set up a Personnel Department, and, it started arranging fortnightly meetings with the Association. This made the Association very active and opened the way for its development as a collective bargaining agent of workers.

The Association took up an alleged increase in the workload in the hydrogen plant. When the Association found that the government director in the Board of Management questioned the supervisory personnel in the Chemical Control Division regarding their work for the purpose of refixing the workload, it protested to the management saying that this was highly irregular. The Association asserted that it had a right to be consulted by the management on the fixation or refixation of workload.

Soon trouble broke out in the Smithy Department, when the superintendent in charge asked its personnel to do casting work. They did not

obey the orders on instructions from their Association. The superintendent had no alternative and he charge-sheeted the entire group of personnel for disobedience. The Association's stand was that simply because they had been doing the casting work all along they were not bound to do it. While it desired an impartial enquiry into the matter, the management preferred arbitration by the Labour Commissioner. But actually only a conciliation meeting was held in the presence of an Assistant Labour Commissioner. The settlement went against the stand of the Association.

One victory of the Association was the management's decision to confirm the cafeteria employees and grant of *bata* (allowance) to *syrangs* (drivers) employed in the motor tugs used in transporting the company's products to Kochi harbour. The Association complained that centralization of decision-making power in the Board of Directors reduced the usefulness of the Personnel Department and the channel of communication that had been recently set up.

In 1954 the Association held a demonstration by asking all its members to come late for duty by one hour in sympathy with the striking tile workers in Aluva. This action violated the Standing Orders, but the Association held that it was their fundamental right as a trade union to exhort its members to stage sympathetic strikes. But unfortunately, this sympathetic show of support led to a long strike in FACT lasting about three months. It was called off after a tripartite conference.

The capacity to sustain long strikes was a sign of growing strength of the Association. In October 1955, it requested for a meeting with the Managing Director and that was granted. This was the first meeting of that kind since 1944. The Company agreed to reconstitute the Works Committee. At that time the FACT Employees' Association could claim hardly a half of the total workers in the company as its members. The Association took a firm stand that until the issue on scheme of Incentive Bonus was settled, it would not participate in any consultation with the management. This caused considerable strain in the mutual relationships in the Company.

There were signs of pre-meditated acts of indiscipline on the part of workers and acts of instigation on the part of a few office bearers of the Association. When a leading member of the Association was charge-sheeted for acts of misconduct, he not only refused to submit an explanation as instructed, but went on to question the authority of the person who had signed the charge-sheet. The Association, in order to support him, challenged the management's authority to take disciplinary action under the Standing Orders. After referring the matter to the company's legal adviser, who reported that the objections were unsustainable, the management constituted an enquiry.

The Association declined to participate in it. The management plainly told the workers that it was determined to take all steps to see that discipline was restored in the company.

The Kerala State was then under the President's Rule and considering the seriousness of the strained labour relations in the FACT, the Joint Advisor of the Government was apprised of the developments. The Company allowed the President of the Association to meet the Joint Advisor in Thiruvananthapuram. The transfer of a leading Association activist from one department to another was interpreted as an act of victimization. When the Association showed signs of taking retaliatory steps, the management came out with an order suspending the President and the General Secretary of the Association for acts of misconduct under the Standing Orders. Before doing so the Personnel Manager had conducted an-enquiry ex-parte and charge-sheeted five others also. When the Association questioned the authority of the enquiry and the suspension order based on it, the management remained firm. Strained relations were, however, no bar in the FACT for the conduct of "written dialogue" between the Association and the Management and this helped to reduce tension in the company.

When all eyes turned to the developments in the FACT, the management found it necessary to make its stand clear though a Bulletin No. 283 dated 24-12-1956. It mentioned acts of misconduct and instances of illegal strikes by the Association. The Association was also not without allegations on the attitude of the management. In late December 1956, a gang of workers waylaid a Senior Operator in the Gas Division while he was returning home after duty. They abused and threatened to assault him as he was supposed to be acting against the directions of the Association. They were armed with sticks and used a language most abusive and insulting. This incident spread anxiety about the safety of senior personnel and caused more rumours to spread like wild fire. A petition relating to the assault was filed before the Circle Inspector of Police, Aluva. A second petition from two Junior Operators alleging that the Association men obstructed them at factory gates was also filed followed by another from an employee of the Welfare Department. Several other complaints were also received from ordinary employees regarding acts of obstruction, intimidation, coupled with selective picketing at factory gate. According to the rules, the management asked the personnel superintendent to supply the list of persons involved in these unlawful activities.

At this state the Association instructed the marine crew not to take barges to bring oil to the factory from the Standard Vacuum Oil Company's installations at Kochi. Considering the bad turn of events, the Management

thought that it had no option but to extend protection to loyal employees and it forwarded a petition to the Executive First Class Magistrate, Ernakulam on the matter. This sparked off wild reactions from the Association. It directed its members to squat inside the workshop from 4 pm on February 19, 1957 and they refused to leave the premises when instructed by the management to do so. The Management was forced to call the police to remove them. While this was being done, two employees squatted in the garage in spite of it being locked out. A section of employees in the Firewood Handling Section unauthorizedly remained with in their section. The same tactic was used in the General Maintenance and Welding Sections too. Section 18 (d) of the Standing orders permitted the management to close down either wholly or partially any section of department of the company in the event of a strike and this was what the management did.

6.5.8 Strike of 1957

Illegal strikes were followed by partial lockouts. The Association declared a total strike from the midnight of March 12, 1957. Consequently, the company was compelled to shut down the entire factory. The Management alleged that the Association leaders were indulging in violent campaigns against loyal employees. As the factory had been closed, union activity was directed to the employees' housing colony. The management even went to the extent of attributing the occasional thefts in the FACT colony in the township to the activists of the Association. On getting information that an Assistant Foreman had been assaulted and hit, the management appealed to the Ernakulam District Collector and the ASP, Aluva, for their immediate intervention.

Before the situation got out of control the State Labour Minister intervened and a settlement was reached at a conference. The strike had lasted one month. The management felt that the company had just passed through one of its most critical periods in its history and that a new chapter in industrial relations had to be opened. But unfortunately, mutual allegations and accusations continued. It is stated that there was no change of heart on the part of the Management, since it refused to declare a holiday on the May Day and to give an advance payment to Muslim employees for the *Ramzan* festival, as evidence to justify their complaint. The Association was also a little agitated over the delay involved in the re-instatement of its President and General Secretary even after the settlement had been reached. They were, however, reinstated only by the end of December 1957 after a further high-level meeting held by the Chief Minister at Thiruvananthapuram. During the whole of the year 1958 the Association was deeply concerned with the

implementation of the decisions of that meeting and putting out experimental feelers for starting contract negotiations.

6.5.9 The Association and Long Term Agreements

The period after 1959, witnessed the creation of Long Term Agreements in the FACT Ltd.²⁶ The time was ripe for the attempt at negotiating long term collective agreements as tempers on both sides had cooled down and the company which was previously controlled by Seshasayee Brothers had became a government company. When the initiative came from the management, the Association did not hesitate and responded positively. The General Body of the Association appointed a Negotiating Committee headed by its President to represent its case on all matters, which were likely to come under the contract, and duly authorized the committee to take decision on its behalf. The first Long Term Agreement was signed in April 1959. It covered subjects like rights and responsibilities, management prerogatives, unfair labour practices, wages and allowances, bonus, amenities to workmen, retirement benefits, shop committees, grievance procedure, code of discipline, joint council and arbitration. For facilitating negotiation, the company recognized the FACT Employees' Association as the sole collective bargaining agent of employees.

Since the Tripartite Indian Labour Conference adopted the Code of Discipline in 1957, many companies and trade unions in the Aluva-Kalamassery area decided to incorporate the Code in their long-term agreements. Under the Code, in the FACT Agreement, the management and the Association eschewed all unilateral action for the settlement of all outstanding issues. They agreed to avoid coercion, intimidation, victimization, go-slow, litigation, strikes and lockouts and affirmed their faith in democratic principles and practices to settle all future differences, disputes and grievances by mutual negotiations, conciliation and voluntary arbitration. In two respects the First Long Term Agreement in the FACT broke fresh ground. They were the Shop Committees, Grievance Procedure and the Joint Council. The Shop Committees were conceived as consultative and advisory committees for the regular exchange of views between the supervisory staff and the workers on matters concerning the improvement of production to increase efficiency for this purpose and to make recommendations thereon. The Shop Committees in the FACT tried to uphold the philosophy of decentralized relationship and they opened the way for the emergence of a class of shop stewards in whose hands were deposited the full responsibility of maintaining stable labour management relations and increasing production. A constitutional grievance procedure enabled the settlement of grievances at the lower itself, since it was

structured as a multi-level procedure. The Joint Council was based upon the belief that an increasing measure of association of employees with the management was desirable for improving working and living conditions of employees, to improving productivity, encouraging suggestions from employees, assisting the implementation of laws, rules, standing orders and terms of agreements, creating in employees a sense of participation in management and serving as a channel for communication between the company and its employees. The Joint Council in the FACT set up three standing committees, viz., the Welfare Committee, the Safety Committee and the Suggestions Committee. A wide range of subjects was discussed in the Council. However, since the demarcation between the respective functions of the Joint Council and collective bargaining was not clearly understood in the beginning, there arose some confusion and misunderstandings. But they were successfully overcome in a few years' time. The relatively uninterrupted industrial peace and visible increase in the efficiency of operations and productivity must be attributed to the Joint Council.

Several factors contributed to the successful functioning of the Joint Council in the FACT. Firstly, the Council was set up at a time when industry-wide joint consultations and collective bargaining had become the order of the day in Kerala. Secondly, joint consultations of an informal type were already in vogue in the FACT. Thirdly, the FACT Employees' Association was the only trade union functioning in the establishment. It was strong and well organized and had enlightened and well-informed leadership from within the establishment. Fourthly, the Association had no political affiliation and it was unconnected with any Central Trade Union. Fifthly, mention must be made about the high educational standards of the employees. They had shown a sense of constructive appreciation of the evolving pattern of labour management relations in the factory, lending good support to the endeavours of the management on the one hand, and their own leaders on the other. Last but not the least was the vital role played by the Managing Director and the Personnel Manager (who later became the Company's Industrial Relations Manager) in establishing trust and cordial relationship with labour.

6.5.10 Second Long Term Agreement, 1962

The First Long Term Agreement ceased to operate from December 31, 1961. During the operation of the Agreement, the Association had found differences with the management on several issues like Production Bonus as distinct form Profit Bonus, work-study and job evaluation and implementation of certain "promises". But both the parties agreed to start negotiations once the Association submitted a new Memorandum of Demands. This led to the Second Long Term Agreement of 1962 signed on April 2, 1962. This Agreement, for the first time, granted employees a number of allowances like

night shift allowance, house rent allowance (HRA), tool allowance, overtime allowance and bata for drivers, conductors and escorts in the company's fleet of transport vehicles, special allowance for out of pocket expenses during absence from headquarters on duty, special allowance for extra work done by Staff in the administrative department, stores and tool crib, special poking allowance to helpers in the Production Gas Plant and ad-hoc special allowance to employees who are assigned special duties. As the factory had to operate all the 24 hours of the day, the elimination of absenteeism was a difficult job. The Second Agreement had a bold programme to handle it. As a general rule, in all operational divisions, working in relay shifts, absenteeism was covered up by stepping up persons from lower cadres or by over time. In such cases, preference was given to a man from the lower cadre even if it required a chain promotion and due compensation was given to the incumbent by giving him an acting allowance. The Agreement also fixed a number of fringe benefits for the employees which included subsidized meals, tea and snacks and transportation in company vehicles, 9 festival holidays, 24 days of privilege leave, 7 days wages during absence due to employment injury, supply of uniforms and coveralls and washing allowance to about 46 categories, foot wears to about 21 categories and free tea and milk to few other categories of employees. Though a general scheme of production bonus could not be negotiated and settled before the Second Agreement was signed, the management and the Association agreed on an Incentive Scheme based on minimum norms and minimum work turn.

6.5.11 An unusual development in FACT

The developments during the life of the Second Agreement were of a unique character²⁷. S.C.S. Menon, the then President of the FACT Employees' Association was serving as a Foreman in the Process Control Division. When he was promoted as General Foreman, he declined to accept it as desired by the Association, because assuming such a managerial post, he would be forced to resign his Presidentship before the completion of negotiations on pending issues with the company. Normally the matter would have ended there. But S.C.S. Menon offered to carry out the duties of the General Foreman without either the designation or the salary of the post. This was irksome to both top management and supervisory staff in relatively lower rungs.

It was in this context that Menon was selected for a six months' study programme in the USA on industrial relations sponsored by the National Productivity Council (NPC). M.K.K. Nair, the Managing Director, supported Menon's trip. During Menon's absence, another veteran old-timer in the

Association was elected President of the Union, but due to some unhappy developments within the Association the latter was forced to resign. During this period, the Association had been constantly agitating against the non-implementation of many decisions of the Joint Council, creation of new posts by management against the interests of existing employees and acts of victimization. The Management had also complaints against the Association cadres who had frequently flouted the Code of Discipline and refused to carry out orders on the plea that it would increase their workload. The Association was also particularly opposed to the company's new management development programme.

On return from the USA, S.C.S. Menon was posted as Assistant Personnel Manager, and, soon sharp differences arose between him and the Personnel Manager, for, Menon's heart and soul were always with the employees. Though Menon was holding a key management position, his interest lay with his Association, which he had helped to grow all these years since 1940. But as critical days passed by, it was clear to all that Menon would not be able to play the twin role as a management as well as a union man. And when he permitted himself to be elected as the President of the Association, since the employees wanted him to lead them, the Management legitimately refused to talk to the Association as long as Menon was its President. Though Menon was specifically instructed by the company Managing Director to dissociate himself from the Association in the FACT and several other trade unions outside, under one excuse or the other, he flouted it and openly continued his trade union activities. As early as 1954, S.C.S. Menon, was elected President of the Aluminium Factory Workers' Union. He also led the T.C.C. Employees' Association, I.R.E. Workers' Union, Cochin Refinery Employees' Association, H.M.T. Employees' Union, Connico Binani Employees' Union, Cochin Shipyards Employees' Union, Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union, Modern Bakery Employees' Union, Balmer and Laurie Employees' Organization, O.E.N. India Employees' Union, Carbon and Chemicals Employees' Union etc. in later years. Such was the personality of S.C.S. Menon and his involvement in the trade union movement.

After six month's work as Assistant Personnel Manager, S.C.S. Menon requested the Managing Director to allow him to go back to his old position of Foreman because Menon was always uncomfortable in the managerial post. But M.K.K. Nair refused his request. He posted Menon to the FEDO, a unit of the FACT. It was while he was serving there as an Officer in FEDO that the Association elected him as their President. M.K.K. Nair got furious. The issue was referred to P.N. Krishna Pillai and B.V.D. Menon, members of the State Industrial Relations Board. According to the settlement, S.C.S. Menon

was allowed to resign from the FACT to enable him to function as a trade unionist and whenever he abandoned the trade union connection, he could come back to the FACT and work in the same position he was holding then. Being a true and honest trade unionist, Menon opted for the former and resigned his post in the FACT to become a full time trade unionist.

In its Bulletin No. 788, the Company stated its final view on the matter thus:

"It will be fundamentally wrong to concede the point raised by the Association as it will be setting the worst precedent imaginable in industrial history. It will amount to setting up a very bad and dangerous convention in industrial relations. No industrial management will be able to maintain any discipline either among the workers or among the managers if it is conceded that a managerial man himself could get elected as the President of the workers' union. It needs no emphasis that such a position should never be created in India where industrialization is still in its infancy and the efforts of all concerned one and have to be directed towards the rapid industrialization of the country".

The Association, on the other hand, argued that in the Agreement between it and the Management, the former had been specifically recognized as the sole bargaining agent of employees, and, therefore, the refusal to negotiate with the Association and its office-bearers was highly objectionable and illegal. Since section XII of the Agreement provided for final arbitration by the Labour Commissioner, the management decided to refer the above controversial issue to such arbitration. Meanwhile, the Association took the advantage of the confused relations to raise a Bonus dispute.

6.5.12 Saga of S.C.S. Menon

M.K.K. Nair in his autobiography titled "*With Malice Towards None*" devoted a full chapter to S.C.S. Menon under the caption "Trade Unionism: S.C.S. Menon Style". According to M.K.K. Nair, "*among the trade union leaders in Kerala, S.C.S. Menon is most knowledgeable about industrial matters. His adherence to principle, honesty and affection for workers is unparalleled. But his greatest enemy in his king-size ego, uncompromising nature and intolerance towards opposite views, but for which he would have become a tallest trade union leader in India*".

But S.C.S. Menon believed that M.K.K. Nair was partially wrong and partially right. He said: "Many of my well-wishers had advised me to be little

more compromising in my attitude. But my attitude always depended on the nature of response from the management. If the management is just and reasonable to a cause, I fully support them. If they adopt an unreasonably tough and unyielding stand towards the employees, I too get tough with them”.

M.K.K. Nair stated that S.C.S. Menon, though one of the greatest trade union leaders, had suspected him when the American Embassy initially turned down, Menon’s request for visa to go to the US under the National Productivity Programme. In fact what happened was that on making customary enquiries about Menon, the Embassy was told that Menon had done some sabotage during a strike in the FACT when the EMS Ministry ruled Kerala and that he had been dismissed from service on that account, but was reinstated later. Menon suspected M.K.K. Nair because the latter was then functioning as the Chairman of the National Productivity Council. Since M.K.K. Nair thought that it was he who had recommended for Menon’s American trip and, therefore, it was his duty to see that Menon went to the USA. Accordingly, Nair got in touch with the Central Government and got Menon’s trip cleared for the next batch in the same Programme. It was again M.K.K. Nair who had taken the initiation to give S.C.S. Menon a promotion that was due to him. On return from the USA, Menon was posted as Assistant Manager. Since Nair had full faith in Menon’s abilities, he put him in charge of the Personnel work when G.S. Pillai, the Personnel Manager went to Italy for attending a Management Development Programme. Menon was entrusted to complete a negotiation with the Union of Stenographers and settle an agreement. M.K.K. Nair stated that he signed the agreement negotiated by S.C.S. Menon without changing any word in it. Such was the faith that M.K.K. Nair had put on S.C.S. Menon.

When M.K.K. Nair went to Europe on an official trip, Kasturirangan was holding charge as Managing Director. Kasturirangan could not put up with S.C.S. Menon, particularly when Menon was elected as the President of the FACT Employees’ Association. When Kasturirangan knew that S.C.S. Menon was standing for election to the post of the President of the Association, he issued a warning to Menon. But Menon flouted it and went ahead with his nomination for election. At this, Kasturirangan suspended Menon. On his return from Europe, M.K.K. Nair was shocked to find the new developments and he gave the ultimatum to S.C.S. Menon and then the latter decided to resign from the FACT. Menon then was reported to have sent a telegram to the Prime Minister saying that as long as M.K.K. Nair continued as the Managing Director, the Government should not sanction any new project to the FACT. It was a time when Kerala, under the President’s Rule, was trying to accelerate the process of industrialization of the State. The

Prime Minister was wise that he sent the telegram back to M.K.K. Nair for his information.

It was on January 13, 1949 that S.C.S. Menon commenced his trade union activity and he chose January 13, 1999, the Fiftieth Anniversary of that day to call it a day. He told the *New Indian Express*²⁸:

"I had wanted to leave the trade union field on January 13, 1999, on completion of fifty years on the trade union front and to take up social work thereafter. But I am forced to continue for a few more months so as to enable me to settle the present issues with the unions. By the year-end, all the issues in the unions I am connected with would be settled and I could retire peacefully, leaving the mantle to more deserving leaders. But I would like to make an exception in the case of FACT, which moulded my trade union career. My services would be available to its employees so long as they want me".

Paul Pothen, a brilliant management consultant, had great admiration about S.C.S. Menon²⁹. According to him, with his activities centred around Udyogamandal where he had started his work, his influence spread over a much wider area. His pattern of leadership was unique in its principles and the duration for which these principles have been adhered to. For the sheer durability and tough stance on the principle of independence of the union, S.C.S. Menon stands out as a class achiever. It was this tenacity and toughness that are going to be missed following Menon's decision to call it a day.

Menon joined the FACT as a junior chemist at the early stage when an elaborate study was being undertaken to establish a source of dependable water supply for the factory. He had earlier been employed in Mettur Chemicals, a unit managed by Seshasayee Brothers who were also the promoters of the FACT. It was but natural that an opportunity nearer home should attract him. Eloor and Aluva had become pockets of intense political activity. The staff and workers of the FACT and neighbouring establishments could not avoid the infection of the pervasive spirit. The tremors resulting from the new political structures that were forming could not be avoided by the industries of the area.

This was the time when sudden strikes, lockouts and other phenomenon of the disturbed millions became a familiar experience. Distinct from the influences that were prevalent in that disturbed period was the major FACT union, the Association, holding firmly to the principle of non-affiliation. This did not mean a weakening of the labour unions stance or its militancy. There were un-notified strikes and plant stoppages. They were

financially and physically damaging for the company, which was struggling to find its foot. Management of the FACT also held firm and government intervention became a feature of the mechanics of dispute settlement. This was the time when S.C.S. Menon achieved prominence as a trade union leader. As a part of his union strategy, the Association led by him had indulged in militancy, including interference in operations obviously involving physical hazards and production losses, inviting strict action by management.

As a trade union leader, what characterized Menon's stand vis-à-vis managements has been his commitment to principles. In that he did not compromise. Taking a cup of tea or a ride in management's vehicles was anathema to him. A rare instance of breaking the rule was when he accompanied senior officers on a journey to Tiruchi to attend Seshasayee's obsequies. The rigid observation of this self-imposed protocol earned him his followers' trust. People still remember that in a period of severe stress and inter-union rivalry, he alone among leaders could walk nonchalantly down the main approach road. This was confidence born out of his personal integrity and the loyalty of the rank and file. However, in recent times S.C.S. Menon had a serious set back when some of the unions led by him in the past suddenly lost confidence in him and saw that he was defeated by their general body in the union elections. S.C.S. Menon could not bear this shock but on second thoughts felt that his type of unionism has ceased to appeal to the present generation of workers.

Always clad in Khadi and carrying an umbrella under his arm, for many years S.C.S. Menon had led well over 40 trade unions at a time. His views on some of the contemporary issues in the trade union movement had been clear-cut. Menon finds less dedication and commitment among present day trade union leaders. Holding office in a union was an alibi for many to shirk work. There are trade union leaders on the pay roll of companies who do not even sign the muster. Menon does not subscribe to the view that trade union leaders should be elected from within the organization. He stated: '*My experience is that employers do not give as much respect to internal leaders as they do to leaders from outside the organization. It strengthens the bargaining power of employees*'.

Neither the referendum nor secret ballot could help check the multiplicity of trade unions, which is the bane of India. Nor could the Code of Discipline or the Trade Union Act could effectively tackle the problem. The most viable solution, according to S.C.S. Menon, is the formation of a 'bargaining council', as suggested by the late V.V. Giri, with proportional representation for all recognized trade unions to serve as the bargaining agent.

Today the relationship between trade unions and political parties has become an issue of controversial debate particularly in the context of the CPI (M) and CITU tussle. Menon is not a member of any political party but hold pro-labour and pro-left views on many issues. But he believes that workers should be politically educated with the ultimate object of creating a socialist society. Trade unions should not be reduced to an appendage of any political party. He always used to quote EMS Namboodiripad, who advocated that trade unions should not function as tails of political parties. He felt sad when the CPI (M) leadership refused to allow the late O. Bharathan to take over as President of the Kerala State Road Transport Employees' Association when its general body elected him. According to him, due to politics, trade unions cheat leadership and sometimes leadership cheats the unions. He had an experience. In the election to the Premiership of the Union in Premier Tyres, Menon was defeated by K.R. Gowri, since she belonged to the ruling party and the workers thought that she would be more effective than Menon to secure larger benefits to them. Menon also feels sad that in the same establishment leaders of the same political party establishing rival unions which is a recent trend particularly in the INTUC. For instance, INTUC unions led by Oommen Chandy, K.V. Thomas and Ramesh Chennithala all leaders of the Congress existed in the same industrial unit at Udyogamandal.

6.5.13 Emergence of FACT Employees' Union

We had been making an assessment of the saga of S.C.S. Menon till now. It is now time to go back to our narration of events in the trade union movement in Aluva. We need to deal with some more events related to the FACT, before we go to other industries in the region.

Even before the expiry of the Second Long Term Agreement, the FACT Employees Association raised some issues relating to production bonus and non-implementation of certain points agreed to by the management. Government referred the issues to adjudication. In the midst of these developments, there emerged into the limelight the FACT Employees' Union. Its President was T.C.N. Menon, an outsider, and, he exhorted all employees to defer their agitational approach and pleaded for return to sanity. According to him, a strike at this juncture would be totally unwise and somewhat suicidal and asked the employees to wait till the tenure of the Second Agreement was over. He added that his members would go for work and sought police protection. The Labour Commissioner convened a number of conciliation conferences but due to non-cooperation of parties, no settlement could be reached. The Management took a firm stand that unless and until the Association desisted from instigating workers from go-slows and strikes, it

would not participate in any such conferences. When the employees in various plants resorted to illegal strikes without giving proper notice, the management insisted that it would not pay wages for the strike days. It wanted the Association to withdraw the strike unconditionally. A general strike started from the mid-night of August 24, 1965. The Association had given a Notice on August 2, but from that day itself its members had commenced a tool-down strike. Once the strike started, the employees obstructed senior personnel of the company from entering its premises and deliberately stopped the operation of some of the plants without the knowledge of the Section Foremen or Heads. The telephone operators joined the strike, paralysing communications with outside. The Association claimed that it had started the general strike only after assuring itself that all conciliation efforts had failed.

In a press note, the Management alleged that the employees had resorted to wholesale indiscipline, tampered with vital installations thereby putting the plant operations to a standstill. According to its estimate, the company suffered a loss of Rs. 2.50 lakhs per day and the expansion schemes in the FACT had virtually stopped. The work stoppage in the FACT had affected the working of other companies in Udyogamandal like the Travancore Cochin Chemicals, Indian Rare Earths and Hindustan Insecticides. To bring about a settlement, the Management offered bonus as per the provisions of the Payment of Bonus Act. It offered an interim increase of 7.5 per cent in the basic pay of all permanent employees.

The FACT Employees' Union, viewing the whole matter tactically, raised a fundamental issue. It questioned the representative character of the Association. The Union submitted that neither it nor the Association enjoyed the majority needed for recognition as a representative trade union. On December 29, 1965 the Association submitted a charter of 29 demands and a more or less similar charter of demands was submitted by the Union, a few days later.

Meanwhile, some of the defectors from the Association sought the law court to remove the President from his office on the basis of the byelaws of the Association. The Court decreed in favour of the defectors. On his exit, the Association was weakened and it was forced to call off the strike that had lasted 15 days. The management then decided to be tough and tighten discipline. The Association did not unfortunately disintegrate. But there was infusion of new blood accompanied by re-entry of some old timers. The KPCC deputed a committee of six consisting of K.C. Abraham, K.P. Harikrishnan Nair, C.M. Stephen, K.A. Damodara Menon, Mathew Maniyangadan and T.O. Bava to bring about a settlement of the strike. At the same time, leaders like V.P. Marakar, A.C. Jose, P.K. Sadanandan and A.C.

George were addressing workers in the strike campaign meetings. At one stage of the strike, K.P. Paul started a hunger strike in front of M.K.K. Nair's (managing director's) residential quarters. On September 4, 1965 a delegation of 15 employees who coming to the office of the Personnel Manager, G.S. Pillai, to submit a memorandum, were arrested. The Governor held a discussion with Panampally Govinda Menon. On the 12th day of the strike, K.T. George, V.P. Marakar and Kutty Krishna Menon started a Satyagraha at the gates of the FACT. This was to indicate that for the first time the Congress leaders as well as the INTUC leaders had started evincing keen interest in the affairs of the FACT from 1965 onwards, when a crisis of leadership in the Association emerged and its antagonism with the Management became strong.

6.5.14 The Third Long Term Agreement, 1966

By 1966 the FACT Employees' Association and the FACT Employees' Union had been recognized as bargaining agents and the company reached a settlement. The Third Long Term Agreement applied to all monthly-rated employees. It was agreed to conduct a work-study and job evaluation study. The task of fixing crew or personnel strength was assigned to the company's own Industrial Engineering Department. The objective was to improve productivity and establish rationalization. Any personnel declared surplus as a result of work-study would be fixed in suitable alternate jobs without reduction in emoluments and benefits. For this purpose, the management agreed to consult both the Association and the Union. This was a turning point in the labour-management relations in the FACT and it could pave the way for lasting peace in the establishment for a number of years.

6.5.15 Strike in FACT Ltd., 1972

The month of June 1972 saw the FACT in the grip of a long strike. By that time, besides the FACT Employees' Association, there had emerged six more unions. A few of them like FACT Employees' Congress (INTUC), FACT Staff and Workers' Association (AITUC) and FACT Employee's Union (CITU) had clear political affiliations, while the rest were category unions. The 39 day long strike jointly called by all the trade unions was taken up for conciliation in the presence of the Home Minister K. Karunakaran. Of the seven unions, four, the FACT Employees' Congress, FACT Staff and Workers Association, FACT Workers' Union and FACT Engineering Workers' Association, agreed to withdraw the strike, but the CITU union rejected the settlement. C.M. Stephen, E. Balanandan and K.N. Ravindranath were the prominent leaders who participated in the conciliation conference.

Finally the CITU union stated that they do not want to continue the strike alone.

6.5.16 An interesting episode

K.N. Gopala Pillai, one of the founders of the FACT Employees' Association remembers one unforgettable episode during his trade union work in the FACT. The Third Central Pay Commission had just submitted its Report and the officers of the FACT wanted to take up the revision of their pay on par with the recommendations made by the Central Pay Commission. At that time, B.V.D. Menon was the Chairman of the FACT. R.N.Khanna came to replace M.K.K.Nair as the Managing Director. Khanna was a tough guy and most unpopular. But everybody knew how close he was with Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister. Khanna's uncle was a rich sugar baron and was highly aristocratic. The Officers' Association in FACT was called the Managerial Guild. P.N. Menon, the Joint General Manager was M.K.K. Nair's loyalist. When one day Khanna asked for the personal file of K.N. Gopala Pillai, P.N. Menon told Pillai that something might happen soon. But Gopala Pillai was bold and he sought an appointment with Khanna saying that he was the President of the Managerial Guild and wanted to raise the issue on pay revision for officers in the FACT. Khanna, through his Secretary, asked Gopala Pillai whether the Officers' Guild was a trade union. Khanna was not ready to grant an appointment to Gopala Pillai and kept him waiting for a long time. Viewing this as a deliberate tactic of Khanna, Gopala Pillai asked Raman Nair, the driver of Khanna's car to remind his master about Gopala Pillai's request for an appointment. When Khanna was returning to his office after lunch, Gopala Pillai came on his way and reminded him about his request for an appointment with him. Finally Khanna agreed to give him time. The first remark that Khanna made was that he could not recognize the Officers' Guild. Gopala Pillai clarified that the Guild was not a trade union. It was only a forum to express the grievances of officers. He told Khanna that even the members of the Indian Management Pool (IMP) had an organization. Khanna then said that though he belonged to the IMP, he was never a member of any organization. When Gopala Pillai raised the issue of revision of pay scale of officers in the FACT on par with Central Pay Commission, Khanna ended the meeting saying that he had no time to waste. In another meeting, Gopala Pillai succeeded in submitting a document to Khanna on some revised scales for consideration. At this Khanna asked Pillai whether he was asking for higher scales.

Since it was difficult to bring around Khanna to a favourable mood, the Officers' Guild decided to invite him for a meeting with the officers. During this meeting Gopala Pillai informally told Khanna that in sister concerns like Cochin Shipyard, the officers had already been given revised pay scales on par with the Central Government Officers, besides some extra benefits. Khanna listened to this and after a few days ordered pay revision for the officers.

6.5.17 Looking back

The above discussion on the trade union activities in the FACT Ltd., would not be complete without mentioning some later developments. Like in any other industrial establishments, the FACT Ltd., also witnessed the proliferation of trade unions. The greatest evil was the emergence of category/craft unions that represented only the exclusive interests of the members belonging to a particular category or craft. There used to be fundamental conflict between the interests of each category and this had stood as major constraints in pursuing collective bargaining. The character of grievances and disputes also became complex. The change in the character of the leadership and entry of political affiliation made matters worse. The FACT Ltd., was an industrial establishment where all the leading figures of the trade union movement had one time or other played a significant role. Mention may be made in this context about K.N. Gopala Pillai, S.C.S.Menon, Panampally Govinda Menon, C.M. Stephen, T.C.N. Menon, K.A. Rajan, E. Balanandan, K.N. Ravindranath, Vayalar Ravi, A.C. George, A.C. Jose, V. Viswanatha Menon, V.B. Cherian, K. Chandran Pillai, and P.S. Gangadharan extended over a long period and perhaps over a few generation of workers. In fact the interaction among them, some times overriding political and ideological conflicts, had been responsible for bringing about lasting industrial peace in the FACT Ltd. Senior Management stalwarts like M.K.K.Nair, G.S. Pillai, B.V.D. Menon and P.N. Menon and old timers in the trade union movement like K.N. Gopala Pillai and S.C.S. Menon had helped to lay the foundation for a cordial industrial relations in the FACT Ltd. Further the impact of this on other establishments in the region was enormous. Establishments like TCC, Hindustan Insecticides, Indian Rare Earths and new enterprises like Premier Tyres, Carborandum Universal, and HMT, COCHIN Shipyard etc. have benefited considerably from the experience of trade unions in the FACT Ltd. Indeed the leaders of the unions in the FACT Ltd were also functioning as leaders of trade unions in many other establishments in the Cochin belt.

6.6 UNIONS IN INDIAN ALUMINIUM COMPANY, ALUPURAM

6.6.1 The Beginnings

Started in 1938, as a private limited company by British and Canadian interests, the Indian Aluminium Company was converted into a Public Limited Company in 1946. Eventually, the British interests were bought out by the Aluminium Limited, of Canada, a holding company with some seventy subsidiaries and affiliates spread through thirty odd countries. The company began its production operations with a rolling mill at Belur in 1941, followed by the production of aluminium ingots from imported alumina at its reduction works at Alupuram, near Udyogamandal, Aluva in 1943. The guarantee of cheap electricity from Pallivasal Hydro-electrical Project, near Munnar in the high-ranges and the acquisition and transfer of the required land by Government of Travancore to the Company were the major incentives for starting the unit at Alupuram. It was estimated that an aluminium smelter with a capacity of 1500 tonnes of ingots would require annually about 1000 tonnes of caustic soda. Indeed, this gave a fillip for the establishment of the FACT Ltd and the TCC Ltd. The Aluminium smelter in Alupuram started operations in March 1943, and, since then, excepting a few hiccups, the company had expanded considerably, making Aluva a great hub of industrial activities.

At Alupuram, the production was a highly mechanized process and required comparatively a small labour force. Though the bulk of the unskilled workers were drawn mainly from neighbouring areas, the technical and supervisory personnel were recruited on an-all India basis and they were interchangeable between the company's other units. As early as 1950, the company had established a unique wage pattern. The basic wage rates were fixed on an hourly basis and it was subject to variations according to a Job Evaluation System. The basic hourly wage rate of a skilled charge-man, for instance, was Rs. 0-5-6 in 1950.

6.6.2 Aluminium Factory Workers' Union (AFWU)

The first trade union in the Company was the Aluminium Factory Workers' Union (AFWU). Though it was established during 1943-44, the management only in 1951 first recognized the voice of the union³⁰. Since then, the Union had grown steadily in strength and bargaining capacity. It had constructed an imposing building for its office. In 1948 the supervisory staff with outside political leaders as Presidents formed the Aluminium Factory

Staff Association (AFSA). But for this reason, the Management refused to recognize the Association.

The AFWU had passed through many crises during its chequered career. The management was against the involvement of outsiders in the labour-management relations at the works in the early days and the Union had to wage a strenuous battle on this issue, which it finally won in 1957. However, squabbles about leadership had considerably weakened the union in recent years and opened the way for the emergence of rival unions in the Works.

There were certain distinct characteristics about the AFWU. Firstly, it was the only union recognized by the management as the sole bargaining agent of its workers in the first two decades of its existence. Secondly, the Union embraced only the employees of the Alupuram Works. However, the President of the Union was an outsider, S.C.S. Menon, who also held the presidency of the FACT Employees' Association. As we had seen, S.C.S. Menon was an employee of the FACT Ltd. As soon as factions appeared in the Association, an effort was made to set up rival unions in both the FACT and Aluminium Company almost simultaneously. Even when S.C.S. Menon was removed from the Association, he continued to be the President of the AFWU. Between 1962-64 Panampally Govinda Menon belonging to the Congress Party held the leadership of the Union. But during his tenure as President of the Union, active leadership and day-to-day management of the Union were in the hands of the rank and file, working through the General Secretary. Thirdly, the Union had always stood for independent unionism, i.e., not affiliated to any political party or a Central Trade Union. Excepting for the period 1962-64, the Union had maintained, through out its existence, complete independence from any known ideology. Though an All India Aluminium Employees' Federation had been formed, the Union pursued its independent policy. Fourthly, the Union had maintained a high democratic tradition. Because of greater union consciousness and skill, the workers had built up a solid Union that could act as an enlightened model to any other in the country. Internal leadership was very strong in the Union despite the President, S.C.S. Menon, being an outsider. The Union was also a good model of trade union democracy. Its offices were hotly contested and the rank and file took a deep interest in the various union activities.

6.6.3 Early attempts at Collective Bargaining

Aluminium Factory Workers' Union was able to reach a conciliation agreement with the company in the presence of the Labour Commissioner as

early as 1951. The period before 1951 was one of constant struggle for union recognition and union privileges. The Union failed to impress the management because the leadership of the Union was in the hands of an outsider. The Management wanted the Union to build up internal leadership. When the Staff Association was formed in 1948, the management made its stand clear by refusing to accept any representation or memoranda from the Staff Association. The management argued that the supervisory personnel/staff were part of the management as distinct from workers. It contended that a trade union was meant for workers, and not for staff.

The attitude of the management brought about an agitational atmosphere in the works. This led to a strike. It was the first total strike at Alupuram and it lasted 36 days. At the intervention of the State Labour Department, the matter was referred to adjudication. Meanwhile, the Labour Commissioner attempted conciliation proceedings, which lasted three months, and fortunately a settlement was reached. The memorandum of settlement was jointly submitted by the management and the Union to the Industrial Tribunal, which passed an Award on it. This settlement gave unofficial recognition to the Aluminium Factory Workers' Union. A special clause that the supervisory staff had no right to form a trade union was incorporated in the settlement. This settlement of 1951 lasted till 1955, when the Union filed a new charter of demands.

Before its final collapse, the Staff Association had another blow, when it preferred an Appeal before the Industrial Tribunal against the certification of draft memorandum of settlement. It alleged that the Certifying Officer did not accept the objections raised by it, even though it was in his jurisdiction to accept such objections based on the grounds of fairness and reason. The Tribunal, however, dismissed the appeal.

By 1951, the Union and Management succeeded in establishing a permanent channel of communication between them. But the situation soon turned adverse. First, it was argued that the charter of demands filed by the Union automatically cancelled the Settlement of 1951, and, the employees were not eligible to claim the rights and privileges laid therein. Though the management did not expressly take this stand, this was something that caused serious apprehension in the Union camp. Secondly, both parties feared that the abandonment of collective bargaining would have far reaching adverse effects. So they ardently desired a return to sanity and to restart collective bargaining. But the question was who should make the crucial move or concession to put it back on to the right track. The suspense did not last long. The Union, without standing on prestige, took a practical view of the situation and approached the management for the continuation of the 1951 conciliation

settlement until a new long-term agreement was reached. This was conceded and the settlement continued to operate till 1957.

In 1957, the Union demanded a flat 50 per cent increase in basic wages and dearness allowance, besides bonus. The management refused to negotiate. As conciliation failed to settle the issue, it was referred to adjudication. Pending such proceedings, the Union directed its members to launch a strike. The management declared the strike as illegal and sternly refused to initiate any dialogue with the Union as those matters were already the subject of adjudication proceedings. The strike lasted 65 days. The trade union leaders of standing intervened in the dispute and as a result the strike was called off. The management agreed to pay 16.66 per cent bonus for 1956-57. It also agreed to introduce an Incentive Scheme as a precondition for restarting collective bargaining. As a result, negotiations were initiated and the First Long Term Collective Agreement was signed in February 1957 and it operated for three years. Since then, long-term agreements were regularly contracted which brought lasting peace with virtually minimal loss of man-days and direct action by both parties.

6.6.4 Significance of the Agreement of 1957

This Agreement covered the entire gamut of relations and settled matters like rights, responsibilities and privileges of both parties, wages, bonus, working hours and overtime, recruitment and promotion, welfare and other amenities, retirement benefits like provident fund and gratuity, leave and holidays, joint consultations and grievance procedure. The Agreement thus recorded the intention of both parties to submit themselves to joint regulation. The Union was officially recognized as the sole bargaining agent for its employees and vested the Union with certain rights and privileges. The company agreed to give all reasonable facilities to the authorized Union representatives to collect union dues near the Pay Counter or at the Time Office on Pay Day. Unfair labour practices were clearly defined. The company allowed Union members to attend the meetings of Joint Committees with out loss of pay and it also made available to the Union a Notice Board to post Union notices. Joining the union was considered a matter of free choice to employees. The Union agreed to respect certain well-defined managerial rights and prerogatives. The Agreement laid down, in unambiguous terms, a list of punishable offences which included, among other things, negligence of duty, careless operation, damage to company property, loitering aimlessly in the factory and its premises causing disturbance to others and insubordination and indiscipline.

The Agreement also undertook to make clear the distinction between constitutional and unconstitutional methods of appeal, emphasizing that the latter should never be used and if used should be jointly discouraged by the parties. The company had the credit for pioneering scientific wage fixation based on techniques of job evaluation and a Joint Job Evaluation Committee conducted it. The company did not accept the concept of Profit Sharing Bonus. Instead, it introduced two bonus schemes, the Monthly Incentive Bonus Scheme based on average aluminium production for a month, and, the Annual Productivity Bonus based on total metal production and calculated as a percentage of gross earnings which included earned basic wage/pay and DA.

The company agreed to allow every employee a grace time of five minutes for reporting for work. This indeed was an unusual concession rarely granted by managements of companies in Kerala. It also agreed that 50 per cent of unskilled workers could be recruited from amongst relatives of permanent employees. Such relatives would also get a preference in all recruitment to other categories of jobs in the works. A man-rating scheme was introduced so that the rating chart would be the deciding factor in determining the efficiency of a worker. An important feature of the Agreement was the establishment of joint committees like the Joint Relations Committee, Joint Production Committee, Joint Canteen Committee, and Joint Job Evaluation Committee. The Agreement also established a Grievance Procedure.

After the conclusion of the First Long Term Agreement, significant changes occurred in the character of production and work standards. The level of technology was also changing fast. The company was also undertaking expansion of production capacity. All these called for a review of wage rates, crew strength, work standards and productivity-based bonus. Early in 1964, Union filed yet another charter of demands. As the job values were in the process of finalization, workers had complaints about increase in their workloads. The management insisted on a Job Evaluation and Work Study as a condition for negotiating a new long-term agreement. Subsequently, the company appointed a consultancy firm of industrial engineers to conduct such a study at the Works. But as the study showed signs of protracted delays, the management agreed to go ahead with negotiation on other matters. The Union also put in pressure and thus the Second Three Year Long Term Agreement was signed on January 19, 1960.

6.6.5 The Second Long Term Agreement, 1960

According to this Agreement, the wages were raised considerably. The management agreed to pay incentive bonus, fixing lump sum amounts set

apart for distribution as bonus for every slab increase in production above a previously fixed minimum. It agreed to pay bonus in excess of this sum if the number of eligible workers exceeded a crew strength of 866 during the period of Agreement because the number of workers was on the increase on account of expansion of the Works. Another gain to workers was the grant of overtime wages and compensatory off when working on off days. The man-rating scheme was continued and carefully prepared rating chart was used to determine worker's efficiency. The Agreement, in short, sought to enlarge the bargaining area, and negotiations to that effect were much more smooth, cordial and constructive.

Soon after the Agreement began to operate, the Report of the Industrial Engineers and Consultants was submitted to the Management. With a view to foster joint consultations, the Management sent a copy of the Report to the Aluminium Factory Workers' Union for its study. This move helped to initiate direct negotiations with the Union and the parties reached an agreement on the Report in 1961. According to it, about 200 workers were declared surplus. But to avoid hardships to workers, the management agreed to employ all the affected workers in the new expansion schemes at Alupuram and declared its policy of "no retrenchment" in most unequivocal terms.

As soon as the Agreement was signed, a section of workers passed a No-confidence resolution on the leadership, particularly the President of the Union and he was thus ousted from that position. This was indeed a bad turn for labour-management relations in Alupuram. A leadership change during the life of a long-term agreement was always unpleasant. The Presidentship was hotly contested and Panampally Govinda Menon was elected and being a great Congress leader, many thought the Union was going to lose its independent character. But nothing happened.

One of the very first acts of the new leadership was to send a notice to the management terminating the 1960 Agreement. The Union argued that this Agreement was no longer valid and binding on workers, as the original leadership had gone. The management did not yield and insisted that the Agreement should continue for the full term. The Union had to accept this view. On assumption of office, Panampally found that since an Agreement was in operation, he had nothing to do immediately. But this attitude made him unpopular among members of the Union. But in early 1963, the Union wanted to negotiate a new long-term agreement, but the management insisted that it should be based on the Job Evaluation and Work Study Agreement of 1961. After a period of intense re-thinking the Union decided to approach the Management, submitting that it was ready to conclude an agreement

incorporating the work-study report. Thus the Third Long Term Agreement was signed on June 12, 1963.

6.6.6: Significance of Third Long Term Agreement, 1963

In this Agreement, the parties agreed to maintain the work standards and crew strength that were established in 1961 in line with the recommendations of the Industrial Engineers and Consultants. They recognized the necessity for further increasing productivity and rationalizing work standards and improving work methods. The company was engaged in expanding its production capacity at Alupuram. The Union and Management agreed to make every effort to man the new smelter with the existing personnel as far as possible.

As the re-employment of this redundant labour could be done only in stages consistent with stages in the construction of the new smelter, a system of rotation was introduced. Under this, the redundant employees out of work on rotation would receive the basic wages or salaries in accordance with the old wage or salary grades. It was agreed that no employee would be retrenched or his wages or bonus reduced as a consequence of rationalization and re-employment on rotation. The rotation periods would be in the ratio of the number of retained to redundant employees in each category and the rotation would be arranged in such a manner that the period an employee remained out of work would not be more than one month at a stretch as far as possible.

In short, the Agreement meant that the employees who were out of work would get their wages or salary and for it they would have to come to the factory and punch their time cards on the 1st, 10th and 20th of every month. If such employees wished to stay in the factory after punching their cards they could do so. Notifications concerning work were posted in the Notice Board. Besides, the management sent individual intimation to such workers by registered post or in person asking them to return to work within three days. Those who did not report for duty were treated as absent and were subjected to disciplinary action.

The above Agreement was very outstanding in many respects. This was one of the very unique productivity agreements in the country. This could be compared to the famous Folly Agreement in the U.K. negotiated between the management of the ESSO Company and their unions. The Alupuram Agreement of 1963 provided for the payment of full wages to the surplus labour force while they were out of work. The Agreement also eliminated the system of employing helpers in certain crafts. The pioneering spirit behind

this historic agreement was P.N. Krishna Pillai, a veteran trade unionist and a former Labour Commissioner who had taken up the assignment as the Industrial Relations and Personal Advisor of the Indian Aluminium Company at its headquarters in Calcutta. Pillai was the founder president of the National Institute of Personnel Management (NIPM) and a brilliant collective bargaining specialist. C.R.S. Pillai who was then serving the Alupuram Works as its Personnel Superintendent ably assisted P.N. Krishna Pillai.

6.6.7 The Post 1963 Situation

After the Agreement came into operation in 1963, the management began to feel that it might not always be possible to re-employ the entire redundant labour particularly those belonging to unskilled and semi-skilled categories. In such cases, a lay off was inevitable and the management informed the Union that in such a contingency the company would apply the “last come, first go” principle. The management also decided to abolish the Joint Job Evaluation Committee in favour of establishing a separate Industrial Engineering Department as they felt that this task required highly scientific and technical skills and qualification. The management told the Union that the Union representatives would be consulted in the implementation of any recommendation of the new Department and to facilitate such consultations a Joint Implementation Committee was set up. Following the Alupuram Agreement, the Company could conclude a similar agreement at its Hirakud Works in September 1963. Meanwhile, the emergence of two new mushroom unions in the post 1963 period caused some damage to the industrial peace in Alupuram Works.

The Indian Aluminium Company at Alupuram, like the FACT Ltd., witnessed the formation of new trade unions affiliated to major trade union centres like the AITUC, INTUC, CITU, and, HMS, besides a number of category/craft unions. The experience of concluding long-term collective agreements in both the FACT Ltd., and Indian Aluminium Company inspired conclusion of long-term agreements in almost all the major industrial establishments in the Aluva-Kalamassery and Kochi region. E. Balanandan, the CITU leader and CPI (M) Politburo member was a worker at Alupuram in its earlier years. Later he left it and went to North India to return after some years. By that time, he had become a leading figure in the Communist Party. He had also worked with leaders like S.C.S. Menon in the union movement in the Aluminium Company.

6.7 OTHER MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN COCHIN

In this section, we attempt to chronicle other important episodes in the working class struggles in the Aluva-Kochi region. In October 1949, the bidi workers of Aluva conducted a hunger strike demanding reinstatement of workers whose services were terminated by bidi companies on the plea that they were unable to sell their accumulated stocks. The issue was settled at a conciliation conference held by A.V. Joseph and the Assistant Excise Commissioner in the presence of the Assistant Labour Commissioner. The bidi companies agreed to take back 10 out of the 21 workers who were sent out by giving a wage rate of Rs. 1 as. 13. As soon as the surplus stock of 2 lakh bidis was cleared, the rest would be reinstated. On this understanding, the bidi workers called off the Satyagraha.

6.7.1 The 1950s

In the first week of May 1950, tile workers in S.N. Vilasam, Lakshmi Vilasam, Victory, and Usmania Companies struck work. The Municipal Workers' Union, Bidi Workers' Union, Tiles and Pottery Workers' Union, State Transport Workers' Union and the FACT Employees' Association expressed their solidarity and support to the striking tile workers³¹. K.N. Gopala Pillai, the President of the FACT Employees' Association announced that he would commence a hunger Satyagraha in front of the S.N. Vilasam Tile Factory, since the companies had not responded to the memorandum submitted by the tile workers' unions. Gopala Pillai's move shocked the Tile Companies and they agreed to an amicable settlement. It was in return of the gesture shown by K.N. Gopala Pillai that the Tile Workers' Union came forward to observe a one-day sympathetic strike, when the FACT Employees' Association went on a strike in October 1950.

In November 1951, the Ferry Workers in Ernakulam, Mattancherry, Aroor and Edakochi struck work, demanding payment of previous month's salary. In May 1952, a tile company terminated the services of 15 workers. To protest against this unilateral action the workers commenced a strike, picketing and marches. Police arrested 30 workers including the Union President K.K. Kumaran Vaidyan and K.A. Thomas, a socialist party worker. The strike soon spread to the 15 tile factories in Amballur and Manali, and 10 factories in Ollur. The main demand behind this struggle was an increase in basic wage and payment of bonus. The strike lasted 21 days in Amballur and Manali and 17 days in Ollur. We have narrated this episode under Aluva because in the case of struggles in tile factories they used to cover tile industries in Cochin as well as Thrissur almost simultaneously. Further in Cochin, tile factories are concentrated in Aluva, which is in close proximity to Chalakkudy, Amballur and Ollur in Thrissur region. That is why these

struggles get transformed into region wise struggles cutting across political boundaries.

Perumbavoor was the house of the Travancore Rayons Factory, which was doing well during 1950-1980. In September 1952, the Rayon factory saw a struggle demanding an increase in wages and payment of DA. The issue was settled with the timely intervention of Panampally Govinda Menon. Panampally had inaugurated the Labour Union in the Vanaja Textiles. He declared that the Congress Government would not allow the employers to deny legitimate demands of the workers. It was a time when the Congress leaders were trying to establish INTUC unions in major industrial centres. The President of the Vanaja Textiles Labour Union was K. Karunakaran. He appealed to workers not to fall prey to the promises made by the communist unions and asked them to join the INTUC union³².

The Standard Potteries was closed in October 1953 on account of the accumulation of unsold stocks of 4.5 lakh tiles, and, as a result 500 workers lost work. The union held demonstrations demanding the re-opening of the factory³³. The issue was referred to conciliation by the Labour Commissioner and the Management agreed to re-open the factory from November 1, 1953 if the stocks of tiles could be sold out as expected. If the stocks were not sold, the Management agreed to inform the Union about it before October 25.

The INTUC held its Kerala Convention in Kochi on May 16, 1954 chaired by R. Vasudev, the all India President of the INTUC³⁴. B.K. Nair, P.C. Jacob (Kochi Port Labour Union), K. Karunakaran, K.P. Krishnan Kutty Nair, K.P.M. Sheriff, Pamban Madhavan and Ummer Koya participated. The Convention stated that the growth of the INTUC in Kerala had started, sending shivers and stocks to the Communists all over Kerala. In a meeting of the INTUC held in November 1954 Sarangadharan who had resigned from the communist party spoke about the failure of communist tactics in the Travancore-Cochin area. Joseph Velikadan, Kesavan Nair, V.D. John and G.N.M. Pillai supported him.

In the middle of November 1954 there was a strike in the Ashoka Mills at Aluva. The police held a brutal lathi charge on the workers who picketed the factory gates and about 20 workers were injured. The workers who were on strike for about a month allowed only the General manager and the Works Manager to enter the factory. The lathi charge was unprovoked and many unions in and around Aluva registered their protest through sympathetic strikes and marches. The company warned that if the workers continued picketing, it would be forced to close down the factory and issued a deadline to report for work before December 1. On that day, a Muslim worker and his wife came to join duty but it was alleged that the striking workers had

manhandled them. The struggle became aggressive. It was reported that the struggle was started when the company refused to consider the workers' demand for leave as well bonus. Finally after 40 days, the dispute was referred to adjudication.

Following the reference to adjudication, the Government declared the strike as illegal. It requested the Union to call off the strike and allow workers to resume duty. Though the reference to adjudication was made, the proceedings got delayed and the Union then decided to defy the government order and continue the strike. Communists led the Union. It was alleged that this Union deliberately turned down the offer made by the company to pay the bonus and started the strike again making a new demand for payment of wages for the strike period. Finally the struggle failed and workers in Ashoka Textiles lost wages for 59 days, the period of the strike.

Koratty is the home of the Yamuna Thread Mills. There the Communist led trade union had made a demand for bonus, increase in wages and DA. In the absence of a positive response, the union called for a strike. The Mills had a work force of 1019. The management filed a case against the union leaders, V.R. Menon, K.K. Nair, V.N. Bhaskaran and K.K. Kuttappan³⁵. As the Mills was considered as an important industry in the State, the Government took a quick decision and referred the dispute to mediation by a mutually agreed person not below the rank of a High Court Judge. It was agreed that only those who accepted the mediator's award would be allowed to work in the Mills. Accordingly 969 out of 1019 workers reported for work.

Travancore Rayons in Perumbavur was facing acute shortage of waste wood, an important raw material, along with accumulation of unsold stocks of output in early 1958³⁶. The company was, therefore, remaining virtually closed throwing 250 workers and their families into destitution. Both the Management and the Union had represented the matter to the Government but no steps had taken to resolve the issues. Hence the Union had no alternative other than launching a strike. Earlier, the workers in this factory had conducted a struggle for bonus and during that several had been arrested. Government had promised to refer the dispute to adjudication but did not do so. The new struggle was inaugurated at a public meeting at Subhash Maidan at Perumbavur. Mathai Manjooran presided over the meeting. With this episode, the decline of the company started and thereafter it could not be revived. Today this pioneering factory rests only in the memory of the old generation.

By 1959 the INTUC was emerging as a force to reckon within Kochi and Aluva. For instance, in the elections to the office bearers of unions in

Petroleum companies like Burma Shell, Standard Vacuum and Caltex, the INTUC nominees defeated the communists and took control over the unions. Panampally Govinda Menon, K.K. Vasudevan and Henry Austin defeated the Communist leaders T.C.N. Menon, M.M. Lawrence and M.M. Cherian to the posts of President, Vice-President and Secretary of Petroleum Workers' Union³⁷.

The anti-communist leaders came together and decided to convene a state level meeting of anti-communist organizations for launching a big struggle. 200 delegates, representing 153 such organizations, held a convention at Ernakulam and they set up a seven-member committee to decide the future course of action. M.K. Raghavan, B.K. Nair, C.G. Janardhanan and T.K. Divakaran took the initiative for the convention. The seven-member committee consisted of R.S. Unni, K. Pankajakshan, B.K. Nair, K. Karunakaran, A. Subbiah, P.K. Sankaran Kutty, M.K. Raghavan and P.F. Thomas with A.A. Kochunny as convener. The convention submitted a 10-point demand. They were re-opening of all closed factories, implementation of Minimum Wages Act, 12.5 per cent bonus, interim increase in wages by 33 1/3 per cent, reduction in the prices of essential commodities, sale of rice to workers at subsidized prices, withdrawal of cases related to industrial disputes, payment of lay off compensation to workers in establishments coming under the purview of the Industrial Disputes Act, prohibit police intervention in industrial disputes and speedy settlement of the ongoing plantation workers' strike.

6.7.2 The 1960s

Following the introduction of Gold Control Order, gold smith workers began to lose jobs. On February 20, 1963, the gold and jewellery workers of Ernakulam district held a march and a public meeting in the Town hall chaired by V.A. Kuruvila, the Chairman of the Ernakulam Municipality. Annie K. Thayyil inaugurated the meeting. P.N. Velappan, T.K. Bhanu, M.M. Lawrence and M.S. Appukuttan spoke. We have mentioned this episode just to indicate that the 1960s had started witnessing rapid unionisation among workers in the unorganised industry/employments and the above was only just one such attempt. All the Central trade unions had taken interest in this sector.

A meeting of the leaders of the independent trade unions (not having any political affiliation) was held in Kochi under the presidency of S.C.S. Menon in the last week of May 1966. Panampally Govinda Menon inaugurated the meeting. At that time, Panampally was leading the Aluminium Factory Workers' Union. Though he was a congress leader, he was a

supporter of the concept of independent unionism, which had originated in Aluva, which was facing a serious threat to its existence. This meeting was attended by A.A. Kochunny (of the C.T.T.U.), P.K. Sadanandan, J.F. Kurian and K.M. Joseph.

In the first week of February 1967, the public sector undertaking, the Hindustan Machines Tools (HMT) witnessed a strike which started as a mark of sympathy to the workers in the TCC, who were engaged in a strike. But the police alleged the HMT strike to have become violent resulting in a brutal lathi charge. In the stone throwing and the lathi charge eight workers, one Sub Inspector and 3 constables got injured. 700 workers under the RSP led union were on strike when the INTUC workers tried to report for duty leading to some violence. Following the lathi charge, workers in other establishments like the FACT, Chithra Mills, Ashoka Textiles, Chackola Mills, Katha Mills, Indian Rare Earths, D.D.T, Indian Transformers and Ogale Glass Factory struck work³⁸.

The management of the HMT declared a lock out. The workers picketed the officers and blocked their entry into the company. Several workers were arrested for causing obstruction. Conciliation conference was held to resolve the dispute but it failed. The unions expected one month's salary as bonus advance but the management said that only the Board of Directors of the company at Bangalore could take a decision on this. N. Sreekantan Nair, President of the HMT Employees' Union announced that under the above circumstances, the workers could not accept the Management's stand and they would continue the strike until the issue was settled. Babu Kumar, Govindan Nair, Prabhakaran Pottangady and Manikantan supported Sreekantan Nair. The HMT Workers' Congress was affiliated to the INTUC and was led by C.M. Stephen, Ummachan and K.V. Ramachandran. The Workers' Congress also decided to continue the strike.

On October 13, 1967 the unions agreed to a settlement and it was decided to lift the lockout from October 23. The HMT management agreed to pay one month's wages/salary as advance. It also agreed to pay the DA at central rates. The settlement was reached at a tripartite conference held in the presence of the Labour Minister Mathai Manjooran³⁹.

In June 1968, Travancore Rayons at Perumbavur witnessed a lighting strike when the company management refused to grant an eligible leave to a worker. The Employees Union and Employees' Association led the strike. John Manjooran and M.T. Thomas represented the Union and S.C.S. Menon and T.C.N. Menon represented the Association.

6.7.3 The 1970s and 1980s

The CITU held its All India Annual Conference in Ernakulam in the second week of April 1973. B.T. Ranadive, P. Ramamoorthy, N.P. Padmanabhan, K. Chandrasekharan, Father Vadakkan, S. Ramachandran Pillai, E. Balanandan, C. Kannan, K.N. Ravindranath, O. Bharathan, O.J. Joseph, K. Padmanabhan, V. Viswanatha Menon and others participated. The conference lasted five days.

In February 1974, the port workers in Kochi commenced a go-slow agitation and as a result loading and unloading operations in the Port came to a stand still⁴⁰. A.K.K. Nambiar, Chairman of the Dock Labour Board and the Cochin Port Trust took a stern stand and declared a kind of emergency in the Kochi Port. In the history of the Port, for the first time, 26 workers were dismissed. The strike spread to many sections. Since the nation wide Emergency had been declared, the Government didn't want the Port to suffer from a strike. The Kerala Chief Minister called for a conciliation conference in Thiruvananthapuram on February 18. The INTUC declared that it would not participate in the statewide strike being called by various trade unions. At the conference held in the presence of K. Karunakaran, the Home Minister and Vakkom Purushothaman the Labour Minister, a settlement was reached. The unions agreed to stop the notorious evil practice of accepting "*ghost money*" (wages over and above the normal rates for executing work). The situation had reached such a stage in Kochi Port, that no work could be got done without paying this extra *ghost money* to workers and the unions closed their eyes against this unhealthy and unethical practice.

On September 15, 1975, the veteran trade union organizer and top leader of the Communist Party, George Chadayanmury passed away. Starting his career as a teacher, he became a clerk in the Kochi Port from where he turned his attention to organizing trade unions. He worked with P. Kesava Dev, P. Gangadharan and P.S. Namboodiri and in 1939 helped to form Koci Pine Factory Workers' Union. He spent many years in jail as well as in underground. He married Subhadramma Thankachy, sister of Sankaranarayanan Thampi, a revolutionary hailing from the Ennakkat royal family of Chengannur. Chadayanmury organized several unions in Thrissur and particular mention must be made about the Toddy Tappers' Union at Anthikkad. He was an activist of the *Kochi Praja Mandalam* and gradually moved over to the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and finally to the Communist Party. He led the Kochi Harbour Workers' Union, Seetharam Workers' Union, Cochin Port Cargo Workers' Union, KSRT Employees' Union, KSRT Ministerial Employees' Union and unions in Alagappa Textiles

and Cochin Marbles etc. At the time of his death George Chadayanmury was a member of the AITUC General Council and the State Council of the CPI.

On June 23, 1977, the HMT workers commenced an indefinite strike raising nine emergency demands. The strike involved 2500 workers coming under the banner of a record number of 10 trade unions. The next few weeks witnessed a series of agitations all over Kerala including a statewide *bundh* and also a strong struggle by electricity workers pushing the state into virtual darkness for days because of alleged sabotage by striking workers led mainly by E. Balanandan, V.B. Cherian, and K.O. Habib of KSEB Workers' Association. In June 1979, along with other regions of Kerala, Cochin region also participated in the statewide strike to protest against the Central Governments' New Industrial Relations Bill. AITUC, INTUC, CITU, UTUC, STU, KUC, HMS, HMP, and BMS unions were actively involved in this. In April 1980, C.M. Stephen became a Minister in the Union Cabinet and V.P. Marakkar was elected the President of the State Unit of the INTUC. In March 1982, the private bus workers struck work in Cochin and their Federation affiliated to the CITU led it. The AITUC and the INTUC workers did not participate. It was interesting to note the emergence of a strong division in the INTUC, based on the division in the Congress Party into Congress (I) and Congress (A). The strike lasted a few days but at the intervention of the Government, the workers were given some interim relief and they agreed to call off the strike. Very soon the INTUC (S) group also emerged with K.V.K. Panicker of Thrissur as the President. The three factions emerging in the INTUC weakened the trade union movement particularly because each of the groups started forming their own trade unions in the same establishment fighting each other and creating confusion in the minds of the working class.

An Action Committee of trade unions was formed at a meeting held in Ernakulam on August 12, 1984. The Committee had 26 members including C. Kannan, K.N. Ravindranath, O.J. Joseph, and E.G. Bhaskaran Nair and with N. Padmalochanan as Convener. The Committee decided to organize a massive demonstration of one-lakh workers belonging to the traditional industries in Kerala in Thiruvananthapuram. E. Balanandan inaugurated the meeting and C. Kannan presided. V.S. Achuthanandan, Suseela Gopalan, Imbichibava, Puthalath Narayanan, A.P. Kurian, V.B. Cherian and K.K. Chellappan spoke.

On August 13, 1985 a Joint Action Council of Trade Unions announced that it would call for a state-wide general strike from August 20, if the Government failed to bring about an amicable settlement of the strike commenced by government employees and teachers' organizations. The Joint Action Council representing 10 trade unions consisted of S.C.S. Menon, S.

Varadarajan Nair (INTUC), J. Chitharanjan (AITUC), K. Pankajakshan (UTUC), K.N. Ravindranath (CITU), P.K. Sankarankutty (HMS), P.T. Rao (BMS), K.P. Kosalaramadas, M. Bava (KTUC) and K.K. Abu (STU).

The Kerala Electricity Workers' Federation held its fourth State Convention in Ernakulam on May 14, 1985. It announced an indefinite strike, if the Board did not settle the issues raised by the Federation. An Action Council was set up consisting of J. Chitharanjan, K.A. Rajan, M. Sukumara Pillai, K.N. Alikoya, Thomas Mathew and others. Though some of the issues were common to all sections of workers, the other major trade unions in the Electricity Board did not lend support to the Kerala Electricity Workers' Federation. In short, one unique feature of the trade union movement in Cochin region as well as in the rest of the State was the growing inter-union rivalry causing a general weakening of the working class. Division and fragmentation caused by political factors, conflicting ideologies, and personality clashes and leaders' egos became a cardinal feature of the trade union movement in the 1980s.

6.8 THE EDAPPALLY POLICE STATION EPISODE

6.8.1 The Background

The historical narration of trade union movement in the Cochin region would not be complete without the details surrounding the Edappally Police Station Episode of February 1950. Let us first look into the background of the episode. Payyappilly Balan, the communist and literary writer, who played an active role in the episode, has given a detailed account of the major events and also a graphic picture of torture and brutality of the police executed against the hapless political prisoners⁴¹.

On January 26, 1940, the railway workers raised the national tricolour flag in many centres, defying the ban imposed by the British rulers. The railway workers also held marches and several of them were arrested and remanded to custody. When India attained independence, communal riots and refugee influx became a headache for the new government. In many places, railway transportation came to a standstill, particularly in Punjab. When Jawaharlal Nehru made an appeal for help, the South Indian Railway Labour Union led by communists agreed to send 50 volunteers to Punjab to run the railways. But after restoration of normalcy, the Government did not act kindly to the railway workers. It stopped the Grain shops, which used to supply food grains at subsidized rates to the workers. The Railways on their part followed

it up with terminating the services of a large number of running staff including loco drivers and firemen. The Union filed a charter of demands and a strike notice. The Railways and the Government started victimization of leaders. Under the black law, Railway Services (Safeguarding of National Security) Rules of 1949, they decided to wipe out trade union activities. Only after the 1950 Constitution came into operation that the workers got back justice through the intervention of the courts.

6.8.2 Entry of N.K. Madhavan

Edappally, located between Ernakulam and Aluva, was famous for Changampuzha, the great poet. Devankulangara, Chuttupadakkara and Elamakkara in Edappally were Nair Community dominated, while Ponekkara, where the Edappally railway station was situated, had an assortment of communities including a large number of industrial workers and other employees. As early as 1939, State Congress activities were held in Edappally. The veteran socialist, left trade unionist Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair belonged to Edappally. In Palarivattom, near Edappally, George Chadayanmury and his colleague Hindi Pandit Ravi Varma had mobilized bidi workers. Though a large number of workers and staff employed in various companies in Aluva, Kalamassery, Kochi and Wellingdon Islands, and Mattancherry resided in Edappally the communist party could not make a strong presence there. However, a few communist activists and supporters used to assemble there and discuss general issues of interest. But a beginning to establish communist presence in Edappally was first made by N.K. Madhavan in 1943, when the Party from Alappuzha deputed him. He was instrumental in first organising a Bidi Workers' Union at the Edappally Railway Station junction, but it did not survive for long. When R. Sankar was showing allegiance to the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Ezhava youth got furious and they decided to organize an Ezhava Youth Movement under the late Thazhava Kesavan in Edappally. N.K. Madhavan and Krishnankutty organized the Ezahava Youth at Ponekkara. The Ezhava leader of the local SNDP unit Achukutty did not like this. He threatened the youth. Meanwhile, the Punnappra-Vayalar struggle started and the Dewan had set in motion a series of repressive measures. N.K. Madhavan went underground to escape arrest. Though the Government lifted the ban on the communists in 1947, the Party was treated as illegal for some more months. Leaders and activists were hunted out and fundamental rights were denied.

The Police Inspectors posted to the Edappally Station used to be treated as guests of Achukutty. Even the fearsome Nallamuttam Pappu Pillai became a stooge of Achukutty. The communist party workers realized that

unless they exposed Achukutty's misdeeds, they could not survive in Edappally. They printed a leaflet and distributed its copies widely including among the passengers in the trains passing through Edappally Station. Gradually, the Party started building up a cadre of sympathizers and M.A. Aravindakshan and K.A. Krishnan played an important role in this. The former was running a tailoring shop and the latter a barbershop. The tailoring shop was used as a temporary centre for exchange of communications between party workers. Several party shelters were set-up and meetings were held during night. Party workers never came out on the roads during daytime. K.M. Kannan, a time keeping clerk in the FACT used to live near a rich Brahmin landlord's property in Ponekkara. Kannan was an upcoming communist and many party workers found his house a reliable safe shelter. In the chain of shelters in Edappally, meetings of the D.C. Secretariat, trade union fractions, local committees, sympathizers etc., were held. They decided to do all their best to make the railway strike proposed to be held on March 9, 1950 a grand success.

The Aluva Committee's assigned task was to see that no trains were allowed to move between Angamaly to Vaduthala in Ernakulam. Edappally was a small railway station but it was always alive with activity, since it was a shunting centre also handling wagons and employing fairly large number of railway employees. Most of them were living in Ponekkara and other nearby places. The task was to mobilize all of them to participate in the strike. The Party and trade union fraction commenced extensive squad work and on its final day they organized a public meeting at Elamakkara on the side of the railway line. A crowd of 200 attended the meeting and it gave the impression that the people were with the Party.

6.8.3 Capture of N.K. Madhavan

On the night of February 26, 1950 the Aluva Local Committee met at Vattekkunnath to discuss the proposed railway strike on March 9. It was decided that a large meeting of Party members, and sympathizers and trade union workers would be held at Ponekkara. After this meeting, N.K. Madhavan could not reach his shelter safely. Accompanied by Vareethukutty, Madhavan was walking through a cashew growing land near the railway line at Vattekkunnathu, hardly half a mile from the Edappally railway station. Both of them were hungry and famished due to loss of sleep the previous night. At last they decided to take the risk of reaching the teashop run by one, Krishnan, near the railway station to eat something to satisfy their hunger. After they finished their meals, they came out of the teashop. On seeing a worker of Chitra Mills known to him personally, Vareethukutty asked for a small cash

loan. The worker informed him that presently he had no cash with him to spare but if they could wait for some time, he could arrange to send them some money. When Madhavan and Vareethukutty with all trust waited there, 5 police constables reached the spot and caught both of them. Madhavan kept cool but asked Vareethukutty to run away to safety. When Vareethukutty started running, the attention of the police turned in that direction. At this moment N.K. Madhavan started running in the opposite direction. The police constables who pursued him threw stones at him. Finally when Madhavan fell down the police surrounded him. Even then he did his best to battle with the police and at last Madhavan was taken into custody. After he was locked up in the jail, the police let lose a brutal attack on the comrade. When the constables got exhausted, they stopped the brutality declaring that they would restart it later during the night.

Since the Inspector of the Edappally police station was on leave, Head Constable Krishna Pillai was in charge. He had a nickname, Pakki Krishna Pillai or Nadapadi Krishna Pillai. He was an expert in preparing charge sheets against the accused and conducting court proceedings. It was his "brilliance" that led him to register the case of the attack on the police station, which included N.K. Madhavan who was kept in the lock up. But the fact was that it was the work of a few adventurous young communists who attempted to break open the jail to rescue their leader N.K. Madhavan and Madhavan had no role in the incident. The idea was that if Madhavan was not booked for the crime, the accused might produce Madhavan as a prime witness to deny the charges on them. However, Krishna Pillai was kind hearted. If any one gave him a bribe of Rs. 10, he would change it into coins and after taking first $8 \frac{1}{4}$ annas, the balance would be returned. Out of this Pillai would spend 8 annas for lunch and the remaining balance set apart for betel leaves. Pillai did not like his colleagues for indulging in the brutal attack on N.K. Madhavan in the lock up and particularly so because, he was an important political prisoner. He arranged to bring food to be given to both Madhavan and Vareethukutty. After they finished their food, they were put back in the lock up cell. Krishna Pillai himself put up a lock on the cell and kept the keys with him, for he had no faith on the fellow constables.

After the arrest of N.K. Madhavan and Vareethukutty, many stories started circulating. N.K. Madhavan was a pioneer in mobilizing working class in the Aluva region and he had a trusted colleague in K.C. Mathew who was charge sheeted as the first accused in the Edappally police station attack episode. They were leading the Aluva Factory Labour Union, which set up units in Sri Chithra Mills, and Standard Tile and Pottery Works in the 1940s. N.K. Madhavan saw that even before he reached Aluva, there was a union in Sri Chithra Mills led by K.R. Krishnan Kutty and A.K. Mohammed.

Madhavan attended one of these meetings in which along with the president of the meeting, a local lawyer, and another person whom Madhavan could easily identify as the C.I.D. officer from Travancore. Naturally, Madhavan wondered what kind of trade union the workers were having. The meeting commenced with a prayer in honour of the Maharaja (*Vanchisa Mangalam*) and it was followed by reading out a Resolution emphasizing the show of respects and obedience by the workers to the Maharaja. In those days, the minutes of the meetings of the trade unions had to be sent to the police station for scrutiny and approval. It was from these primitive conditions that N.K. Madhavan, through great hardships, built up a strong self-respecting working class in Aluva and instilled in them the Marxist-Leninist ideology and a love for socialism and justice.

During the Punnappra-Vayalar struggle N.K. Madhavan succeeded in opening a second front line in Aluva. He was instrumental in mobilizing coir workers in North Parur and Wadakkekkara. He played an important role in the Paliyam struggle. Considering these qualities of N.K. Madhavan, the party cadres decided that they should do something to get him out of lock-up by any means. But the big question was how to do it?

It was rumoured that due to brutal handling by the police, N.K. Madhavan had little chance of survival and perhaps his colleagues and family members might not get even his dead body. The stories of similar incidents involving the martyrdom of Moyarath Sankaran in Malabar, C.K. Damodaran of Eroor in Ernakulam district, Vaikom Damodaran, Narasimha Iyer of Koothattukulam and others flashed in the minds of the young communists of Edappally and they took a vow that this should not be allowed to happen in the case of their dear leader N.K. Madhavan. The police had a grudge against Madhavan since he had taken an offensive posture and attacked the constables who were trying to capture him.

6.8.4 Plan for Suicide Squad

After serious thought the young communists decided to form a suicide squad for attacking the police lock-up at Edappally Police Station. K.C. Mathew suggested the suicide squad and it was unanimously approved. Usually during night, the police station might have only a few constables and some of them might occasionally fall asleep. The suicide squad needed some weapons when they really marched to the Station and they had to be procured without delay. They gathered a few axes used in households to cut firewood and also a few wooden rods. Some suggested that they should take a few firecrackers. As the scheduled time for the march was fast approaching, many

realized that they had not taken their noon meal and it was too late to have it then. An alternative was to collect some tender coconuts and drink their sweet water.

6.8.5 The Assault

Once the suicide squad started moving towards the Police Station, the members clarified among themselves that being a suicide squad very few among them might return alive. They remembered the martyrdom of Keleth Krishnan in the Karivelloor struggle in which he raised the Red Flag at the top of the MSP camp. Keeping all these in the back of their minds, the volunteers of the suicide squad reached the Edappally Station premises by 2.15 am. They shouted "Attack" and charged forward with K.C. Mathew in the lead. Since N.K. Madhavan, a valuable political prisoner, was put up in the lock up, the police had taken special precautions by installing a higher wattage bulb on the station veranda and a constable was standing on duty with the gun/rifle in his hand. Head Constable Krishna Pillai who was in charge of the station did not allow N.K. Madhavan to be taken for confinement in the Aluva Lock-up and so authorities had sent additional police force to Edappally Station.

As the suicide squad jumped on to the station veranda, sentry constable Mathew who was serving the sentry duty did not fire even though he had a fully loaded rifle with him. If he had fired all the members of the squad would have been killed. What Mathew did on seeing the armed squad was to take a cane and try to alert his colleagues who were sleeping on the station floor. At the same time the squad had reached so close to Mathew that he could not use the rifle to fire, but, instead, he directed the bayonet to stab K.C. Mathew on his chest. In a flash another member of the squad K.U. Das rushed forward and caught hold of the bayonet and he struggled with Mathew, the sentry. In the process the bayonet caused injuries to another volunteer and K.C. Mathew's hand got wounded. The squad members then used the sticks in their hands to attack Mathew and he fell down. Meanwhile constable Velayudhan rushed to the Inspector's room and attempted to use the telephone by one hand and close the door to the room by the other hand. The squad did not attack Velayudhan and they merely cut the telephone wires. At this Velayudhan took a dagger from his trouser pocket and jumped forward to attack the volunteers who had no alternative other than using the sticks liberally to down the constable. In the commotion the majority of constables ran out in fear shouting for help.

The squad had carried some country bombs. One bomb was used but it did not explode partly because it was crude and further there was a small

drizzle of rain. The squad used the axes to cut at the lock and bolt in front of the lock-up door but with no success. The Godrej Lock could withstand the pressure used on it even when rifle butts were used to hit it. The squad had taken a decision that it would leave the station premises after executing their action within a few minutes and run to safety because they knew that a large contingent of armed police was camping at Kalamassery two and half kilometres north of Edappally and there was a big police reserve camp at Ernakulam under the charge of senior level officers and they could reach the spot of action very quickly. If any one of the constables who had run away got an opportunity to inform higher authorities, one could easily imagine the consequences. Therefore the captain of the suicide squad shouted "Return" and all the members after collecting a few rifles from the Edappally police station ran towards darkness.

6.8.6 Arrival of Police reinforcements

One of the constables who ran away was Narayana Panicker. He went to the post office a furlong away from the police station and informed the authorities within minutes of the attack on the station. But the first batch of reinforcements led by the Divisional Inspector Venugopal from Ernakulam reached Edappally only after a full three hours. One of the seriously injured constables died a few minutes before reinforcement reached and another died after reaching hospital. Had the reinforcement reached Edappally quickly, two lives could have been saved. This delay continues to be an unexplained mystery.

Divisional Inspector Venugopal informed his superiors about what happened and also about the death of two constables while performing their duties. Police set out unleashed a chain of repressive measures, raiding houses of suspected communists and their hideouts and arresting dozens in the process. After arresting K.C. Mathew and M.M. Lawrence, they were brought to Ernakulam and paraded through the Broadway, and Shanmughom Road and they were brutally beaten by the police in front of the passers by and once they could not stand in their legs they were dragged through the roads. Payyappilly Balan, who was also arrested, had given a graphic description of police brutality in the jail lock ups⁴². Travancore-Cochin State was then under the Congress Ministry headed by Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai. According to many, in the matter of police repression and lock-up brutality, this ministry was trying to excel that of Sir C.P.'s government. However, the T.K. Ministry did not last long and by early 1951 political vindictiveness against the communists came to an end for the time being. "*Edathu Paksham*" and "*Mazdoor*", publications, brought the details of the lock-up repression

suffered by the communists to the attention of the common man. Casper D'Silva, MLA of Ponjikkara raised the issue of brutality on those accused of the attack on the Edappally police station in the Travancore-Cochin Assembly.

6.8.7 List of Accused

The Communist Party, KSP, RSP and independents that had faith in democracy joined an alliance of left elements to fight the case of the accused in the Edapapally Station episode and set up a Defence Committee with K.G. Narayanan of KSP as the Convener. Government appointed the First Class Magistrate A.A. Diaz, as Special Court and Sasthamangalam Govinda Pillai as the Special Prosecutor and the venue for the Special Court was the building adjacent to the Aluva Palace. Prominent criminal lawyers of Kochi, G. Bhaskara Menon, Kumari P. Janaki Amma and Ambady Narayana Menon and also P. Ramakrishnan Nair, lawyer of Aluva appeared for the defence. When the charge sheet was prepared there were 31 names in the list of the accused. They were: K.C. Mathew, K.U. Das (died in lock up), K.A. Rajan, K.A. Abraham, K.R. Krishnakutty, Balakrishna Pillai (Payyappilly Balan), O. Raghavan, M.A. Aravindakshan, K.A. Krishnan, M. Unni, V.C. Chanjan, K.M. Bava, V.P. Surendran, V.K. Sugunan, N.K. Sridharan, A.V. Joseph (died in lock up), V. Sourimuthu, K.B. George, A.K. Kumaran (Manakkoli), N.A. Kumaran, K.M. Kannan, Dr. K.M. Ayyappan, P.K. Ravindran, Kunjan Bava Kunjumon, T.T. Madhavan, S. Sivasankara Pillai, K.I. Raman, C.N. Krishnan, V. Viswanatha Menon, M.M. Lawrence, P. Vijayakumar, N.K. Madhavan and K.A. Vareethukutty. Of them, only 31 could be produced before the court since two had died in lock-up. With the exception of two constables, all the other police personnel had run out when the suicide squad attacked the police station. But in the first stage of prosecution proceedings itself, the police brought a number of "eye witnesses" from nowhere.

6.8.8 The Court Proceedings

As the prosecution proceedings went on, Advocate G. Bhaskara Menon openly expressed his lack of faith on the impartiality of the judge. The judge, though he could not satisfy himself with the evidence against the accused, ordered the case to be committed to the Sessions Court. Since there was a delay in taking up the case at the District Sessions Court, all the accused excepting M.M. Lawrence and Sourimuthu were sent to Viyyur Central Jail. These two succeeded in getting their names listed as witnesses in a farm

workers' case at Edavanakkad and so they were kept in the Mattancherry lock-up.

In 1952 the proceedings on the Edappally Police Station case were started in the Sessions Court. By that time the Congress had been routed in the general elections and the left controlled United Front had emerged as a major political force. But the Congress minority allied with the Tamil Nadu Congress group from Kanyakumari and formed a coalition government with A.J. John as the Chief Minister. On the request of the defence counsels, the case was shifted from Parur Sessions Court to Ernakulam and the Edappally Station case came to be known as "K.C. Mathew versus the State".

Leading Lawyers like K.G. Kunjikrishna Pillai (former Advocate General of Travancore), K.T. Thomas, M. Bhaskara Menon, G. Bhaskara Menon, Kumari P. Janaki Amma (who later became High Court Judge), T.V. Prabhakaran, and T.C.N. Menon appeared for defence. Sasthamangalam Govinda Pillai continued as the Public Prosecutor. The Sessions Judge was Anna Chandy (who later became the Chief Justice of Kerala). She was kind to the accused, gave them benches to sit in court, allowed friends and colleagues to meet them during periods of intervals and permitted them to procure food from outside during days of session. She also allowed books, newspapers and magazines to be given to the accused. In short, she was treating the accused as human beings, not because she was a pro-communist or a sympathizer. She was impartial in every sense. Prosecution witnesses cut a sad figure when they were cross-examined by the veteran defence counsels. Two or three witnesses fell unconscious in the court during the grilling by defence counsels.

Finally when the case ended, the court sentenced K.C. Mathew, K.A. Abraham, and K.R. Krishnan Kutty for 12 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.500 and another six months if they fail to pay the fine. A.K. Kumaran and N.A. Kumaran got 5 years and Payyappilly Balan, M.A. Aravindakshan, O. Raghavan, K.A. Krishnankutty and K.B. George were sentenced to two years each of rigorous imprisonment. The accused filed an appeal before the High court and there the State pleaded for enhancing the punishment. The High Court dismissed the appeal but converted the sentence to life imprisonment for all. An appeal was filed on their sentence at the Supreme Court where Mohan Kumaramangalam argued the case. The Supreme Court, however, ratified the decision of the High Court.

6.8.9 Release of the Accused

In 1957 the Communist Party was elected to power and the EMS ministry took charge on April 11. Even after six days of assuming office, the

accused in the Edappally Station case were languishing in jail. But on the sixth day, the Jailor, Vasu Menon rushed to the jail lock-up and informed them that the Minister in charge of Jails was visiting the Jail. This raised a ray of happiness in their mind that a minister in the communist government found time to visit them who had formed a suicide squad to get a leading communist escape from the jail a few years ago. V.R. Krishna Iyer, the Minister informed them that the Cabinet's first decision was the release of all political prisoners from jail, but the bureaucracy had delayed the implementation of the order through red tape tactics. He held a meeting with all of them. When he enquired whether any one had any complaint to raise, one of the prisoners drew the attention of Krishna Iyer to the lock and chain on his legs. Krishna Iyer got furious and asked the Warden to bring a blacksmith immediately to cut the Chain and bring relief to the prisoner. Krishna Iyer issued a stern warning to the jail officials against such primitive sadistic practices and told them to stop them forthwith. Thus at last the accused in the Edappally police station case were released.

We mentioned this important episode because some of the activists in this were prominent trade union leaders and they deliberately synthesized the union and working class mobilization and political mobilization to achieve certain pre-determined goals as per their ideological perspective and their vision of human society.

6.9 SOME REMINISCENCES

During our fieldwork, we had met a number of leading trade union activists who showed no hesitation to share their reminiscences with us. Some of them had been very useful to our exercise in documentation of the history of trade union movement. For the Cochin region, the reminiscences of M.A. Kaku who was one of the founders of the Thrissur Labour Brotherhood threw considerable light on the union movement in the Thrissur region. Similarly the reminiscences of T.M. Aboo and A.A. Kochunny coupled with certain articles in Trade Union Souvenirs gave us much information about the developments in Cochin Port and the neighbourhood. The reminiscences of P. Balagangadhara Menon and his writings about his own experience of handling labour law cases also provided us with a large amount of historical source material about trade union movement in the old Cochin State. We have already brought together the major events in the trade union movement at Aluva though our attempt to draw from the reminiscences of S.C.S. Menon and K.N. Gopala Pillai, particularly with regard to the FACT Ltd and the Indian Aluminium Company, which were the two major industrial undertakings in that region. Now we proceed to give a historical narration of

certain developments in the trade union movement in the Cochin State through the reminiscences of M.A. Kaku, T.M. Aboo, A.A. Kochunny and P. Balagangadhara Menon.

6.9.1 M.A. Kaku and Labour Brotherhood

Son of a *peedika thozhilali* (shop worker), M.A.Kaku, after leaving school, started to work in the same line as his father at a *Kuri* company (chit fund). He left school because his father, earning Rs.7.50 a month could not just afford to pay Rs.3 charged as school fees. The family of Kaku lived in the Brother's Line. There was a communal flare-up in Thrissur in 1921, perhaps as a sequel to the arrest of Congress leaders in Malabar, following the Malabar Rebellion. At *Thekkumkadu Maidan* (open ground in front of the Vadakkumnatha Siva Temple in Thrissur) public meetings used to be held. One day Paliath Kunjunni Menon made a speech there that incited the Christian community. There was stone throwing and marches were held by Christians and backward classes. When the marchers passed through in front of a Muslim mosque there was a clash. In 1921 educated Christians and backward classes were not getting jobs in public service and they believed that the Congress could not help them, as it was suspected to be working for safe guarding the interests of the forward community. K.P. Karuppan, the Harijan leader was then campaigning against the evil of untouchability.

As stated elsewhere, the formation of Labour Brotherhood was inspired by the felt need for mutual help among working people. When a young shop worker got ill and died his family had no money even to arrange for his burial. It was decided that this should not happen again. The Labour Brotherhood was formed with 400 members. K.P. Paul (now proprietor of Popular Automobiles), K.J. Francis (of Fashion Fabrics), T.V. Andrews (of Andrews Furniture), T.V. Paul, Vareeth Kadavil and M.A. Kaku used to regularly assemble at *Thekkumkadu Maidan* to spend their evenings and listen to public speeches being delivered in various meetings. Amsi Narayana Pillai used to sing revolutionary nationalist songs and sell books containing literature on British colonialism and imperialism and speeches of national freedom fighters. C. Kuttan Nair and K.R. Viswambharan used to deliver speeches on subjects relating to Mahatma Gandhi and freedom struggle. I. Velayudhan, a Hindi *Pracharak* (propagator), taught the group Hindi and advised them to wear and propagate Khadi. All this attracted the group of young men closer to the Congress. When they formed the Labour Brotherhood they wanted a good leader to guide it. They got in touch with K.K.Warrier, an activist of the Namboodiri *Yogakshema Sabha*. He was running a small khadi store on his return from Malaya. They visited him and attended the Night Study classes

conducted by Warrier. He taught them the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism and impressed upon them that they need to organize workers as a class, instead of looking after their welfare. It was then that the activists of the Labour Brotherhood, all spirited young men, decided to form the *Peedika Thozhilali Union* (shop workers' union). M.A. Kaku, M.A. Francis, O.L. Ittyathi, E.P. Lazar and K.P. Paul were the leaders. The union raised the demand for eight-hour work and minimum wages. Soon other unions like General Workers' Union, Municipal Workers' Union, and Rickshaw Workers' Union were formed.

6.9.1.1 Alagappa Mills Dispute

Kaku remembers that when different wage rates were being given to Malayali and Tamil workers at Alagappa Chettiar's textile mill at Amballur, the aggrieved workers approached the Labour Brotherhood. It was known that Alagappa Chettiar was very close to Shanmughom Shetty, the then Dewan of Cochin State and as such he was a powerful employer. The activists of the Labour Brotherhood agreed to help the mill workers in ending the discrimination in wage payment. They made squad work, talked to the mill workers and enthused them to strike work without fear. The priest in a nearby Church called an *Edavaka* (parish) meeting and sought the help of all faithfuls in bringing relief to the families of striking workers. It was at this time that the great leader and inspirer of the working class, P. Krishna Pillai, arrived on the scene. He brought Ravunni Nair known as Ramani from Coimbatore to speak to the Tamil workers in the mill along with M.A. Kaku and as a result the Tamil workers also joined the strike. The success of Amballur strike inspired the workers in Sitaram Mills to form the Textile Workers' Union.

According to Kaku, the Congress at that time was only a small organization in Thrissur. Meanwhile, the agitation for temple entry for the harijans and backward classes had been started. The Maharaja of Cochin announced administrative reforms and appointed Ambat Sivarama Menon, a minister for that purpose. Two factions of the Congressmen emerged, namely the Cochin Congress led by Panampally Govinda Menon and the State Congress led by T.K. Nair. There was some political instability consequent on the election of Panampally and resignation of K.S. Panicker from Cochin Congress. It was in this context that the *Kochi Praja Mandalam* was established with Neelakanta Iyer as President, Krishnan Ezhuthachan as Secretary and Dhara Singh and M.A. Kaku as Joint Secretaries.

6.9.1.2 Shop Workers' Union

In 1939 the shop workers, engaged in loading and unloading of grain in the Food Supplies Depot, were engaged on contract work and they had to satisfy themselves with whatever was given as wages by the contractors. They approached Kaku for help and a union was formed to negotiate with the contractors. As a result V.T.R. Menon, the Director, Food Supplies agreed to disburse the wages directly to the workers instead of routing it through the contractors. Registered workers would get this benefit and their list was published in the government gazette. When contractors alleged malpractices by workers, the union approached the Registrar of Cooperatives and requested for the formation of Workers' Cooperative. But the union could not mobilize enough money to pay the initial caution deposit. Panampally who held the portfolio of Food Supply suggested that a contractor could acquire the tender for the work and the workers could work for him. This arrangement was acceptable to the workers and the work was carried on that basis.

An accident occurred in a Rice and Oil Mill when a worker fell into the ash pit. The Mill owner did not pay compensation. K.K.Warrier approached Dr. Girija Vallabha Menon, the Superintendent of Ayurvedic Hospital and the injured worker was admitted in the hospital. On the strength of this, Warrier filed a case and secured due compensation to the injured worker.

In 1939 anti-war protest marches and meetings were held in Thrissur. P.M. Thomas, in his speech, questioned the Raja's right to use treasury funds raised from the people. The police at the Thekkumkadu Maidan attacked him soon after he finished his speech. During the war, shortage of grains and essential goods created many hardships to people. An interesting incident occurred during this period. The trade union activists were informed that a bullock cart carrying eleven bags of rice meant for a ration shop had stopped at a private grain shop. That shop had been closed for the night and a few bags had been unloaded there. Union activists immediately reached the spot and kept vigil over the bags until the I.G. of Police Sreenivasa Iyer arrived. On examination, it was found that the load did not carry any official indent and, therefore, the Supply Officer caught the culprits and registered a case. This episode brought greater confidence and faith among the workers on the advantage of worker mobilization and vigilance against injustice, corruption and anti-people activities.

In the Municipal elections, under the system of Diarchy, the trade union activists put up U.D. Kunchetty and Annie Joseph (who later became Annie Thayyil) as their candidates and they won the elections. The Church did not like Christians to become communists or to associate themselves with communists. The Church warned E.R. Lazar and O.K. George that they would be ostracized by it. N.C. Sekhar, K. Damodaran and P. Krishna Pillai, Left

and Congress Socialist Party leaders, made regular visits to Thrissur to assess the mass popular movements, including trade union movement, and, inspire the local activists. P. Krishna Pillai used to tell them that communists were those who transform anti-socials into human beings. Kaku cited the case of *rowdy* Potten Krishnan and Sandhya, a scavenging worker, who got transformed into good communists, and, the latter an able trade union leader.

6.9.1.3 Smallpox in Mala

In 1943 an epidemic of small pox was reported from Mala where four to five people were dying daily. Kaku at that time was a full time trade union worker and he was deputed to Chalakudy. C. Janardhanan, a student leader, rendered great service to the people at Mala. They immediately mobilized a few volunteers, collected medicines from four homeo doctors and ayurveda pills from E.T.M. Vaidyasala and went to Mala to do intensive squad work, visiting every house in the area and distributing medicines and offering nursing service if necessary. Aryan Namboodiri of Kochi *Praja Mandalam* also rendered his help.

6.9.1.4 Noon-feeding in Schools

In the Marthoma School, Thrissur some students used to fall unconscious due to starvation. This opened the eyes of the union activists and due to their timely appeal, I.N. Menon, the Director of Schools arranged for distribution of *Kanji* (rice gruel) in the schools at noon time. The communists were demonstrating that they were the people who could feel the pulse of the poor and the downtrodden. This general impression helped the communists in the municipal elections.

6.9.1.5 Sitaram Mill Dispute

There arose a dispute in the Sitaram Mills and Kaku and his associates felt the need for standardization of work. There was, however, some differences between Kaku and N.C. Sekhar on this issue. K. Karunakaran at that time decided to exploit the situation by forming a rival union whose main job was to supply blacklegs when the communist led union workers went on a strike. Strike and picketing were met with police lathi charge in which one woman worker's legs were broken. The communist led trade union was marginalized, and, soon a large number of workers left it to join Karunakaran's union, which promised them many benefits. But after a short

interval, the communists could revive their trade union, the first one, in the Sitaram Mills.

6.9.1.6 Other Unions

During the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, K.K. Warrier had gone to Alappuzha. When the news that Warrier was feared dead in brutal police lathi charge, the workers of Thrissur took out a protest march. Subramonia Shenoy of Payyannur had been deputed to Thrissur to strengthen the communist party and its allied organizations. Under his direction a full time party worker was fixed for each ward. Kaku was sent to Chalakudy where he organized the Timber Saw Mill Workers' Union. A union for hospital workers was formed in Thrissur Mission Hospital. T.K. Karunakaran organized a Head load Workers' Union. In the early days of trade union movement, its workers, according to Kaku, were self-less and willing to sacrifice everything for the working class. He cited the case of a trade union activist who fell unconscious on account of starvation, even though he had Rs.30 as Party fund in his pocket. He did not want to use that money even to buy a cup of tea.

6.9.2 T.M.Aboo and A.A. Kochunny look back

The reminiscences of T.M. Aboo and A.A. Kochunny throw considerable light into the trade union movement in Kochi in general and the Kochi Port in particular, since both of them had been leading the port workers for well over five decades. They represent two opposing political ideologies, Aboo following the CPI and Kochunny moving closer to the congress.

Son of a Job contractor attached to a Gujarathi trading firm in Mattancherry, T.M. Aboo had his education in T.D. High School and studied only up to E.S.L.C (10th standard). All the members of his family were highly religious and at the same time progressive in outlook. They used to spin on the *Thakli* and *Charkha* (traditional instruments used for spinning and making yarn, both being popularised by Gandhiji) and wore Khadi. During the Bengal Famine, Aboo participated in the activities of a Relief Committee. When Nehru was arrested in 1942 at Kashmir, the daughter of Popat Lal led a protest march in Mattancherry and Aboo participated in it.

He had sat for a test for a job in the Post and Telegraphs and got appointed as a Telephone Operator in its office near Menaka Theatres in Ernakulam. When he discovered that corrupt officials in the office were permitting free telephone calls for some people, he opposed this, but he was taken to task. The Superior Officer charged him with dereliction of duty

accusing him that he had slept during working time. Aboo threw away the job and went to Alappuzha, the hub of trade unions and communists. His resignation letter stated thus: "As I am otherwise engaged, I tender my resignation". Aboo's father passed away in 1945. In the same year Aboo secured Party membership and started to work in the trade union movement. He chose to work for the Cochin Port Cargo Labour Union (CPCLU) and George Chadayanmury who was leading the Union appointed him as Secretary.

6.9.2.1 Aspinwalll Company Strike, 1928

Aboo first came to know about a workers' strike when he was four years old in 1928. This strike in Aspinwalll Company was a spontaneous one. The wage paid for transporting 100 bags of merchandise from Mattancherry to the ship was Rs.3. The company refused to pay the same wage for transporting the same quantity from Kochi to godowns, which was considered by workers as a work similar to the one mentioned earlier. At that time Sha Poppatal Hathi Bai led the Cochin Labour Association (CLA) and Advocate Shenoy was the Secretary. When the CLA celebrated the May Day it was described as anti-British.

One of the earliest issues facing the port workers was the system of *Chaappa* or Tokens that gave the right to work. For grabbing that, most workers had to get ready by 4 am and this forced them to sleep in the verandas of nearby shops. The workers demanded the abolition of the Casual/Contract System in which the stevedores and job contractors had an upper hand in deciding whom they should employ.

The Calcutta Thesis adopted by the Communist Party had created some confusion and some were of the view that they should take up arms. In that context communist led unions were legally banned and many leaders went underground and this helped the growth of the rival union in the Port, the *Cochin Thuramugha Thozhilali Union* (CTTU) led by K.H. Sulaiman, M.K. Raghavan and A.A. Kochunny. The CTTU was also opposed to the *Chaappa* system but through back door they secured the monopoly right to distribute the tokens for work. It created a unique situation when a trade union like the CTTU was given the power to control labour allocation in the port. Workers began to support this thinking that whenever they needed work, their CTTU could give them work forgetting that the total quantum of work available for distribution among them depended on the arrival of ships over which the union had no control. In the absence of a regulating agency like the Port Trust, the Administrative officer M.S. Venkataraman entered into collusion

with the CTTU leaders. When the CTTU took over the distribution rights over tokens, they saw to it that the AITUC affiliated union members were totally kept out from work. Initially the CTTU used the Tri-colour but soon abandoned it for the Red Flag.

Soon there was a division in the CTTU leading to the emergence of two power centres led by Dhara Singh and M.K. Raghavan respectively. Dhara Singh met Abid Ali, the Central leader, and the latter brought a settlement that both Dhara Singh and M.K. Raghavan would share the issue of token according to a pre-determined formula. In September 1953 there was a long strike. There used to be regular clashes between communist and pro-communist workers at the port premises. In one such incident Aboo was rumoured shot dead. T.V. Thomas on hearing this rushed to Kochi but fortunately found Aboo alive. Later Aboo and his associates formed the all-India Port Waterfront Workers' Federation covering a large number of port and dockworkers in the country. When the Port Trust and the Dock Labour Board worked for a few years, a suggestion was made to effect a merger of these agencies. The AITUC union was denied membership in these agencies.

According to T.M. Aboo, now the conditions of work and wages of port workers had improved a lot as compared to that of yester years. Trade unions are more disciplined, though occasional inter-union rivalry emerged disturbing overall peace. The use of ghost money was universal and unofficially this is being treated as a kind of incentive payment. The situation is such that no trade union dared to oppose it. The character of the Port worker had also changed a lot and he had ceased to be committed to ideologies and had least concern for other sections of workers less fortunate than them. Aboo remembers with reverence the great leader P. Krishna Pillai with folded umbrella under his arms briskly going about talking to working class activists and inspiring them. For a short period, P. Krishna Pillai was said to have taught in the T.D. School at Mattancherry. Aboo had also close association with N.C. Sekhar, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, T.V. Thomas, M.N. Govindan Nair and R. Sugathan. Aboo, on looking back, felt that the working class needed a single central trade union centre and for this everyone in the trade union movement should sink their mutual differences and collectively work for protecting class interests and class goals.

6.9.2.2 The CTTU

The CTTU as stated earlier was also opposed to the *Chaappa Token System*⁴³. Besides the hardships to secure tokens, it was found that hardly 10 per cent of the workers got reasonable quantum of work. There were several

Kanganis called *Sranks* (job contractors) who acted as agents of stevedores in effecting the distribution of tokens. Family ties and good contacts, begging, willingness to perform bonded labour, and, muscle power were the essential requisites to get work.

6.9.2.3 Working Conditions in Port

Work usually started when the worker got into the *Machuva* (small boat) to cross the backwaters to reach the ship anchored in the sea and opened the hatch cover called *Palka* to get into Hull. Once inside the hull at about 8 am, the work commenced and went on till 12.30 without break. Not even drinking was provided to the workers. The stevedores supplied cooked rice and *dahl* (a kind of pulses) curry and this had to be taken while sitting on the deck. The food used to be served for about 5 to 6 workers in a single plate or *palmyra thali* (plate made out of palmyra leaves). With the movement and swings of the ship in the sea, some part of the food would fall on the deck and get spoiled. Besides their usual work of loading and unloading merchandise, they were also asked to do menial work on the ship.

In 1948 a boat carrying a gang returning after work from the ship owned by the Scindia Company got sunk in the backwaters and one worker, Kunjamu Mohamed lost his life. After burial, the workers assembled in a nearby place and thought that they should have a trade union to protect their interests. They mobilized Rs.18 and 6 annas and entrusted it with V.A. Hassan. They went to meet K.H. Sulaiman, MLC and sought his help. He agreed to help and asked the workers to set up a Working Committee with K.B. Moideen Sahib as Convener. Boat Workers, *Batha* workers, and loading and unloading workers were the three major categories of workers employed in the Port. A leaflet highlighting the hardships of these workers was circulated with the name of Moideen Sahib.

Ayyotti Bava, Mohammed Ali, Sulaiman, Koyamu Kunhadima, Araman Sranks, and Abdullah Sainuddin were the earliest frontline leaders. Bava Abdul Rahiman was in charge of propaganda using hand held country made megaphones. As a large number of workers evinced keen interest in joining collective organization of workers, a 25 member committee was set up with K.M. Saithu Mohammed (President), Haji Abdul Khader (Secretary), V.M. Hamza, K.A. Koya (Joint Secretaries), Arankutty Abdul Khader (Treasurer) and K.H. Sulaiman MLC, A.A. Kochunny and M.K. Raghavan as advisers.

6.9.2.4 Rival Union

An attempt was made to form a rival union by K.K. Viswanathan who later became Secretary of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. But the workers soon got in touch with K.H. Sulaiman and he advised them to stand united. Thus on December 17, 1948 the first public meeting of the Union was held and Panampally Govinda Menon inaugurated it at the Karippalam Maidan. Chowara Parameswaran was one of the speakers. The leading light of this Union was the Indian National Congress and the leadership of the Kochi *Praja Mandalam*.

6.9.2.5 Issue of Identity Cards

During that period the Police used to question workers for suspected thefts and criminal assaults and harass them. The Union found a remedy for this and issued the members with an identity card. During 1949 the CTTU became weak due to increased repression on it by stevedores. They intimidated workers and workers started discontinuing their union subscription. K.H. Sulaiman found himself helpless at the turn of this. He later left Kochi for higher studies. A.A. Kochunny was running a school and he offered space for the Union to open its office there after classes were off. Kochunny went round and met the workers. With the help of M.K. Raghavan, the activities of the Union were revived and expanded. Soon 26 branches of the CTTU were opened. In 1951 a Charter of Demands was formulated and this was announced at a public meeting held at Ramachaparambu Maidan. Following that, the Cochin Government called a meeting but that failed to reach a settlement.

One day the Police beat up a worker and he got injured. When the CTTU workers took a protest march, the police got furious and many were taken into custody. M.K. Raghavan and K.H. Sulaiman had to go to the police station to get them released. Next day the CTTU staged a demonstration led by C.P. Simon. In the meeting held at the Boat Jetty, a CTTU activist Koya Sahib tore up his congress membership card as a matter of protest against the police of the Congress Ministry.

6.9.2.6 Blacklegs

When workers belonging to the CTTU struck work, the employers tried to bring blacklegs from Alappuzha. V.A. Hamza of the CTTU went to Alappuzha to meet T.A. Raja, President of the *Alappuzha Port Swathanthra Union* but the latter took an unfriendly attitude.

Saithali, a worker was killed when a beam fell on him while working in the ship *S.S. Jayalanka*. Police report was adverse to the diseased and that would deny his family any benefits. Knowing this the Secretary of the CTTU rushed to the ship and tore up the FIR. The employer then agreed to pay the eligible compensation to the family of the diseased.

On another occasion, Balan Menon of DCB Company tried to recruit blacklegs for work. The CTTU then intervened and with the help of P.D. Kuruvila, the Director, Civil Supplies, a settlement was reached. After these incidents, the CTTU began to grow in strength. The CTTU resisted the attempt by Abdul Rahman Kutty Mooppan to organize a rival union of blacklegs. Many Sranks who used to ill treat the workers earlier came forward to join the CTTU. Members of the CTTU were so considerate that they often volunteered to vacate a job and offer it to other less fortunate who were not getting regular work. They also brought greater discipline among the ranks and respect for leadership.

6.9.2.7 The Strike of 1951

On May 19, 1951 ship workers agitated by refusing a new work arrangement called “*double slink kulathu*” work that increased workload unusually high. The agitation succeeded. The CTTU was preparing for a general strike and wanted to take a strike ballot on March 1, 1951. But a few among the leaders did not want to wait for the strike ballot but start the strike immediately. K.H. Sulaiman was totally opposed to this idea but some leaders kept him in total darkness.

However, only on May 29, 1951 that they could commence the strike. Work in 19 ships at the Port came to a standstill. K.H. Sulaiman was elated to find the unity and solidarity among the workers but wanted the CTTU cadres to resort only to peaceful action. The employers tried their level best to purchase the leaders and defeat the strike. Balasundaram, the Regional Labour Commissioner, Madras intervened and held several conferences but failed to bring about a settlement. Government thought of using the police and military to carry on the work at the port. A rumour began to spread that the CTTU was planning to call off the strike and workers obviously got furious saying that the leaders were letting them down. K.H. Sulaiman intervened at the right time to defuse the situation. Workers were asked to work even without any wages for handling work relating to food grains. The Regional Labour commissioner was happy at this gesture of the CTTU. Then the employers said that they could not pay more than Rs.2 as wages but subsequently they agreed to pay Rs.2.50 and a settlement was reached.

The communists were getting unhappy in seeing the rapid growth and popularity of the CTTU in the Kochi Port. T.V. Thomas and K.R. Gowri tried their level best to promote the communist led union in the port affiliated to the AITUC but they could not pull down the image of the CTTU. After the General Strike of 1951, night shift was abolished. The CTTU took up the case of workers employed in Aspinwalll Company who were denied satisfactory conditions of work.

6.9.2.8 Right to allocate work

The CTTU was against adjudication as a method settlement of disputes since it preferred direct negotiation. One major achievement of the CTTU was the acquisition of the right to distribute tokens or allocation of work, which was formerly held by the stevedores. The CTTU believed that the AITUC affiliated unions led by communists like T.M. Aboo and T.V. Thomas only promoted a division among the working class in the Kochi Port. On another side the INTUC also formed a rival union and inter-union rivalry became strong. The CTTU claimed that it was independent and not having any affiliation to any of the Central Trade Unions. In 1954 inter-union rivalry resulted in clashes and police firing in which two workers were killed.

By the mid 1950s work in Kochi Port came under a closed shop system and under it the control over allocation of work among the workers rested with the unions. In 1954 workers were decasualised at the Calcutta Port and it was done in Bombay Port in 1958. But this was implemented in Kochi Port only on November 5, 1962. To facilitate it the Dock Labour Board was set up.

6.9.2.9 All India Federation

The CTTU tried to form an all India Federation of Port Workers in 1954. Today the CTTU leads the All India Dock Workers' Federation and it has well over 2.50 lakh workers. The CTTU was nursed from its infancy by the triumvirate, K.H. Sulaiman, M.K. Raghavan and A.A.Kochunny. Of them, Kochunny was jokingly nicknamed "*Kayamkulam Kochunny*" the illustrious benevolent thief in the history of Travancore who used to rob the rich to help the poor.

On May 1, 1976 the CTTU celebrated its Silver Jubilee and on that day it occupied its Silver Jubilee Building of 7000 sq. ft costing Rs.3 lakhs raised as contribution from its devoted members. In 1977 the CTTU lost recognition and thus membership in the Dock Labour Board. With the entry of CITU union, the scene of inter-union rivalry became more challenging leading to

secret collusions. Following an agitation and picketing before the Dock Labour Board on July 28, 1977, the CTTU did not allow the Board to conduct its meeting for a few months. Finally CTTU was given representation in the Board.

6.9.2.10 Port Staff Association

The Cochin Port Staff Association was affiliated to the INTUC and for a long time Vayalar Ravi led it. The Warf Staff Association was also affiliated to the INTUC. Later many members of these two INTUC unions left their parent organization and joined the CTTU. The Cochin Port Workers' Union had its members who were employed directly by the Port Authority. Later this union merged with the Cochin Port Staff Association.

6.9.2.11 Claims of CTTU

The CTTU had made certain claims regarding its achievements. They included (a) settlement on better piece rates than those given in other ports, (b) Extension of piece rates to Winch drivers, (c) the Dock Labour Board was forced to accept Rigor Charge men as its workers eligible for 60 per cent of the prevailing piece rates, (d) grades were given to Signalmen and they were paid wages higher than that given to Mazdoors, (e) house loans from Welfare Fund at 3 per cent rate of interest.

A.A. Kochunny Master, as he was called, was a teacher in the H.E.H.M.M. School belonging to the S.N.D.P. Yogam. He had close association with both the Indian National Congress and *Praja Mandalam*. Later he contested the elections in the Congress ticket and was elected the Mayor of Kochi. He had also been an MLC in the 1946 Kochin Assembly and in 1971 he became an MLA in the Kerala Assembly.

M.K. Raghavan was a leading Criminal Lawyer. In 1956 he was elected Municipal Councillor from Mattancherry. In 1971 and 1977 he was elected to the Kerala Assembly and became the Minister of Labour.

The Marxists in a clash killed V.A. Hamza, who was the Joint Secretary of the CTTU, on September 23, 1971. He was an inspiring force in the CTTU.

6.9.3 P. Balagangadhara Menon remembers

Being a leading labour law practitioner, P. Balagangadhara Menon had rich experience of the intricacies of a variety of industrial disputes, close observation of major events and stakeholders and leaders involved in them. His narrative throws a deep insight into certain developments in the trade union movement in the State⁴⁴. Here we refer only to those cases relating to the Cochin region.

6.9.3.1 First Adjudication Award, 1945

According to him, the first industrial dispute in the whole of South India that was referred to a court was the one raised by the Petroleum Workers' Union in Ernakulam in 1945. Menon had just started his legal practice at the High Court of Cochin at Ernakulam. Panampally Govinda Menon was a leading figure in the High Court Circles but he was also a President of several important trade unions in Cochin. He combined both these duties exceedingly well.

6.9.3.2 Mine and Oil Workers' Union, 1940

When the Second World War commenced the Cochin Government started taking steps to increase production and employers exploited this situation by increasing workload and reduce wages. The workers of the Burma Shell and Standard Vacuum Oil Companies submitted a memorandum to the British Managers "praying" for the grant of dearness allowance and seeking an audience with him on this matter. Watts and Graham, the managers, turned down the request saying that they would not entertain any collective memorandum but individual workers could make requests. The workers got furious and they decided to collectively organize a union but they did not know how to go about it, while some feared victimization at the hands of the Managements. At this time a worker of Burma Shell, Poorepparambil Joseph offered to hold a meeting at his house courtyard on April 29, 1940. Muniswamy Naidu, another worker of Burma Shell Company chaired the meeting. They decided to form a trade union and call for a bigger meeting of all workers in the Oil installations in Kochi. On May 6, 1940 the first general body meeting of the Mining and Oil Workers' Union was held and Panampally Govinda Menon and P.K. Deewar were elected as the President and the Secretary. On May 23, 1940 the Union got its registration. Panampally used to be described as Kerala's "intellectual demon" (*Budhi Rakshasan*).

6.9.3.3 Bonus Dispute, 1945

In 1945 the Oil Workers' Union launched a struggle on the twin issue of payment of Bonus and reinstatement of 25 Malayali Watchmen who had been retrenched without notice. The management was planning to recruit *gurkha* watchmen in their place. The strikes by workers had been banned under the Defence of India Rules (DIR). But DIR had a provision stating that if the workmen or their unions gave a notice, the dispute could be referred to adjudication. Panampally met, Sir George Bog, the Dewan, in this connection and convinced him. He quickly ordered referring the dispute to adjudication by K.S. Krishnaswamy, the Chief Justice of Cochin. He had retired from Madras high Court and the Cochin government had appointed him the Chief Justice of Cochin. Panampally knew that the Company was being represented by none other than Small, a member of the reputed law firm King and Patridge of Madras and he was to be assisted by Guna Pai, the well known lawyer of Cochin and father of Balachandra Pai, who was one of the greatest lawyers practicing in the Supreme Court. Though Panampally single-handedly argued the case of workers, he wanted P. Balagangadhara Menon and Pavizham Madhavan Nair (wife of K.P. Madhavan Nair) to assist him. This case was the first of its kind in South India and surprised the public that reputed legal luminaries were fighting a court battle on issues relating to workers.

The proceedings took place in the Legislative Assembly Hall (the Law College Building, Ernakulam). Police surrounded the Hall even one hour before and entry was allowed only by passes. Even the lawyers had to use the passes. P.K. Deewar and Chowara Parameswaran also accompanied Panampally. The judge while starting the proceedings fired a basic question at Panampally. When a settlement was in existence, under what law the issue of bonus was being raised. Panampally replied that the said settlement was not between equals and when the workers felt that they could not live with the wages contracted, they had a right to demand bonus as a share in the profits of the employer. All over the world social justice was being recognized as the foundation of labour laws. Panampally ultimately won the case for the workers.

On another occasion while speaking in the Assembly, Panampally pointed his finger at Sir George Bog warning him that if the Cochin Government continued to reject the legitimate rights of workmen, he would destroy the walls of the Assembly Hall. P.K. Deewar was also an inspiring force and a pioneer in the trade union movement in Cochin. He presided over many unions and occasionally when certain actions by unions and colleagues went against the principles held high by him, Deewar had not shown any

hesitation to resign from the unions. When the ‘mistake’ was rectified the workers would request him to come back and guide them. Deewar used to oblige them. He was a principled man and as a result he was acceptable to both congressmen and communists who held him in high respect.

6.9.3.4 Onappudava Dispute

In 1946 there were disputes in both the Burma Shell and Standard Vacuum Companies. One of the issues in dispute was the demand by workers for *Onappudava* (set of dress given during Onam). In their establishments in Madras, the companies used to supply *Pudava* (dress) to its workers during the Pongal festival. The workers in Cochin met the British Managers several times to raise this issue but the latter did not relent. The issue was then taken up by the trade unions and workers began shouting slogans raising the demand for *Onappudava*. When conciliation failed, the Government referred the dispute to labour court for adjudication by District Judge C. Sankara Menon, whose sense of social justice often had irritated the authorities. After hearing both sides, the Judge ordered the companies to give *Onappudava* to workers, as there was no justification for denying the workers in Kochi a benefit similar to the one that the same companies were giving to workers in their Madras establishments during the Pongal festival. In this context, P. Balagangadhara Menon could not resist in making a revered mention about Santhyavu K.K. Krishnan, E.X. John, Michael Asan, K.P. Mathai, “Electric” George, Leon Rodriguez, Narayanan, K.V. Varghese and Narayana Iyer who had rendered self-less service in building up the trade union movement in Kochi and most of them were industrial workers who had lived in abject poverty till the end of their lives. They never made any material gains and never went out seeking position and fame. Special mention should also be made about K.N. Narayana Iyer, an officer of the Standard Vacuum Oil Company in Kochi. He had rendered yeomen service to the union and working class at a time when staff in such companies kept away from workers. On one occasion the workers wanted Narayana Iyer to become the President of their union. Though Mathai Manjooran also contested, Iyer was elected by a majority. For the first time the union had an insider as its President.

6.9.3.5 The Tata Union, 1938

The Tata Oil Mill Workers’ Union (TOMWU) was one of the earliest trade unions of Kochi. It was formed at a meeting of workers held on December 29, 1938 at Thrikkanarvattom Union School. M.A. Paul, an employee of the Company and who had participated in the Vaikom Satyagraha as a volunteer presided over the meeting. Paul had earlier spent

some days as an inmate of the Sabarmati Ashram. His attempt to mobilize the Tata Oil Mill workers resulted in his dismissal from the company. On January 22, 1939 a meeting of the workers was held and it unanimously elected M.A. Paul as the President and P.K. Deewar as Secretary of the Union. At that time Cochin State had a Trade Union Act, but did not have a Labour Department or Labour Commissioner. The Director of Industries was functioning as the Trade Union Registrar. Only after P.K. Deewar succeeded in convincing this Officer that formal registration was granted to the TOMWU. The first anniversary of the Union was held in the premises of the company on January 7, 1940. Sir R.K. Shanmughom Shetty, the then Dewan of Cochin, presided. The main speakers were Dr. A.R. Menon, a member of the Popular Ministry (who also later served as Minister in the first EMS Ministry in Kerala in 1957) and Panampally Govinda Menon and T.K. Nair, members of the Cochin legislature. In those years before India attained independence, such meeting was an epoch making historical event unheard of in any other part of India. The presence of the Dewan boosted the reputation of the Union. Panampally had been elected the President of the Union on January 1, 1940 and he continued his close association with this Union for a number of years.

6.9.3.6 Strike Ballot, 1946

During the period 1940-46, the relationship between the Union and Company management began to deteriorate steadily. When the Union submitted a memorandum of demands in January 1946, the Company did not show any sympathy. When Panampally joined the Popular Ministry in Cochin, he resigned from the Presidentship of the Union. In his place Chowara Parameswaran was elected President. He was a pure Gandhian and a good trusted friend of the working class. His efforts to negotiate a settlement with the Company failed and consequently on November 8, 1946 a strike ballot was taken and a decision was made to launch a strike. At this point the Government intervened and referred the dispute to adjudication, though generally the Company as well as the Union showed a strong preference for direct negotiations. The Company, therefore, initiated negotiations and an amicable settlement was reached in May 1947, which granted an increase in wages, and DA. One of the issues left unresolved was unique and it was related to the reinstatement of one Vadhyar, whose services had been terminated on disciplinary grounds and this issue was left to adjudication. The allegation against Vadhyar was that he had misbehaved when the Mysore Maharaja Jayaramachandra Wodeyar was visiting the Tata Company. The fact was that the Vadhyar had fitted a paper cone on his earlobe to bluff Sebastian, a colleague of his and he had therefore not intended to show disrespect to the Maharaja. Though the Court ratified the Management's action against

Vadhyar, the Company after further negotiations with the Union agreed to reinstate Vadhyar by giving him an alternate job in the Company canteen.

K.V. Gopalan was one of most devoted activists of the TOMWU. He was once prosecuted under the DIR for inciting workers to strike. Gopalan argued before the District Magistrate that he had not committed any crime since the workers had a fundamental right to strike peacefully for the redressal of their grievances. The Magistrate rightly set him free. Gopalan was also an active member of the *Praja Mandalam* while continuing as a worker in the Tata Oil Mill Company (TOMCO).

6.9.3.7 Bonus Dispute at H.P. Company

The Standard Vacuum Oil Company was called the Hindustan Petroleum Company (HPC) in the late 1940s. In this Company the union demanded bonus at 25 per cent of total earnings. The Company rejected the demand outright but agreed to use the services of Howard, the Manager of their Madras unit. Chowara Parameswaran and P.Balagangadhara Menon representing the Union went for the conciliation conference. The Burma Shell Company in Kochi was also not willing to pay bonus to its workers stating that legally they were not bound to pay it, besides it was difficult to determine accurately the operating profits for the Cochin unit separately from the company accounts. Howard was adamant and told the Union representatives that excepting bonus they were free to raise any other demands for his consideration. The Kochi Manager of the Company, Graham conveyed to the Union that their men were wasting time and that the Company would never yield on bonus. The Manager went on to tell Chowara Parameswaran that they could get bonus only if they stepped on to his dead body. At this, Chowara Parameswaran told the Manager that it was better that he got ready for that eventuality. The manager was stunned. The workers went on strike, which lasted for more than a week. Then the government, anticipating shortage of petroleum causing serious hardships, legally banned the strike and referred the bonus dispute to adjudication. The Court decided in favour of the Union and awarded bonus at 20 per cent of total annual wages. The Company immediately disbursed the bonus. The workers thus secured the bonus they demanded and the angry Manager did not lose his life.

6.9.3.8 Madura Company Dispute

The dispute in the Madura Company Boat Yard at Vypeen was also a historic one. Raman Kutty Achan of the Congress was responsible for

mobilizing the workers in this unit and Chowara Parameswaran was elected President and Menon Secretary. McKinnon Mackency, a well-known Managing Agency of 1940s, controlled the Company. The Company did not fear the Cochin Government since the Managers of this Company had close relationship with some Lords of England and the British emperor. One day the management discovered the theft of a piece of iron that could be used in making a sword. An enquiry was conducted and George, a union activist was charged with the crime and he was dismissed. The Union felt that technically what George did was wrong but considering his long association with the Company and past conduct he should be reinstated. Further, George if he really wanted to steal the iron piece, he would never carry that piece openly in front of the watchman. So the Union requested the Management to condone the action of George. But MacGregor, the Manager was adamant. Due to the pressure from the Union, the Labour Minister of Cochin intervened and called a conference at Ram Mohan Palace (presently the seat of the Kerala High Court). This Palace was built specially for accommodating Lord Irwin, the Viceroy of India during his visit to Cochin State.

The conference was scheduled to commence at 3 pm. The manager reached in time. The union representatives, Chowara Parameswaran, Ramankutty Achan and P. Balagangadharan Menon also took their seats before 3 p.m. But the Labour Minister did not reach the Hall even by 3.30 p.m. The British Manager left at 3.30 p.m. instructing one of his officers to inform the Minister. When the Minister finally arrived and was informed about the Manager's exit, the Minister got furious and asked his officers to use the telephone and summon the Manager to reach the Hall without delay. The manager, when contacted, asked the officer to convey to the Minister with all respects the fact that he was attending another urgent meeting at his office and his absence at the Minister's conciliation conference might be excused. As a result of this drama, the dispute on George's reinstatement became a dispute between the Government and the Madura Company. This was an interesting turn in the dispute. The Government decided to refer the dispute to adjudication. The court decreed that the punishment given to George was on the high side and so he should be reinstated. As per the law, an adjudication award could be implemented only after the government issued an order on it. In the George dispute, the Labour Minister called another conference and he was prompt in reaching the venue at the scheduled time. He asked whether the Company had to say anything on the adjudication award. The manager then replied that the Company stood by its earlier stand, but since the court had issued an award, as a law abiding company, it would reinstate George, the accused worker, and back wages would be disbursed to him without delay. Such was the respect to law of the land which the British company manager had openly expressed.

6.9.3.9 Panamkulam-Karuvannur Tile Sector

During the second half of 1940, a number of Tile factories were established in Karuvannur-Ollur-Thrissur region and erstwhile tile workers who could mobilize the seed money for them started them. Invariably the tile factory owners took an anti-labour attitude and did not like trade unions. Puthur Achutha Menon and P.S. Namboodiri were responsible for mobilizing tile workers. While Menon concentrated his attention in Karuvannur, Namboodiri confined himself to the Ollur region. The Panamkulam-Karuvannur Tile Workers' Union was one of the strongest unions and it was led by Puthur Achutha Menon as President and Kuttan as Secretary. Kuttan was revered by the workers as he was a self-less union activist. The Union submitted a charter of demands on wage increase and bonus. Though the factory owners showed readiness to attend a conciliation conference, they did not agree to a settlement. The Union then launched a strike that affected almost all tile factories in the area. The Cochin Government also initiated a conciliation conference and when it failed the dispute was referred to adjudication. The Award was in favour of the Union, but the employers refused to implement it. They filed a suit in the Munsif Court questioning the legality of the Award and obtained a stay order. Following this, they locked out all their factories pushing the workers into great misery.

The developments forced the Cochin Government to refer the Award for reconsideration and for this the Trade Disputes Act was amended to provide for the establishment of an Appeal Court, the first time in India. The Appeal Court had three members, a Brahmin, a Syrian Christian and a Nair. The Brahmin was the Chief Justice of the Cochin High Court and he acted as the Chief Presiding Officer of the Appeal Court. The Court met at the Legislative Assembly Hall and made a few substantial changes in the original Award. The Award had fixed the minimum wage of a tile worker as 12 annas but the Appeal Court reduced it to 7 annas 7 paisa for Male, 5 annas 1 paisa for women and 3 anna 10 paisa for children and adolescents.

There were interesting developments during the proceedings before the Appeal Court. Questions were raised about the methodology of fixing minimum wages and D.A. The Court then directed two Economics Professors from St. Thomas College, Thrissur and Maharajas College, Ernakulam to conduct a Family Budget Survey and submit a report. The Union found it useful and they used this report to argue the eligibility of workers to get a higher wage. The employers countered this view by highlighting their poor capacity to pay. P. Balagangadhara Menon, representing the Union, argued that in preparing the family budget, expenditure on liquor should also be taken into account as revealed in the survey conducted by the Economics

Professors. The Presiding Officer of the Appeal Court being a Brahmin could not accept this idea. But the Syrian Christian member of the Appeal Court came to the help of Balagangadhara Menon. He told his Chief that liquor/toddy had nutritional value and expenditure on it should be included in total family expenditure being estimated for wage determination. Though finally the Appeal Court agreed to it, it awarded only lower wages than that given by the original award. The employers decided to lift the lockout and workers, though a bit disappointed at receiving lower wages, remained happy in finding that they got back their employment and daily bread. But the union leader, Kuttan, was a disappointed man and workers in the region soon forgot this self-less union activist.

6.9.3.10 Iyyappan Mills Dispute

Inchedy Iyyappan had risen from the position of a low paid worker to become the owner of a large Copra Crushing Oil Mill in Thrissur. His Iyyappan Mills also produced soaps using coconut oil. He was also a director of the famous *Dharmodayam Kuri* (Chit) Company. He used to extend financial help to hospitals and social welfare activities and earned the reputation as a generous and kind person. But Iyyappan was anti-labour and did not like when a union was formed in his Mill. He announced the closure of his Mill saying that he was not interested in running it any more. In such cases the government could normally do nothing. The workers marched in protest and shouted slogans against Iyyappan and demanding his prosecution for illegally closing the Mill.

Fortunately, at that time Panampally Govinda Menon was the Labour Minister of Cochin. When informed about the closure of the Mill, he personally came down to Thrissur and visited the Mill where at the entrance the employer had posted the Notice of closure. In spite of Panampally's intervention, Iyyappan refused to reopen the mill. At this the Government had no option but refer the dispute to adjudication. As the employer was unwilling to run the Mill, and there was no law to force him to run it, the Court decided that it suspected some kind of victimization since it felt that the closure was a sequel to the formation of a trade union. As such its Award directed the employer to pay retrenchment compensation to workers. It was interesting to note that this Award came many years before the amendment to the Industrial Disputes Act made in 1953 giving the right of workmen to claim retrenchment compensation when a factory or establishment get closed.

With the issue of the Award, Iyyappan was forced to give retrenchment compensation, but he reopened the Mill only after recruiting a new set of

workers in the place of the old. But soon even the new set of workers formed a union, which prompted Iyyappan to close down the Mill once again. The dispute was again referred to adjudication. When the award came, the integration of Travancore and Cochin States had been effected. This enabled Iyyappan enough time to file a writ appeal in the Travancore-Cochin High Court against the Award. The writ appeal came up before a two judge bench. At the beginning of the proceedings, both judges openly asked the employer's lawyer whether there was victimization behind the closure of the Mill. The judges had revealed their mind and they advised both parties to come to a negotiated settlement and avoid further litigation. Balagangadhara Menon, appearing for the Union agreed to the advice while the employer's lawyer was reluctant to give even a promise to consider the advice of the judges. One of the Judges went even to the extent of pressing the employer's lawyer to rethink saying that if the court decided the case against the employer, it would order payment of court expenses to the trade union. The lawyer consulted Iyyappan who was present in the Court and he enquired with the lawyer how much money could be found to pay court expenses to the Union. The lawyer told Iyyappan that it would come to Rs.500. Then Iyyappan directed his lawyer to continue the case. The Judges heard the conversation between Iyyappan and his lawyer and they felt that conciliation was not possible. The Court declared its helplessness under the prevailing laws, which contained no provision to force an unwilling employer to reopen his establishment for the benefit of the workers and the society at large.

Iyyappan thus won the case and his Mill remained closed forever, though the dream Mill he had built up over years of hard toil got destroyed and he had lost lakhs of rupees on this adventure. Though he became a great hero among the employers in the Cochin State, his anti-labour stand resulted in a big loss to the people of the State.

6.9.3.11 Trouble in Chalakkudy Potteries

Sir. T. Vijayaraghavachari, the Dewan of Cochin was responsible for laying the foundations for the Pottery industry in the state. In the first phase, the state owned the Chalakkudy Potteries, one of the first of its kind in South India for the manufacture of ceramic cups, saucers and jars. Later the Government decided to lease out the factory to private parties. Initially no one succeeded in this venture. But Sundaram, the legal adviser of Chalakkudy Potteries who hailed from Madras, volunteered to take the Company on lease. He invested some funds in it, but soon he fell into trouble. Being kind hearted, he had given all the benefits demanded by his workers. The Company confronted a big financial crisis on account of this. The market demand for

pottery products went down. The technology used by the Company was old and consequently the cost of production was high compared to that of competing companies. On second thought, realizing the gravity of the problem, Sundaram started withdrawing some of the benefits given to the workers.

The Workers' Union decided to resist this move by the employer. The workers started picketing at the factory gates and conducted Satyagraha. The dispute was referred to adjudication. The Award was in favour of the Union and it directed the employer to restore all the original benefits given to the workers. At this the employer filed an appeal before the Cochin Labour Appellate Tribunal. The Appellate Tribunal ratified the original Award and refused to make any change in it. By this time Sundaram, the employer, had become totally bankrupt. He informed the Government that he could no longer continue to run the Chalakkudy Potteries. He handed over the Company to the Government and left for his homeland.

Iyyappan and Sundaram were two extreme cases. The former was anti-labour and to deny legitimate benefits to workers, he had closed down his oil mill thereby pushing many workers into utter misery and destitution. The latter being pro-labour offered more benefits than what was demanded by the workers and in the process created a financial crisis forcing him to abandon the Company. In short, the contrasting attitudes of both were not suitable for the industrialization of the State. These episodes continue to reappear in new forms even to the present day. Those who are engaged in investigating the true causes for industrial backwardness of Kerala would find the above cases of Iyyappan and Sundaram very interesting.

P. Balagangadhara Menon pointed out an incident that occurred in the USA during the Great Depression in the 1930s. At that time a number of garment factories there had been closed down due to decline in demand and also due to a financial crisis. As there was no immediate remedy, the workers rose to the occasion to help the companies by offering loans drawn from the Union Funds. The companies thanked the unions and took the funds to revive the companies and workers got back their jobs. But unfortunately the trade unions in India were not so resourceful as the American unions and as such even today the Indian trade unions could not think of taking a similar step.

6.9.3.12 Anamalai Timber Trust

Chalakkudy was well known for timber yards. E. John Kuruvila, a reputed industrialist of Travancore, had started the Anamalai Timber Trust. The workers in this unit began to join a union led by Puthur Achutha Menon,

and A.V. Menon. A.V. Menon was also working as the correspondent for the newspaper, *Express* and he acted as the Secretary of the Timber Workers' Union. When the dispute on wages and bonus could not be settled through direct negotiations, the Cochin Government referred the dispute to adjudication. While the adjudication proceedings were going on the Company terminated the services of a worker. The Union raised this issue before the court and requested that the worker be reinstated with back wages. The court issued an Award in favour of the Union. Naturally the Company went on appeal to the Madras Labour Appellate Tribunal. When the union received the Notice from the Appellate Tribunal to appear before it, A.V. Menon was upset since there was not enough money with the Union to send somebody to Madras to argue its case. On his request, Balagangadhara Menon agreed to accompany A.V. Menon to go over to Madras.

The case was argued but the Appellate Tribunal dismissed the Award of the lower Court saying that the company's action did not in violate the law. It was in this Anamalai Timber Trust case that an authoritative interpretation of Section 33 of the Industrial Disputes Act was made available. On his return, A.V. Menon was removed from the post of Secretary of the Union. This was the reward that his workers, whom he had mobilized, had given to him. He died of tuberculosis as an unsung forgotten hero.

6.9.3.13 Conciliation Board, 1947

Following an industrial dispute in the tile industry in the Manali-Pudukkad region, the Cochin Government constituted a Conciliation Board by issuing an order on June 13, 1947. Bonus and union recognition were the two main disputed issues. The Conciliation Board had M.K. Devassy, the State Labour Commissioner as the Chairman, C.A. Ouseph, a leading lawyer of Thrissur, P.K. Deewar the labour leader and Devaraja Iyer, owner of Kalyanam Tile Works were the other members of the Board. The Board had a tile worker as a member but on his resignation Government nominated another leader P.S. Namoodiri in his place. P. Balagangadhara Menon represented labour to present the views of the Union. It was alleged that the tile worker who had been originally nominated to the Board left the place and went into hiding under the pressure of factory owners. On the whole, the Chairman of the Board was always just and had a soft corner for labour. In spite of this, the decisions of the Board were not in favour of the workers, mainly due to the non-cooperation and misunderstanding between the labour nominees in the Board. This was most unfortunate.

6.9.3.14 Vellanikkara and Thattil Estate Dispute

Reference had been made earlier about the Thattil Estate Union led by K. Karunakaran and the success it achieved in getting the Plantations recognized as an industry under the Industrial Disputes Act. P. Balagangadhara Menon in his reminiscences had given some more details about this. Thattil Kochu Vareed, a rich citizen of Thrissur, owned the Estate in question and like Inchedy Iyyappan mentioned earlier, Vareed was a philanthropist. He was also a member of the Cochin Legislature and as such wielded much influence in the government. No one in Thrissur, dared to question trade union workers of his Rubber estate. But unlike in other areas where communists holding the red flag formed the unions, in the Thattil Estate it was K. Karunakaran who mobilized the estate workers under the tri colour. His union was the Vellanikkara and Thattil Estate Labour Congress (VTELC). Balan was the Union Secretary and Balagangadhara Menon was engaged as the Unions' legal adviser. In a sense, Menon was acceptable to both communist and congress unions because being a professional and a sympathizer of labour, he could always highlight the cause of labour and interpret the labour laws in favour of the working class.

As soon as the Labour Congress started to function, the management terminated the services of Balan its Secretary. The workers took out a march in Thrissur because it was a clear victimization. Since the management did not show sense, the Labour Congress launched a strike. The owner of the Estate, Vareed declared that under no circumstances, Balan would be reinstated, and if he were forced to reinstate him, he would close the estate, cut down all the rubber trees and plant wild timber trees there. The strike went on for days and finally on February 24, 1950 the Government referred the dispute to adjudication. On November 17, 1950 the Court gave its Award stating that estates/plantations did not come under the purview of "Industry" as defined in the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947.

By the time the Award was declared, a Labour Appellate Tribunal had been set up in Bombay. Balagangadhara Menon was directed to file an appeal before it. As a result of political integration the States of Travancore and Cochin had merged and Panampally Govinda Menon had taken over as the Labour Minister of Travancore-Cochin State. K. Karunakaran and Menon met Panampally and appraised him about the background of the dispute. Panampally held the view that the Government should be neutral and could not interfere in the due process of law. But Karunakaran argued that this was a fit case for the Government to take a position based on justice and it should depose the Advocate General after making the State as a party to the dispute. Panampally finally agreed and directed the Advocate General to represent the T.C. State in the Labour Appellate Tribunal. The Tribunal after hearing both sides gave an Award favouring the workers. Estates/Plantations thus

came under the definition of “Industry” in the Industrial Disputes Act for the first time in India.

After the Award, the management reinstated Balan with back wages. At a public meeting in front of the Estate, K. Karunakaran made a historic speech. He declared that the workers had won their case and rubber trees had been protected, for the employer could not act as he had proclaimed when the dispute arose. If the workers stood together and fought for a right cause no employer could misbehave. At the end, he added, that even without holding a Red Flag, he could prove himself a true nationalist. This was Karunakaran’s inimitable dig at the communists who used to circulate the view among the working class that Karunakaran was a blackleg and always stood to support capitalists.

6.9.3.15 The Azhikode Revolt

Azhikode, near Kodungallur (Crangannur) in the Cochin State had a big landlord, Khan Sahib Alikunju Sabib, a devotee of the Raja. The Azhikode revolt was a sequel to a misunderstanding created in his mind. The events that led to this revolt were as follows: Jawaharlal Nehru broke the prohibitory order and had entered Kashmir. The Kashmir Dewan Ramachandra Kak was a notorious ruler who was determined to crush the Congress. He ordered force to be used against Nehru but luckily the latter escaped unhurt. All over India people took out protest marches. Students left classes and workers struck work. In Cochin the *Praja Mandalam* workers took out marches and at Azhikode their activists were beaten up by street goondas.

The *Praja Mandalam* activists decided to hold a meeting to condemn the attack. They had chosen the Kodungallur Kavu maidan for the venue and a big march of farm workers was taken out led by Elamthattil Gopala Menon, a *Praja Mandalam* activist. When the march was passing in front of Ali Kunju Sahib’s house, a set of goondas from the compound of the house began attacking the marchers with lethal weapons. It was alleged that the marchers had shouted anti-Raja slogans and being a devotee of the Raja, Alikunju Sahib could not bear it. Many marchers got injured in the attack. People thought that this attack was pre-planned and was carried out with the knowledge of the Police. The *Praja Mandalam* appealed to the Government seeking stern punishment to the real culprits. But though the case was investigated, no charges were registered.

At that time Cochin was just granting responsible government and in the first general elections the *Praja Mandalam* candidates were elected securing an absolute majority in the legislature. The new popular ministry

ordered the Dewan Sir George Bog to conduct an impartial enquiry into the Azhikode revolt. Unfortunately the popular ministry did not possess full-fledged freedom to function since the so-called responsible government was subject to the sovereignty of the Raja. Under the arrangement, the Dewan continued to be in charge of Law and Order. Being a British civilian officer, Sir George Bog was a true democrat and he accepted the viewpoints of the *Praja Mandalam* and ordered the setting up of a Special Court with K.A. Paulose as Chairman.

Khan Sahib engaged two reputed Cochin lawyers to represent him at the Special Court. *Praja Mandalam* directed Gopala Menon to file affidavits stating the details of the case. Balagangadhara Menon was engaged to represent the *Praja Mandalam* and argue its case. In this case the first accused was Khan Sahib himself and the second accused was his friend K.C. Mohamed Sahib, another big landlord of Kodungallur. As the case hearings went on, one by one all those representing *Praja Mandalam* as witnesses disappeared leaving Gopala Menon and Balagangadhara Menon to continue the legal battle. Though charge sheet was issued to Khan Sahib, the final judgement declared him innocent and left him free. Later it was reported that some people had misled Khan Sahib in causing this trouble. One important dimension of Azhikode revolt was the involvement of farm workers in a political struggle, again for the first time in the Cochin State. Balagangadhara Menon had pointed out that most public enquiries conducted to bring to book the real culprits did not serve its purpose since the involvement of the affected in the exercise became just minimal. The enquiries thus became a farce.

Menon cited another public enquiry episode in which the centre of focus was the toddy tappers of Anthikkad. In the 1940s, the police officers used to accept bribes from employers and shop contractors and at the suggestion of their benefactors, they used to register false criminal charges and harass members of the working class. A few such incidents were raised in the form of a memorandum by the toddy tappers' union and peoples' representatives raised this as a serious issue in the legislature. The Cochin Government then set up a Vigilance Commission under the Chief Justice, K.S. Krishnaswamy Iyer to enquire into corruption charges against police and other government officials. Balagangadhara Menon represented the workers. During the proceedings before the Commission, Menon found that the workers and union activists who had raised specific incidents of corruption had started backing out one by one thereby weakening the case. It is unfortunate, that even after six decades, this trend had not shown any improvement. The unions are still docile and cause considerable irreparable damage to workers' basic interests of self-protection against injustice.

6.9.3.16 Coir Factory Dispute in Fort Kochi

During the 1940s, British Companies had a virtual monopoly over the coir factories in Alappuzha and Fort Kochi. Fort Kochi was then under the direct control of the British government. The conditions of work and wages of workers in the coir factories in Fort Kochi were deplorable with long hours of work, low wages, and unhygienic factory conditions. The bulk of work force constituted women. Those who resented were dismissed. Most workers looked famished due to malnutrition and under nutrition and were anaemic. George Xavier, a young spirited and devoted Catholic Christian was a Congress activist and after his prayers in the Church he used to make regular visits to the coir factory centre and interact with the workers about their sad plight. Xavier was also running a small candle-making unit and with the small amount of earnings from this, he used to spend for the welfare of coir factory workers. Soon Xavier became a trade union leader.

Even before George Xavier came on the scene there was a trade union among Fort Kochi coir factory workers under the leadership of the Communists. Both the employers and the British government saw to it that the communist union did not become active. Anyone who tried to mobilize workers would be branded a communist in those days. But when George Xavier, a devout Roman Catholic came forward to unionise the workers the companies could not adopt the same posture as they had taken towards the communists. Soon the National Coir Factory Workers' Union of Xavier became popular and it became bold enough to submit a charter of demands to the company managements. The Madras Government then decided to refer the issue to adjudication along with similar disputes from the Coir factories in British controlled Malabar. Xavier's union had raised 24 demands relating to 14 companies but finally the dispute was confined to 5 companies, Volkart Brothers, Aspinwall, Pierce Leslie, William Goodacre and Bombay Company. The dispute arising in a coir factory at Badagara was settled before the reference to adjudication. Nobody came forward to represent workers from the coir factories in Kozhikode. The Presiding Officer of the Labour Court, Krishna Rao, however visited Kozhikode factories and was convinced about the conditions of work and wages.

The Court was functioning from Coimbatore. George Xavier wanted P. Balagangadhara Menon to assist him as Vice President of his National Coir Factory Workers Union. In that capacity Menon argued the case of the Union before the Labour Court. The managements of the companies told the Court that all their workers were casual workers as the coir industry itself was seasonal and as such they were not liable to observe the requirements prescribed in the Factories Act. During the field visits to the coir factories in

Fort Kochi the judge had first hand observation about the conditions of crèches and toilets in Volkart and Pierce-Leslie companies. The Managers accompanying the judge promised on the spot that they would immediately improve their conditions. The intervention by the Court had its effect.

The Court awarded an increase in wages at 12.5 per cent at Fort Kochi and 8.5 per cent at Kozhikode. The DA was fixed as 75 percent of wages. Besides, the workers were also awarded Bonus at the rate of 2 months' wages for the period 1945-48. This Award of the Labour Court of Coimbatore brought significant improvement in the conditions of work and wages for coir factory workers in Fort Kochi and Malabar. Most of the women workers utilized the increase in their emoluments to buy gold bangles and ear studs and started wearing them when they came to work and there was considerable amount of happiness on their face.

6.9.3.17 White Collar Unions

The conditions of work and wages of white-collar employees in companies were not much better than those of blue-collar workers. The white-collar work force consisted of clerks, peons, and others who worked for monthly salaries. They did not possess job security since the managements could terminate their services at any time they liked. The attire of white-collar employees was funny as it was half European and half native. They wore coat and tie over dhoti. A majority of the employees were Brahmins and upper caste Hindus and a few Christians. They spoke English and were friendly to their managers. Some European managers even after their retirement and after going back to Europe used to remember their white collar subordinates and send them gifts during X'mas and New Year.

In 1946 two organizations of white-collar employees came into being. They were the Mercantile Employees' Association of Kozhikode and the Commercial Employees' Association of Cochin. Of this, the former was affiliated to the INTUC and had branches in Mysore, Madras and Kerala later. The Cochin Commercial Employees' Association had K.J. Herschel as the founder President. This Association did not go for affiliation with any central unions. C.C. Nair, the idealist and true Gandhian used to wear Khadi when he went to work at the office of the Madura Company. He sacrificed his opportunities for promotion in service since he wanted to build up the Association. He had to retire as a clerk, the job that he held at entry. Another notable unionist was Krishnamoorthy of Volkart Brothers. He used to be assisted by Ramaswamy and P.J. Joseph of Pierce Leslie Company in developing the activities of the Association.

Once the Association succeeded in admitting a fairly large number of employees, its leaders prepared a charter of demands and submitted it to the managements of 19 companies. But the managements refused to call a conference since they, being mostly Europeans, did not want to sit at the conference table with their own employees, which was below their dignity. The issue came up before the Kozhikode District Labour Officer for conciliation. He could not bring about a settlement. By that time India had become independent and this brought about a positive change in the attitude of the companies. They agreed to talk to the Association representatives. The Labour Commissioner of Madras visited Fort Kochi on February 24, 1948 and convened a conference and he suggested, after hearing both sides, that since the demands of the Association were genuine, it would be advisable that they were settled through mutual negotiations. But the European managers did not accept this view. Failing the conciliation efforts, the Madras Government referred the dispute to the Coimbatore Industrial Court on May 15, 1948. On October 8, 1948 the Court issued an Interim Award and on March 8, 1950 the final award was given. The Award for the first time fixed the terms and conditions of work and wages of salaried employees in the coir factories.

The Court had fixed the minimum salary of a clerk at Rs.40, watchman at Rs.20 and Cleaner at Rs.16. It also awarded a special allowance for those who were working in the company offices located in Wellington Islands. In the early years after Sir Robert Bristo, the British engineer, created the Wellington Islands, there were no buildings in the Island excepting the Kochi Harbour Office and the Malabar Hotel. Subsequently government as well as many companies started building their offices in the Island. The Island did not have any transport or hotel/lodging facilities. The Court considered this when it awarded the special Islands Allowance to the employees in offices located there.

In the conduct of proceedings on the dispute, Balagangadhara Menon highlighted the involvement of Ramaswamy and Joseph of Pierce Leslie Company and Krishnamoorthy of Volkart Brothers. All the three of them were the main pillars of the Association. Among the three, Krishnamoorthy worked day in and day out in the narrow corridors of the Arya Bhavan hotel in Kozhikode to type out various documents required to be submitted to the Coimbatore Industrial Court in time. As usual, the Commercial Employees of Cochin and Kozhikode soon forgot the services of this great trade unionist.

6.9.3.18 A complex dispute in TOMCO, 1951

After independence, the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 was extended to all states in the country. There were companies which had branches all over the country and some of the awards given by labour courts and tribunals in various states were found to be mutually conflicting and this caused considerable confusion to such companies as well as trade unions. There was, therefore, a demand for some coordination and unification. The INTUC in particular was the first to take up the issue. Due to the pressure from the INTUC, the Central Government set up a Labour Appellate Tribunal (LAT) with its headquarters in Bombay. The LAT used to hear cases in Allahabad, Calcutta and other cities. Senior High Court Judges who had retired were posted in the LAT.

In 1951 there arose a dispute in the Tata Oil Mill Company (TOMCO) when it decided to terminate the services of 45 monthly paid staff with long years of service saying that the finances of the company could not afford their continued employment. But the Tata Company Staff Association (TCSA) questioned this view. Though several rounds of negotiations were held to reach a settlement, the dispute remained unresolved. The Government of Travancore-Cochin then referred the dispute to adjudication by the Ernakulam Industrial Court.

The TCSA was celebrating its Silver Jubilee on November 14, 1976 and on that occasion K.M.K. Mohammed, the Convener of the Reception Committee made a speech in which he highlighted the details of the old dispute cited above. The 45 members of the staff were served with notices of termination of service on October 20, 1951. At that time the Association was in its infancy. The staff approached the Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union (TOMWU) for help but the latter did not show any interest. The staff then went to Panampally Govinda Menon's house. Panampally consulted labour law practitioner and a friend and well-wisher of labour, P. Balagagadha Menon and they decided that the matter should be brought to the attention of the Government. On October 19, K.M.K. Mohammed, P.A. Parameswaran, A.V. Viswanathan, P.K. Prabhakaran and K. Raman Menon were deputed to go to Thiruvananthapuram. There, accompanied by Chowara Parameswaran, they met P.K. Krishnankutty Menon, the Labour Minister in the morning at 7 and submitted a detailed memorandum. Immediately, the minister referred the matter to P.N. Krishna Pillai, the then Labour Commissioner. At 8.30 am Pillai contacted K.P. Rao, Manager of TOMCO on the telephone. At that time the Notices of Termination of 45 staff and the money for paying salary to them till that day were actually lying on Rao's office table. P.N. Krishna Pillai made himself unequivocally clear to inform K.P. Rao about the views of the Government on the matter and requested him to desist from issuing the termination notices. Rao had no alternative and staff had won a struggle. In no

time the staff decided that they should have a separate Association and unanimously elected Panampally Govinda Menon as their President.

When C. Kesavan became the Chief Minister in the Travancor-Cochin State, a conciliation conference was held. The company argued that it had the right to decide how many staff that they should employ. Panampally was representing the Staff in the Conference. On hearing the views of the management, C. Kesavan emphatically told them that though they had that right, the Government could not allow them to misuse it. If the management did not change their views, then the Government would be forced to intervene in the dispute. Ultimately the Government had to refer the dispute to adjudication by the Ernakulam Industrial Court. The Court gave an Award in favour of the Staff. This prompted the Company to file an appeal in the Labour Appellate Tribunal (LAT) and it gave an Award striking down the Award of the lower court and made it clear that the company had the right to decide how many staff they should employ. When this Award came, Panampally had become a member of the Travancor-Cochin State Assembly. After looking into the provisions of the law, to help the staff from the threat of termination of the services, the leaders discovered one option. According to it, under Section 15 of the Industrial Disputes Act, the Government could reject the Award of the Appellate Tribunal and legally ban the termination of services of the staff. Could the executive resort to such a drastic step? Would not the Government be criticized for sacrificing the principle of neutrality, particularly when Panampally himself was continuing as the President of the Association, which is a party to the dispute. The Association pressed the Government to intervene and use its discretionary powers. Sensing the implications, the Employers' Association also submitted a memorandum to the Government pointing out that it was unethical for the State to interfere with the due process of law and reverse an Award issued by the Court. But the Chief Minister, after exhaustive consultations on legal points, came to the conclusion that the Government had a moral duty to protect the interests of the Staff. On December 22, 1952 the Government issued a Gazette Extra Ordinary stating that under Section 15 of the Industrial Disputes Act, it had decided to reject the Award of the LAT. In the Notification, the views expressed on this Section 15 by Jagajivan Ram who had piloted the Bill in the Parliament were extensively quoted in support of the government decision.

In 1943, the Government of Cochin had notified the TOMCO under the Essential Services Act and in spite of this as well as availability of jobs, the action by the company to go ahead with termination of the services of staff could not be approved. The Government Order also stated clearly that it could not but bring to the attention of the company the valuable services rendered by the company to help it make substantial profit earlier. The strong stand

taken by the Government discouraged the Company to go for appeal or a direct confrontation with it. Sense prevailed upon them and they retained the staff and did not resort to any victimization.

6.9.3.19 The Deepika Dispute

Deepika Printing Press was under the control of Catholic priests. For a long time its Manager was Father Romeo Thomas, the Principal of the Sacred Heart College, Thevara in Kochi. In those days the Christian employers viewed anyone with communist leanings with great suspicion and as soon as they discovered them their services used to be terminated. Under such suspicion, a worker employed in the Binding Section was dismissed though he was a religious and a devout Christian. The management pointed out that this worker had close connection with the communist party. In the termination notice some other reason was given. The workers were agitated and they decided to start a trade union and got it registered. The issue was referred to adjudication but the court decreed that the said worker need not be reinstated as he and the management held two opposing ideologies and as such might not be able to live and work in harmony. However, the Court directed the management to pay the worker compensation. The Award of the Court virtually wiped out the workers' union. Similar cases of termination of service of several workers who had been suspected to be pro-communists had been reported in Kerala. But as soon as the communist ministry of EMS Namboodiripad came to power in 1957, the Government ordered reinstatement of many of them with back wages.

6.9.3.20 Nelliampathy Estate Case

Nelliampathy at the northern border of old Cochin State (and presently a part of Palakkad district) was famous for its estates, particularly those growing oranges. In the late 1940s the workers of Nelliampathy estates had no unions, though several leaders tried to form them⁴⁵. In those days, Nelliampathy was not accessible by road transport. One had to travel from Nenmara to Padagiri on the foothills of Nelliampathy by a private bus, which used to break down frequently. Anyone who dared to overcome these constraints and reach the estate was severely handled by employers and their *goondas*. But Xavier, an activist took the trouble and reached Nelliampathy to mobilize the estate workers. He himself first reached there in search of employment and had experienced the hardships of the workers at first hand through his observations. He formed the Nelliampathy Labour Union (NLU). The employers did not like this and they sent their *goondas* to physically

attack Xavier but the latter did not back out. The office of the Union functioned from Padagiri.

One day Xavier reached Ernakulam to meet P. Balagagdhara Menon and informed him that Menon had been unanimously elected as the President of the Union. Menon could not turn down their request. It was decided to organize the official inauguration of the union at the workers' colony at Padagiri but the estate managers did not permit them to use the venue. The workers feared the managers and they kept away. The leaders, however, decided to go ahead and once the meeting commenced, *goondas* of employers started disturbing the meeting. Some fully drunken blacklegs also reached the spot. Given the situation Xavier and Menon declared the inauguration of the Union and left the venue.

At a later date, a dispute arose between the owner of an estate and the Union. The matter went up to the Supreme Court. It was in this judgement that the Supreme Court had made a number of significant declarations that shaped future litigation on the issues. The issues covered by the Supreme Court were (a) under what circumstances that the Court could declare a strike as not justifiable, (b) during the strike period, had the workers the right to get wages, (c) could one say that a strike was partly right and partly wrong. Xavier, the founder of the Union in Nelliampathy, later got elected as the President of the Padagiri Panchayat, a post which was held by an estate owner when Xavier was organizing the Union. See the contrast.

6.9.3.21 Cochin Motor Thozhilali Congress

Before the integration of the States of Cochin and Travancore on July 1, 1949, the monopoly of road transport service from Alappuzha to Aroor was held by the West Coast Motors Company. The passengers had to cross the Aroor ferry to Edakochi to catch another bus to reach Kochi in those days. The conditions of work and wages of motorbus workers were bad and most of them were not getting their salary regularly. Those who dared to show any protest used to be mercilessly dismissed. Sometimes the employer used to stop the bus on the road and execute the dismissal of the erring workers whether he is the driver or conductor. Two Congressmen, V.S. Govindan and Chakrapani of Pulluruthy decided to organize the motorbus workers into a union. These activists had earlier worked closely with P. Gangadharan and P.S. Namboodiri in forming the Cochin Labour Union, the pioneer trade union of Cochin State. The Cochin Motor Workers' Congress (CMWC) soon began to gain strength and fame.

Most of the demands raised by the Workers' Congress could not be amicably settled and as a result the Government was forced to refer them to adjudication. The Court gave awards in favour of the union and the bus owners had to pay them huge amounts as dues. When the bus owners could not bear the liability they offered their buses to the workers and the latter began to run them. Unfortunately the workers were not good at managing the bus services efficiently. They realized that management was a unique skill and workers hardly possessed it. But a socialist society should prepare the working class to achieve the right perspective to handle such a situation.

6.9.3.22 The FACT Strike, 1948

P. Balagangadhara Menon, the noted labour law practitioner in his reminiscences had given some details about a workers' struggle in the FACT at Eloor, Udyogamandal⁴⁶. An American Company had been entrusted with the construction of the factory and installation of its plants and equipment and it did the work in record time. Seshasayee and Company, the Managing Agency firm, controlled the FACT and the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer was the guiding force behind the FACT, which laid the foundation for modern industrialization in Travancore.

The labour-management relations in the FACT initially were cordial but troubles started when the management terminated the services of one Appukkuttan Nair, an Overseer, who had taken the initiative to form a Union in the Company. Appukkuttan Nair left Eloor and accepted a job in a Fertilizer Company in North India. There also he formed a union. The departure of Appukkuttan Nair did not destroy the spirit of unionisation. The workers and staff finally formed and registered the FACT Employees Association (FACTEA). On January 20, 1948 it was inaugurated by Pattom Thanu Pillai, the then President of the State Congress. P.N. Menon was the first president of the Association. Since no outsiders were included as office bearers, the Association created history in the trade union movement in the State. Pattom reminded the members of the Association that the Government held 50 per cent of the share capital and if the Congress formed a popular Government, they could expect full cooperation from it. Ikkanda Warrier, another veteran congress leader also spoke about Nehru's slogan "produce or perish" and appealed to the employees to work sincerely in building up the nation.

In 1950-51 the FACT witnessed a long strike. Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai was the Chief Minister and his brother-in-law (wife's brother) S.C.S. Menon was a leading trade unionist in the FACT. The main issue in the

dispute was termination of service of nearly 1000 workers soon after the completion of the construction phase of FACT. While the management maintained that these workers would become surplus and the Company could not retain them, the Association claimed that the Company could absorb them easily once the Plant is expanded. The Government referred the issue to adjudication. When the Court proceedings were found biased in favour of the Company, the Association boycotted the Court, which was holding its hearings at the Government Rest House in Aluva. The workers and staff struck work and marched to the Rest House. Sensing trouble, the Judge left the place. He announced that in future the Court would function from Thiruvananthapuram. Finally the Court gave an Award permitting the Company to go ahead with its plans to terminate the services of the staff found surplus by them.

The FACT Employees Association decided to file an appeal before the Labour Appellate Tribunal (LAT) at Bombay. In the appeal it requested the Tribunal to issue an Interim Stay on the implementation of the Award of the lower court. Even before the LAT issued the order of stay, the FACT management announced that it would not implement the earlier Award. The Association's major slogan in those days was termination of Seshasayee's management.

P. Balagangadhara Menon had placed on record the valuable services rendered by K.N. Gopala Pillai, who was one of the founders of the FACT Employees' Association. K.N. Gopala Pillai's reminiscences had been stated elsewhere. S.C.S. Menon was another veteran who was groomed by Gopala Pillai and today Menon is a much respected trade union leader who developed independent unionism in Aluva-Kalamassery industrial belt. Under independent unionism, the union would have no political affiliation and such a phenomenon was a unique feature of Aluva till recent times.

The relationship between Parur T.K. Narayana Pillai and S.C.S. Menon had been mentioned earlier. When Menon was arrested in connection with a strike in FACT, Parur T.K. was the Chief Minister. But the latter allowed the process of law to take its own course, though he could have easily prevented the arrest of his brother-in-law.

6.9.3.23 The Alupuram Struggle

The Indian Aluminium Company at Alupuram was another large industrial enterprise in the erstwhile State of Travancore and as in the case of the FACT, the Dewan had an important role in establishing it. It was during 1940-41 that a Canadian firm offered help to an Indian Company to set up an

Aluminium Plant in the Mysore State. During a garden party Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer had a chance encounter with the Canadian Engineers and the Dewan cordially invited them to visit Travancore as well as the valleys of Periyar River. Being a power intensive industry, the Canadians were happy to set up the Aluminium Plant in Aluva when the Dewan offered cheap electricity from the Pallivasal Project.

During 1949-50 itself workers' struggles appeared in the Alupuram Company. One of the first struggles was in connection with the termination of service of one Marcos, a trade union activist. The union approached P. Balagangadhara Menon for legal advice and guidance. The Labour Department of the Travancore Government intervened in the dispute. Several conciliation conferences were held but no settlement was possible. Finally the Labour Minister himself held a conference. Both the Union and the Management stood firm. The Minister appealed to the management to reinstate Marcos but the Canadian manager rejected the minister's appeal outright. At this the minister stood up and declared that Marcos would be reinstated. The Canadian manager enquired with his legal adviser whether the minister or his government had the power to do so under the existing laws. The adviser told him that it was not legally possible. The Manager then turned to the Minister and quietly told him that he was sorry that he could not oblige the minister. The minister was stunned and after consulting the labour officers present there abruptly called off the meeting and left the place. This was an episode where the minister had cut a sorry figure for not reading the file on the issue and doing sufficient home work before convening the meeting and making his declaration in the open.

M.P. Mathai was one of the founders of the Aluminium Workers' Union. The company terminated his services for participating in the election campaign for the communist candidate in the Aluva constituency. Had he continued in the company Mathai might have had become a senior general manager. With his exit the Company lost an able trustworthy employee, but the exit benefited the peasant class in Kuttanad. Mathai on leaving his trade union work went to Kuttanadu, his native place, and there he organized the All Kerala Karshaka Federation and worked as its Secretary.

The Union and Management in the Aluminium Company had made an agreement that employees in the supervisory positions would not be admitted as members of the Union. As days passed by, many worker members of the Union secured promotion to supervisory cadres. The management objected to their continuation in the Union and started disciplinary proceedings against them. The management questioned the government's order by approaching the High Court, which gave a judgement in favour of the management. The Union

filed an appeal before the Supreme Court but it was dismissed. The workers had spent lot of money to fight this case but at the end they lost the case. P. Balagangadhara Menon in this context made a suggestion that in fighting labour cases in courts, the unions should be given some financial assistance reminding all that though both labour and management were always considered as partners, the management had resources to fight and these resources were usually drawn from the company they were managing. The Union had no right to draw resources from the company they were working for. Indeed this was unjust, according to Menon.

6.9.3.24 Peerumade Labour Struggle

Rosamma Punnoose was responsible for mobilizing the plantation workers in the high ranges covering Munnar and Peerumade and bringing them under the Communist Party fold. In the early phase she and her colleagues had to face several confrontations from powerful estate owners, managers and their henchmen⁴⁷. During the period 1949-50, the estate owners received considerable support from the police also in eliminating union leaders and threatening workers. Chandy, the Secretary of the High Range Estate Workers' Union was a major target for estate owners. One day Chandy met P. Balagangadhara Menon, a leading labour law practitioner, labour sympathizer, and pro-communist and sought his help in a dispute that had been referred to adjudication. In one estate the owner terminated the services of all workers who had joined the Union, closed the estate and left for England to attend the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

In those days no one dared to take up labour cases relating to High range areas and workers too fearing victimization did not show any interest to fight the employers. Chandy was threatened that he would be shot dead if he produced any worker before the Labour court to give evidence. Chandy was fearless and went around to mobilize enough workers to give evidence. The Court in its Award directed the management to open the estate and reinstate all the workers. The estate owner went to High Court and filed a writ appeal and the case went on for years but at the end the High Court approved the employer's action. Here the Union had a backlash and workers were pushed into utter destitution as nobody could save them.

6.9.3.25 Pala Motor Workers' Union

Pala was known as a Catholic Christian dominated centre in Travancore. In 1953 Pala witnessed a grand march and demonstration of

workers holding tri-colour and led by a Professor of English of the St. Thomas College⁴⁸. He was none other than K.M. Chandy, who later became the Chairman of the Rubber Board and a State Governor. Chandy founded the Pala Motor Workers' Union and the bus owners retaliated by dismissing a number of union workers. When the dispute was referred to adjudication, the court gave the Award in favour of the Union. Following this victory, many educated congressmen fearlessly came forward to mobilize workers and forming new trade unions. One day the Bishop of Pala invited K.M. Chandy, P. Balagangadhara Menon and many other union activists for dinner with him. It was a unique historic event since a high priest of Christian Community was showing ardent sympathy to trade unions and their activists.

6.9.3.26 From Trade Union to Political Office

A number of leaders in the trade union movement had stepped into political offices later in their careers. Among them the majority never looked back on the working class who had given them the stature of a leader and at least a few used to turn anti-labour once they established themselves securely in their political career. But there were a minority who had sacrificed every thing they had for the working class and later finding it difficult to adjust themselves to the political office. One such person was the late K.P. Kutty Krishnan Nair⁴⁹. He was "Kuttettan" to all workers whom he had mobilized. He was one of the founding members of the Kerala unit of the Indian National Congress and his area of union activity was Kozhikode. In the general elections to the Madras Assembly he had created history by defeating the great communist leader E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

While continuing in the trade union movement, even after his victory in the elections, he was suddenly called to Madras to become the Law Minister in that State. At that time the Kozhikode Electricity Company dispute was going on between Kutty Krishnan Nair's Union and the management. Nair sought the help of P. Balagangadhara Menon in arguing the Union's case in the Labour Court. The dispute had raised a number of important issues like: (a) had the workers employed in an electricity undertaking the eligibility for getting bonus, (b) if they were eligible, could they get bonus worked on the basis of the Full Bench Formula given by the Labour Appellate Tribunal (LAT). The second issue was controversial since two different Benches of the LAT had given conflicting views on the Full Bench Formula and its applicability to electricity workers. To resolve this controversy, the LAT decided to hold a Full Bench Session at Calcutta. In this case the Kozhikode Union and the Union in the Ernakulam Chandra Company joined as parties.

Electricity industry came under the jurisdiction of the Electricity Supply Act and as such any profit the industry secured should be shared with consumers of power and the workers had therefore, no right over profit. This view of the companies was not acceptable to the Court, which referred it to Madras Bench of the LAT. Balagangadhara Menon and the Union's Secretary made a courtesy call on Kutty Krishnan Nair's official residence. He was found restlessly waiting for them. The visitors gave a detailed briefing to the Law Minister. He advised them to go to the Tribunal's office in his office car saying that at least workers could save some money on taxi charges. Nair asked them including P.K. Koru, another union activist from Kozhikode to stay at the Minister's residence to save on expenses. After dropping them at the Tribunal's Office, Kutty Krishnan Nair was to go to his office in the Madras Secretariat. But on the way he changed his decision. Though being the Law Minister he had no inhibition to enter the courtroom along with his trade union activists. When the Judges entered the Courtroom, they were stunned to see the Labour Minister of the State among the union men. Balagangadhara Menon requested the great leader to go away since the Court might misinterpret his presence as an instance of government intervention with the due process of law. Kutty Krishnan Nair then told Menon that Ministership might come and go but he would always prefer to be a true trade unionist. Though he left the Courtroom, he waited in another room till the proceedings were over. After he left the minister ship, Kutty Krishnan Nair came back to the Union movement to serve the working class till his end. Such leaders of Kutty Krishnan Nair's character are not to be found in contemporary trade union movement in the country.

6.10 CONCLUSION

Kochi and Aluva constitute the centres of modern industries co-existing with some of the traditional industries. The Cochin region had witnessed several socio-political struggles on par with those of Travancore. During the anti-communist and anti-trade union repression by Sir C.P.'s Government reached their peak, most of the leaders found shelter in Kochi. Even the Travancore State Congress had shifted their headquarters to Ernakulam for a short period fearing the onslaught by the Dewan. Kochi was also a common meeting place for leaders from Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. All these factors, directly or indirectly, had influenced popular mass movements and working class mobilization in the Cochin State. We have attempted to give an objective narrative of various struggles by drawing heavily on published source materials as well as personal reminiscences of leaders who had played a role in them.

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CHAPTER VII

UNION MOVEMENT IN MALABAR

In the Malabar region, the oldest industrial centres were Feroke, Kozhikode, Kannur, Cheruvannoor, Payannur and Pappinissery and a number of trade unions were operating there in the early 1940s. The earliest among them were the Cheruvannoor Cotton Mill Workers' Union, Kannur Aaron Mill Workers' Union, the Bidi and Cigar Workers' Union and the Unions at the Feroke Tile Factory, the Commonwealth Tile Factory and the timber and handloom units. In organizing some of these unions the late P.Krishna Pillai and A.K.Gopalan, the founding members of the communist movement in the region, played a very significant role. These unions also had a chequered history of working class struggles, which in the early period, were conducted as a part of freedom struggle and the establishment of the Communist Party. Malabar had also witnessed, unlike Cochin and Travancore regions, revolutionary movements of small peasants, tenants, landless farm workers and schoolteachers. In fact these movements to a large extent eclipsed or overshadowed the movements of industrial working class in Malabar. In our present exercise we attempt to deal only with the trade union movement of industrial workers. However, we wish to cover some peripheral movements of working class such as that of toddy tappers of Badagara, which as per historical records preceded the movement of industrial workers.

In Chapter II we had narrated certain historical events that occurred in Malabar in our attempt to delineate the socio-political situation in Kerala. For instance, we had mentioned in chapter II the Manjeri Political Conference, Badagara Conference, March by A.K.Gopalan and Morazha Episode. In this chapter, we wish to elaborate on the socio-political background to the trade union movement in the Malabar region. Prof. A.Sreedhara Menon's work, Kerala and Freedom Struggle (1997) is a good source book for chronicling the major historical events that occurred in Malabar.

7.1 HISTORICAL SETTING

7.1.1 Resistance to alien domination

Vasco Da Gama landed in Kozhikode in May 1498, marking the beginning of European expansion in the East¹. Soon resistance movements against alien domination took place. When the Zamorin of Kozhikode

welcomed Vasco Da Gama, he could not foresee the imperialist objectives of the Portuguese, though they had initially come for trade and commerce. The Portuguese started to expand their imperial control as evidenced by the capture of Arab vessels, massacre of their crew and wanton cruelty against the natives in the Kozhikode Port. This naturally aroused the hostility of the local Mappilas and Nairs who later went on a rampage and destroyed the Portuguese factory, killing its Chief and fifty three men. The Zamorin was compelled to become the leader of the native resistance to the Portuguese and wage a struggle to secure the command of the sea. The Kunhali Marakkars were the celebrated Admirals of the Zamorin's fleet and they initiated epic struggles. But the vacillation of the Zamorin and contradictions in his policy enabled the Portuguese to take Muhammed Kunhali Marakkar (Kunhali IV) as a prisoner in 1600. He was taken to Goa along with his close associates for execution in cold blood. Prof.Sreedhara Menon stated that Kunhali's body itself was cut into four parts and exhibited in four prominent places. His head was salted and sent to Kannur, where it was exhibited in the local bazar as a warning to the local Mappilas. The martyrdom of Kunhali Marakkar was a symbol of his heroic role in the fight against foreign domination.

7.1.2 Developments in Mahe and Thalassery

As elsewhere in India, the French and the English were locked in serious conflicts in North Kerala. In the end, the French had to be content with a foothold at Mayyazhi (Mahe) near Thalassery. The English had established its power strongly with its troops well settled and strategically deployed in Thalassery. Mahe continued as a small independent enclave of the French in Malabar till 1947. When the English took steps to consolidate their position in Malabar, many uprisings emerged against their domination and atrocities. These uprisings were led by diverse elements like dispossessed local princes, feudal chieftains and landlords, aggrieved peasants and tribal communities.

Kozhikode and Kolathunad were the earliest dominant powers in Malabar. When they started declining, conditions of anarchy arose. According to Prof. Sreedhara Menon, the rulers of Kadathanad, Arakkal and Kottayam had become semi-independent chieftains giving an opportunity to the English to play these rulers against one another. In 1682 the English secured from Vadakkilamkur prince of Kolathunad the permission to erect a factory at Thalassery. In 1704-05, one of the rival Kolathiri princes in alliance with Kurangoth Nair, a local chief, raided the company's warehouse and inflicted heavy damage to property. Following this, the English obtained permission from the Prince Regent of Kolathunad to erect a Fort at Thalassery and this was formally commissioned in 1708. However, in 1750 Thalassery was

besieged by the combined forces of Kolathunad, Kottayam (of Malabar) and Kadathanad. During the Mysore invasions, the English gave asylum to a number of local chiefs and their followers in Thalassery.

During the closing stages of the Mysore invasion, the English tried to win over the Malabar princes to their side by giving them the assurance that after Tippu's expulsion they would be restored to their lost thrones. But this never happened. The Treaty of Srirangapatnam in 1792 provided for the transfer of the whole of Malabar, except Wayanad, to the English. Thus at the end of the Mysore War, the Malabar District came under the direct rule of the English East India Company. Firm arrangements were made for the administration of the Malabar District, which became part of British India, while Travancore and Cochin became protected states.

7.1.3 Popular Insurrections in early Malabar

The establishment of British hegemony was followed by armed insurrections and popular upheavals organized by patriotic elements of the population who were determined to overthrow the British and secure independence. The earliest of such insurrections was the restorative rebellion by the dispossessed princess of the Zamorin's family to assert their independence but this rebellion fizzled out.

The Pazhassi Raja's revolt was, however, different. Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja's fight against the British was an epic of heroism and sacrifice. The Pazhassi Revolt of 1793-97 and 1800-1805 were really peoples' revolts. All classes of people, including the Nairs, Kurumbars, Kuruchiyyas, local Mappilas and Muslims from outside, particularly disbanded soldiers of Tippu, formed the backbone his army. The participation of Kurumbas and Kuruchiyyas lent it the dimensions of an agrarian upheaval as well. On November 30, 1805, the British, after a hectic manhunt, shot Pazhassi Raja down, though local tradition reported that he had committed suicide to escape capture by the ruling power. One of his revolutionary colleagues, Thalakkal Chandu, the Kuruchiya hero, was also killed by British troops. Pazhassi Raja's martyrdom has made him a cult figure in the history of Kerala.

7.1.4 Kurichiya Revolt, 1812

The Kurichiyyas were a tribal community living in mountainous Wayanad. After the suppression of the Pazhassi uprising they were put to untold miseries and hardships. One of their leaders Thalakkal Chandu had become a martyr. The British seized many of the Kurichiyyas and made them

slaves of British Officials. The introduction of new revenue settlement and the attendant penalties for payment default forced the Kuruchiyaars to rise in revolt. The Kurumbars, another tribe in the area, joined hands with them in starting the revolt aimed at the expulsion of the British from the country. The whole of Wayanad including the key mountain passes came under the control of the rebels. The British brought reinforcements from Mysore and suppressed the revolt by May 1812. The Kuruchiya Revolt was essentially a peasant revolt, but had none of the trappings of a feudal uprising either.

7.1.5 Mappila Outbreaks of the 19th century

Prof. A Sreedhara Menon quotes Sumit Sankar's book Modern India 1885-1905, which said: "*The turbulent history of the Mappillas of Malabar reveals yet another facet of the complexities of the Indian situation – the way in which religious fanaticism has served as the outward form for the expression of anti-landlord and anti-foreign discontent*"². Most of the Mappila ryots and converts from the lower classes in the Hindu community had become economically impoverished because of rack-renting, extortionate renewal fees and inadequate compensation for improvements as pointed out by the Report of the Logan Commission which was appointed to enquire into land tenures in Malabar. The Mappila Revolt occurred during 1836-53 with 22 important outbreaks being reported. There were more riots during 1882-86. In order to mitigate the sufferings of the Mappila tenants, the Logan Commission suggested the creation of a statutory class of peasant proprietors with permanent rights of occupancy and provision for payment of adequate compensation for the improvements made on land. The Government accepted the suggestion and enacted, the Malabar Compensation for Tenants' Improvements Act of 1887, superceded by the later Tenancy Act I of 1900.

7.2 POLITICAL AWAKENING IN MALABAR

7.2.1 The Congress in Malabar

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and it attracted the attention of people of Kerala, particularly those from Malabar. Chettur Sankaran Nair, G.P.Pillai, V.Raiyuru Nambiar, Mannath Krishnan Nair, C.Kunhirama Menon, Dr.T.M.Nair, C.Karunakara Menon and K.P.Achutha Menon attended the Congress sessions as delegates. In fact in 1897, Chettur Sankaran Nair (popularly known later as Sir.C.Sankaran Nair) from Malabar got the unique honour of being elected to preside over the Amaravathy Session of the Indian National Congress. As Malabar District came under the

direct administration of the British, the Congress became very active in there. However, organized political movement began in Malabar only after the turn of the 20th century.

In 1910 a District Congress Committee came into being in Malabar with C.Kunhirama Menon functioning as its Secretary for some years. A political conference was first held at Kozhikode in 1913. During the First World War (1914-18), organized political activity started in the district. A branch of the All India Home Rule League was set up in Kozhikode and Thalassery. K.P.Kesava Menon, P.A.Kunhammad, and V.K.Krishna Menon were the important activists of the Home Rule League in Malabar. In 1916 a large group of citizens led by K P Kesava Menon staged a sensational walk out from a public meeting called by District Collector, Innes, for raising public contribution to the Governor's War Fund.

7.2.2 District Political Conferences

The activists of the Congress in Malabar decided to conduct District Political Conferences every year. The first such conference was held in Palakkad in 1916 under the presidency of Dr.Annie Bezant. None other than Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer, who turned anti-Congress after becoming the Dewan of Travancore, chaired the Second Conference. The Third Conference was held in Thalassery in 1918 under the presidency of Mir Azad Ali Khan Bahadur, a Zamindar of Bengamapilli. The Fourth Conference was again held in Thalassery with K.P.Raman Menon in the Chair. The Manjeri Political Conference of 1920 was a watershed in the political history of modern Kerala. This has been discussed in some detail in Chapter II. Till the Manjeri Conference, the earlier Conferences used to pass resolutions that lacked any revolutionary fervour, as they were mainly appeals to the British government for introduction of reforms. But the Manjeri Conference was a turning point as it was decided that the Congress in Kerala should hereafter adopt a radical approach to the issues concerning people. In 1921, after the Ottappalam Conference, the leaders of the Congress in Malabar decided to set up the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee (KPCC) with K.Madhavan Nair as its first Secretary.

7.2.3 Campaign against Untouchability

Inspired by the Sri Narayana movement in Travancore, C.Krishnan, the Editor of the "Mithavadi" in Malabar campaigned vigorously for the eradication of untouchability. In November 1917, he defied the order of the Malabar Collector denying freedom to the *Thiyas* (Ezhavas) and other

backward classes to walk along the approach roads to the Thali Temple at Kozhikode. This incident symbolized the new awakening among the backward classes and focused public attention on the need for early eradication of untouchability.³

7.2.4 The Yogakshema Sabha

The Namboodiris were experiencing several social disabilities largely on account of a large number of obsolete and primitive social and religious practices and traditions. To eradicate them progressive minded Namboodiris came forward to establish the *Yogakshema Sabha* during 1910-11 under the leadership of Kurur Unni Namboodiri. V.T.Bhattathiripad and K.N.Kuttan Namboodiri took the initiative to establish the Namboodiri *Yuvajana Sangham* (Youth League) with a radical plan of action. This league took active part in the non-cooperation movement in the early 1920s. Some of the rebels in the group discarded their sacred thread, condemned polygamy practiced by elders and openly advocated widow re-marriage. When Namboodiris like B.Brahmadathan Namboodiripad joined the Congress and courted arrest, his community subjected them to social ostracism. It was during this period that E.M.Sankaran Namboodiripad came to be involved in the Yogakshema Sabha as well as active Congress politics.

7.2.5 Malabar Rebellion, 1921-22

This was one of the best-known and most controversial episodes of early Malabar⁴. Some described it as the Mappila Rebellion, an uprising or revolt by the Muslims of Malabar belonging to Eranad and Valluvanad Taluks. According to some others, it was a peasant or tenant struggle against the repression of feudal landlords and the British rulers in the area. E.M.S. Namboodiripad took the view that there was some element of truth in both views. Following the Jhalian Wala Bagh massacre, there was universal resistance against the British policy of repression. Gandhiji had initiated the non-cooperation movement. The Ali brothers had initiated the Khilafath movement. The waves of both of these had reached Malabar and the Congress leaders and Khilafath leaders of the region had found a common forum to launch a mass movement. The British effort in removing the Khalif of Turkey had instigated the Muslims in Malabar. Already there were some incidents in which the tenants of Malabar, particularly belonging to the Muslim community, had some confrontation with the rich feudal lords on issues of tenancy rights and share in crops during the period 1836-1921. The struggle against the British repression, the non-cooperation movement based on non-violence, the Khilafath movement and the peasant/tenants struggle had

converged. The armed confrontation against the feudal landlords had forced the British authorities to pass the Mappila Outrageous Act to meet the situation.

It was alleged that some of the Congress leaders of Malabar, mostly Hindus, had met Gandhiji and impressed upon him that without the involvement of Malabar Mappilas, no struggle would succeed there and they appealed to Gandhiji to issue a call to the Mappila tenants to join the struggle against the British. Gandhiji did not see an important point when he made this call. At that time religious leaders were leading the Mappila tenants and the mosques had an important influence on the community. Under these circumstances, the Gandhian method of non-violence might not succeed and things might go beyond the control of the Congress leaders of Malabar. In fact, M.P.Narayana Menon, the then Secretary of the Eranad Khilafath Committee and Mohammed Abdu Rahiman met Gandhiji and told him that his appeal to the Muslim tenants would misfire and may end in an armed rebellion and loss of life. But Gandhiji felt confident that no one would sacrifice non-violence.

C.Gopalan Nair, former Deputy Collector in his book "*Mappila Lahala*" (Mappila Revolt) had given the official version of the Malabar rebellion. According to him, a gun was reported missing from Pookkottur Kovilakam of Nilambur Thirumulpad in the context of a confrontation in August 1921 between the Estate Manager of the Kovilakam and Muslim tenants. The police searched the house of V.Mohammed, Secretary of the Regional/Local Khilafath Committee. Hundreds of Mappilas staged a protest march that turned violent, particularly after a call was issued by the religious leaders from the mosque through loud beating of drums. The violent demonstrators threatened landlords and collected money from them. Soon normal civil rule came to a virtual halt in about 220 revenue villages. Variam Kunnath Kunhahmed Haji declared himself the Chief Dictator/Ruler of the region. He started collecting taxes and directed agricultural workers to confiscate crops of the landlords. It was reported that this Ruler had also started issuing passports to his "people". He was later hunted out by the authorities and shot dead. Kumaramputhur Seethikoya Thangal was another hero who conducted military courts and punished people at will. Another Chemprassery Impichikoya set up his own Court, but abused a few Hindus by tying their hands to their back and parading them in public on charges that they had given milk and tender coconut to the British soldiers. Out of the 40 Hindus he caught, he ordered his followers to cut the heads of 38 and put the bodies in an adjacent well. He personally supervised the operations. A retired police inspector was also shot dead. It was alleged that soon the Malabar region witnessed a series of violent communal clashes and riots that destroyed the historically long period of harmony between these two communities. On

the whole at least 500-600 people were killed during this Malabar Rebellion. In Pookkottur, for a few months, civil rule virtually came to an end and this happened in such places like Malappuram, Thiruanganadi, Manjeri and Perinthalamanna also.

7.2.6 Views of E. M. S

1996 saw the 75th anniversary of the Malabar Rebellion as well as the 50th anniversaries of the Karivelloor struggle and the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, and, according to E.M.S. Namboodiripad, all the three were revolutionary struggles on the Marxist-Leninist lines. The Malabar Rebellion was not a communal revolt as alleged by the Congress, it was indeed a struggle against British repression and exploitation of tenants by feudal landlords. The Karivelloor struggle was a spontaneous uprising against feudal landlordism. The Punnappa-Vayalar struggle was against the Dewan Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer's policy of repression against popular mass movements including that by the working class. The struggle reached a climax when the working class joined hands with the State Congress in their demand for freedom, adult suffrage and responsible government and in condemning the Dewan's plans for an Independent Travancore and the American Model Reform.

While the Malabar Rebellion was mainly led by the bourgeoisie elements in the Congress, in the Karivelloor and Punnappa-Vayalar struggle the Communist Party played a strategic leadership role. The formation of the Communist League in Thiruvananthapuram in 1931, the Congress Socialist Party of Malabar in 1934 and the emergence of the Communist leadership in 1937 gave all popular mass movements in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar a Marxist-Leninist touch. N.C.Sekhar of the Communist League was one of the first communists in the State and with people like P.Krishna Pillai at the vanguard, the Communist Party and the working class movement witnessed rapid growth.

In this connection an important point could not be missed. In the Malabar Rebellion, the influence of religious leaders in the Muslim Community had been responsible for creating some fear and insecurity among the Hindus. But it did not cause a major communal war between the two communities as alleged by some writers.

7.2.7 Three different views

According to Prof. A Sreedhara Menon, there have been differences of opinion among historians in regard to the genesis and character of the Malabar Rebellion. There are broadly three views about the origin and character of the Rebellion⁵. Firstly, it was considered as a political upheaval of the Mappilas against police repression or state-sponsored terrorism. In other words, it was an anti-imperialist upsurge. Secondly, it was held that it broke out as a result of the operation of economic factors, since the Mappila tenants were victims of the worst forms of repression at the hands of feudal landlords most of whom being Hindus and they revolted against their tyranny. In other words, the Rebellion was an agrarian outbreak. Thirdly, it was held that the Rebellion was a communal flare-up or an outburst of religious fanaticism since those who perpetrated the atrocities were Mappilas and the victims were Hindus. Sreedhara Menon feels that an objective assessment would show that the Mappila Rebellion was the result of the combined operation of political, economic and communal factors and it would be wrong to attribute it to any one of these factors exclusively. This is the only conclusion, which an impartial historian can arrive at on the basis of an objective study of the facts of the case, according to him. It may be worth nothing here that according to E.M.S. Namboodiripad the Malabar Mappila Rebellion, Karivelloor struggle and the Punnappra-Vayalar struggle were all revolutionary struggles on the Marxist-Leninist lines.

7.2.8 Politics after the Rebellion

Prof. A Sreedhara Menon highlights certain political developments that occurred immediately after the Mappila Rebellion⁶. The Hindus of Malabar suspected that the Congress support for the Khilafat cause led to the Rebellion, while Muslims felt that the Congress deserted them after they joined the Khilafat movement, pushing them to the mercy of the police and the military. These developments thus created widespread hostility among the public towards Congressmen.

In 1923, the Second Provincial Conference met at Palakkad under the Presidency of Sarojini Naidu. A literary conference was held along with the Provincial Conference and Sardar K.M. Panikkar, the Editor of *Swarajya*, chaired it. Besides, Sarojini Naidu, C. Rajagopalachari, and Devadas Gandhi attended the Palakkad conference. In the same year a Khilafath Conference was held at Thalassery. The period also saw the birth of political journalism in Malabar with K.P. Kesava Menon starting the *Mahrubhoomi* in March 1922 and Muhammed Abdur Rahiman starting the *Al-Amin* in 1924 from

Kozhikode. Both of these newspapers served the nationalist cause by spreading the message of the Congress among the masses.

Another movement sprang up in Malabar for the improvement of tenancy rights including security of tenure and stay of evictions. G.Sankaran Nair, K.P.Raman Menon, Mannath Krishnan Nair and others led this movement. The Congress leaders and the leaders of *kudiyans* (tenants) worked in close cooperation. This made the feudal landlords the bitter enemies of the Congress and they turned to the British for favours.

In the Vaikom Satyagraha, leaders and volunteers from Malabar actively participated. Mention may be made about Kelappan who was made the Convener of the Special Committee set up at the Ernakulam Conference of 1924 to chalk out a programme of action for carrying on the campaign against untouchability. K.P. Kesava Menon and Kelappan were among the volunteers arrested and sent to jail during the Vaikom Satyagraha.

The Third Provincial Conference of the KPCC was held at Kozhikode on April 16, 1927 and it reiterated its demand for active involvement of the Indian National congress (INC) in the affairs of the princely states. The KPCC organized widespread demonstrations in Malabar against the Simon Commission. The Fourth Provincial Conference held at Payyannur on May 25 – 27, 1928 was a landmark as it was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. His speech on the inseparability of the concepts of political independence and social freedom inspired the extremists and they emerged as the dominant group among Congressmen.

7.2.9 The Railway Strike

Another significant event of the later 1920s was the strike by the Railway employees of South India under the leadership of V.V.Giri. The strike commenced its work in July 1928 at Nagapatnam, Thrichy and Podanur demanding the reinstatement of employees who had been retrenched, besides demanding an increase in wages and settling complaints of running staff. The strike spread to Badagara, Kozhikode, Kannur, Thalassery, Palakkad and Shoranur. The leaders of Malabar, the public and class organizations expressed solidarity with the railway employees and supported their struggle.

7.2.10 Salt Satyagraha

The year 1930 saw the Dandi March and launching of the Salt Satyagraha by Mahatma Gandhi. The KPCC decided to organize the Salt

Satyagraha in the Malabar area and selected the beaches of Payyannur and Kozhikode as the main venues. A batch of 32 volunteers led by K.Kelappan started from Kozhikode to Payyannur on foot and on April 21, 1930 they broke the salt laws at Payyannur beach. Another batch had reached Payyannur from Palakkad led by T.Krishnaswamy Iyer. Muhammed Abdur Rahiman and E.Moidu Maulavi led other batches. Payyannur in Malabar became the focus of attention for Congress workers all over the country. When Mahatma Gandhi was arrested on May 5, 1930, Satyagrahis in Malabar like Kelappan were arrested. Moyyarakth Sankaran took Kelappan's place. He too was arrested along with several other leaders. Along with the salt Satyagraha, volunteers also picketed toddy shops.

At Kozhikode, Police held a brutal lathi charge injuring leaders like Muhammed Abdur Rahiman, P.Krishna Pillai and R.V.Sarma. When the police attempted to seize the national flag, Krishna Pillai and Sarma exhibited real heroism in defending it. Kelappan, Muhammed Abdur Rahiman, K.Madhavan Nair, R.V. Sarma and P.Krishna Pillai were tried and sentenced to nine months imprisonment each. The repressive measures failed to break the morale of the satyagrahis. Breach of salt laws by them became a matter of daily occurrence everywhere. The picketing of toddy shops and boycott of foreign goods also went on simultaneously. Students boycotted classes and joined the agitation. They were also subjected to lathi charge. Some activists and youth started an underground movement and copies of the Congress Bulletin were printed secretly and circulated.

Since sanction for conducting salt Satyagraha was denied by governments of princely states of Travancore and Cochin, the leaders and volunteers from there moved over to Malabar for offering Satyagraha. Thus Ponnara Sridhar, K.Kumar, N.C.Sekhar and N.P.Kurukkal courted arrest in Malabar. This provided an opportunity for close interaction between the leaders of Travancore and Malabar.

7.2.11 Guruvayur Satyagraha

We have already narrated the developments related to the Guruvayur Satyagraha in Chapter II. However, in this context we are documenting some of the events from the Malabar perspective. The narration here need not be treated as repetition since our intention was to provide the reader of this chapter a broad idea of what was happening in other parts of Kerala which essentially were interconnected. A year before the Guruvayur Satyagraha, the Fifth Provincial Conference was held at Badagara on May 4-5, 1931. This has also been mentioned in Chapter II (2.3.1). The session was significant because it also gave way for a Provincial Women's Conference, the all-Kerala

Students' Conference, the Kerala Political Sufferers' Conference and the Hindi Prachar Conference.

In the Guruvayur Satyagraha commencing on November 1, 1931 several leaders and volunteers from Malabar had actively participated. The Guruvayur Temple was under the control of the Zamorin of Kozhikode, who acted as the Trustee. T.Subramonia Thirumumbu led the first batch of volunteers from Kannur. The supreme leader of the Satyagraha campaign, as in the Vaikom Satyagraha too, was none other than K.Kelappan. Among others who offered Satyagraha at Guruvayur mention must be made about A.K.Gopalan and N.P.Damodaran. It was here that AKG was assaulted and he fell down unconscious. On another day the inimitable P.Krishna Pillai offered Satyagraha and he was brutally manhandled for having dared to ring the sacred bell in front of the *Sri Kovil (sanctum sanctorum)*, a right exclusively reserved for the Brahmins. As tension mounted, the authorities suspended the pujas and closed the Guruvayur temple for a month.

Kelappan announced to start a hunger strike along with 30 volunteers at the Eastern Gopuram of the Temple. Gandhiji did not approve this, and he advised Kelappan to call off the strike. But Gandhiji's assurance did not materialise. In December 1932 C.Rajagopalachari, K.Madhavan Nair and U.Gopala Menon held under their supervision a historic referendum in Ponnani Taluk among caste Hindus. 77 per cent of the 20163 persons participating in the referendum were in favour of temple entry. The issue of Temple Entry was everywhere including Cochin and Travancore. But it was the Maharaja of Travancore, Sri Chithra Thirunal who created history by issuing the famous Temple Entry Proclamation on November 12, 1936.

7.2.12 Sixth Provincial Conference

Once the Congress gave a call for the renewal of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the Government declared the Congress as an unlawful organization and resorted to repressive measures. The Sixth Provincial Conference was held at Kozhikode in this context on May 15, 1932. It was presided by Samuel Aaron and attended by about 400 delegates from all over Kerala. The police arrested all of them and among those convicted were Samuel Aaron and his wife. It is worth to note here that it was the same Samuel Aaron who owned and managed the Aaron Mills, a centre of extensive working class struggle in Malabar.

7.2.13 Rise of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP)

By 1930 signs of a division among Congressmen were emerging largely on principles of ideology and strategies. The old guard in the Congress believed in Gandhian methods of non-violent non-cooperation but they accepted the socialist ideology and took active interest in mobilizing peasants and workers. These Congressmen were “Socialist minded”. On November 5, 1933 they had met separately in Kozhikode and decided to form a Kerala Karshaka Sangham. A formal conference of these congressmen was held on May 12, 1934 at Kozhikode and they resolved to form the Kerala Congress Socialist party (KCSP) within the Indian National Congress and organize peasants and workers on socialist lines. A committee was formed with C.K.Govindan Nair as President, P.Krishna Pillai as Secretary and five others including E.M.S.Namboodiripad as members. In September 1937, Govindan Nair resigned and in his place EMS was made the President, with P Krishna Pillai continuing as Secretary.

The CSP was unique since a dominant section of its members believed in the communist ideology and working class and peasant struggles. The time was ripe because these classes had started bearing the ill effects of the worldwide depression of 1930s. The CSP leaders could easily establish a chain of well-knit organizations of peasants, industrial workers, aided elementary schoolteachers and students all over Malabar. The CSP group thus established itself as the Leftist group in the Congress, while those who continued to profess faith in the Gandhian ideology of truth and non-violence in the fight for freedom came to be known as the Rightists. Some alleged that the communists were masquerading as Congress Socialists. The emergence of the CSP was a national phenomenon and Malabar, Cochin and Travancore could not remain isolated from it. Because the CSP had a strong presence in Malabar, EMS was elected as the Joint Secretary of the All India Socialist Party in December 1934. In 1935 EMS was elevated to the position of the General Secretary of the organization in Kerala.

Soon the gulf between the Rightists and Leftists began to widen. While K.Kelappan, U.Gopala Menon, Kongattil Raman Menon, K.Madhavan, and P.Kunhisankara Menon shifted to the Right wing, EMS, P.Krsihna Pillai, K.P.Gopalan and H.Manjunatha Rao belonged to the Left wing. Though they signed a compromise formula, it did not work.

The CSP leaders began campaigns for rousing the peasants, workers, teachers and students/youth and preparing them for mass struggles against colonialism, imperialism and capitalism for achieving socialism. AKG led jathas/marches in Kurumbranad and Kottayam taluks. In 1936 he led a 750-mile hunger march from Kannur to Madras to focus attention on the poverty

among the Malabar peasantry. He was sentenced to nine months' simple imprisonment for having made inflammatory speeches against the Government. The All Malabar Karshaka Sangham was established in 1937 with P.Narayanan Nair as President and K.A.Keraleeyan as Secretary to do organizational work among the peasants.

7.2.14 Views of A.K.Gopalan

In his book *Kerala Past and Present*, (1959) and in his autobiographical work in Malayalam (1980), A.K.Gopalan has drawn attention to some important developments in Malabar in the field of political and trade union activity. According to him, following the founding of the Congress Socialist Party, they carried an independent agitation propaganda and organization among workers, peasants, students and teachers. Trade unions were formed in all industrial towns of Malabar – all of them led by members of the newly formed CSP. EMS and P.Krishna Pillai thus are credited with the building up of the organized working class movement.

In the words of AKG: “*A strike wave took place in an organized fashion all over Kerala during 1934-35 helping to increase trade union membership. Organizers went to every nook and corner of Kerala where there was a factory or people working together in cottage industries with the message of the Red Flag. Their aim was to rally the working class against imperialism under the banner of anti-imperialist national freedom movement. In the mid 1930s a series of industrial strikes at Kannur, Kozhikode, Feroke, Thrissur, Cochin, Alappuzha and Kollam were linked with the political awakening of the people of Kerala against imperialist domination and feudal exploitation. The trade union organizations and their struggles were an indivisible part of the general anti-imperialist movement in Kerala*”⁷.

AKG said that, “*the first all-India Conference of Trade Unions was held in Kozhikode in 1935. The union of Socialist consciousness with the mass working class movement transformed the political history of Kerala. The working class had come of age and was now taking a leading part in all political activities, installing itself in a dominant position on the social and economic platform and in the forefront of anti-imperialistic struggle. The national movement for freedom, the reform movement and the revolutionary movement for socialism all came under the leadership of the working class in Kerala*”.

According to AKG, the formation of the Congress Socialist Party led to a bitter fight between the left and the right in the Congress. “*The Socialists (Left) tried to bring about radical changes in the programme and methods of*

work of the organization but at the same time they carried on independent agitation, propaganda and organization among the workers, peasants, teachers and students. In all the industrial towns trade unions were formed and day-to-day economic struggles of the workers were linked with the activity of the anti-imperialist united front. The peasants were involved beginning in North Malabar and the various activities of the Socialist led Congress Committee, of the trade unions and the peasant organizations were closely coordinated. The organization of the government aided elementary school teachers was also led by the CSP. Coming mainly from the peasant class, the teachers had an interest in the peasant movement and exploited like the industrial workers. The teachers were concerned not only with their own organization, but in the organization of the working class and peasantry as well and supplied some of the most active and capable cadres of the anti-imperialist movement.”

AKG believed that the formation of the Congress Ministry in Madras, following the general elections of 1937, led to a great new upsurge, in which the trade unions grew very rapidly. He referred to his hunger march from North Malabar to Madras as something that helped to rouse the people to fight against unemployment and starvation. The Socialist-led Provincial Congress Committee organized and trained 3000 volunteers and 500 village and rural district committees.

According to AKG, “*the Congress organization in Malabar was a model of anti-imperialist united front in action. It assisted and led the working class, the peasants and the lower middle class in their day-to-day struggles and at the same time rallied all these classes and their organizations for the main task of ending imperialist rule. Such activity was not at all to the liking of the Right Wing Congressmen, and they began to refuse to cooperate with the CSP... In 1940, the entire CSP group got transformed into the Communist Party”.*

7.2.15 Background of AKG

Born in July 1906 in Makreri Village, Chirakkal Taluk in North Malabar as the son of Velluvakkanno Rairu Nair and Ayillath Kuttiyeri Madhavi Amma, AKG attended the English Middle School, started by his own father at Kadachira. AKG's father was a true social reformer and he had to counter very stiff resistance from the orthodox conservatives of the area when he started the English School in the backward rural area. His father was also an active organizer of the Nair Society of Malabar. Besides, he used to publish *Vyavasaya Mithram*, a Malayalam periodical. Rairu Nair was the first person in the area to popularise multi crop system by introducing the

cultivation of peanuts and sugarcane besides paddy. He also got elected to the Chirackal Taluk Board and in that capacity got involved in various public activities. AKG used to say that his mother was his greatest inspiration in moulding his political life. She passed away in 1954 when AKG was deeply involved in electioneering work.

AKG worked initially as a schoolteacher in Peralassery Board School where his elder brother A.K.Sankaran Nambiar was the headmaster. AKG learnt the elementary lessons in public activity from this brother who wore Khadi and participated in the Home Rule League activities. No wonder that the family background and environment were sufficient to transform AKG into a selfless political worker. From 1928 onwards, AKG got involved in the boycott of foreign goods, engaged in campaigns to popularise Khadi, and conduct struggles against the British. In 1930 AKG decided to take a full plunge into full time political work and left his home and relations. Thereafter he used to get arrested regularly and undergo imprisonment for varying periods. He travelled all over Kerala for doing political work and participated in most of the popular struggles. In jail and lock-up he shared comradeship with a number of political workers and leaders. After India attained Independence, AKG became a national figure and top leader of the Communist Party of India (CPI). But at the CPI's National Council meeting held in 1962, AKG along with another 31 of his colleagues staged a walk out in protest against wrong policies of the top leadership. Those who made the walkout were alleged to be agents of China and anti-Indian.

AKG was critical about the trends in the Party where the activists were trying to get into political office and establishing themselves as a distinct class. Similarly, leadership of trade unions were going into the hands of those who knew little about workers, their environment and their problems. The new trade union leaders also constituted a new class, which had little sincerity or commitment to the working class. All these were not conducive to building up a revolutionary communist party. The party, according to AKG, ignored the fact that the working class and the peasantry constituted its real foundation and source of strength. The party also failed to attract other progressive sections of the public towards it. Party also failed to impart political and ideological education to the cadres and make them absorb the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism. The Sixth Party Congress of the CPI held at Visakhapatnam had irrefutably rejected the idea of unity between the Indian National Congress and the CPI but the official wing of the CPI ignored it totally. In November 1962, the Party Chairman, who was also the nominee of the AITUC, put his signature to the Industrial Truce Resolution, which was contrary to, and a negation of the working class character of the CPI and the AITUC fraction openly justified it as inevitable in the context of the Chinese attack on India's northern borders. The opposition to the Dange Group in the

CPI came into the open with the Calcutta Congress in 1964. The differences came to a head both in the Central Committee, the Secretariat and the Control Commission. Ranadive, EMS and several others who had opposed the Dange group were arrested. The later events led to the split of the CPI and thus CPI (M) was formed. AKG stood with the CPI (M).

AKG was elected to the Parliament more than once and he had also held the position of Opposition Leader in the Lok Sabha. He had demonstrated his skills as an able parliamentarian and spokesman of the poor and downtrodden. Even while serving as a Member of Parliament, AKG had found time to lead popular struggles, marches and demonstrations and hunger satyagrahas. One such long hunger Satyagraha was done by AKG to protest against the eviction of migrant peasants from high ranges and forceful transfer of them to Amaravathy for resettlement. Trouble was brewing at Ayyappan Kovil and Udumbanchola. The Congress Government that came after the dismissal of the EMS Ministry in 1959 did the eviction. One could go on recounting several unforgettable episodes in the life and career of AKG, but for want of time and space we do not venture into such an exercise here. However, we attempt to give a more elaborate account of the life and work of P Krishna Pillai who is considered as the architect of the working class movement in Kerala, a leader who exerted his influence in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore and almost every important industrial centre of the State.

7.3 ABOUT P. KRISHNA PILLAI

Before we continue our historical narration of the trade union movement, we present below an account of another working class leader of Malabar, P.Krishna Pillai, who like AKG spread the network of his activities to the entire state of Kerala⁸. In fact unlike AKG, P.Krishna Pillai had a unique quality that tried to integrate the popular movements in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore so closely through his adventurous and some times risky campaigning and organizing work. Krishna Pillai virtually reached every nook and corner of Kerala and with his vision and organizational skills captured the attention of all revolutionaries. He moulded ordinary men into great revolutionaries. He was seen everywhere leading the men on the onward march to freedom, self-government and communism. He used to travel incognito, changing his dress and disguising himself into any human form, to escape arrest, conduct study classes, organize revolutionaries and chalk out specific programmes of action for them.

7.3.1 The family background

P. Krishna Pillai was born in the Parur *Tharavad* (ancestral home) at Vaikom in 1906. His father Mannappally Narayanan Nair, a *Parvathyakar* (revenue official) passed away when he was just 13 years old and mother Parvathy passed away when he was 14. Krishna Pillai was thus forced to end his schooling with fourth standard and begin the search for a livelihood. He went to Alappuzha and worked in a coir factory for some months. In 1922 he returned to Vaikom and started a teashop and when that collapsed he joined another teashop as a worker. To supplement his earnings he also worked in a cycle shop during leisure time. Krishna Pillai during this time started to learn Hindi by himself. He was attracted to the nationalist movement and struggle for freedom and that made him an ardent Hindi *Pracharak* (propagator). He wanted to master the Hindi language and so decided to leave Kerala to undertake a long journey to North India.

7.3.2 Love for Hindi

Krishna Pillai finally reached Allahabad when he was just 21 years old. He spent two years in learning Hindi and passed the *Sahithya Visarad* examination. This secured him the job of a Hindi teacher at Trippunithura in Kerala at a monthly salary of Rs.30. It was at this time that Mahatma Gandhi launched the Salt Satyagraha and announced his famous Dandi March. It had created waves in Malabar and teams of satyagrahis were proceeding to Kozhikode and Payyannur to defy the salt laws. Krishna Pillai could not remain unconcerned. He was fired with the spirit of nationalism. So he left his job of Hindi teacher and went straight to Kozhikode. He joined the team of volunteers who went on foot from Kozhikode to Payyannur beach and broke the salt laws and got arrested.

7.3.3 Entry into Politics

At the Kozhikode beach Abdur Rahiman Sahib, T.R.Krishnaswamy Iyer and R.V.Sarma led the salt Satyagraha. The police lathi charged the sathyagrahis, tried to take away the tri-colour flag from their hands, and, destroyed the clay vessels used for making salt. In spite of the brutality by the police, many sathyagrahis refused to part with their flags, as they were dear to their hearts and symbolized their yearning for freedom. Krishna Pillai was one among these satyagrahis and showed grit and determination.

Following the Gandhi-Irwin Treaty, the Congress withdrew the second Non-Cooperation Movement. The youth in particular saw it as a surrender to

the British. The Congress leaders, inspired and pressed by the dominant section of youth in the organization, succeeded in devising new instruments of popular struggles. The blue print for that was created at the meeting of the Congress Provincial Committee at Badagara. One such struggle was planned against the evil practice of untouchability and denial of temple entry to low caste Hindus. Following this, the Guruvayur Sathyagraha commenced. When Krishna Pillai was released from Jail he went straight to Guruvayur. There, as mentioned elsewhere, he created history by ringing the sacred temple bell inside the temple precincts which was the exclusive prerogative of Brahmins till then. The volunteers of the Temple Protection Committee and goondas then attacked him. AK Gopalan was present there. Following the tension around the temple, Zamorin ordered the closure of the Guruvayur Temple for about a month.

7.3.4 Working class mobilization

When P Krishna Pillai was released from jail, he decided to concentrate his attention in organizing the working class into trade unions. The Kozhikode Handloom Workers' Union was one of the first unions organized by him. Krishna Pillai became its Secretary. Thereafter he went to Cheruvannur, Feroke and Puthiyara and organized Cotton Mill Workers' Union, and Tile Workers' unions. In fact, P.Krishna Pillai became instrumental in laying the foundations for a systematic trade union movement in Malabar.

7.3.5 Formation of C.S.P

The radicals in the Congress were trying to assert and they stoutly opposed the moderates as well as those who put their faith in the Gandhian method of non-violent non-cooperation. It was under the pressure from the radicals that the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed with P.Krishna Pillai as its first General Secretary. Later events demonstrated beyond doubt that it was Krishna Pillai who transformed the Congress organization and brought it under the control of leftists.

When the struggle for responsible government was launched in Travancore, the CSP and Krishna Pillai played a leading role in it. In the first round of the struggle the leaders were the same, though they belonged to the CSP and State Congress. The Action Council of the KPCC was set up at Ernakulam to plan and execute the programmes relating to the struggle that started on August 26, 1938. Meanwhile the Youth League had also been formed. The Government banned both the State Congress and the Youth

League. In the first round of struggle, due to the organization skills and vision of leaders like P.Krishna Pillai, volunteers from Madras, Malabar and Cochin came in large numbers to offer sathyagraha along with the volunteers from Travancore. In the second round of the struggle for responsible government, as has been stated elsewhere, the leaders decided to submit a Memorial to the Maharaja of Travancore listing the allegations against his Dewan, Sir C.P.Ramaswami Iyer. But on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi, the Travancore State Congress withdrew the Memorial. The Congress Socialist Party and Youth League could not accept this stand. The State Congress was on the verge of a split, but P.Krishna Pillai, using his skills, vision and general acceptance, prevented that split.

7.3.6 At Alappuzha

The working class of Alappuzha was brought to the front line of the struggle for responsible government in the early 1940s. Till that time they had given attention mainly to secure their economic demands fulfilled. But with the arrival of P.Krishna Pillai on the scene the working class of Alappuzha and Cherthala became politically conscious and started treating political demands as equally important as their economic demands. Krishna Pillai was by that time accepted as their leader and he was lovingly addressed as their *Saghab* (comrade). He organized the working class of Alappuzha to launch a general strike with the help of other leaders who had acquired the spirit of Marxism-Leninism and got transformed into real communists. P.Krishna Pillai himself became a true communist through constant interaction with such national left leaders like P.Sundarayya and S.V.Ghate. In 1937 itself Krishna Pillai had succeeded in forming a Communist Group with EMS, N.C.Sekhar, K Damodran, AKG and others and Krishna Pillai himself functioned as its Secretary.

7.3.7 Pinarayi Meet

The ideological conflict in the CSP brought the Right and Left wings in the organization into an open confrontation particularly in the context of the stand to be taken in the matter of the Second World War. At the end of 1939, leading left activists of the CSP assembled at Pinarayi near Thalassery and decided to transform the Kerala unit of the CSP into the Kerala unit of the Communist Party of India (CPI). Soon after the Pinarayi Conference, P.Krishna Pillai was forced to go underground and while remaining so, he ran about all over Kerala incognito and disguised, to organize and strengthen the Communist Party.

The KPCC gave a call for observing September 15, 1940 as a Black Day to protest against police brutality. Krishna Pillai was fully immersed in mobilizing cadres to make this a great success. It was as a part of this that the Morazha episode occurred. This has been discussed in Chapter II (2.5.7). It was in the Morazha episode that K.P. Gopalan was sentenced to death for his involvement.

7.3.8 P. K. Weds

After a few weeks of the Morazha episode, P.Krishna Pillai returned to Travancore and while in Vaikom his native place, he was arrested. This time he was sent to Edalakkudy Sub Jail near Suchindram Temple in Kanyakumari district. It was during his sojourn in this Jail that he saw Thankamma who became his wife in future. Their relation started as a political one but Hindi language was a uniting link between them. Soon after he was released from Jail in March 1942, their marriage was conducted.

7.3.9 Party Rift

When at one stage of the Second World War Hitler attacked the Soviet Union, the Communist Party in India was forced to take a clear stand particularly because Britain was an ally of Soviet Union in its fight against Nazim. The Quit India Movement launched by the Indian National Congress also led to an ideological and political debate with in the Communist Party. The Party for its own reasons opposed the Quit India Movement. Krishna Pillai had a task exclusively cut out for him to elaborate the ideological and political underpinnings of the stand taken by the Communist Party to the cadres and activities at all levels. Meanwhile, the British Government withdrew its ban on the Party. Krishna Pillai attended the nine-day long Plenum of the CPI held in Bombay in September 1942, which decided on the programmes and campaigns for strengthening the party. The Party asked the Government to release all political prisoners from jail and initiated agitation for achieving this. The First Conference of the Communist Party of Kerala was held in 1943, which elected Krishna Pillai as its Secretary. The same year he was elected as a member of the Central Committee of the CPI at its First Congress held in Bombay. Krishna Pillai also had the distinction of sitting on the Presidium, which controlled the proceedings.

7.3.10 Calcutta Congress of CPI

When the Second World War was over, India witnessed extensive popular movements demanding early independence for the country. It was as a part of the mainstream struggle that Krishna Pillai could organize the Punnappa-Vayalar episode as well as Peasant struggles in North Malabar. After 1947 the CPI held its Second Congress in Calcutta in 1948. It witnessed a fundamental deviation in Party strategies. The Second Congress approved the policy of what was described as “Left Sectarian Adventure” which, according to some, later proved to be a wrong step. As soon as the delegates of this Congress returned from Calcutta to their respective States, they were arrested and governments all over India banned the CPI and declared it as an unlawful organization. Soon after reaching Kerala, Krishna Pillai went underground to escape the trap laid by the police.

7.3.11 The End of the Comrade

On August 19, 1948 at the young age of 42, Comrade P.Krishna Pillai died of snakebite. He was hiding in Kannarkat in the Kanjikkuzhy Panchayat in Alappuzha district and staying incognito at Chellikkandathu Veedu. He used to stay in this house occasionally whenever he visited Alappuzha for conducting study classes and also updating his reading and writing. N.C.Sekhar, K.C.George and C.G.Sadasivan used to be with him. Chellikkandathu Raghavan, who was only 18 years old then, was in charge of looking after the requirements of Krishna Pillai. Raghavan’s mother, Kalyani, used to cook meals and serve them to Krishna Pillai and other leaders. During this visit Krishna Pillai broke his usual practice of staying at Chellikkandathu Veedu for not more than 3 or 4 days. This time he was staying there for more than a week. On the fateful day, Krishna Pillai was reading the book *Dawn Out of China* and the chapter on Agrarian Revolution in China. In the morning Raghavan had just served a cup of tea to Krishna Pillai. Soon after that Krishna Pillai was found to go to Raghavan’s mother Kalyani who was engaged in cutting and preparing fish for making curry. Krishna Pillai was found to be in great pain and agony and had a piece of cloth towel tied tightly around his left arm. Before he could speak to Kalyani about what happened, Krishna Pillai fell down unconscious. Kalyani cried aloud and on hearing this Raghavan and his elder brother Nanappan came rushing to the spot. Soon C.K. Madhavan, C.K.Vasu, Sankunny, N.Vasu, Ramankutty, Kuttan, K.V.Narayanan and K.V.Thankappan, all Party workers rushed in from the nearby tea shop where they were sitting and sipping tea. Krishna Pillai was immediately carried to Veluthassery Narayanan Vaidyan,

Kadutha Vaidyan and Vadathottu Vaidyan (Vaidyan means physician) but before reaching them Krishna Pillai seems to have become lifeless.

7.3.12 Few Reminiscences

Here we quote some valuable reminiscences documented by the well-known writer C.Bhaskaran.⁹ According to M.V.Kurup, when Kannarkattu Vasu entered Krishna Pilai's room, where he was reading a book, he saw note book with the following words in Malayalam jotted down in the comrade's own handwriting. The English version was like this: "*A snake bit me. Darkness is enveloping my eyes and head. Inform all comrades. LAL SALAM—March Forward*". These were his last words. The work edited by C Bhaskaran is a collection of reminiscences of those who had known P Krishna Pillai closely. A brief reference to some of these reminiscences is useful to know more about the personality of this great comrade.

According to M.S.Devadas, Krishna Pillai could link together persons who are opposed to each other, since he had an enormous galvanizing unifying power. Bringing out a consensus from any conflicting viewpoints, arguments and postures was easy work for him due to his mesmerizing influence. He could identify the strength and weakness of each whether he be an ordinary worker, office boy, middle level party functionary or a big leader and could put each one of them to specific tasks, responsibilities and assignments to enable them to bring out their fullest potential to the benefit of the working class and the Party. Krishna Pillai was always charged with enormous energy so that he became, sometimes, adventurous and taking up challenges that ordinary mortals would not dare to try. At the same time, he was so lovable and broad minded that he did not pursue any kind of sectarianism.

Mammen Mappila of *Malayala Manorama*, who had suffered much during the Dewan Sir C.P's rule following the manipulated collapse of Quilon National Bank, has recorded in his autobiographical work *Jiviha Smaranakal* (Memoirs), his memories of Krishna Pillai. According to Mammen Mappila, Krishna Pillai was a young brilliant intellectual and was very close to him. After his release from Jail and after Sir C.P. left Travancore, Mammen Mappila was staying at Manorama Bungalow. Krishna Pillai used to visit him often and spend hours discussing matters of common concern and interest. Mammen Mappila had felt extremely sad on hearing Krishna Pillai's untimely death.

K.Madhavan has recorded that Krishna Pillai was a hurricane in every sense of the term. He inspired all those who had met him. He never wanted

any position in public life. He just wanted to mobilize the downtrodden and the exploited and push them onwards to fight against the exploiters. He was indeed a Yogi in the sphere of public life.

K.P.R.Gopalan, who was sentenced to death in the Morazha episode, got his life back when the Government after 1947 intervened. He had known Krishna Pillai very closely. Pillai had demonstrated that even an ordinary worker could traverse the path of Marxism and become an extraordinary individual in every sense of the term and help the cause of the exploited.

AKG considered Krishna Pillai as a great fighter who had only politics, none else, all over him. He was willing to bear any amount of suffering, to eat any kind of food that is offered to him and if nothing came in his way, he would just starve, and sometimes for days, without any complaint. He slept wherever he gets a place sometimes on the floor by spreading newspapers. AKG had said that it was Krishna Pillai who helped him to become a good communist and grow in politics. He had all the qualities that an ideal leader of people required. He was always receptive to others' views and patiently listened to them and then he would try to bring them around to his way of thinking with great persuasive skills.

Azheekodan Raghavan of the CPI (M), who had a tragic end at the hands of a group of political assailants at Thrissur, had fond memories of Krishna Pillai. In 1933 P.K., as Krishna Pillai used to be called, was in the thick of the harijan movement in Kannur. At Thullicherry, the orthodox upper caste Hindus caught him and tied him to a coconut tree and beat him mercilessly. After some time, P.K. decided to keep away the Gandhian spirit of non-violence and tolerance, and turn to become a true fighter to confront his tormentors.

P.Krishna Pillai was the inimitable architect of the trade union movement. Always Khadi clad, being a Congress worker in his early days, he used to come before factory gates, but workers used to turn their heads away from him thinking that he would spoil their lives. In those early days the workers were not willing to take police lathi blows like the Congressmen. In spite of the unfriendly attitude and stiff resistance from workers, P.K. and AKG did not back out. They spoke to the workers in front of the factory gates. Gradually, the workers understood them and started listening to them patiently. They were thus gradually mobilized for undertaking collective action. P.K. could starve for days but AKG could not.

K.Viswanathan of T V Puram near Vaikom remembered the help rendered by Krishna Pillai. Viswanathan had stood for election in 1948. Krishna Pillai was at the head of the campaign. Viswanathan at that time was

only 25 years old and had attended study classes at the TCFWU office conducted by Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, R.Sugathan and C.J.Thomas. Both Krishna Pillai and his wife Thankamma had campaigned for Viswanathan. When radio news about the killing of Gandhiji by Godse came, Krishna Pillai was at Vaikom. For a moment he was speechless. But immediately he got back his composure and called upon Party cadres to see that they gave protection to all the Muslims in the area. He organized a protest meeting at the Vaikom boat jetty maidan. Krishna Pillai told the meeting that the RSS might be the force behind Gandhiji's murder.

The life of P.Krishna Pillai, the comrade, lasted just 42 years. But during the two decades of his political work he did a commendable job by making the working class of Kerala fully conscious of their rights and also duties to the people and society at large. As B.T.Ranadive had said, till his end Krishna Pillai lived as a true Marxist giving full trust to Marxist-Leninist Philosophy.

The collection of selected writings and speeches edited by Andalat of CPI (M) and AKG Centre, Thiruvananthapuram throw further light not only on the personality of P.Krishna Pillai but also on the political and working class struggles in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore¹⁰. The selected writings and speeches of Krishna Pillai are broadly classified under four heads, namely, Freedom Struggle, Revolutionary Movement and the Communist Party, Working Class Movement, and, Contemporary Issues. A scrutiny of the first section itself showed the rich canvas Krishna Pillai was using. He covered a wide range of problems and historical events and bulk of the material was related to Travancore based troubles. In passing, mention may be made about the article on Malabar District Board, published in the *Prabhatham* of June 26, 1939. In the elections to the District Board, initially there was no contest and Congress leaders were elected but it only increased the liabilities of the Board. The Malabar District Board could work, according to Krishna Pillai, only if the right-minded and devoted Congressmen got elected to it. The Board should also give representation to all groups in the Congress. Here he made a pointed reference to the different groups that stood in the way of protecting the interests of the common people.

7.3.13 Condemnation of destructive activities

The article Krishna Pillai wrote in the *Desabhimani* of August 8, 1943 was a brilliant piece that was used to condemn the destructive activities conducted by a few to tarnish the image of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee and its respected leaders who had been put in jail. People of Kerala were reeling under severe hardships caused by chronic shortage of

food grains and essential articles, rise in prices, hoarding and black marketing, and spread of cholera. Since most leaders were confined to jail, a few remaining outside were trying to mislead the youth and forcing them to engage in destructive activities. Krishna Pillai listed the Thalassery Conspiracy, demolition of Feroke Bridge, blocking telegraphic communications, burning of Chemancherry Registration Office, arson at Azhiyur railway sheds etc, as examples of these destructive activities, which only supported the Fifth Column forces, which in turn were paving the way for Japanese infiltration into India.

Krishna Pillai appealed to the people to be sensible and if they really longed for freedom they should mobilize and defeat the Fifth Column forces. He wanted the immediate release of all Congress leaders in jail, and collective action by State Congress, Cochin Congress, *Kochi Praja Mandalam* and leaders like Samuel Aaron, Potheri Madhavan, E. Kannan, Janab Nurudeen Sahib and others to mobilize working class, peasants, farm workers, students, youth, women, teachers, traders and even landlords to fight and defeat the programmes of the Fifth Column forces. The agenda prepared by Krishna Pillai contained unity for securing national security, unity for getting the release of national leaders from jail, unity for food security (need to organize food committees and squads), unity for increasing production to protect national security (organize production teams, produce for people and also for soldiers who defend India's borders, prevent strikes, strengthen Kisan Sabha etc.), unity of students and youth and unity of women (raising slogans like self-protection, food security and national security) and on. In fact, these were the integral parts of the Political Resolution passed by the First Congress of the Indian Communist Party.

The Second Part relating to Revolutionary Movement and the Communist Party, Krishna Pillai's deep knowledge and analytical understanding of developments in Soviet Union and Europe become clear. Here, Krishna Pillai puts the freedom struggle in India in the international context and discusses fascism, communism, First Congress of the Communist Party, the relation between the Congress and the Socialists and Communists and the stand taken by Acharya Narendradev and Jai Prakash Narayan on national liberation struggle. In passing, Krishna Pillai referred to certain developments in Malabar. A few are discussed below:

7.4 MAJOR EPISODES IN THE UNION MOVEMENT

7.4.1 KPCC Summer School, 1939

The KPCC started a Summer School in the premises of the Mankate Church on May 8, 1939 and it ended on June 5. Besides various Congress Committees, the all-Kerala Malabar Karshaka Sanghom, organization of workers and students and youth had sent their nominees to attend the summer School, which had a total of 79 students ¹¹. They were exposed to study classes held by experts on such subjects like World History, Indian History, Political Science, Economics, beside organization of Congress, War, and Contemporary Political Situation. Arrangements were made for conducting debates and discussions on various issues and also for keeping a good collection of books for reference. The students in the Summer School had a strict schedule with wake-up at 5 am at the blow of a camp whistle, flag hoisting at 6 am breakfast at 8 am, study classes from 9 – 12 am, rest interval from 12 – 2.30 pm, study classes again from 2.30 to 5.30 pm, rolling down of the flag at 6 pm, dinner at 8 pm and special classes, debates and discussion from 8 pm to 10 pm and after the roll call and a whistle, the students would go for sleep. The camp maintained military like discipline under the control of the KPCC volunteer captain. The Principal and four Professors also stayed in the camp. Principal T.J.George taught Economics, World History was taught by K.Damodran, Indian History by K.K.Vasudevan Namboodiripad, and Political Science by S. Subramonia Sarma.

Food was served free in the camp. Students were housed in a roofed shed. The camp was located away from the town, a little isolated, in a hilly region. Students could take their bath in a nearby stream. Medical aid was not available nearby so that whenever someone had illness, doctors were brought from Perinthalmanna and Malappuram. Students were encouraged to participate in essay writing competitions on subjects like Indian Poverty, United Struggle, War etc and the winners were presented with a prize in terms of books. The purpose of the KPCC Summer School was clear-cut. It was meant mainly to train cadres and equip them with the necessary qualities and skills to lead the struggle for freedom and mobilize the members of the public behind them. A good political party needed able and committed workers. The KPCC, organizations of workers and peasants and students had hundreds of committees and cadres. It was decided that those students who had attended the KPCC Summer School would train others. The expenditure of a Summer School used to come to Rs.1000, of which Rs.500 was contributed by the KPCC and local committees raised the balance.

7.4.2 Sixth Conference of Kerala CSP, 1939

The Sixth Conference of the Kerala CSP was held at Thalassery under the presidentship of P.Narayanan Nair during June 16 – 18, 1938. 170 delegates from all over Kerala attended this and as such this was the first representative conference. K.Damodaran's thesis on the world situation was the first to be discussed. This enabled the delegates to understand the need for united struggle against evils of fascism and war. After Damodaran, E.M.S. Namboodiripad presented his thesis on contemporary political situation. It argued the case for anti-war struggle through the unification of the socialists and the communists along with the left forces within the Congress. The thesis of EMS was subjected to serious debate among the delegates.

Subramonia Sarma's thesis made a critical analysis of Gandhian outlook and approaches. There were other theses also on subjects like peasant movement, working class movement, communal problem and volunteer organization. All of them were subjected to serious debate before approval. The Conference came to the conclusion that the cadres were to be given intensive training in Marxism and scientific socialism before they were deployed for organization work and execution of Party campaigns. As early as 1938 George Chadayanmury, P.Gangadharan, P.S.Namboodiri, K.K. Warrier, P.Krishna Pillai, A.K.Gopalan, T.K.Raju, A.K.Raghavan and K.Damodaran had started organizing work and establishing contacts with the leaders of the Congress in Travancore, and Cochin.

7.4.3 Notable Programmes of Communists

On November 1, 1942, the Kerala Unit of the Communist Party conducted an important campaign at the instance of the all India Party organization. According to it, rallies and marches were held in several places, particularly in Kannur and Thalassery. In Kannur the rally was organized by workers to protest against Japanese fascism and the anti-national strategies of the Fifth Columnists in the State who were trying to bring about the disintegration of the country by adopting destructive activities. In Anthikkad, the rally was organized mainly by toddy tapping workers. They organized group meetings and mobilized funds. Workers in Sitaram Mills in Thrissur and those in the Cotton Mills in Kozhikode also made contributions to the Party fund.

In Chirackal, Kannur, the small peasants, tenants and landless workers took the lead. When they were asked to collect Rs. 250, they collected Rs. 447 as. 14 p.3. When directed to organize 500 group meetings they completed 700 meetings and this demonstrated their commitment to the Party. Women joined

the rallies in large numbers, some shouting that they would kill the Japanese with their knives. Contrary to the expectations of the Party leaders, the participation of Muslims in the rallies was enormous. They demanded that cooperation between the Congress and the Muslim League was essential for securing freedom and strengthening national unity and integration.

7.4.4 Kerala's Bolshevik Hero

In December 1942, P.Krishna Pillai brought out a small leaflet attached to and distributed by the *Desabhimani*, Kozhikode on K.P.R.Gopalan, the Bolshevik hero of Kerala as he was described¹². K.P.R.Gopalan, the chief accused in the Morazha episode, had worked as a Congressman, served as a Member in the Malabar District Board and participated in the Hunger march to Madras. He was known for his singing of folk songs in meetings and groups. KPR as colleagues and followers lovingly called him had chosen the interior places of Chirackal taluk for his activities. Every farm family in areas extending from Kalyat and Karakkattidam to the coastal regions upto Western Ghats knew KPR closely. He was in the front line of struggles of farmers and tenants against the extortion practices and exploitation of landlords. KPR used to reach sensitive spots if he came to know of any problem affecting the farmers, though he was based in Kalliaserry.

KPR was deeply involved in the movements of farmers, working class, students and youth, children's groups, library and reading rooms. In all Kerala organizations, though Keraleeyan would be the chief representative of Chirackal Taluk, he himself usually deputed KPR to the meetings of these organizations. Keraleeyan would first speak, but KPR would surely act. KPR functioned as Keraleeyan's main weapon and the former fulfilled the role. KPR always appeared unperturbed and calm even when confronted with a crisis. He exhibited enormous boldness, efficiency, and capacity for execution, revolutionary outlook and trust of his close colleagues. He grew through civil disobedience struggle, Socialist Party, Communist Party and with pep for defying draconian and anti-people laws of the authorities. His faith in the Party was unshakable.

The Bakkalam Convention was a landmark in the life of KPR. He had gone to Tripura Conference of the Indian National Congress and most delegates were planning to vote for Subhash Chandra Bose for the Presidentship. Once KPR reached the Conference venue, he was informed of the stand taken by the CSP not to support Bose. Being loyal to CSP, KPR stood by it. During the Conference, KPR prepared a blue print and ground plan of the Conference Pandal. Back home, KPR arranged to build a similar pandal at Bakkalam for the State Congress Conference there. The Gandhists

were opposed to the Bakkalam Conference and started campaigns to sabotage it. C.Rajagopalachari had instructed that no Gandhists should attend the Bakkalam Conference. KPR was unperturbed. The pandal was completed. Volunteers were trained. All the material, funds and skilled carpenters, masons and other workers were easily mobilized by KPR. When the Convention was actually held, the Gandhists had to bow their heads in shame.

During the elections to the Malabar District Board in 1939, several hardships had to be confronted. KPR had been a member of the Board. The Party's plan was always KPR's plan; such was the faith that KPR had on the Party. In the 1939 election to the District Board, the Party decided to make Janab Abdur Rahiman the President while the Party nominees were not to accept any political office. Narayanan Nair was directed to be the candidate in the constituency of Samuel Aaron and KPR was to fight from Thaliparamba. Narayanan Nair, known also as Sadhu Narayanan Nayanar was defeated in the elections and it was he who, being an accused, had got sentenced for a 20-year imprisonment for his involvement in the Morazha episode.

Abdur Rahiman lost in the elections. Some proposed KPR for the presidentship and a Muslim to be the vice president. But Party had directed that no one should accept any political office. At that time the Party had been banned and police was attacking activists. In this context, accepting political office would make Party nominees virtually powerless and inactive. There were rumours that KPR had an eye on getting the Vice President's post, but it was proved wrong. Never in his life KPR had stood against the wishes of the Party. He had all the qualities of a true Bolshevik. He was never after power, position, and, money. He never had any individual aspirations or personal relationship with others. He was a Bolshevik, a loyal revolutionary of the Party and one who lived for the Party.

KPR was involved in civil disobedience movement of 1930. While leading a march in 1931 police made a brutal attack on him. He was arrested along with Achuthan Nambiar and remanded to Kannur jail. From then on, KPR became a revolutionary. He bore the brunt of police brutality led by notorious Police Superintendent Ramanan in the Kannur jail. His co-sufferers were AKG, Chandroth and P.Krishna Pillai. While in jail, the favourite past time of KPR was playing chess.

KPR belonged to one of the biggest families in Kalliyassery, the Erampala Tharavad. After completing school final examination, KPR worked for a short period in the Registrar's office, but soon let it to join the Congress Party. It was KPR who transformed Kalliyassery into a Communist fortress. He was the leader of revolutionary movement not only of Chirackal, but the whole of Malabar. A.K.Narayanan and E.K. Narayanan (E.K.Nayanar) were

his relatives. E.K. Nayanar's full name was Erampala Krishnan Narayanan, an accused in the Kayyur case but who escaped falling into the trap laid by the police. Later E.K.Nayanar rose to the top of the Kerala unit of the CPI (M) and served the State as Chief Minister for the longest period for any chief minister in the State. Though KPR was sentenced to death, on account of nation wide agitation, the sentence was converted into life imprisonment.

7.4.5 Joshi's visit to North Malabar

Comrade Joshi was one of the top leaders of the Communist Party of India. He made a visit to Kozhikode, Badagara, Thalasserry, Kottayam, Peralassery, Kannur, Kalliaserry, Baliapatam and Irikkur during the month of March 1943. This was a historic campaign trail for him and it brought a renewed vigour to the communist movement in Malabar¹³. Joshi and several other delegates had attended the campaign. When the campaign concluded on March 22, the Railway had arranged to provide a special compartment for them to travel to destinations in North Malabar. The Kerala Conference of the Party had been held at Badagara in 1931 and Krishna Pillai had the responsibility of taking care of the then President Sen Gupta and he remembered it when dealing with the visit of Joshi in 1943. At every station, when the train carrying Joshi stopped, large crowds of Congressmen, Muslim League, traders, students and youth hailed him with slogans and garlands. Joshi, then functioning as Secretary of the Party, made short speeches and the delegates accompanying him made on the spot collection of funds for the benefit of the families of the accused in the Kayyur episode.

At Badagara a big meeting was held at Kottaparambu at midday time, under the scorching sun, attended by more than 4000. Krishna Pillai introduced Joshi and Sundarayya to the public of Badagara. The leaders spoke about the contemporary political situation, particularly relating to the food problem and lack of consensus and unity on questions of national struggles for freedom. The Kurumbranad Taluk Committee made a contribution of Rs.201 to the Party fund. Later the leaders left for Thalassery via Mahe. At Thalasserry and suburbs like Pinarayi and Vadakkumbadu houses and shops had been specially decorated in connection with the visit of the leaders. Leaders after reaching Thalassery bus station took salute in a guard of honour given by volunteers. After tea the leaders took bicycles to visit houses of martyrs and party workers at Pinarayi and Vadakkumbadu. In the evening the meeting held at Fort maidan was attended by more than 6000 people. There Joshi told the audience about his involvement in the Meerut Conspiracy and why it was executed. He also spoke about the freedom struggle, food problem, release of Mahatma Gandhi from prison and the ultimate goals of the Party. He appealed to Muslims to demand Gandhiji's release. Sundarayya

conveyed the greetings of the Telugu people to the people of Kerala. Krishna Pillai at the Thalassery meeting moved a resolution demanding the immediate withdrawal of the death sentence awarded to the comrades involved in the Kayyur episode and the resolution was passed by loud applause. The Party delegates from Bombay, Santharam, Govindiji and Gopalan sang revolutionary Hindi songs.

After the meeting, some Muslim Youth in Thalassery gave a tea party to the leaders and the delegates. Many Congressmen and Muslim League activists attended the party. From Thalassery the leaders moved to Kottayam, the native place of A. K. Gopalan. The boat workers had prepared a special raft platform to carry the leaders across the river there. The meeting at Kottayam was over only by past midnight. Some young men from Peralassery suddenly appeared on the venue, distributed a printed notice to Joshi, raised pro-Gandhi slogans and staged a walkout. In his speech there, Joshi touched on the demonstration and described it as an act of cowardice on their part.

On 23rd the leaders reached Kannur by car and in front of the Party office, volunteers gave them a guard of honour. At 11 am, a big rally and meeting attended by about 8000 people were held at the Police maidan. People from all sections attended the meeting. A most noteworthy development was the participation of a large contingent of workers who had availed of a day's leave from their establishments just to see and listen to the leaders. Joshi spoke to explain the various political issues in the national movement with particular emphasis on the dangers underlying the government's anti-people repressive measures and the support given by fifth columnists to it. Both these were misleading the public and the Party wanted to rectify it. Krishna Pillai was presiding over the meeting. An attempt to create disturbance at the meeting by a few misguided youth carrying a dagger was, however, spoiled by alert volunteers. A plains cloth policeman, probably a CID, was also found moving among the crowd. But the meeting ended without any disturbance.

At 12 am Joshi and other leaders went to Kannur jail and visited all the detainees of Kayyur episode. He promised them the full support of the Communist Party of India. While speaking to the detainees, Joshi's voice choked and eyes were filled with tears. The detainees told him that they were ready to die for the people and the country and appealed to the leaders that after their exit from the world, the Party should continue its work and tread the chosen path with added vigour. With the consent of the jailer, the leaders shook hands with the detainees before they left the jail.

The leaders then boarded the train and went to Kayyur. At Cheruvathur station, Rangarao Thalcherkkar, the lawyer who had argued the case of the Kayyur detenues, received Joshi. After the reception at the station, Joshi visited Kayyur by boat to pay respect to the family members of the Kayyur detenues. He presented a fund of Rs.500/- to be shared among four such families. From Kayyur the leaders went to Pala where they attended a feast offered by Kottayil Govindan Nambiar, a landlord and Balakrishnan Nambiar. Next day the leaders reached Thaliparamba and visited the members of the family of KPR Gopalan. After lunch they called on the parents of Narayanan Nair, the accused in the Morazha Case. At a meeting held in Kalliaserry, both Joshi and Sundarayya paid their respects to the people there for contributing a leader like KPR to the nation.

Next visit was to Irirkur, known widely as the Red Farkha in the Red Taluk of Chirackal. There Joshi spoke at a big gathering of peasants, tenants and farm workers and appealed to them to increase food production to save the nation. If this were not done, town people would invade villages leading to fights. They should therefore organise themselves into strong associations. From Irirkur, the leaders went to Baliapatanam and there they spoke about the urgency of unity among the Congress, Muslim League and the Communist Party.

We have extensively quoted the developments as included in the articles written by P.Krishna Pillai in the *Desabhimani* April 4, 1943 just to highlight the penetration of support to the Communists among the people of Malabar. Naturally this got amply reflected in the working class movement also in Malabar. The working class movement had leaders belonging to the Congress, CSP and the Communists and as such that movement ran side by side with the movement for freedom.

7.4.6 Deseeya Peedika Thozhilali Convention, 1943

P.Krishna Pillai was highly critical about the *Deseeya Peedika Thozhilali* Convention (convention of shop workers) held at Kozhikode Town Hall on June 23, 1943 and presided over by Quilandy Kumaran because it showered undue praise on Subash Chandra Bose, Jai Prakash Narain and others who, according to the Communist Party, were leaders of the Fifth Column group. This Convention spent most of its time, according to Krishna Pillai, to condemn the Communist Party, working class organisations and teachers' organisations. They went to the extreme by describing the Kayyur Comrades as a bunch of drunkards. R.M.Manakkalath from Thrissur, it was alleged, described the policy of the Communist Party as anti-national.

Krishna Pillai was provoked by the developments in the Convention and he used the occasion to write an elaborate counter on the issues in the *Desabhimani* of June 27, 1943. He raised the question, what was nationalism and what were the clear-cut strategies of the Fifth Column group. He argued that this group was trying to support Japanese fascism, force working class into unnecessary strikes, destroy means and instruments of production, aggravate food crisis and execute anti-people struggles, all in the name of nationalism. The issues raised by Krishna Pillai in that article were widely debated with in various popular and mass organizations.

In any attempt to do an objective historical narration of the trade union movement in Malabar, one may have to chronicle the major episodes in it. For this, one has to tap several kinds of sources. We have, in the present exercise, tried to tap the maximum available sources to bring out a true picture of the trade union movement. Some times in doing so we were forced to abandon strict chronology of events as they took place. We start with the period of the second half of 1910.

7.4.7 The Badagara Struggles

In September, 1918 Kottiyath Krishnan and Chandu, along with a handful of activists, were reported to have campaigned among the toddy tapping workers of Badagara with the idea to impress upon them that they should abandon their tapping work and join the *Kerala Thozhilali Union* (Union of Workers of Kerala)¹⁴. That was a time when toddy was being used as offering to Gods as a part of temple rituals in Malabar where the authorities had just imposed prohibition. On this the Chirackal Raja submitted a memorandum to the Madras Government that in the 36 temples under his control, toddy was an essential item for the daily poojas, and, therefore, they should be exempted from the Order on Prohibition.

The *Kerala Thozhilali Union* chose the famous Jagannatha temple near Thalassery, and founded by the great social reformer Sree Narayana Guru to concentrate on the activities of the Union. The first aim of the Union was to start a unit to convert toddy into jaggery and convince the tapping workers that this new activity could also give them a decent livelihood. Between 1911 and 1913 the number of toddy tapping workers had fallen from 25568 to 10919 and as such the search for alternative livelihood opportunities was inevitable.

According to Dilip Menon, the 20th century had heralded significant changes in Malabar. Farmers had begun to shift from food crops to cash crops. Cotton Mills, Tile factories, saw mills and similar other establishments

had been set up by private petty capitalists. They created a new class of wage labour that were put to utter exploitation by the capitalists. The workers after an exacting day of work, used to find some relief by taking toddy or spurious arrack to ease their body and mind. In those days, therefore, the trade union organisations began to focus on prohibition as one of the major items in their agenda. In fact, the Congress in Malabar had already initiated picketing of toddy shops and organising anti-liquor campaigns.

While the *Thiyyas* (Ezhavas) were abandoning their interest in toddy due to the influence of Sree Narayana Guru's teachings, the Mappilas (Muslims) in Malabar were being attracted to liquor trade. This had led to some open confrontation among these communities. It was in this context that the Union took up the campaign. Its major slogan was "promote coconut, coconut husk and yarn, but discourage toddy". The former gave employment and the latter ensured healthy living. The movement brought about dynamic changes in other communities. The *Chaliyans* (weavers) turned in favour of prohibition and love for Khadi because at that time the weavers had started facing the impact of import of cheap mill cloth. The popularity and spread of Khadi brought them great relief. The *Chaliyar Sabha*, the organisation of Chaliyars had even ventured to impose penalties on liquor drinkers in Payyannur.

To wean drinkers away from toddy and spurious arrack, the Congress Socialists started libraries and reading rooms where workers after a day's toil could come and spend their evenings more usefully instead of visiting liquor shops. In the reading rooms, one of the activists would read aloud the newspapers and others would listen. Those assembled there would also join to take a cup of tea together. This enabled some amount of political discussion. People of all religious communities and castes assembled in the reading rooms in the event.

This era in Malabar also saw the spread of socialist ideas. K.Damodaran's "*Pattabakki*" (Residue of Rent) had given a graphic description of the social situation then prevailing in Malabar – unemployment, indebtedness, poverty, exploitation and repression of workers by the employer, and, employer-landlord-police nexus. The imposition of prohibition in Malabar caused loss of jobs to hundreds of tapping workers and shop workers and they put the blame on the Union and the Congress Socialists for supporting prohibition. In this background the toddy tapping workers, who were threatened with loss of job, started forming their own exclusive organisations. For instance, the tapping workers of Manappuram were reported to have circulated leaflets on entitled "Call of Hunger" and appealed to their colleagues thus. "*Rise against capitalists who imposed*

prohibition. Look comrades, the coconut trees in our villages are calling us, Let us climb and tap them'

In 1949 along with the imposition of the ban on the Communist Party, the toddy tappers' unions were also banned. However, in the 1951 elections most of their leaders were elected to the Legislative Assembly. In 1967 the United Front Government lifted prohibition.

Kadathanadu in North Malabar had played a leading role in the national movement against British imperialism¹⁵. In 1921 for about 13 years the heroic Moyarathu Sankaran was Taluk Secretary of Kurumbranadu. The decision to launch salt Satyagraha at Payyannur was reported to have been taken at a meeting held at Badagara. In 1923 the meeting of the farmers at Puthupanath had focused on the disadvantages faced by tenants. A protest march of hundred activists led by eighty-year-old Moolayil Korumban went to Madras to submit a memorandum to the then Law Member, Mannath Krishnan Nair. Badagara also played host to several meetings when the decision to launch the Guruvayur Satyagraha was taken. It also saw even the members of the royal family wearing Khadi and participating in agitations and consequently getting arrested and remanded to jail. Mention may be made about E.K.Sankara Varma and Kutti Krishna Varma in this connection.

In May 1931 the Fifth State Conference of the Congress was held in Badagara at M.P.Narayana Menon Nagar. Menon had been jailed and sentenced for life imprisonment for participating in the Malabar Rebellion. In the State Conference, J.S.Sen Gupta, K.F.Nariman, T.Prakasan and Smt.Padmavathi Asher spoke. Moyavath Sankaran had raised Rs.2000 as share capital by selling a share at Rs.5 each in order to start the *Kerala Kesari* paper of which he himself functioned as the Editor. After the Communist Party was formed in 1939 at the Pinarayi Conference, working class mobilisation picked up. Keluvatten became the founder president of the United Workers' Union with P.P.Sankaran as the secretary and M. Kumaran Master, U. Kunhiraman and M.K.Kunhiraman Master as executive members. One of the first struggles they launched was against hoarding of essential goods and Japanese imperialism. When the cholera outbreak came, the volunteers of the Union did commendable relief work. In September 1940 the Bidi and Cigar workers came forward to hold marches against imperialism. In those days conditions of work in the bidi making units were deplorable. The workers held a struggle lasting 96 days demanding protection against exposure to sun and dust. They conducted picketing before factory gates. The employers retaliated by throwing caustic soda and thorns at the workers and used *goondas*, to attack workers and registered false police cases.

The Malabar Collector William convened a meeting at Badagara Magistrate Court and settled the dispute. Workers got an enhancement of wages by Rs.2/- . They treated it as a bonus while the employers considered it as a special benefit. It is believed that it was this group of Badagara bidi workers who got bonus established as a right for the first time in Malabar. Soon bonus dispute spread to other sectors. Government then set up an Industrial Tribunal and referred the dispute to adjudication. N.C.Sekhar, Kukaliya and V.R.Krishna Iyer represented workers. The Tribunal awarded two months' wages as bonus. This was a great victory for the workers of Badagara and neighbouring areas.

During the tour of T. Prakasam, the Chief Minister of Madras, in 1946 the workers of Badagara picketed him at the Bus stand and tried to submit a memorandum to him. It ended in a brutal police lathicharge. During the Railway Strike, 1946, the bidi and cigar workers of Badagara blocked train movements in sympathy of the railway workers. It was reported that the Bidi and Cigar Workers' Union of Badagara had helped to mobilize peasants in Kurumbranad Taluk to form 40 units of Karshaka Sanghom. The Koothali Karshaka agitation was a notable event. On April 10, 1948, the police held a lathi charge at Onchiyam during a workers' struggle. Firing followed the lathicharge in which eight were killed. Mandody Kannan and Kottacherry Kumaran were two prominent martyrs among them. P.R.Nambiar also was a leading figure in the Badagara Struggles.

Dr. K.K.N.Kurup, the noted historian had recorded the government take over of Kootholi estate in 1938 under the Estate Law. The estate had an extent of 30,000 acres of land. To put an end to the feudal system and the dominance of Brahminical control, a strong *Karshaka* (peasant) movement came into vogue. Kadathanad Raja and the Kurumbranad Raja were the biggest feudal landlords in the areas. They had given their lands to smaller landlords like Koothali Nayar, Gosalakkal Nayar, Valoori Nayar, Padavetti Nayar, Kalpathur Idam, Chamravattathu Nambiar, Karivalathil Nambiar, Karippoyil Nambiar, Konothu Adioyodi, Mookathu Moideen and several settlers from Travancore.

Another important incident was the throwing open of the Lokanar temple to lower castes by T.Prakasam, the Chief Minister of Madras. This was resisted by the upper castes. The lower castes resisted and retaliated by holding marches and demonstrations. Police registered several cases. A popular slogan raised at that time was "Kattumadom Kurumbranad Vidanam" (Kaattumadom should leave Kurumbranad). A *Kuli* (Bathing) case was registered against A.P.Krishnan, N.Kannan, K.Kunhappan, T.C.Chacko, P.K.Sankaran, P.P.Kunhirama Kurup, A.K.Krishnan Nair, M.P.Kelu (Keluvettan) and Paravan Chathu.

The Malabar Temple Entry Law was passed in 1947. The 1940s witnessed several clashes between Congress and Communist activists in the Badagara area. Agricultural workers and tenants agitated demanding right to work in the Koothali estate land. After the struggle, the Government yielded to their demand and released 15,000 acres to them for cultivation. In short, Badagara had seen a number of historic struggles both political and economic in character. Peasants, tenants, toddy tappers, bidi and cigar workers, and several other categories of working people were unified in the process of these struggles. The same phenomenon was witnessed in other centres in Malabar.

7.4.8 Conditions of Work and Wages, 1930s

A.K. Gopalan had given a brief description of the conditions of work and wages of workers and peasants in Malabar during the 1930s¹⁶. The workers had to toil from dawn to dusk and had to bear the brunt of physical punishments by employers. To get employment and retain it they had to pay hefty sums and grease the palm of *Kanganis*. After long hours of work, workers would become totally exhausted so that many had to drag themselves on the roads to reach their home. The reward they were getting for this toil was insufficient to keep body and soul together, but more than sufficient to create profits for the employers. The workers could not dream of any comfort in life let alone even the necessities. They had no faith in their capacities or abilities. Only because revolutionary instincts were dormant in them, that they did not think of ending their life. But occasionally some dared to commit suicide out of hopelessness. For a long time the workers never thought of having a saviour coming to help them. They were being treated as instruments for toiling for the capitalists and were made to believe that it was their fate and destiny.

The conditions of peasants were worse. They had unbearable burden of extortion levies, taxes, rent and deductions from the produce that they toiled to create. Every birth and death in the landlords' family or household only added to the burden of peasants and tenants. On many occasions they had to toil and offer free labour. They were not allowed to wear good clothes. Whatever cloth they wore should not extend below their knee. Their women could not be good looking, and, if they were, it would bring tragedy to them. Landlords had the sole right over land. If crops failed due to floods or drought, the landlord was not worried, since he would surely be compensated by the tenant which was the latter's responsibility. The landlord was unquestionable and he enjoyed the discretion of evicting his tenants whenever he wanted. The land laws were always in favour of the landlords.

When he was released from Jail, AKG made an on the spot study about the conditions of work and wages of people in Malabar. This enabled him to understand the hardships of workers, peasants and tenants. He became fully convinced that these social classes had unlimited capacity to bear sufferings and hardships. AKG was, therefore, determined that he should mobilize those classes and bring them on to the frontline of political and economic struggles. He soon learnt that, though some of the capitalists and feudal lords were progressive minded and they had joined the freedom struggle, they were not kind to the workers, peasants and tenants. He cited the case of G.D. Birla at the all India level and Samuel Aaron in Malabar. Samuel Aaron joined the freedom struggle after becoming a Congressman but denied the working class even its legitimate rights. This was a paradox. It was in this context that people like P.Krishna Pillai, E.M.S. Namboodiripad and A.K.Gopalan and others decided to hold a meeting of similarly minded activists towards the end of 1934. Kunju Sankara Menon was one of the secretaries of the Committee that was formed at that meeting.

Once the Civil Disobedience Movement failed, the Congress in Malabar had been virtually reduced to a small namesake unit confined to a corner of the office of the *Mathrubhoomi* Paper in Kozhikode. According to AKG, the only assets that the Congress then had were a Table and two or three chairs. Many thought that reviving the Congress would be a formidable task. There was no money for printing even membership receipt books. Luckily the *Mathrubhoomi* Press rendered great service by printing the receipt books free of charge. AKG and others first of all made the employees of the *Mathrubhoomi* Press members of the Congress and with the money thus raised went to many centres in Malabar for canvassing Congress membership. Krishna Pillai and AKG even went to Travancore and Cochin with such campaigns just to revive the Congress. It was during their campaign that they had met N.C.Sekhar of the Youth League.

In 1934, the textile mill workers in Bombay had gone on a long strike. About this strike R.P.Dutt had said:¹⁷

"The textiles general strike in Bombay lasting from April to June and in Sholapur from February to May, despite intense repression was clear proof that the working class had resurrected its scattered forces, reforged its unity and thrown up a crop of militant leadership."

The strike commenced on April 23 when the mill owners reduced the wages by 25 percent. It soon transformed itself into a general strike spreading to other centres and other industries. It brought into graphic relief the fact that what lay behind the working class movement was not the Bolshevik ghost but the burning flames of hunger and poverty of the workers. The working class

had been kindled with the slogan "*Workers of the world Unite, You have nothing to lose, but your Chains*". The AITUC appealed to all workers to stand ready to sacrifice something to help the striking textile workers. The message had reached Malabar too without further delay.

7.4.9 Early Trade Unions in Malabar

Kozhikode and Kannur were the major centres where industrial activity started emerging since 1870s. The Feroke Commonwealth Tile Factory owned by the Germans was a pioneer in this. After the First World War the ownership of this enterprise got transferred to British hands. According to some reports, Suryanarayana Rao and V.R.Narayana under the banner of *Bharatha Seva Sangh* organized some sort of trade union activity in Kozhikode, when they resisted several forms of inhuman treatment of workers. Retrenchment and dismissal were universal so that no worker dared to raise any objection to the managers. In the factories, during the working hours, workers were not allowed even to go to toilet. The Railway strike of 1928 gave added inspiration to social activists to mobilize workers. According to N.C.Sekhar it was the Railway Strike of 1928 that brought a sense of unity and solidarity among the workers and it kindled urgency for mobilization. During 1930-31 new factories like Commonwealth Cotton Mills came into being besides new factories at Olavakkode, Puthiyara and Thirunavaya. V.R.Narayanan mobilized the tile workers in Cheruvannur and Feroke. Some point out that Samuel Aaron who later became one of the big entrepreneurs and a Congress leader himself was involved in the trade union movement. He had in his early life functioned as the Vice-President of Kozhikode Commonwealth Weaving Factory Workers' Trade Union and Amayankararoopan, worker was the union secretary. One of the Executive members of the union was Unneerakkutty Vaidyan.

In 1931 following a decision by the management to effect a cut in wages a strike was launched by the union involving about 500 workers. This strike lasted 19 days. Isaac Pillai, the then secretary of Kozhikode YMCA mediated with the English factory manager, Hinley to bring about a settlement. English speaking activists had succeeded in establishing some rapport with the European managers. It was in 1932 that P.Krishna Pillai and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) activists came on to the scene. By 1935 trade unions began to be formed and most of them had the character of revolutionary collective organisations. Prior to this, besides the early trade unions mentioned above, the unions of handloom workers at Azhikode and Kannur were also launching working class struggles but they lacked revolutionary character.

In the beginning A.K.Gopalan, P.Krishna Pillai, Krishnan Nair, Kunhiraman Nambiar, Gilbert Vaidyan, Choyikutty, Abdulla and others worked hard to form the Kozhikode Labour Union. Its members belonged to a variety of sectors, industries, and establishments like handloom, soap making, tailoring, tiles, sawmills, and, cotton mills. AKG had recorded in his autobiography that he learnt the first lessons of Marxism during his close interaction with ordinary workers. In this matter, AKG was highly indebted to Manari Appu, Manayikkodan Abdulla, Mullikkodan Raman and Kidaran Chandu.

7.4.10 The Feroke Tile Factory Struggle, 1935

On March 4, 1935 the workers in the Feroke Tile works commenced a strike. Feroke, a few kilometres south of Kozhikode, had six tile factories and a baniyan (vest) company, which on the whole employed around 3000 workers. Out of these companies two were under European management. The tile companies had two types of workers, contract workers and those who were directly employed by the companies. The bulk of the workers fell under the category of contract labour. The capitalists preferred the contract labour in order to step up the rate of exploitation and extract maximum profits. Some of the contractors or agents and a few of the company owners were feudal lords. If any worker or group of workers made any demand or questioned the employers or management, they were summarily discharged from service without giving an opportunity for the workers to offer an explanation. The tile workers' union was set up at a meeting presided over by K.Kelappan and within the first two days, the union had 400 workers coming forward to join them. The employers did not like this and they started dismissals and victimization.

The factory owners were not willing to permit holding of meetings of workers even in public places. For instance, when a meeting was scheduled to be held at a maidan in front of the Cheruvannoor temple, the factory owners went to court pleading for a ban on the meeting. The meeting, therefore, had to be shifted to a *poromboke* land (open land owned by government) near the Feroke Bridge. On the second day revenue officials came to the spot and announced that no meetings should be held there, as it was a government property. After a few days, a factory owner acquired the same land and he immediately put up a fence around it to deny the workers a place to hold a meeting.

With effect from January 1, 1935 working hours were reduced to 54 hours a week but following that the factory owners wanted the workers to finish this amount of work in 5½ days and by this they saved a half a days'

wages from the total wage payment. But the Commonwealth Company put the workers to a 50-hour work in 5 days. Another company chose to employ workers for 9 hours a day for 6 days. Thus there were differences in working hours across factories in Feroke. This forced workers in Feroke to demand uniform working hours (9 hours) in all factories. Petitions were submitted and there was no response from the factory owners. As a last resort, the workers decided to strike work.

A meeting was organized at Ramanattukara to mobilize sympathy and support for the strike. Miscreants deployed by the factory owners threw stones at the crowd and a few were injured. A similar incident occurred at another meeting of workers held in Mannur. The police did not intervene in these incidents. In spite of victimization, threats and physical assaults the strike continued. The factory owners put up boards in front of factory gates saying that those who were participating in the strike would never be taken back for work. The striking workers were informed that if they wanted to resume work they should get in touch with the agents and contractors of the factories. The office of the trade union was raided and ransacked.

On April 7, 1935, as notified in advance, a meeting of workers was to start in the morning at Cheruvannur. By 8 am a busload of policemen accompanied by four Sub Inspectors and one Circle Inspector reached the spot. By 11 am Kelappan arrived in a bus and immediately walked upto the temporary dais and started the meeting. As soon as Kelappan started speaking, the priest of the nearby temple arrived on the scene and appealed to Kelappan to call off the meeting so as to avoid the spoiling of the purity of the temple. The priest suspected that the meeting would bring a lot of low caste untouchables to the temple premises. Kelappan told the priest that if he had any reservation, he could appeal to the authorities and get an order from them. Kelappan continued his speech. Before he could proceed any further, a person stood up and questioned Kelappan why he was misleading people, declaring loudly that leaders like Kelappan had been responsible for the Mappila Rebellion. There were shouts and counter shouts. One shouted loudly that the leaders who spoke at the meeting would not leave the place alive. Many got into the dais and surrounded Kelappan who continued to appeal to them to allow the meeting to take place smoothly. When such commotion was happening, the police was just remaining as silent onlookers.

P. Krishna Pillai, A. K. Gopalan, Chandrothu Kunhiraman Nair, K. A. Keraleeyan and K. Damodaran were present at the venue. Damodaran approached the Circle Inspector and requested his intervention to enable them to conduct the meeting smoothly. The Inspector replied that the police would not intervene unless some criminal offence was committed. There were few heated exchange of words between the Inspector and K. Damodaran. After

waiting for more than half an hour, Kelappan decided to call off the meeting. There were allegations that those forces, which wanted to disrupt the meeting, were trying to give a communal colour to the whole incident and bring about a clash between Hindus and Muslims.

Though the strike crossed the 30-day mark, there were no reports of untoward incidents or breakdown of law and order excepting small disturbances to spoil meetings organized by the leaders. The struggle of workers could not be suppressed by mere prohibitory orders. The workers had taken to strike only as a last resort since they had experienced starvation and hunger. Their demands were minimal. The declaration of prohibitory orders under section 144 was not going to wipe out the trade union movement, as no power on earth could do that to the working class.

From early January 1935 onwards a number of workers' meetings were held at Cheruvannur, Kallai, Kozhikode and other centres. Feroke was an active centre of conflict where agents of the factory owners used to create disturbances at the meetings. The factory owners and their agents openly recruited blacklegs who fell in to the trap out of sheer destitution and hunger. In one of the meetings, a local VIP accompanied by a small group of people carrying petromax lamp, vaded through the crowd and reached the dais. One of them jumped on to the dais and started speaking on behalf of the employers. Considering that the emerging situation was not conducive for holding the meeting, leaders decided to call off the meeting. By that time a busload of police had arrived on the scene. Alleging that there was stone throwing and it was AKG who had done it, a few pro-employer miscreants raising daggers in their hands rushed through the crowd shouting for AKG's blood. All these miscreants were incidentally people known to the police. They rushed to the union office and ransacked it in the presence of the police just remaining onlookers at that place. The objective behind all this drama was to discredit the trade union movement and its leaders and wean workers away from it. The *Mathrbhoomi* of April 6, 1935 put out an editorial appealing to workers not to get disheartened but to follow the Gandhian path of non-violence and tolerance. It asked the public of Kozhikode to register their strong protest against the attitude of the police to remain just onlookers when miscreants disturbed meetings and physically abused and assaulted the union leaders and activists.

7.4.11 Unions prior to 1935

A.K.Gopalan had gone on record about the early trade unions in Malabar before 1935¹⁸. At that time he was functioning as the Secretary of the Tile Workers' Union. According to him, even before 1935 there were a Bidi

Thozhilali Sanghom in Thalassery, Bidi Thozhilali Sanghom in Kannur, Thozhilali Union in Kozhikode and also two other unions, namely, Handloom Company Thozhilali Union and Metal and Carpentry Workers' Union. When the 54-hour week was introduced by law, most employers reduced working days to 5½ days a week and consequently they cut half a day's wages. Since this caused much misery to the workers, leaders began to campaign and mobilize the affected workers. By the end of January 1935, the Saw Mill Workers' Union in Kallai, Thread Mill Workers' Union in Cheruvannur and Tile Workers' union in Feroke had come into being.

Workers were ignorant about the implications of the new schedule of 5½ days a week and how this was being used by employers to increase working hours per day and cut half a day's wages. They did not have organizational or collective strength and therefore leaders had to do constant campaigns and hold meetings at factory gates. The leaders found that initially the workers did not show any enthusiasm and wondered why the Khadi clad leaders were wasting their time. The leaders then decided to engage the workers in one to one talk. This worked wonders and soon at the factory gates the workers stopped to give a patient hearing to the leaders. Apart from the current problems facing the workers, the leaders elaborated on Socialism, Russian Revolution and India's own freedom struggle against British imperialism. They described the dangers of the capitalist system and the instruments of exploitation. They tried to convince the workers that only collective action through forming a trade union could satisfactorily counter the capitalist exploitation.

When two workers, Choyikkutty and Arumughom, joined a trade union, the factory owner terminated their services. AKG and others held a meeting and passed a resolution condemning the action. The employers directed their workers not to join unions, attend meetings addressed by leaders, and also warned them that if they violated these directives they would lose their jobs. If they lost their jobs, they should go and ask the leaders to give them jobs, they added.

When Feroke Tile Works witnessed a struggle followed by disturbances and altercation, K.P.Gopalan decided to offer hunger Satyagraha hoping that it would bring about a positive change of heart among the employers. Initially Gopalan found it difficult to get a place where he could offer the Satyagraha. Finally a paddy field in front of Malabar Company was chosen.

By February 1935, due to continuing struggles by workers, Kerala Tile Company, Star Tile Company, Dutton Saw Mill, South Indian Saw Mill, Premier Saw Mill and Parry and Company agreed to a six-day week work

schedule of 54 hours. Very soon, with the exception of five tile companies in Feroke, almost all companies and mills followed suit with the six-day week schedule.

Suddenly, almost spontaneously, 200 workers including 100 women of the spinning department in the Thiruvannur Cotton Mill went on strike. The leaders knew about it only later. The strike lasted 15 days. No effort was made by authorities to ban the strike. Workers from Feroke companies contributed about Rs.100 to the strike fund and the workers in the Kerala Tile Company supplied five bags of rice to the striking workers. All this solidarity made the Thiruvannur Mill strike a great success but that also provoked the mill and factory owners. They decided to take all steps to stem the tide of workers' struggle.

In the first week of January 1935 the leaders sent a notice to the tile company owners of Feroke requesting them to implement 54 hours 6-day schedule of work. All except the owner of the Malabar Tile Company sent some reply or other. The Manager of the Feroke Tile Company asked his workers to personally represent the grievances if any. Responding to this some workers met the Manager several times and finding that the Manager was not taking any action they told him that they might be forced to go on strike to get their grievances redressed. After a week the workers served a strike notice. AKG, in his capacity as the Secretary of the Union, went to the Manager to discuss the issues. He explained to the Manager that the Union had served a strike notice as a last resort since, even after repeated representations, he had not responded. The Manager told AKG that he had permitted his workers to join trade unions and if other companies agreed, he would also implement the 54 hours, 6-day week schedule. He pleaded for a week's time to give his final decision.

By 12 noon, six workers got prohibitory orders. At the meeting held in the evening at Cheruvannur, AKG asked the workers to give a week's time to the Manager to give his decision. Workers believed that since the factory was getting huge orders, the manager would not force a strike but a few who knew the reality countered this. One of the contractors Kuttayi promised the workers all help. On March 4 workers did not go for work. The company had around 750 workers. The company asked the contractors to bring the required number of workers. Some of the contractors expressed their inability. But one contractor with the help of another factory owner succeeded in bringing a few workers from Kondotty, Manjeri and other nearby places.

The factory owners decided to disturb union meetings. More workers were served with prohibitory orders and dismissal. In spite of all this most workers did not return to the company even after a month. This caused fear in

the minds of the factory owners. They started spending money lavishly to defeat the strike. Still finding no success, they instigated to give a communal colour to the strike. They tried to create a rift between Hindu and Muslim workers. They gave out false propaganda saying that the union leaders were socialists, the socialists in Russia had massacred Muslims there and the socialists would do the same thing here, if they were not properly checked. They filed a suit against AKG. In spite of all this, hardly 60 workers had reported for work. The Feroke strike taught a lesson that if workers stand collectively united they could win their legitimate demands very easily.

7.4.12 All-Kerala Trade Union Convention, 1935

By the middle of 1935 an important initiative was taken to bring the working classes in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar under a common platform and a unified central leadership, though all the territories were under the jurisdiction of separate governments. In May 1935, the first all Kerala Trade Union Convention was held at Kozhikode. The Second Convention on similar lines was held in Thrissur in 1937 and the Third was held at Kanjikkuzhi in Alappuzha district on February 19, 1939.

As a forerunner of these Conventions, the Kozhikode Convention was an epoch making one. It brought together the toiling classes to think about a central organization to fight injustice. The collective strikes by handloom workers of Kannur, tile workers of Cheruvannur, Feroke, Pinarayi, Ollur and Chalakkudy, coir factory workers of Alappuzha had inspired the leaders to consolidate the trade union movement. It was reported that thinking on these lines had emerged since the Railway Strike of 1928 and the response it generated among the working class in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. By September 1931 a North Malabar Thozhilali Union had been formed.¹⁹ Following that in September 1932, the first conference of this Union was held at Azhikode under the presidentship of U.Gopala Menon. Handloom workers mainly attended this. It passed several resolutions incorporating urgent economic demands as well as political demands. In October 1933 the workers numbering 1500 conducted a strike. In January 1935 the workers protested against the shift to 5½ day schedule of work. They demanded an enhancement of wages by 10% for those working under contractors, and, reinstatement of Manari whose services had been terminated. In March 1935 tile workers of Feroke and workers of Aaron Mill Company at Pappinissery struck work. Working class struggles were reported from Thrissur, Amballur, Palluruthy and Alappuzha. It was in this background that the first all Kerala Convention of Trade Unions was held at Kozhikode. This was presided over by Maniben Kara.

7.4.13 Night Class for Workers

Once the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed, trade union movement secured some vital forces to develop rapidly. At Kozhikode the CSP leaders set up a Union office and along with a Night Class was started for conducting study classes for workers²⁰. P.Krishna Pillai, P.K.Balan, H.Manjunatha Rao, P.K.Ramunny Nair and Sarabhai Patel of Nagjee Purushotham Company were the leaders behind this Night Class. The study classes imparted learning on organizational work, fundamental principles of Socialism, Marxism-Leninism, Imperialism and Capitalism and by 1938 an attempt was made to raise the Night Class to the status of a trade union education centre.

7.4.14 A.K.G's Hunger march, 1935

After the struggles in Feroke Tile Works, during 1935 itself several trade unions were formed in Malabar for workers in Handloom, Bidi, *Riksha pulling* (hand held and drawn passenger cart) and other sectors. “Down Down Landlordism, Capitalism, and Imperialism. Up, Up, Revolution” were the slogans that rendered the sky. Marches and demonstrations were held²¹. The landlords and employers complained that the marchers disturbed peace by shouting slogans in front of their residences. A new kind of class-consciousness gripped the workers. Even the middle class showed interest in Marxist ideas. There was general resentment against any one found well dressed, well fed and enjoying material comforts and luxury.

AKG travelled widely in Malabar along with Chandroth, Dr. T.P.N.Nair and T.K.Narayanan. During the travel AKG met an interesting character that had transformed himself from a rationalist to a socialist. He was none other than C.H. Kanaran. The biggest problems confronting the people of Malabar were shortage of food and large-scale unemployment, particularly the latter being acute among the educated. AKG and other leaders decided to address the problem of food shortage and for that a hunger march had to be initiated. First such a march was conducted from Kuthuparamba to the office of Sub Collector Thalassery. A march led K.P.R.Gopalan on foot reached Kuthuparambu and from there a 1000 strong march started towards Thalassery.

The Sub Collector of Thalassery received the marchers and discussed the issues. He promised his help in resolving them. A meeting was held at the beach. It was then decided to commence the hunger march towards Madras, the very next day itself. Marching by foot upto Madras was a great challenge and surprisingly many people and organizations came forward with both

monetary and non-monetary support. The *Mathrubhoomi* daily did a wonderful supporting role. Campaigns were held at several centres informing the people about the march. Opinion on the march and its outcome were sharply divided, as many feared that the march would fizzle out. The authorities sent a small group of police personnel to accompany the marchers. The marches shouted slogans, and sang revolutionary songs besides holding small wayside meetings.

The march was led by AKG who acted as the Captain. Chandroth was the Secretary and KPR was in charge of revolutionary songs. A.N.Kunhikannan and T.K.Raju were the lead singers. The sale of books and other publications was in charge of K.Chattukutty. P.M.Gopalan, Vadavathy Krishnan, Pinayi Krishnan Nair, C.C.Gopi, Kasim, Manuel and Gopalan were the other members of the march. The marchers received enthusiastic receptions and contributions on the way. They crossed Valayar hills and entered Coimbatore. Though in Tamil Nadu, the marchers got receptions, some congressmen like Satyamoorthy accused them for propagating socialism and violence. The marchers camped in Salem for two days. They established close contacts with socialist minded activists there. At Salem a public meeting was held presided by K.Madhavi, a native of Kannur. She was a Municipal Councillor of Salem. Well over 6000 people attended the meeting. AKG spoke in English and it was translated into Tamil. The number of policemen accompanying the marchers had steadily increased.

When the march crossed a month, most of the members had become exhausted. Some fell ill. The daily routine was to start the march at 7 am and go up to 6 pm with short intervals for rest. After a public meeting in the evening, the marchers would rest from 10 pm. Each member of the march carried a shoulder bag containing personal belongings. One common bag, fairly large, contained books and other publications for sale on the way and it also contained some essential drugs needed by all the members. After a month, when most members felt exhausted there was little enthusiasm to carry the common bag. On such occasions AKG himself carried it. At certain places the marchers cooked their own food. At one place, according to AKG, some police constables accompanying them committed a theft as they took away some of their clothes.

When finally the marchers reached Madras, their intention was to enter the Legislative Assembly there. A 3000 strong crowd received AKG and his team. About 200 members of mounted police accompanied them, to ensure security. The Tamil Nadu Socialist Party had arranged for a reception to the marchers. Next day the volunteers marched towards the Legislative Assembly buildings. Since they had no intention to defy law and get arrested, they did not forcibly enter the Assembly premises. After the hunger march concluded,

all the members of the team returned from Madras by train to Kozhikode. They had walked about 750 miles on foot, held about 500 public meetings, addressed nearly two lakhs people, sold 25000 leaflets and booklets, and collected around Rs.500 mostly in small coins. As team captain, AKG suggested to send small teams of marchers to each taluk of Kerala. AKG and K.P.Gopalan were directed by the police to get bail for good conduct. Cases were registered against them. AKG was remanded to police custody and imprisoned for a period of nine months in Tiruchirappally jail. Though he was given the B-class status, solitary confinement had put him under severe strain mentally and physically. But the period of confinement gave AKG to do serious critical assessment of his past words and deeds. He felt that without shedding his middle class mentality, he could not become a true revolutionary. He decided to turn to Marxism and Marxist Party. Elections were soon to be held. The Congress was engaged in election campaigns. When the Congress won the elections, Raman Menon became the Minister for Jails and he ordered the release of AKG one month before the expiry of his term of imprisonment.

7.4.15 Some strikes and cases

After the Congress came to power, there was all-round enthusiasm among Congress workers. E.M.S.Namboodiripad was elected the Party Secretary. Soon the Socialists got the upper hand in the Congress organization. Organizational restructuring, coordination between various levels in the hierarchy, formation of local committees, and proper auditing of accounts were given top priority. Under the control of Chandroth, a volunteer corps was formed and training was given to the volunteers. Volunteer corps for peasants and workers was also set up. At Mankata Pallipurathu, a KPCC Summer School was started to impart instructions on history, economics, politics, philosophy and different ideologies to 100 candidates and this was a unique experiment in the political history of Kerala. The Congress in Malabar was developing into a true popular organization.

People were made intensely conscious about the evils of Colonialism, Imperialism, Feudalism, Landlordism, Capitalism and the State establishment or bureaucracy and the lasting remedy for them was only popular struggles. In Payyannur and Irirkur in Chirackal taluk the same group of people who had attacked AKG and Keraleeyan earlier came forward to give them a reception and apologize for their past misdeeds. It was the sincere work of peasants and workers that had led to the electoral success of the Congress in Malabar District Board as well as all Municipalities. In spite of the Congress coming into power, the police repression continued unabated. Leaders like Kelappan and K.A.Damodara Menon feared the take over of the Congress by the

Socialists. They formed a Gandhi Sanghom and campaigned that all socialists were criminals as they were instigating peasants, tenants, farm workers and industrial workers to launch struggle against landlords and employers. Samuel Aaron publicly condemned the socialists. In the elections conducted to the Malabar District Board, the Rightists aimed mainly at eliminating the Socialists in the Congress. Meanwhile students at Brennen College, Thalassery went on a strike demanding reinstatement of a student who was dismissed. Soon students' unions were formed at Thalassery, Badagara, Chirackal, Payyannur and other centres.

It was in this context that the Teachers' Movement in Malabar got transformed into an anti-imperialist movement by becoming a true popular mass organization. The elementary school teachers of Malabar not only organized themselves but also established close integration with the movements of peasants and workers by helping and guiding the latter. On September 26, 1939 the teachers' movement successfully held a harthal and struggle covering the entire Malabar.

At Kozhikode workers of the Commonwealth Tile Company held a strike. V.V.Giri took the initiative to negotiate with the European manager, but the latter did not agree to a settlement. Police repression on striking workers followed. It registered a petty case against P.Krishna Pillai for creating "nuisance". The bidi workers in Thalassery and Kannur also struck work. During the strike at Thalassery an important incident happened. That was a time when peasant's movement was developing in Pinarayi and Eranjoli. AKG appealed to the peasants to extend support to the striking bidi workers. When a meeting was held at Thalassery beach, the peasants came in large numbers to express their solidarity with the bidi workers. They brought with them jack fruits, mangoes, coconuts, bananas and plantains and heaped them on the beach. At the meeting, the peasants shouted that as long as they were alive the striking workers need not worry and they and families would be taken care of. The peasant movement and the workers' movement were being blended and galvanized to form a strong resistance movement against injustice and exploitation.

The bidi strike continued for long because of resistance by the bidi company managements and the stand taken by Congressmen like Samuel Aaron. Later the handloom workers struck work in Kakkad, Chowra and Azhikode. When they first struck work, the companies agreed to a settlement and the strike was called off. But soon the companies violated the terms of settlement forcing the workers to launch a second strike. This lasted for a long period. Some companies filed cases against workers and their unions. But after some time the companies agreed to implement some of the workers' demands. When these struggles were getting widespread, the true colour of

the Congress leaders came to the open. They wanted the peasants and workers to abandon the warpath and support the Congress.

On September 1937 workers and their unions in Kozhikode, Thalassery and Kannur observed a Demands Day. This was a great day to remember in the history of the trade union movement. At these centres, thousands of workers converged to declare that they were willing to conduct long struggles to achieve their legitimate demands as well as to achieve freedom for the country. At Padiyur near Irity, the police and landlords planned to create disturbances at a peasant's meet but that did not happen because of the display of strength by the peasants. At Blathoor, Padiyur and Ellerinji in the eastern sector, Irity, Kannavam and Mattannur in Kottayam district, Kuttiyadi in Kurumbranad taluk, the peasant movement got strengthened. In Chirackal taluk the struggle against evil practices of "*Vaasi*" and "*Noori*" (extortion payments/deductions from produce) were widespread.

December 18, 1938 saw the opening of a new chapter in the peasant movement of Kerala. Marches led by Chandroth and E.P.Gopalan were held from Karivelloor and Kanchikot. Thousands of volunteers in red uniform reached Chevayur and held a meeting inaugurated by Kozhippurath Madhava Menon. Uniformed volunteers also came from Kannur, Thalassery and Kozhikode. Soon it turned out to be a huge Kisan-worker rally. At Kasargode peasants were organized by Subramonian Thirumumbu and held a march towards Mangalore to submit a Memorandum to the Collector. Unlike the Malabar Collector, the Mangalore Collector happily received the marchers and their memorandum. The landlords, their henchmen, and, the police let loose repression. New police stations and jails were opened. Many were arrested on false charges of violating women, theft of timber from reserve forests and organized looting and arson. In Chirackal taluk alone 151 peasant activists were put in jail. The office of the Karshaka Sanghom at Blathoor was set to fire. Stones were thrown at peasant's houses. Wells providing drinking water were forcibly polluted to deny even drinking water in the area. Landlords and bureaucrats were working together to destroy the peasant movement. Vishnu Bharatheeyan was arrested and sentenced to six months' imprisonment. It was during this period that Prof.N.G.Ranga, the President of the All India Kisan Sabha conducted a field visit to Kodakkat and Blathoor. He addressed big rallies of peasants at these places and they assured him that they were willing to continue their legitimate struggles and prepared to go to jail for that if needed. They organized *Bala Sanghoms* (children's groups) among their children. Women were also organized. K.Damodaran's drama "*Paattabakki*" created a big impact on the people. In the early days AKG, K.Damodaran, KPR, Perachutti P.Sekharan and others played the major roles in the drama staged at several places.

7.4.16 Support to the Struggle in Travancore

The period 1937-38 saw the emergence of strong popular struggles in most princely states. In Vidooraswatham village in Kolar district of Mysore State the police opened fire on an agitated crowd of people killing 32 on the spot and injuring 42 others. This struggle had been for asserting the right of people to hoist the national flag. In Travancore the freedom struggle went in hand in hand with the working class as well as students' struggles. When the State Congress commenced its struggle on August 28, the Youth League acted as the major force in it. N.C.Sekhar defied the ban imposed under Section 144 and courted arrest followed by K.Damodaran and Sreedharan of the Youth League. On July 15, police had made a brutal lathi charge on students in Thiruvananthapuram. On September 21, the police let loose its brutality at the Sangummukhom beach and on August 31 and September 2 police fired at Neyyattinkara and Kollam, followed by firing and lathi charge at Chengannur. The struggle in Travancore was invariably a part of the national freedom struggle.

The Kerala Congress Committee met in Kozhikode and unanimously decided to extend their solidarity and support to the Travancore struggle. A sub committee was formed to organize a foot march to Travancore led by AKG. A large public meeting was held in Kozhikode beach on September 9, 1938. Kozhippurath Madhava Menon, V.R.Nayanan, K.A.Damodara Menon, KPCC President Abdur Rahiman and Municipal Chairman U.Gopala Menon spoke at the meeting. AKG's march as usual distributed leaflets and notices. It passed through Eranad, Cheruvannur, Ramanattukara, Pulickal, Kondotty, Nediyirippu, Manjeri, Malappuram, Ramapuram, Perinthalmanna, Thootha, Cherpulassery, Ottappalam, Shoranur, Wadakkancherry, and Thrissur to reach Ernakulam on September 16. From Ernakulam 8 volunteers joined the march along with another batch from Mangalore led by Kamath. At Ernakulam they were given a large reception attended by about 20000 people. It was here that AKG for the first time met P.T.Punnoose. On September 19, the marchers proceeded to Aluva and there were rumours that the police there would assault them. When the train reached Aluva station, the marchers were greeted by a large crowd shouting "*Malabar Jatha Ki Jai*" and "*State Congress Ki Jai*" (*Ki Jai* means 'hail'). Students of the Union Christian College, Aluva, had reached the Aluva railway station the previous day itself while the students of the Maharajas College travelled with the marchers in the train from Ernakulam to Aluva. There was heavy rain and water was flowing in the Aluva Station premises.

On one side of the railway station, a large contingent of Reserve police, military and ordinary police led by Inspectors and the DSP and several

police and army trucks had taken position as if to guard the borders of Travancore. Tension was being built up and many thought that an explosive situation was emerging. There was some direct confrontation between volunteers and the police. When a police inspector rounded up a volunteer, a strongly built Christian from among the crowd was seen walking upto the Inspector and asking him to spare the volunteer from Malabar and if required the police could take action on him. He warned the Inspector about the possible consequences if the Malabar volunteer was harmed in any manner. Though AKG rushed to the spot, nothing untoward happened since the Inspector saw sense and wisdom and left the place. At the railway gate the Travancore police stopped the march. AKG directed the volunteers to disperse and cross the border at various points to fool the police. As volunteers ran here and there the police pursued them. The Dewan Sir C.P. had directed the police not to harm the volunteers. But the volunteers and the police were locked in direct physical combat, the former trying to cross the borders and enter Travancore and the latter trying to resist them. By 3 pm a huge crowd had gathered to witness the ongoing tussle. Volunteers soon realized that the police had no direction from the authorities to arrest them. But by 8 pm the police changed its policy and decided to arrest the volunteers who crossed over to Travancore territory. After AKG and the volunteers were arrested, fresh marches were started from Kozhikode and Thalassery, led by Mohammed Yusuf and Anandan. A fourth march was initiated from Palakkad and a fifth from Madura all in support of the struggle in Travancore. Soon Aluva on the border of Travancore became an active centre of struggle.

The Travancore police was notorious for its corruption, nepotism and brutality, according to the Mabalar leaders like AKG, in contrast to their counterparts in British administered Malabar. By evening time the Travancore police would become senseless and, acted in whatever manner they liked. AKG's life in Travancore police lock up was miserable. His jail mates were Kedamangalam Pappukutty, the writer and *Kathaprasangam* exponent, Parur Balakrishna Pillai and Chandrasekhara Vaidyan. The case against them had been charged in the Magistrate Court in Parur. During the proceedings, AKG did the cross examination of the Inspector himself and used the occasion for spreading political propaganda. A.M.Kunhikannan, K.T. Madhavan Nair and AKG were sentenced to eight months' imprisonment while others who had been arrested were forcibly deported from Travancore. In the same night those arrested were sent to Kottayam lock-up, which was a small dirty dungeon, with human urine and excreta overflowing the floor. Further the police tried all the tricks in their armoury to provoke the detenues and resorted to brutal physical assault on them causing injuries. The detenues then commenced a hunger Satyagraha in the cell. Students and workers and other Congress activists in Kottayam hearing this crowded in front of the police

station, and, started shouting provocative slogans against the police. The CID constable John had publicly declared that the police would put to an end to the detenues at the earliest. Anticipating trouble, the police took detenues in a car to Vaikom sub jail and the detenues ended the Satyagraha. But when it was clear that the police had no intention to take the detenues to Thiruvananthapuram Central Jail, AKG alone commenced a hunger satyagraha. A huge agitated crowd assembled before the sub jail. The news spread like wild fire and at many places *harthals* in sympathy of the “sad event” were observed. Though the Inspector asked AKG to come out of the cell and display himself before the crowd that he was alive, he did not obey. At last feelers were sent to him appealing to AKG to stop his Satyagraha.

Meanwhile, the Travancore struggle was progressing well. The Alappuzha trade unions staged a political strike. Students all over Travancore joined the strike. At this juncture the Dewan changed his strategy. He released all Congress detenues from jail and deployed the entire police force against the working class. After his release from Vaikom sub jail AKG visited many centres in Travancore and at Alappuzha he came into contact with R.Sugathan, C.K.Velayudhan, Varghese Vaidyan, K.C.George, Bhasi, C.S.Gopala Pillai and M.N.Govindan Nair. All these contacts between the leaders of Malabar and Travancore enabled them to unify the working class movement in the state of Kerala.

7.4.17 Suspicion about leadership

After the Commonwealth Company strike in Kannur a difference arose between the leadership and the rank and file. The Company did not take back eight striking workers when the strike was settled after 29 days and the Company was reopened. Out of the eight such workers, six had been suspended for six weeks and the other two for two weeks by the management. The workers insisted that unless these eight workers were reinstated, the rest would not report for work. But the Strike Committee and the Union Management Committee, after discussing this issue for more than six and a half hours, directed the workers to report for work. This decision of the leaders was not acceptable to the majority of workers. They wanted to launch another strike demanding the reinstatement of the suspended workers. They were not willing to accept the views of the leadership and wanted the issue to be brought to the general body. In the general body the General Secretary of the Union, K.P. Gopalan was confronted with a volley of questions from members who expressed lack of faith on the leadership saying openly that they suspected that the leadership had turned supporters of the company management. Plain cloth policemen and their agents went around the members telling them that the leaders had cheated them. The leaders battled

hard to convince the workers that the former would take up the responsibility of reinstating the suspended workers and appealed to the rest to report for work, making it clear that if they did not do so, their union would be destroyed by the company and the police colluding together. The incident brought into graphic relief the necessity of strict discipline among the rank and file and the ability of the leadership to present the issues in the right perspective, bring to the notice of the worker members of the union the implications of the various decisions they might take and also the necessity to observe democratic practices in the conduct of union meetings. Worker members had to treat the decisions of the leadership with respect and follow them just like that of the soldier who respect the orders of his commander.

7.4.18 Observation of anti-repression day

On September 15, 1940 the Kerala Congress Committee observed the anti-repression day and at several centres like Morazha, Mattannur, Thalassery, Kozhikode and Kannur, protest marches and meetings were held which the police tried to manage. At Thalassery, in police firing Abu and Chathu Kutty were killed. At Morazha, following police brutality, the agitators turned against them and in the violence that followed the notorious Sub Inspector Kutty Krishna Menon and one constable were killed. In Mattannur also police and the activists clashed. The police and the Malabar Special Police personnel were deployed to organize a manhunt. The police announced a reward of Rs.500 for the head of K.P.R.Gopalan. Any one with any similarity to KPR in physical appearance would be taken into custody. All over Malabar police and military raided the houses of all suspected, particularly the Socialists and the Communists. Many leaders went underground to escape arrest. But KPR was caught and later was sentenced to death but got a remission subsequently.

7.4.19 AKG's arrest and escapade

The Government deployed a large contingent of CIDs to track down the leaders who had gone underground not only in Kerala but also in neighbouring states. Their efforts succeeded. P.Krishna Pillai was arrested on the border of Travancore, Mohan, Sarma, C.S.Keraleeyan and Ramamoorthy were arrested in Madras and N.C. Sekhar and a few others from Coimbatore. Ramachandran Nedungadi was picked up from Tirunelveli. While AKG was arrested from Thrichinappally, he was treated like a wild animal and his hands were chained when he was taken to lock-up. When he was remanded to Vellur detenu camp, K.P.Gopalan and K.Damodaran were already there. At that time the political detainees were put under various classification. The Class II

detenues were entitled only to the same food as was given to ordinary prisoners. AKG decided to go on hunger Satyagraha against this discrimination. On the 15th day of the Satyagraha AKG collapsed and fell down unconscious. He was removed to hospital and doctors tried forced feeding. On the 18th day the authorities conceded his demand.

During the detention period the leaders belonging to the Communist group lived in discipline as they were in a commune. They formed committees to look after various things and set up hostel commissar, bazaar commissar, food commissar etc. AKG was removed to A-class cell and his colleagues there were Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon, P. Balachandra Menon, P K Balan, Narayananutty Menon, Dr.K.B.Krishna and others. The conditions in the A-class cell amounted to a luxury in terms of food, clothing, furnishings, laundry service, recreation facilities, supply of newspapers, periodicals and books and even cigarettes. The leaders never liked these comforts since they were alien to their past life and the life of the ordinary masses. AKG decided to escape the jail cell by creating a hole in the walls and had tactically mobilized some tools for this risky escapade in the true style of a Bolshevik. In this escapade AKG was accompanied by four other detenues including C.Kannan from Malabar, the other three were from Andhra. The jailer when holding the routine roll call next morning found that five detenues including AKG were missing. The police made a house-to-house search in the whole of Vellur town for the missing detenues. On returning to Malabar, AKG was down with typhoid fever and when he recovered he decided to leave Kerala because he had been charged with criminal conspiracy against Government, while other communists like EMS and Krishna Pillai were released from jail without any case registered against them. By end of 1942, AKG thus reached North India.

In North India AKG worked in Jhansi as an agent of a Calendar company and also as a sub-agent of an Insurance company Agent. Later he moved on to Kanpur where he was forced to live incognito assuming the name Sankaran Nair. The veteran trade unionist belonging to the AITUC, K.A.Rajan, in his reminiscences, narrates an interesting incident ²². Rajan had gone to Kanpur to work as a clerk in the Ordnance factory there, where his elder brother K.A.Balakrishna Menon was an officer. Rajan at that time was hardly 20 years old. Rajan was staying separately, sharing a small room in a lodging house at Narayangunj. For this Rajan had got help from Michael who, as Rajan came to know later, was the son-in-law of Samuel Aaron, the famous Congress leader-cum-industrialist of Malabar. Through Michael, Rajan came to know one Sankaran Nair who was very popular among the Malayalees there. Nobody knew about Sankaran Nair's background. But he was a help to all and served all those who called for his services. Rajan used to entrust many tasks to him, like washing and pressing clothes, buying bidis

from shops and Sankaran Nair would readily oblige. Rajan was not satisfied with life at Kanpur and he was looking forward to going home to Kodungallur and join the communist movement there. One day he decided to leave Kanpur. After a few days, newspapers carried the sensational news of the arrest of AKG in big headlines along with a photo. Then Rajan had a shock and realised that the Sankaran Nair who had been at his beck and call and who had been ordered to buy bidis for him at Kanpur was none other than the great AKG whom he had only heard about and not seen earlier. Rajan knew later that AKG was staying in Kanpur incognito to escape detention and only Michael who had arranged the lodging for Rajan knew this. AKG was released at the end of 1945.

7.4.20 Repression in Malabar continues

While the British Government was preparing to leave India and was permitting the formation of Interim Government by the Congress, the police repression was mounting in Malabar. Following the bidi-cigar workers' strike in South Karnataka, sympathetic strikes were held in Malabar too. In eastern Malabar peasant struggles occurred. In Kavumbayi and Karivelloor police resorted to firing. Alleging that a revolution was initiated, the authorities let loose repression on the communists and their supporters. The house of peasant leader Thaliyan Raman was set ablaze. The scale of repression was worse than that during the Malabar Rebellion. The authorities seemed to be determined to destroy the Communist Party. In almost all the villages of Malabar, the Malabar Special Police was deployed. They were even used against teachers. Food shortage was acute. Black marketing and hoarding were the order of the day. The authorities shut their eyes to them. At Kozhikode Town Hall a meeting was held to discuss the food problem under the presidentship of EMS. In January 1944, the publication of *Desabhimani* daily commenced from Kozhikode. In 1946 KPR and the accused in the Morazha case were released. AKG was made the Secretary of the Kerala Committee of the Communist Party. After the general elections, many struggles like the Railway and postal strike were held. EMS and AKG were arrested, while P.Krishna Pillai was deported to Travancore. During the Paliyam struggle in Cochin even Namboodiri women were not spared from police repression (see section 6.3 in Chapter VI). On March 1, 1948 the Communist Party was banned and leaders and activists were hunted out. When India was celebrating independence, many communists were actually in jail cells and lock-ups.

7.4.21 Bakery Industry Conference, May 1945

Bakery industry in Malabar was highly scattered, but the employers and leaders of working class decided to convene a conference at Kozhikode to discuss issues of common interest. The Conference held on May 27, 1945 attracted delegates representing all interest groups from all over Malabar. The Conference was presided over by M.Radhakrishna Pillai, the then Mayor of Madras and he exhorted the association of bakery owners to update their skills and for this it should appeal to government to send some of them to England for acquiring practical training ²³. The members of the Association complained that the authorities did not supply them with adequate quantities of sugar, flour and other ingredients. But the workers had misgivings about the attitude of the bakers. Without the support of the bakery workers, the industry could not progress, the speakers at the conference added.

7.4.22 Handloom Industry in Chirackal

The handloom industry units in Malabar were also equally scattered as the bakery industry. Chirackal Taluk, in particular, had a big concentration of “handloom units”. In 1946 many of these units had been forced to close down, throwing about 60,000 workers into distress ²⁴. Smaller handloom units were equally in distress when the debt burden on the money borrowed for setting up looms became heavy. It was alleged that the big handloom factory owners and the bureaucrats in charge of government textiles department were solely responsible for the crisis. There was shortage of yarn and the distribution of the available quantity of it was uneven. The workers and their leaders in the handloom sector, therefore, demanded immediate remedial measures like increased import of yarn, decontrol of cloth, action against hoarding and black marketing of yarn, formation of cooperatives of workers and small handloom producers, control over malpractices by big producers like Samuel Aaron and Alagappa Chettiyar, constitution of a Relief Fund for workers and also three months' bonus to all workers. One important demand was the setting up of joint committees with workers and handloom producers to control hoarding and black marketing of yarn in Malabar. The unions decided to hold a one-day strike on February 1, 1946 under the leadership of the Chirackal Taluk Handloom Workers' Union.

7.4.23 Struggle by Scavengers in Kozhikode, 1948

The scavengers' work in those days was beyond description. It was not only dirty but also filthy and inhuman since these workers were forced to

carry human excreta in buckets kept on their heads and keep all latrines clean. September 4, 1948 was a memorable day since it was on this day, as a last resort, the scavenging workers of Kozhikode struck work. Their demands were simple and reasonable. They had demanded an increase of one *anna* (1/16th of a Rupee) in their wages, and a roof over their head. The prominent freedom fighter and the Congress Leader Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon was the Prime Minister of Madras at that time. Neither his Government nor the Kozhikode Municipality was showing any sympathy to the scavenging workers. When the strike became longer, about 5000 latrines in the town started overflowing on to the streets.

The Government came out with a campaign to defeat the strike. It alleged that scavenging workers had taken to strike in order to discredit a Kozhikode Congress leader who had become the Prime Minister of Madras. To counter the scavengers' action, members of the well-to-do families in Kozhikode announced that they would take up scavenging work themselves. But this threat did not materialize since none of them really liked to perform the dirty work. Soon there was confrontation between the strikers and the campaign activists on the streets. The scavengers gave the latter a fitting reply by beating them with their booms. The campaign against the scavengers came to a sudden end.

The authorities, then tried to bring Tamil workers from Madura district. But the leaders of scavenging workers like T.K.Karunan soon succeeded in converting the Tamil workers as strong supporters of the Kozhikode scavenging workers. Finally the Government saw sense and settled the dispute. In those days scavenging workers could not enter hotels. They were denied even meals from them. To counter this discrimination, a new venture called *Thozhilali* Hotel (workers' hotel) was set up. Since most scavenging workers were illiterate, the officers in the municipality used to cheat them of their legitimate wages. They were also physically assaulted even for small mistakes from their side. Moneylenders and toddy and arrack sellers also subjected them to severe exploitation.

T.K.Karunan, a native of Thalassery, had been directed by P.Krishna Pillai to mobilize the scavenging workers. Karunan affectionately called Karunettan took up the task, lived with the scavengers and mobilized them. Thus he got the nickname "*Thotti Karunan*" (scavenger Karunan). Inspired by his devotion to the upliftment of scavengers in Kozhikode, Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai in Thiruvananthapuram, R.S.Unni in Kollam, V.L.Thomas in Alappuzha and M.M.Lawrance in Cochin also set out to mobilize the scavengers in their respective areas. In the Kozhikode Town Hall, along with the photo of Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon, one could see the photo of Maani, the dynamic woman activist among the scavengers of Kozhikode.

When the upper caste people declared that they would defeat the strike by scavengers, the scavengers took out a protest march led by this woman-scavenging worker Maani. She used the broom in her hands to strike at the upper caste volunteers. In the evening a meeting was held in the Town Hall presided over by AKG. In that meeting Maani made a rousing speech, declaring that the Kozhikode Municipality was not a private property of Kozhipurathu Madhava Menon. Such was the personality of Maani.

7.5 THE AARON MILL STRUGGLE

Any one who undertakes a study of the history of trade union movement in Malabar would find the Aaron Mill struggle as a brilliant milestone. The Aaron Mill was one of the largest cotton mills in the Malabar region and was named after its proprietor Samuel Aaron, a Congress activist as well as a cruel capitalist. The struggle in this Mill brought together all the social and political forces to fight injustice against the workers. Almost all the leading social and political activists had involved in the struggle from its beginning to its end.

7.5.1 The Beginning

Following the Naval Mutiny of 1946, the working class in Malabar held sympathetic strike and demonstrations in support of the navel cadets who had resolved to join the national freedom struggle. When the workers of the Aaron Mills held the sympathetic strike, the company management terminated their services saying that they would be reinstated only if they submitted written apologies. The workers in their patriotic spirit refused this. A long struggle thus began with P. Krishna Pillai leading it from the front line.

7.5.2 Samuel Aaron

Samuel Aaron was a Congress leader who turned a cruel capitalist and treated his workers as a class of slaves who should always submit meekly to his exploitative policies. In his West Coast Textiles unit, Stanley a worker was dismissed for alleged garlanding of P.Ramamoorthy, the Communist leader who was standing for elections from the workers' constituency. The maistries and supervisors of the company were threatening the workers who were planning to vote for Ramamoorthy, the Communist Candidate. Another 16 workers were dismissed for participating in unions' organizational work. In Pappinissery, hundreds of workers gathered to sign a memorandum to Samuel Aaron demanding the reinstatement of the dismissed workers²⁵.

The average wage of a handloom worker was around Rs.15, which was insufficient to meet the minimum living expenses of a family. Samuel Aaron had converted the line sheds allotted originally for the residence of the workers into canteen sheds by driving them on to the sheets. He had appointed a lady doctor in the mills to give medical assistance to the workers, but this doctor used to collect a Rupee each from each worker for medical examination. Samuel Aaron was a typical capitalist who became very rich quickly during the War period.

7.5.3 Krishna Pillai's questions

Krishna Pillai posed the following questions to the Congressmen of Malabar asking them whether they could reform their leader Samuel Aaron, the capitalist exploiter.

- (i) Could the workers be provided with a minimum of Rs.36 a month?
- (ii) Could the working hours be limited to 8 hours a day?
- (iii) Could the workers be provided with cheap accommodation?
- (iv) Could the capitalist open a small health centre or hospital clinic to provide workers free medical aid?
- (v) Could he be forced to stop violation of restrictions of democratic rights of his workers?
- (vi) Could he be made to agree to grant recognition to the trade union in the mill?

Krishna Pillai warned that if Samuel Aaron did not mend his ways, people of Malabar would lose their respects for the Congress as an organization of the people and for the people. Unfortunately the Congress and the *Mathrubhoomi* daily, then considered as the Congress newspaper, were still supporting Samuel Aaron. The day when he dismissed some workers from his mills, Kelappan, the respectable leader of the Congress was staying with Samuel Aaron as a guest. On that day 1200 workers participated in the strike and Kelappan did not express any sympathy to them.

The workers in the Aaron Mills had been organized into a trade union since 1935 and from day one Samuel used to implement strategies to destroy the union. When the left leadership was emerging strong in the Congress, it was Aaron who had opposed the Congress and supported an anti-congress candidate for elections to the Malabar District Board. He had also tried his best to assist the police and the authorities to trap the heroes of the Morazha episode. He had volunteered to appear before court to give evidence against

the accused in the Keezhariyoor case as a witness for the police. It was under these circumstances that Krishna Pillai had appealed to the workers of Malabar to stand united and rise against Samuel Aaron and capitalists like him who deny them their basic rights and social justice.

7.5.4 Collector's Initiative

Bowshier, the Collector of Malabar held a conciliation conference to resolve the dispute in Aaron Mills. The management was represented by Samuel Aaron himself and the Union by C.Kannan. A.Madhavan also attended conference as the Union's lawyer²⁶. On a query from the Collector, Madhavan highlighted the following points. On February 26, 1946 some workers had not reported for work in sympathy for those who had joined the naval mutiny in Bombay. The workers believed that it was their basic right to do so. The company's action to demand a written apology from those workers was not legal and not within the purview of company's rules. The action not to allow about 500 workers to enter the factory the next day virtually amounted to a lockout, which was illegal. The notice issued by the management that the workers should apologize was nothing but illegal.

On this the Collector sought Aaron's opinions. Aaron stated that workers had asked him for permission to stage a *harthal* on February 26 and he had refused it and the very next day 500 workers abstained from work in violation of the agreement that the union had with the management. Since their action had disturbed the discipline in the company, he had issued a notice to the workers to tender an apology before they were allowed to enter the factory. He also told the Collector that Krishna Pillai and Kannan, the union leaders, were threatening and instigating the workers causing disturbances there. Madhavan reacted to this and told the Collector that this was the management's strategy to destroy the union and the issue of discipline was unnecessarily being dragged into it. During the last six years, Aaron had succeeded in destroying two other unions. He had in fact terminated the services of 1600 workers during this period for their involvement in the trade union. Aaron expressed his objection to the Collector on Madhavan's remarks and threatened to walk out, but the Collector asked him to remain there since as Collector aiming at resolving the dispute, he was not interested in raking up the past issues.

The union leaders suggested to the Collector that the dispute could be resolved only if their minimum demands were accepted by the management. They were: all the 500 workers whose services had been terminated should be taken back without insisting on tendering apologies; those 17 whose services were terminated on December 11 should be reinstated; since the situation was

the creation of the management, they should pay full wages to the workers during this period of dispute. After this the Collector asked the union representatives to go to another room so that he could get Samuel Aaron's reactions to their demand. After some time the Collector informed that the company would not take back any workers unless they tendered an apology. The Collector took a firm stand that if the union asked its 200 workers to picket 1000 workers who were willing to work, he would be constrained to ask Samuel Aaron to lockout the factory.

When the union leaders asked the Collector to use his authority to render justice. But he pleaded that he was acting as the District Magistrate and he had no power to compel the Management. He suggested that the union could demand a Court of Inquiry to resolve the dispute. The union leaders said that there was no need for a Court of Inquiry into the issue of apology to be tendered by workers and the management's action was a violation of legitimate rights of workers. They issued the warning that any lockout by the company would only aggravate the situation and thousands of families of workers would be put to utter destitution. The Collector expressed his helplessness. Madhavan appealed to the people and the Congress leaders in Malabar to treat the strike by workers of Aaron Mills as a general issue involving legitimate rights of the workers and their demand for justice.

7.5.5 M. Kanaran's Views

According to M.Kanaran, the Aaron Mill strike was not caused exclusively by the issue on tendering apology by workers²⁷. The trouble was brewing there for a long time. The speech made by Kanthalot Kunhambu at Muthalakkulam maidan at Kozhikode on April 13, 1946 had revealed the background to the struggle. For a long time the workers of the Aaron Mills had been subjected to inhuman treatment. The maistries and supervisors were typical rowdies and they behaved savagely to workers and women workers too did not escape their wrath and misdeeds. Any written complaint submitted by workers was never allowed to reach top management since it had to be forwarded through the supervisors. If any woman worker was late by two or three minutes in reporting for work, she would be asked to stand for a long time by keeping both her hands clasped in the back. In this process many women used to fall down unconscious due to physical and mental strain. This was a savage punishment. Those women workers who delivered more than two children were denied work. Workers had not been provided with minimum housing facilities even in line sheds. The management had not taken any action against supervisors who had misbehaved to women workers. The workers in the factory did not enjoy any human rights. They were not allowed to go to libraries and reading room. The management had warned

them not to participate in marches and demonstrations. Wages were abysmally low and even those who had worked for 36 years ended their working life in total penury, being compelled to carry a heavy debt burden. Since the Company was set up, bonus was paid for the first time only in 1945 and the average amount was a pittance of Rs. 21 as. 2. If any worker took a day's leave, he lost his job and if he wished to work, he was forced to sign the 'A' form and join work as a new hand losing all his seniority.

When accidents occurred and workers got injured, Aaron used to report to the Labour Department that such workers were not on the rolls of the company and this was done deliberately to deny due compensation. Similarly on the death of Kaniyara Achuthan, while within the company, the workers were denied leave and also permission to hold a condolence meeting. The enraged workers went out side the factory and held a meeting and passed a condolence resolution on their departed colleague. Initially the management refused to pay any compensation to the family of the diseased, but due to pressure from workers, it paid Rs.720. M.Kanaran had made special mention about the workers who stood firm with their decision on continuing the strike, particularly, Kappally Paithal, a woman activist among workers, and, the sixty year old Thuthi Appan Master having six children and deep in poverty and starvation.

7.5.6 Views of T. C. Narayanan Nambiar

T.C. Narayanan Nambiar had described the police repression in Pappinissery and nearby places²⁸. This became intense after April 12, 1946, the day on which some Congressmen held a meeting at Kannur demanding stern police action against striking workers in Aaron Mills. On April 15 at 10 am the Circle Inspector and the Sub Inspector of Baliapatnam (Valapattanam) accompanied by Samuel (alias Manja Mammath) and Pola Kunhappa and a few constables reached Pappinissery and started beating up Chundakkaran Kunhambu (blacksmith), Edakkepraval Narayanan Nambiar (farmer) and Kalathera Kunhiraman (worker who was on strike) alleging that they did not show respect to the police men. The same day a few blacklegs had appeared on the scene and they were terrorizing local people and forcing them to join as black legs for work in the factory. The police was deployed in Aroli and they started terrorizing workers in the area. On the night of 16th they threatened Vanneri Bappa, Puthen Appu, Mathettam Kannan, Madathi Kunhambu, P.V.Kannan, Kappan Raman and others. Police extended their repression from Pappinissery, to Morazha, Kalliassery and Mangot, but people resolved to stand firm. Non-uniformed policemen were also deployed and as mufti police they raided workers' houses and attacked them. The police warned the people that they might be forced to open new police stations to deal with the

deteriorating situation and in such cases, the local people had to meet all the expenses of the police.

7.5.7 Police atrocities

On the night of 28th, the police raided the house of Vaniyangat Kannan. At that time there were no male members and Kannan's sister Thaala refused to open the door. The police then broke open the door to search for Kannan. On not finding Kannan there, the Inspector asked his men to leave the site, but Thaala insisted that unless the police, who broke the door open, repair and set it back, she would not allow them to leave the house. Thaala was so heroic and strongly adamant that police apologized to her and set the door back to its original shape. T.C.Narayanan Nambiar had narrated several such stories. On April 29, a meeting was held in front of the Pappinissery Railway Station and it was presided over by Nambiar. It condemned police atrocities and appealed to the authorities to check them. The meeting also resolved that if the company and the police did not behave well, the workers would be constrained to retaliate.

7.5.8 Longest Struggle

The Aaron Company strike lasting more than 45 days was one of the longest working class struggles in the history of Malabar. It was a struggle between the poor and the rich, and, between the workers and the capitalists. The workers of the company had people of all castes and religions. The Director Board had Congressmen like Samuel Aaron and Muslim League leaders like Kadirkutty Sahib. A political issue triggered by workers' spontaneous response to the Naval Mutiny of Bombay basically caused the struggle in the company. Later it turned out to be a struggle for securing some basic human rights and minimum conditions of work and wages. The Congress and the Muslim League tried to weaken the struggle by promoting blacklegs from all over Malabar. Neither the Congress nor the League supported the demand for the reinstatement of workers dismissed by Samuel Aaron from his company. The Government and the police openly acted as the agents of the company and tried repressive measures to defeat the struggle. But the Taluk League Committee came forward to support the struggle. The struggle could succeed only if all sections of the people including workers, farmers, tenants and political parties who opposed imperialism and capitalism came together and extended support to the workers' struggle.

7.5.9 Giri's Initiative

In Pappinissery small pox had started spreading. Due to loss of employment most workers had been driven to starvation. The houses of workers had not been thatched before the onset of the monsoon. But support from workers and farmers were flowing. Pappinissery used to witness scores of workers and farmers coming with jack fruits, mangoes, cucumbers, coconuts and other eatables to be given over to the workers who were on strike. When the strike crossed the 45-day mark, P.Krishna Pillai, Stanley, the Assistant Secretary of Aaron Mill Workers' Union, and P. Balachandra Menon the Secretary of the Malabar Provincial Trade Union Council (MPTUC) went to meet V.V.Giri, the Labour Minister. He informed the delegation that the Madras Government had decided to set up a Conciliation Board to resolve the Aaron company dispute. The Board would start functioning, as soon a suitable sessions judge was made available after the court holidays were over. V.V.Giri also promised that the prohibitory order asking Krishna Pillai to keep out of Malabar and also false criminal cases registered in connection with the dispute would be withdrawn at the earliest. The delegation also had met Bhashyam, the Law Minister. In spite of all these promises the Aaron Company strike crossed 90 days.

The crucial question raised all over Malabar was why should starving workers go on a struggle for such a long period, which would only add to their woes. There should be something solid behind their resolve to continue the struggle and it was that the leaders were trying to tell the public of Malabar who were being misled by the false propaganda of the Congress, Muslim League and anti-communist forces. Krishna Pillai appealed to the public to understand the ground realities behind the Aaron company struggle. He appealed to the workers and trade unions in other sectors to consolidate their forces for a unified struggle.

7.5.10 Conciliation Efforts

Sherifuddin, the Sessions Judge of North Malabar, was appointed the presiding judge of the Conciliation Board, which started meeting representatives of workers and management from June 10, 1946. In this context we give a brief account of the efforts at unionisation of workers in the Aaron Mill. Since 1934 when trade unions were being formed at various industry centres in Malabar, attempts were made to form unions in Aaron Mill also but without success due to the repressive measures by the management. An attempt made in 1940 to form a union had led to the arrest of Vishnu Bharatheeyan followed by brutal repression. In January 1945 the Aaron Mill

Workers' Union succeeded in getting registration and it had a membership of 700 workers out of a total number of 1300 workers. The management did not recognize this Union and it terminated the services of Stanley, the Assistant Secretary of the Union. Along with Stanley, 16 more workers were dismissed. The company management refused to accept the memoranda submitted by the Union. Not even letters from the Union were accepted. Samuel Aaron expected full support from the Congress, but he was shocked to find that a good number of Congress leaders opposed his actions against the workers and the union.

Once the conciliation proceedings started, it was unlawful to recruit substitutes in the place of striking workers. Therefore, Aaron adopted new strategies. But he tried to bring in substitutes. The Union brought this unlawful activity of the management to the notice of the authorities and simultaneously commenced picketing at the factory gates. But Kelappan, the Congress President did not approve the picketing and wanted the Union to withdraw it. The union leaders told Kelappan that if the company reinstated all workers whose services had been terminated, they would call off the strike. Unfortunately this offer was not acceptable to Aaron. K.M.Soman and P.T. Achuthan, prominent Congress leaders of the Chirackal Taluk unit of the Congress personally came to the factory gates and encouraged black legs to tread over the body of picketing workers who were lying on the ground. They were trying to create a situation in getting the dispute converted into a battle between the Congressmen and the Communists. Since the union leaders feared eruption of conflicts and violence, they decided to call off the picketing operations immediately.

7.5.11 The end of the strike

The strike finally ended. The Conciliation Board saw that the only issue behind the dispute was the reinstatement of workers. The management, while agreeing to reinstate them, did not insist on the workers tendering an apology. This was a major shift in their policy. However, the management had argued that the workers should apply for reinstatement instead of the Union collectively asking for it. Samuel Aaron even argued that the members representing the Union were not the real representatives of the workers in the factory. He insisted that 34 workers in the list prepared by him had attempted to kill him and therefore they could not be reinstated. At last he agreed that he would reemploy 6 of them in the mill and the remaining 28 could be given some employment outside the factory. The Union in a conciliatory posture insisted only on one major condition that in future, in the implementation of the terms of settlement, the management should conduct constant consultations with them. The Union conceded to the management's decision

to reemploy 28 workers outside the factory. The objective of the Union was to force the management to grant recognition to the Union. The Aaron Mills Union decided to call off its struggle in the Mills but wanted the Malabar Provincial Trade Union Council to launch a unified struggle by all trade unions in Malabar for getting union recognition, fixation of decent wages, permanency of service, and production of essential goods according to a joint plan to be formulated by companies and workers in Malabar.

7.5.12 Aaron's misleading propaganda

On June 18, 1946, Samuel Aaron published a misleading advertisement in the *Mathrubhoomi*²⁹. The advertisement told the readers that the Conciliation Board had declared the Aaron mill strike as illegal. This was a deliberate attempt by him to create confusion. The Union had, therefore, decided to give a clarification saying that the issue whether the strike was legal or illegal had never been raised before the Board whose only aim was to do conciliation for bringing the dispute to a fair settlement. Aaron had also stated in the advertisement that workers were not eligible for back wages for the strike period because the strike was illegal. This statement was countered by the Union, which clarified that the strike was never declared illegal. However, the workers, in order to bring about a speedy settlement of the dispute, had volunteered to sacrifice their back wages. In fact, the Judge had visited the factory at Pappinissery and personally made enquiries with the striking workers to find out whether the union leaders were true representatives of workers. This development had also exploded Samuel Aaron's argument that they were not representatives of workers.

Another allegation of Aaron was that the Union in his company was a communist union, and, therefore, he tried to promote the formation of a *Deseeya* (nationalist) union. This did not succeed. Krishna Pillai who masterminded the Aaron Mills Strike from the beginning was an optimist when the strike ended because the working class of Malabar had seen the misdeeds and evil strategies of the capitalists and this had led to strengthening of class-consciousness among the working class.

7.5.13 Krishna Pillai's plea to Government

According to Krishna Pillai by the second half of 1947, Malabar as a whole had been pushed into a very deep economic crisis³⁰. The one and only yarn mill in Malabar had been closed. Bidi workers had been denied their legitimate bonus sanctioned by the Government. Bidi employers who were unwilling to implement the bonus order had started closing down their

factories one by one. The Umayal Handloom Company terminated the services of their 300 workers and closed down the unit. In Aaron Mill even after the settlement reached by the conciliation board, the management was refusing to implement the minimum wage of Rs.26 fixed by the Board. Motor transport workers had been forced to strike. Company managements were violating all settlements and awards given out by conciliation boards and labour courts. Companies were closing down their units alleging simple and silly reasons. Highlighting these, Krishna Pillai appealed for maintaining industrial peace, and uninterrupted production but for this the companies and their owners should be a little more considerate to the poor working class.

Due to incessant demand from the trade unions, the Madras Government appointed Venkataramayya, retired judge, to enquire into the conditions of the cotton mills in Madras state. The Madras State Trade Union Congress had given a detailed memorandum on this and held some agitation to press their demands. The unions had demanded a minimum basic wage of Rs.35 for the mill workers. The Chairman of the Enquiry Committee in fact suggested that the ideal minimum would be Rs.37, but until an arrangement was made to fix wages by a properly constituted wage board, he could recommend only Rs.26. The Government approved this. The judge submitted that he had no expertise in fixing wages scientifically and hence the suggestion for a wage board. Because of the pressure put up by the unions, the Government issued orders for implementing the wages as Rs.26/- . But mill owners came out with silly excuses for non-implementation of the order. According to some, since they were still using old steam engines and steam driven machinery they could not afford to pay Rs.26/-. The unions pointed out that if the managements invested a little more, this problem could be resolved. The Government was helpless since it had no powers to compel the companies to keep their mills open always. This applied to Bidi companies too. However, the Government promised the unions that it would definitely bring out a law on this issue.

Resolving disputes in industries located in Malabar by a Government located far away in Madras was a difficult proposition. The Malabar District authorities were not keen to intervene in the disputes with earnestness. Though the Congress was the ruling party in Madras, the trade unions had little faith in them. It was believed that one of the ministers in Madras Government was patently pro-employer. The Madras Government was also not sympathetic to the demand for a new tenancy legislation aimed at protection of tenancy rights and fixation of fair rent.

As a lasting solution to the problems, Krishna Pillai suggested early consolidation of all progressive forces not only in Malabar but also Cochin and Travancore. Congressmen, Socialists, Communists and Muslim League

should unite and work for the benefit of the downtrodden masses. Trade unions should hold continuing campaigns to reopen all closed factories, and to implement all settlements and government orders relating to the legitimate demands of workers. For this grass root mobilisation was inevitable.

7.6 OTHER IMPORTANT STRUGGLES

An attempt is made in this section to document as many working class struggles as possible given the available historical sources as well as the reminiscences of important trade union leaders whom the author had personally contacted. However, the author makes no claim that the documentation done here is comprehensive. We have collected information about working class struggles in such areas as Kozhikode, Kannur, Kasargodee, Malappuram and Palakkad. Since Wayanad has a high concentration of plantation estates, the working class struggles in Wayanad are discussed in a separate chapter devoted exclusively to the Plantation Sector along with struggles in other plantation areas like Pathanamthitta, Peerumade, and, Munnar.

7.6.1 Achutha Menoky, The Martyr of Feroke

Feroke, near Kozhikode from the days of British rule started witnessing the establishment of many industries like Tiles, saw mills and handlooms. But for a long time Feroke was known for its tile factories set up by both the British as well as the indigenous Chettiyar community. Feroke was the battleground for many working class struggles. Velukutty of Puthenpurayil remembers the day in 1940 when he joined the Feroke Tile Works as a worker at the age of twenty-two. Wages then were low. Work was performed under the iron supervision of *maistries* and foremen. In 1935 A.K.Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai and Keraleeyan had come to Feroke to organise the strike in Cheruvannur Cotton Mills. At that time there was a trade union in the Commonwealth Standard Factory led by one V.R. Narayanan. But that union did not have any revolutionary spirit or fervour. They just made appeals to the management and got satisfied or contended with whatever the management offered.

One day the workers held a march to the Manager, Braithwait Company to demand a hike in wages. He ridiculed and scolded the workers. But contrary to the old practice, they got agitated. Next day morning when the manager was taking his rounds in the factory, the workers under the leadership of one Sankarettan beat him up with whatever that came to their hands. Police registered criminal cases against the workers and put five of

them into jail. In this context, the workers felt the need for a trade union. At that time K. Padmanabhan had just joined the Tile Factory. He distributed Marxist literature among workers. Under his instructions V.T. Achuthan, Vallattil Subramonian Choyi, P.Balakrishnan Nair and Velukutty convened a group and conducted propaganda on ideologies. The membership fee in the trade union was half an *anna*. Thus the Feroke Tile Workers Union was formed. Achutha Menokki, K.G.Gopalan Narayana Menon, T.V.Ayyappan etc. came to lead the trade union.

The Tile workers Union soon submitted a memorandum to the management. On return, the trade union got a dismissal notice to its leaders. The Union warned that if the management went ahead with the dismissal of leaders, it would strike work. Sensing that jumping suddenly into a strike would defeat the union and workers were asked to wait. Palakkara Velayudhan, Maniyathu Velayudhan, C.Kumaran, Chayichellan, Abdu Rahiman and Ismail were the prominent trade union activists. Those who were dismissed from the Feroke Tile Works sought jobs in the Calicut Tile Company. There also E.Ayyappan, Sankaran Nair and Velayudhan formed a trade union. In 1946 the tile workers expressed solidarity with the Railwaymen's strike. Soon trade unions were set up in other factories in and around Feroke. Later all the tile workers in the region were brought under the single banner of Tile Workers' Union in 1946 with Achutha Menokki as the President and Velukutty as Secretary.

Achutha Menokki was an unforgettable figure. During a struggle he led in 1949, the police arrested him. He was paraded on the roads clad in his bare under garments. He was brutally beaten up and dragged through the roads on the way to the police lock-up. He had injuries all over his body. In the lock-up, Achutha Menokki contracted typhoid fever and was denied any medical aid by the authorities. He succumbed to this and became a martyr. There were all round protests by the workers. But the police countered them with brutal lathi charges at several places injuring many. The police singled out the workers of the Standard Tile Company for attack because Achutha Menokki was their leader. The workers thus lost a vibrant selfless trade union leader.

7.6.2 Sadananda Pai, *alias* Vijayan

The year 1946 saw the whole of Malabar in the grip of poverty and starvation, though the granaries of the rich landlords were overflowing with grains. Malabar was then under the control of Madras Government led by the Prakasam ministry. This ministry showed no sympathy to the poor and starving. The Communist Party and peasant movement in Malabar took stock

of the situation and decided to mobilise people's action to prevent hoarding and black-marketing. The landlords and traders countered this move using *goondas* and the police, particularly the ferocious Malabar Special Police (MSP).

Karivelloor was a major centre of action. On December 20, 1946 the Chirackal Raja and a rich landlord made arrangements to transport grain stocks to other areas to counter popular movements against hoarding and black marketing. The volunteers resisted the shifting of grain stocks and they were forced to clash with the police and the MSP forces. The forces fired several rounds in which Thidilil Kannan and Keenery Kunhikannan were killed. Many other volunteers attempted to escape the bullets by falling to the ground. The body of Kannan actually fell on Sadananda Pai, a devoted activist. Since then Sadananda Pai became a target for the police. The police registered cases against 197 activists involved in the Karivelloore episode. Many of the accused went underground and some went to Bombay. Finally the police could take into custody all of them with the sole exception of Sadananda Pai.

Sadananda Pai was the son of a small time merchant of Karivelloor. While in school, he got involved in the freedom struggle. After completing SSLC and typewriting examination, Pai got a job as a schoolteacher and soon became a prominent organiser of the *Bharatha Yuva Jana Sanghom*. He was closely associated with A.V. Kunhambu, P.Kunhiraman Nair and other leading communists. After the Karivelloor incident, it was the local public that sheltered Sadananda Pai from the eyes of the police. Later Pai was directed to reach Kozhikode. In not getting their hands on Pai, the police raided his house, abused his parents and family members, evicted them from their house and sealed the building.

At Kozhikode with the help of the Party, Sadananda Pai secured a job in a soap factory. On finding that his stay in Kozhikode was not safe, the Party deputed him to Alappuzha in January 1948 to involve in the activities of the TCFWU. After the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle, the coir factory workers were planning for launching another trade union struggle. The police then raided the offices of the TCFWU and arrested all those found in the office and its premises. When Sadananda Pai was questioned he told the police that his name was K. Vijayan so as to conceal his real identity and escape persecution. Along with others, Sadananda Pai alias K. Vijayan were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment for eight months.

The Poojappura Central Jail in Thiruvananthapuram was full of communist detainees. Three days prior to the end of their imprisonment came the first anniversary of the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle. The detainees raised a

Red Flag on the occasion and raised revolutionary slogans. Irritated by this unexpected defiance of authority, the jail personnel let loose inhuman repressive measures in which Muhamma Ayyappan lost his life. After this incident many including Pai were not released from the prison and the term of their imprisonment was extended by one and a half years for their participation in the "Jail Mutiny". In 1951 Sadananada Pai alias K.Vijayan was released. Since the warrant issued against him for his involvement in the Karivelloor case was still pending, he could not return to Malabar. In 1952 on the advice of M.N.Govindan Nair and P.T.Punnose, Pai did an unpublicised visit to his mother and after two days he returned. His father had passed away while he was in Poojappura Central Jail. On instructions from the Party, Pai, but known better as K. Vijayan, remained in Thiruvananthapuram for a long period. He was in complete charge of the construction of the M.N. Memorial building which now houses the State Committee Office of the CPI.

7.6.3 Kodakkal-Edakkulam Struggle of 1949

The Commonwealth Tiles had a unit in Kodakkal-Edakkulam. The story was that P.K. Sankarankutty, in his teens after securing his M.Com. Degree, was leading the trade union in this unit. In those days (1949) disputes raised by workers were usually referred to adjudication as managements always refused to, negotiate with the unions. When Sankarankutty's union raised the dispute on behalf of about 250 workers, the Industrial Tribunal at Coimbatore referred it to adjudication. The trade union did not have the resources to employ a competent lawyer. So Sankarankutty, who later became the Working President of the State unit of the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), submitted a statement prepared by him to the Tribunal. The company in its statement prepared by experts, tried to prove its inability to accept the demands of workers. The veteran lawyer Suryanarayana Iyer was representing another trade union. The point highlighted by Sankarankutty in his memorandum was that the Kodakkal-Edakkulam unit was only one among the many units owned by Common Wealth Tiles and that led to transfer of workers from one unit to another, and, therefore, in such a situation, one had to take the entire finances of the company before deciding the rate of bonus payments to workers. Even while one of the units was not making profits, the workers of that unit would be eligible to get bonus as long as the company had an available surplus. The way he presented his case before the Tribunal brought great acclaim to P.K.Sankarankutty from others. His political guru, the veteran Socialist leader Dr. K.B.Menon had asked him to acquire a Law Degree as well as a masters degree in commerce to become well-versed in both law and finance and accounting. Dr.Menon was the leader who was specially deputed by Jayaprakash Narain to work in Malabar. Sankarankutty

accepted Dr.Menon's suggestion and went for higher studies. Dr.Menon's suggestion could not be turned down since he also belonged to Painkulam, a few kilometres from Sankarankutty's house. Other leaders who influenced Sankarankutty in his trade union work were the veterans C.Kannan and Kallat Krishnan.

7.6.4 Saw Mill Struggle of 1951-52

The Saw Mills located in Kallai in Kozhikode employed a fairly large number of workers. Kallai was the popular centre of timber trade. A good proportion of workers were not included in the company records as workers since mooppanas and contractors employed them. These workers did not enjoy any benefits. The trade unions led by the Socialist leader P.K.Sankarankutty launched a long struggle demanding, among other things, the regularization of workers. N.G.Reddy was the presiding officer of the Labour Court in Madras, which heard the case referred to it for adjudication. The demand for regularization was conceded. Soon accepting the proven strength of the union, the managements agreed to increase wages, grant reasonable bonus and also extend provident fund to the workers. In the early years of unionisation of Saw Mill workers, inducing the workers to join unions was a tough job since they feared victimization by employers as well as virtual termination of their employment. Some managements even refused to acknowledge or reply to the letters from the union.

From early 1960s Sankarankutty combined both political and trade union work. Arangil Sreedharan, the senior leader of Janatha Dal was involved in trade union work and Sankarankutty was associated with him. Soon the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) established its influence in the Malabar region. The HMS was upholding democracy and socialism as the twin pillars of its policy. The HMS unions were gradually set up in Payyannur and Palakkad. These were based on industry, factory, and, locality wise. A number of small and large struggles were led by HMS unions during which leaders like Sankarankutty were jailed on several occasions. The HMS now focuses attention on the social transformation of the workers in the unorganised employments.

7.6.5 Handloom Workers' Strike, 1953

In December 1953 the Handloom Workers of Kannur commenced a struggle for increase in wages and DA³¹. The employers complained that the unions had not given them the mandatory strike notice and therefore they would treat it as an illegal strike. But the strike soon spread to almost all

companies in Chowa, Edakkad, Azhikode, Alavil and other centres. In some places the strike led to some violence because of the direct confrontation between the strikers and agents of company employers. The workers held a protest march and a meeting addressed by trade union leaders K.Karunakaran, C.Kannan and Kanthalot Kunhambu on December 22, 1953. The Labour Commissioner intervened to settle the dispute and on January 5, 1953 the strike was withdrawn. But the workers were not satisfied with the terms of settlement and they felt that their leaders had let them down.

7.6.6 Struggle of Bidi-Cigar Workers, 1955

In the second half of 1955 the workers of the Bidi-Cigar industry in Malabar were preparing for a struggle to resolve some of their long pending demands and grievances. The trade unions declared that they would commence a strike on September 19, 1955 and it might assume the form of a big general strike enveloping the whole of Malabar. A meeting of the Malabar Trade Union Congress was held under the leadership of K.P.Gopalan. One of the issues behind the strike was the demand for abolishing the cess on tobacco³².

7.6.7 Kannur Spinning Mills Struggle, 1956

Kannur was the hub of handloom production. There used to be occasional strikes by handloom workers who were known for their political consciousness. In the early years the communists had greater control over the handloom workers in Kannur. However, as years passed by, the INTUC started penetrating the fortress built by the AITUC. In 1956 there was a token strike by the INTUC workers in the Kannur Spinning Mills to press their urgent demands. The President of the INTUC union was C.Bharathan of Mahe and P.Narayanan of Kalliyassery was the General Secretary. Though the strike was a token for one day, the management cut eight days' wages citing the Payment of Wages Act and its provision that a strike without giving 14 days' notice could be treated as illegal.

The INTUC union argued that the Kannur Spinning Mills would not come under the definition of public utility and therefore the clause in the Payments of Wages Act cited by the Management would not apply in this case. The management then served a show cause notice to the workers. The trade union then decided to give a printed reply stating the facts and their arguments. After prolonged discussion, the management agreed to cut only one day's wages of all workers who had participated in the one-day token strike. But the union did not agree to it. On April 22, 1957 the workers started

a stay in strike, which lasted for seven days. C.K.Govindan Nair, K.P. Kuttykrishnan Nair and A.V.Kuttimalu Amma intervened. Then the management informed E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the then Chief Minister of Kerala that the INTUC union's struggle was directed to embarrass him. But EMS stood impartial and finally the management was forced to withdraw their earlier decision. This was a victory for the workers.

7.6.8 Koippathy Saw Mill Strike

The sawmill workers of Koippathy had commenced a strike and there was no sign of any possible settlement even after two weeks. V.T. Induchoodan and Kallat Krishnan, the communist leaders, made several attempts to bring about a settlement but they could not succeed. At one point, Dr. C.V.Narayana Iyer, the Municipal Chairman suggested that a Committee headed by the District Collector and having members representing workers and the management should be constituted and all the parties to the dispute should agree to abide by the decisions of the Committee³³. The dispute was settled amicably.

7.6.9 INTUC Convention, 1956

From early 1950s the INTUC was trying to make inroads into those sectors, which were a virtual monopoly of communists. Naturally this led to friction among opposing groups³⁴. The INTUC was tapping all resources at its disposal including the direct involvement of the Congress Party workers to establish rival unions wherever they could. On July 2 the INTUC held a big Malabar Trade Union Convention by bringing together the workers and leaders of INTUC unions in the region. The convention elected C.K.Bharathan as its President, K.Kumaran as Secretary and K.P.Kuttikrishnan Nair as the Treasurer. It also elected a 15-member committee to coordinate the operation of INTUC unions in Malabar. The Malabar INTUC Convention was held under the presidentship of K.Karunakaran. It was attended by Manoharlal Mehtha, the INTUC Organizer, G Ramanujam, the Secretary of Tamil Nadu INTUC, G.S.Dhara Singh, C.K.Govindan Nair and V.Parukutty Amma.

On February 26, 1958, an all-Kerala Convention of the INTUC was held in Kozhikode³⁵. This was attended by all-India leaders like G.Ramanujam, S.R. Vasvada and R.Venkataraman, the Tamil Nadu Minister who subsequently became the Vice President and later President of India. On March 2, a public meeting was held in Kozhikode in which K.A.Damodara

Menon, Panampally Govinda Menon, K.Karunakaran, B.K.Nair, C.M.Stephen and K.P.M.Sheriff spoke.

In the second half of April, the INTUC led workers in the cashew nut factories in Malabar were on strike. Following that, the factories owned by Pierce Leslie and Company declared a lock out. The march and demonstrations by the INTUC workers led to the arrest of several workers. The INTUC then arranged for a massive demonstration led by I.P.Krishnan, V.Prabhakaran and M.Kamalam³⁶.

Henry Austin, the INTUC leader had gone to attend the all-India INTUC Conference in Bombay in August 1959. This was a development that led to the strengthening of anti-communist trade unions in Kerala. The EMS ministry in the State was facing all kinds of opposition and the INTUC was trying to add fuel to it. Henry Austin reported that all-India leaders of the INTUC, Vasavda and Khandubhai Desai would soon visit the State to inspire and strengthen the INTUC here. Henry Austin had also attended the meeting organized by the All India Petroleum Workers' Federation. N.V.Joseph and P K Deewar from Kerala had been elected as members of this Federation. In Kochi the INTUC had established a stronghold among the workers employed in the oil installations and the Petroleum companies where leaders like Panampally Govinda Menon controlled the unions.

During the first week of June 1959, the INTUC observed a statewide general *harthal* and strike largely targeted against the policies of the Communist Government led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad. The Kerala Committee of the INTUC in its meeting on June 8, 1959 under the presidentship of B.K.Nair decided to constitute an Action Committee with B.K.Nair, K.Karunakaran and C.E.Bharathan as members to coordinate the *harthal* and the strike³⁷.

After the dismissal of the Communist Ministry in 1959, elections were held bringing in a Congress led coalition government. This provided a fertile ground for further growth of the INTUC. On May 8, 1961 an all-Kerala Convention of the INTUC was held and C.K.Govindan Nair, the President of the KPCC, inaugurated it. At that time B.K.Nair was the President of the INTUC, C.M. Stephen the Vice President and K.Karunakaran was the Secretary. K.K.Balakrishnan, P.R.Francis and Kurur Namboodiripad were the other leaders. The Congress President, N Sanjeeva Reddy, inaugurated the public meeting. The other leaders who spoke at the meeting were G.Ramajujam, Indira Gandhi, V.V.Giri, Gulzarilal Nanda, Kamaraj Nadar, S.B.Chavan, Khandubhai Desai and K.P.Kesava Menon³⁸. The meeting stimulated the vitality of the Kerala unit of the INTUC and soon it became one of the leading trade union centres in Kerala.

7.6.10 Motor Workers' Struggle of 1959

It was on July 31, 1959 that the first elected Communist Government led by E.M.S.Nambodiripad was dismissed by the Union Government. One of the strongest protests against this came from the Motor Transport Workers of Malabar. It was the EMS Government that brought about substantial improvement in the conditions of work and wages of motor transport workers in the State, through a settlement arrived at a Tripartite Conference. Besides, these workers were also granted Bonus, based on the principle of deferred wages and the bonus amount was to be disbursed every year on the eve of *Vishu* festival day. Those workers completing 240 working days were also made permanent. T.V.Thomas, Minister of Labour and Transport had played an important leading role in this settlement. Naturally, the motor transport workers were shocked at the dismissal of the EMS Ministry. They decided to launch a Statewide strike from August 1, 1959.

The Liberation Struggle led by the anti-communist forces in the State had just ended but these forces were still active in resisting and countering the communists all over the State. These forces immediately took law into their hands to counter the action by the motor transport workers.

O.Bharathan was deputed to organize the motor workers' struggle in Thaliparamba, and Payyannur. P.V.Krishnan, leader of the motor workers, assisted him. When the two of them travelled from Thaliparamba and reached Payyannur it was around 11 pm. The NKBT Company had virtual monopoly of bus service in that area. They spoke to the workers who were sleeping inside the stay buses of the company and asked them to join the strike. The strike started on August 1 as originally planned. Most buses were off the roads, but after a few hours the leaders got news that some post office mail carrying buses were plying and soon other buses also started plying. The leaders were shocked and they went back to Kannur by train. Bharathan remembered that workers as well as the public then called them names and described them "Swakkal" (dogs) instead of "Sakhakkal" (comrades). But in later years the motor transport workers themselves had approached leaders like Bharathan to lead their struggles.

7.6.11 Strike in Kolappuram Mills, 1960

Kolappuram Spinning and Weaving Mills witnessed a strike that commenced on April 19, 1960. The main issue of contention was the Bonus for the year 1958-59³⁹. Though there was a rivalry between the INTUC and the AITUC all over Kerala, the situation in the Kolappuram Mills was unique. Here both the INTUC and AITUC unions formed a joint front to fight for the

workers' cause. While the unions demanded 23 per cent of net profit as bonus the management was not willing to go beyond 12 ½ per cent. Naturally conciliation proceedings were initiated but without any success. During the strike P.Gopalan, MLA visited the strikers. Finally the strike ended with the unions showing readiness to accept the award of the arbitrator.

7.6.12 Martyrdom of Varadaraja Pai

Kasargodee, the most backward region in Malabar was under the control of feudal landlords, petty capitalists and religious fanatics. It was in this scenario that the motor transport workers conducted a struggle demanding the implementation of the terms of settlement arrived at the tripartite conciliation conference made applicable in other parts of the State. The struggle was conducted in June 1968 and in retaliation, the management of Mehboob Motors terminated the services of eight workers including Varadaraja Pai. The unions continued the struggle demanding their reinstatement.

The owner of Mehboob Motors mobilized a large gang of *goondas* and supporters to counter the workers' struggle. On July 12, 1968, Varadaraja Pai, who was hardly 22 years of age, lay down with his few colleagues to picket a bus ⁴⁰. On instructions from the owner, one of his henchmen started the bus and deliberately drove it over Pai in front of a large gathering of onlookers and killed him on the spot. The striking workers and the onlookers could not contain their feelings and violence was set loose resulting in considerable damage to property. The owner of Mehboob Motors was not allowed to run his buses for a long time. Finally after series of tripartite conferences held at the initiative of Labour Minister Mathai Manjooran and leaders like K.P.R.Gopalan the dispute was settled. When the all India conference of the CITU was held at Kochi in April 1997, the flag hoisted at the venue was the one that was handed over to the leaders by the old mother of Varadaraja Pai. At the time of his death he had, besides his mother, five sisters and a family, which was fully dependent on the earnings of this young martyr.

7.6.13 The Bidi Struggle of 1968

On October 15, 1968 the Mangalore based Ganesh Bidi and PVS companies created a serious crisis by suddenly declaring a lock out of their factories throwing about 12000 workers into destitution. The lockout was a sequel to the decision of the Kerala Government to implement the Central Act of 1966 on Bidi and Cigar workers. Unfortunately the Central Government had not issued any direction to the States to implement the law

simultaneously. Hence the lockout was directed against the Kerala workers alone. After the lockout became effective, the companies appointed contractors and agents to get bidi and cigar production from illegal decentralized sources at lower cost and ignoring statutory provisions. The system was described as "outdoor production".

The Union decided to launch a three-fold strategy to counter the employers. The first was to initiate conciliation efforts. Secondly it was decided to approach courts and industrial tribunal to resolve the issue. Lastly, the strategy of direct action was also accepted. The initiative for conciliation talks was taken by A.K.Gopalan, Azheekodan Raghavan and State Labour Minister Mathai Manjooran, a veteran left trade unionist. Gopala Kamat, a prominent businessman of Kannur, assisted them. Several conciliation conferences were held in Mangalore, Mysore, Bangalore and Madakkara. In these tripartite conferences, both the trade unions and the Government agreed to offer concessions with a view to resolve the dispute. But the companies were adamant and stated that they would never open their factories in Malabar again.

The situation was becoming serious when the Naxalites took up the issue and they got support from some disgruntled sections of the CPI (M). However, the activists of the Jan Sangh, RSS and the BMS, according to O.Bharathan, began to support the Mangalore based companies. Whenever left unions held strike, Satyagraha and picketing, these elements tried to unleash violence. N.Abdulla was a victim of these elements. AKG came forward with a suggestion that the struggle should be extended to Mangalore and he expected full support from the trade unions there. Bharathan was deputed to Mangalore to organize the struggle. The Karnataka Government immediately reacted to this by prohibiting the entry of A.K.Gopalan and O.Bharathan from entering the State.

AKG was then a Member of Parliament and he told the Karnataka Government that he would enter that State and conduct a mass rally of workers and if he were denied entry he would defy the ban on him. In such a situation, he warned high police officials that the workers might clash with the police if he was denied entry. At last the authorities had to concede and AKG made a fiery speech at the rally attended by thousands of workers and their families. Almost every day hundreds of volunteers from Thalassery, Kannur, Payyannur, Nileswaram, Kanhangad, Kasaragod and Manjeswaram reached Mangalore and demonstrations in front of the head offices of the Mangalore bidi companies. AKG went round personally to mobilize funds needed to sustain the struggle. Meetings were held to explain the background of the dispute to the Karnataka workers and many of them, fully convinced about the issues, came forward to work as volunteers for conducting the

Satyagraha. Bharathan who did lot of squad work in Mangalore was ably assisted by Ramachandra Rao who later became the State Secretary of the CPI (M) in Karnataka. Many volunteers were arrested and remanded to jail where the conditions of life were totally inhuman. As the struggle in Mangalore lasted one month, the leaders of the struggle felt that it would be extremely difficult to continue the struggle both in Mangalore as well as in Malabar simultaneously.

7.6.13.1 Formation of Dinesh Bidi Cooperative

E.M.S.Namboodiripad, the Chief Minister of Kerala made a historic announcement that if the bidi factories in Malabar were not reopened, the Government would come forward to take steps to rehabilitate the workers who had lost their livelihood. The announcement brought a great sense of relief among the workers. T.V.Thomas, the Minister for Industries presented a plan to organize workers' cooperatives in the bidi industry and called their product as Dinesh Bidi. The Dinesh Bidi Cooperative Society was registered in February 1969 with G.K.Panicker, an officer of the Industries Department, as its first full-time chairman. According to O.Bharathan, the contributions of AKG, Azheekodan Raghavan and Mathai Manjooran to the formation of the Dinesh Bidi experiment have not been given the due emphasis and importance they deserved. Mention should also be made about the efforts of P.V.Kutty and G.K.Panicker in making the Dinesh Bidi a dream and a reality that came out of workers' struggle.

The closure of bidi factories by the Mangalore companies was a sequel to the demand by the trade unions for implementing the Bidi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966. To resolve the crisis the Kerala Government took the initiative to provide the necessary funds to make bidi and cigar workers to become shareholders in the workers' cooperatives. It was decided to organize 20 Primary cooperative societies where the 12000 workers were enrolled as members⁴¹. Though the membership fee was Rs.20 per head, the workers were not capable of remitting the same in lump and so they were required to remit only Re.1 and the balance of Rs.19 per share was given as grant by the State Government as a share capital loan. About Rs.2 lakhs was thus invested by the State Government in the primary societies by way of share capital loan.

7.6.13.2 Working of Dinesh Cooperative

To supervise and coordinate the working of the primary societies, a Central Society was also organized and registered. All primary societies were

admitted as members of the Central Society on payment of the share capital prescribed. The State Government had also taken shares worth Rs.13.50 lakhs in the Central Society in addition to a working capital loan of Rs.7.10 lakhs sanctioned by them.

As per the method of working of the above rehabilitation scheme, the Central Society would make bulk purchase of bidi leaves, tobacco, labels etc, and distribute the same to the primary societies on credit. The Central Society would pay the duty on tobacco, and distribute the blended duty-paid tobacco to the primary societies. The primary societies produce the bidis, label and pack them and return to the Central Society for marketing the bidis under a single Trade Mark and in the name and style of "KERALA DINESH BIDIS". The Central Society also advances the wages required for payment to the workers. The bidis received from the primary societies would be marketed by the Central Society only. Under this set up, work started on March 1, 1969 taking initially about 3000 workers out of the total 12000 thrown out of employment. The daily production was about 25 lakhs bidis. Naturally in the initial stages of the working of the societies, they had to face a lot of stress and strain to capture a market for their new brand of bidi.

7.6.13.3 Initial Crisis

In the early phase, for want of demand, stocks began to accumulate. The societies could not reduce the production, as it would result in retrenchment of workers. The problem was resolved by the end of 1970, and, within six years, the Dinesh Experiment could rehabilitate all the 12000 workers. Today the Dinesh Cooperative Society is the only one cooperative of its kind in India providing employment for thousands of bidi workers under the cooperative sector and providing all welfare measures.

One piece of experience of the Dinesh Bidi experiment needs special mention here. Initially, market penetration by its bidis was difficult. Advertisement needed more money. Building consumer interest and preferences was slow. Stocks accumulated. The Society could not reduce production by retrenching workers. Working capital was locked up in inventories. The Society struggled to pay wages and meet daily expenses and service its debts. Ultimately the Board of Directors decided to adopt a new sales campaign in which a box of safety matches would be given free to all who buy a bundle of Dinesh bidis. This paid good dividends and a large part of inventories was quickly sold out. The Society also put into the market a special brand of bidis. Though the crisis was resolved, it cost the society Rs. 4 lakhs (the cost of free boxes of safety matches) and Rs.5 lakhs due to the destruction of damaged bidis.

The Dinesh Bidi Society, as early as 1970, had started implementing terms and conditions of work and wages that were favourable to the bidi workers. By 1975 the workers were entitled to 8 festival holidays including the one related to the Dinesh Bidi Day. Earned leave with full wages at the rate of one day for every 20 days of work was given. Sunday wages as well as maternity benefits were extended to workers. Bonus payment was regular. A family benefit scheme, employees' provident fund scheme, thrift fund, interest free loans etc. were the other benefits given to them.

7.6.13.4 Major milestones

Some major events in the first decade (1969-1979) of the history of the Dinesh Bidi Society may be enumerated here. The first General Body meeting of the newly formed Central Society was held in Kannur under the presidentship of T.V.Thomas, Minister for Industries on February 6, 1969. This meeting took very important decisions on the mode of functioning of the society. The Central Society started its office at Madan Buildings in Gopal Street, Kannur. Initially 3000 workers were employed, each one producing 750 bidis so that 25 lakh bidis could be produced per day. Later it was raised to 1000 bidis per worker. As a part of advertisement campaign, Nellicode Bhaskaran, an actor in the film *Virunnukari* was paid Rs. 2500 for displaying the Dinesh Bidi and praising its quality as a part of his role in the film. An advertisement film was made with film comedian Bahadur and it was screened in public places as well as cinema theatres. On March 11, 1970 a Conference was held in Thiruvananthapuram to sort out the problem of accumulated stocks and it was decided to declare lay off for 4 days and work for 2 days and on lay off days workers were to be paid Rs.1.50 as lay off wages per day. On August 12, 1970 a decision was taken to declare Onam as a holiday and pay Rs.5 per worker as Onam gift to all. On November 1, 1970 *Maistries* in Primary Societies were recognized as monthly paid staff and pay scales were prescribed for them.

In December 1970 the private sector Ganesh Bidi Company filed a suit against Dinesh Bidi Society and secured an order prohibiting the Dinesh Society from producing bidis. Dinesh Society challenged this order of the Mysore District Court and it secured a stay order. The Ganesh Company had objected to the move by the Dinesh Society to get a trademark registered in its name. On May 29, 1971, the Dinesh Bidi workers conducted a one-day token strike in support of the Dinesh Bidi Staff Association. Though the Society was their own, the workers and staff had started developing class feelings and questioned the management committee of the society on several issues, as if they were the employers.

When the P.V.S.Bidi Company was closed, the Dinesh Bidi Society had no hesitation in taking the workers in that company to its fold. On December 13, 1973 the workers observed a black day when an officer deputed from the Department of Industries came to take charge in the Society. Like in any other establishment, in Dinesh Bidi Society also the demands of workers used to be submitted by their trade unions and the managing committee of the Society reached settlements on them regularly. The Society deputed four of its workers to Orissa Forest Corporation to help organize a bidi factory there. When T.V.Thomas the chief inspiration behind the Dinesh Society, passed away on March 3, 1977, the workers in all the primary societies observed a total *hartal*. On August 4, 1977 a settlement on wage reached with the trade unions raising the basic wages to Rs.7 per 1000 bidis and a bonus at the rate of 7 per cent. In March 1979, the Dinesh Bidi Society observed its Tenth Anniversary. The Society had been put on strong footing by then and thereafter it grew rapidly.

7.6.13.5 Structure of Bidi Industry

The bidi industry is labour intensive. It uses practically no machinery and requires little fixed capital. The Report of the Court of Inquiry appointed by the Government was headed by Dr.B.V.Narayanaswamy Naidu cited the existence of bidi making in Madras Province as early as the second half of 19th Century. In South India, Madras, Bellari, Vellore, Tirunelveli, Salem, Trichy, Coimbatore, South Karnataka, Malabar, Warangal and Hyderabad were the major centres of bidi making. Initially self-rolling of bidis for own consumption was the order of the day. Later due to progress of division of labour, rolling of bidi became a field of specialization. It started from small pawn shops and grew into specialized production units, mostly in the unorganised sector. Some started labelling their bidis. Soon bidi making spread to towns and villages. After World War II, the bidi industry began to come under the organized sector. In 1931 the Madras Government brought it under the Factories Act. To escape this the big bidi companies promoted decentralization and contract system deliberately to circumvent the labour-capital relation. Under this peculiar mode of production, the workers would first buy the raw materials (tendu leaves, tobacco, yarn, labels etc.) at a price stipulated by the bidi capitalists. The workers would then make the bidis and sell them to the same capitalists at a price. The difference between the price of the raw materials and the price of bidis would then constitute the wages for the labour rendered by the workers. In this particular mode of production, the capitalists neither buy labour nor the workers sell their labour to the capitalists. So the question of expropriation of surplus value and exploitation of labour by the capitalist did not arise. As there were no fixed wage rates, the

problem of wage fixation also did not arise. The capitalists were always insured against damage or loss of raw materials or production.

Later middlemen began to emerge. The middlemen agents used to entrust one kilogram of raw materials with the bidi-making worker and demand a stipulated number of bidis to be made. This was known as "Average". Usually this was 25-40 per cent higher than what one could reasonably produce during a day's work. When the workers fail to deliver the stipulated number of bidis, the difference between the value of the stipulated number of bidis and the actual number of bidis would be deducted from the workers' wages. The system of "average" and cut in wages was a kind of robbery. Cuts in wages were also effected on account of substandard output.

The bidi industry had witnessed four forms of organization of production, namely, (1) the Branch System, (2) Contract system, (3) Home work or Pass Book System, and (4) Direct Production. The Agency System was a blend of (2) and (3) and it was mainly responsible for the employment of women and children. The agents recruit them in batches, give them the necessary training in bidi making and send them back to their houses. The agents would then start delivering the raw materials, collect the finished bidis and pay the wages. The bidi making was thus shifted from factory to the home. The agency system thus became a highly exploitative one, and it stifled any attempt at unionisation of workers, and always kept workers at pauperised level. The Dr. Narayanaswamy Naidu Report (1946) had made a detailed study of the conditions of work and wages in the bidi-making sector. According to it, of the 96000 workers, 26500 were women and 36000 were children. There was also high incidence of tuberculosis among the workers. Earlier in 1934 the Royal Commission on Labour had stated that bidi workers were employed in airtight box type places with unhygienic damp floors. The REGE Committee of 1944 had also reported the extent of ill health and long working hours confronting the bidi workers in different parts of the country. The National Commission on Labour 1966 pointed out that in the bidi industry capitalists were resorting to decentralization to evade labour laws.

7.6.13.6 Suggestions of Trade unions

As early as 1979 the trade unions of bidi workers made interesting suggestions for reorganizing the bidi industry. According to them, if the provisions of the existing laws were enforced and workload strictly fixed at 8 hours, the industry could easily provide an additional employment to 7 to 8 lakhs workers. Besides, at least 10000 new administrative jobs could be created bringing some relief to the problem of educated unemployment in the state.

The trade unions suggested the strict enforcement of the Bidi and Cigar Act in all states of India. Existing loopholes in the Law should be plugged and for this a Central Act might be needed. The other important suggestions made by the trade unions in 1979 were the following:

- (i) Higher national minimum wage for bidi and cigar workers to prevent inter-state shift or migration of bidi production.
- (ii) Incidence of Excise Duty should be reduced. The Duty should be imposed on tobacco and not on the bidis. This would plug evasion of excise by clandestine bidi producers. If on the contrary the Government desires to continue to impose excise duty on bidis, it should be based on the band-roll system now in use in the case of safety match box production. Here the band rolls are supplied to produce after clearing excise liabilities. This band-roll system, though neither perfect nor foolproof, was susceptible to closer inspection by the excise staff.
- (iii) Eliminate all middlemen and bring bidi production under cooperatives.
- (iv) Trademark brands owned by bidi capitalists who flout the laws should be forced to surrender them in favour of bidi cooperatives.
- (v) Cooperatives in the bidi industry need funds by way of grants to construct adequate ventilated and hygienic factories for their workers.
- (vi) Welfare fund, Health Insurance, Assistance for education of workers' children, Housing Scheme, Employees' Provident Fund, Employees' State Insurance etc. should be provided.

The veteran working class leaders who had played a leading role in the union movement in the bidi industry in Kannur need a special mention. The list includes EMS, AKG T.V.Thomas, C.Kannan, P.V.Kutty, P.P.Mukundan, Panniyar Bharathan, Mathai Manjooran, O.Bharathan, P.T.Pavithran, N.P.Radhakrishnan, P.C.Joseph, M.C.Kannan, K.P.Cheria Abdul Khader, and K.P.Sahadevan etc. The Dinesh Bidi Cooperative in Kannur had brought the bidi workers a source of decent livelihood and security in life. Today the Dinesh Cooperative has put in to operation a grand scheme of diversification by taking up the production of processed agricultural products like coconut milk, condiments and curry powder with Dinesh brand name. Very recently it opened an Information Technology Centre and Facility with a plan to venture into software exports.

7.6.14 Two Notable Struggles in Kasargodee

In 1973 the BMS established its stronghold in the Kasaragode area particularly among head load workers, scavengers and sweepers, toddy shop employees and bidi workers. A strong propaganda was unleashed by rival unions that the BMS was none other than the RSS and had a Hindi bias. But toddy shop employees, majority among them belonging to the Christian community, rejected this propaganda. False criminal cases were registered against them only because they were members of the BMS union. Finally the BMS union secured for their members their legitimate benefits.

The second struggle was in connection with the four workers employed in the estates belonging to the Kesavananda Bharati Elaneer Madhom. Arecaanut was the major crop and the wage rates were pitifully low at Rs.2 for male and Rs.1.50 for female workers. They did not enjoy any other benefits than this. The BMS organized these farm workers and held a strong struggle to reach a settlement.

7.6.15 Kallat Krishnan's Legacy

Kallat Krishnan was a versatile communist and trade union leader of Malabar. He was the leading light of the Railway Workers' struggle, which extended from Golden Rock to Kannur. He had inspired many young workers in the region to come to the fold of the Communist Party as well as the AITUC. He was meticulous in keeping detailed files relating to all the working class struggles he had led. His chief advice to cadres and young activists was that they should not succumb to pressures or bribes and corrupt practices and surrender their honesty and conscience. Till his death, Kallat Krishnan remained a true self-less communist. When he passed away, the AITUC directed Binoy Viswam to take over Kallat's unfinished work. So the legacy of Kallat fell on young Binoy Viswam.

Binoy Viswam has a strong political background. His father, C.K. Viswanathan was a veteran communist and trade unionist and his mother was a reputed woman activist. Binoy's wife is the daughter of Koothattukulam Mary, another well-known firebrand in the communist movement in Travancore. Binoy grew himself through the student and youth movement and had held the post of Vice President of the World Youth Federation in Budapest. Later he became the Editor of *Janayugam*, the official newspaper of the CPI at its Kozhikode edition. It was the Party that directed Binoy to function in the trade union movement. He was thus thrust into the field in the State Transport Employees' Union, which had late P.S. Srinivasan as the President. According to Binoy Viswam, the State Transport Workers taught

him the fundamental lessons of the trade union movement and trade union work and he owed everything to them.

At Kozhikode when the legacy of Kallat fell on him, Binoy Viswam had to take charge of trade union work in many undertakings including Mavoor Rayons, Chellampra Textile Mills near Kozhikode University Campus in Malappuram, Steel Complex and Kerala Soaps. At Chelampra Mills, all the trade unions with the exception of the AITUC union were pro-employer, and, as a result the AITUC union had to confront many tense situations. The AITUC union had been registered with Kondotty as its office. In the beginning its members were harassed and victimized by other unions and the employer. After some time, the AITUC union led by Binoy Viswan created a close understanding with another union led by GRO Vasu. Jointly they held a token strike. The management took vindictive action and ordered the transfer of the General Secretary of the AITUC union to their Bombay Office. This development brought sense to other unions and all unions thereafter came together to counter the Management's tactics. That was the beginning for building some kind of trade union unity and coordination. In fact Kozhikode and Kannur have demonstrated trade union unity, coordination and solidarity of a high degree in contrast to other districts in Kerala.

7.6.16 Violent Clash at Pallikkara, 1974

Pallikkara, near Nileswaram in North Malabar witnessed a violent clash between the activists of the Kerala State Youth Federation (KSYF) activists and the police on September 4, 1974. The KSYF activists were protesting against the hike in bus fares. Though it was not a struggle by workers, the activists of the CPI (M) as well as those associated with the CITU had joined hands with the KSYF. Joseph Thomas, Superintendent of Police, and Hakim Batheri, the Sub Inspector led the police force. Though the KSYF was leading a statewide protest, it was at Pallikkara where the most atrocious repression was let loose by the police.

Private buses were off the road. KSRTC buses operated in convoy but they carried mostly armed constabulary from Payyannur. At Karivelloor the buses were picketed and the police held a lathi charge to disperse the protestors. The news reached Nileswaram. At Pallikkara a large agitated mob blocked the roads with stones and timber planks. Police action transformed Pallikkara into a battlefield. The police attacked those who ran into the nearby temple to escape the police after entering the temple. Somebody among the police was missing. Several injured including P.Karunakaran had been taken to the government hospital at Kanhangad. A team of left political leaders

including M.V.Raghavan, I.V.Sivaraman, C.P. Damodaran, Pacheny Kunhiraman and O.Bharathan proceeded from Kannur to Pallikkara to assess the situation and after that when they were returning, the SP and his subordinates stopped their car. The SP, an IPS Officer, used filthy words and abused the leaders. He asked M.V.Raghavan, who was an MLA at that time, to move on to the police van. When he did so, the police turned to the rest of the leaders and forced them to remove all their dresses excepting the undergarments. The police then played their usual game of physical torture for a long time. Only by late evening the leaders were taken to the Nileswaram police station.

By early morning a large agitating crowd assembled in front of the police station ready to take in the police for a direct confrontation. They shouted that if the leaders were physically harmed, they would not allow any policemen to walk on the roads alive. In Kannur, the veteran C.Kannan led a march of CITU activists and bidi and textile workers who had always fought for justice. The police let loose repression on the marchers and several were injured. On September 5, the leaders were removed to the Kannur Central Jail where they were given a better treatment. Due to legal hurdles and procedures, the leaders did not get bail immediately and so they were kept in jail for twenty days. The police registered false cases against the leaders but after a long legal battle all of them were released. Hakim Batheri, the Sub Inspector in this episode later became a close friend of M V Raghavan and he and Raghavan later became joint accused in the sensational Koothuparambu case.

7.6.17 The National Emergency of 1975

Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, after the verdict of the Allahabad High Court turned a dictator and declared a National Emergency on June 25, 1975. Many political and trade union leaders were arrested all over India. In Kerala C.Achutha Menon of the CPI was the Chief Minister, but Home portfolio was with the Congress leader K.Karunakaran. Large-scale repression was let loose by the Kerala Police. On July 9-10, 1975, the CPI (M) and CITU activists held protest marches shouting slogans like "Throw the Emergency into the Arabian Sea". A Statewide strike was called for July 11. In Kannur on July 9, A.V.Kunhambu and C.Kannan led the march. The police arrested the major leaders, while dispersing the marchers with a violent lathi charge. On July 10, the second day, O.Bharathan was to lead the march. Previous night Bharathan stayed in K.P.Gopalan's house. When the march started at Kannur bus stand and moved towards the Collectorate, the police encircled them and the police warned them that if they proceeded forward, they would be killed by driving police vehicles on to

them. Meanwhile the police started a violent lathi charge from the behind the marchers. At this point Bharathan and his associate K.P.Rajan decided to lie on the road. The intervention of a kind police officer, ASI Balakrishnan Nambiar, saved them and instead of beating them further the leaders were taken to the police station. Later they were taken to the Magistrate who remanded them to the Kannur Central Jail. Why they reached there, they found that A.V.Kunhambu, C.Kannan and Chathunny Master were already there in the sixth block of the jail. Later all of them were sentenced to two months' imprisonment.

7.6.18 The General Strike of July 11

As originally planned, the CPI (M) and CITU were going ahead with the preparations for the General Strike to be held on July 11. The bidi, handloom, tiles and KSRTC workers participated in the strike in large numbers and demonstrated that the working class constituted the foundation of popular movements and they had the responsibility to protect democratic values. One night the CITU leader, K.P. Sahadevan and a few of his associates were taken into custody from the CITU office at Kannur. They were severely beaten up by the police. Yusuf, a taxi driver of Kannur, was a remand prisoner there and on seeing the violence against the leaders, he shouted at the SP to stop the violence. The SP got enraged and brought Yusuf from the cell. He ordered his subordinates to beat this young man until he lost his consciousness. He was then admitted to the Government Hospital. His wife learnt about this only after two days. She sent a petition to the Collector. On learning this, the police sent Yousuf to the Kozhikode Medical College pleading that a mad dog had bitten him. Though the Doctor there refused to admit him on that count, the police forced him to prepare a false case sheet. Poor Yusuf lost his life on the second day becoming another unsung martyr of the Emergency days.

In the same week the police hunted for O.Bharathan, N.Abdulla, K.P. Sahadevan, Pinarayi Vijayan and Patyam Gopalan. Because O.Bharathan could pass on a signal before his own arrest, Patyam Gopalan could escape the police. In this episode Pulikkodan Narayanan and Joseph Thomas, the SP administered a brutal treatment to Pinarayi Vijayan who was singled out from others. Finally all of them were taken to the Kannur Central Jail. When they reached there, they found leaders from other regions were being brought there. They included, among others, Imbichi Bava, Nandakumar and E.Padmanabhan. There were several naxalites too including Kanaka Narayanan and his wife Mandakini. Soon leaders of the Socialist Party, K.Chandrasekharan, P.K.Sankarankutty and Kuttykrishnan Nair, leaders of Jan Sangh like K.G.Marar, Adiyodi and A.C.Nair and finally Ummer Bafaqi

Thangal, Cheriya Mammukkeyi, P.M.Aboobacker, V.P.Mohammed Haji and Ibrahim Haji of All India Muslim League also reached the Central jail. Others who were brought to the Jail later included M.P.Veerendrakumar, K.K.Abu, Advocates Kunhanthan Nair, M.K.Damodaran, V.Balan and K.E.Gangadharan. The police also booked K.V.N.Shenoy and Narahari Bhat, leading merchants of Kannur.

7.6.19 Attack on workers of Dinesh Bidi Cooperative

During the Emergency period workers of many units of Dinesh Bidi Cooperative were attacked at Pinarayi, Eruvatty, Panthakkappara and Peralassery. Factories and family members of workers were not spared. At Pinarayi and Eruvatty, the attacks were conducted under the leadership of Mamparam Divakaran. When workers resisted the attack, the rowdies threw country made bombs at them injuring many counter offensive followed and at Peralassery two Congress workers were killed. Shops were looted. The AKG Memorial Library and Reading Room in front of the Peralassery High School were burnt down. AKG was informed, and, in spite of his ill health, he visited the spot trying to pacify the local people. Congress *goondas* were having a field day and the authorities did not dare to take any action.

It was in this context that AKG made a heart-rending speech in Parliament. He spoke about the murder of democracy by Indira Gandhi and her associates. Thirty-four members of Parliament were in Jail. AKG declared that the CPI (M) would never stoop before the anti-democratic government.

N.Abdullah, an inmate of the jail along with the political detainees, suddenly took seriously ill and was removed to the Headquarters' hospital in Kannur. He had high blood sugar. Without noting this, he was administered glucose through the intravenous route and he was pushed into a coma. He died after a few days leaving his family in destitution. The political detainees wanted to see the dead body of Abdullah before it was taken away. The jail authorities did not allow it. The enraged detainees then observed a day's fast in protest.

7.6.20 Anniversary Celebrations by Detunes

The political detainees were going to complete one year of their life in jail and they planned to celebrate the first anniversary with pomp. They held a meeting and requested the jail authorities to permit them to celebrate the first anniversary. There were fancy dress competitions, volley ball and badminton tournaments. The jail officials like wardens also participated along with the

detenues in these programmes and competitions. Karimbil Kunhambu presented a *Bhagawathi Theyyam* (a traditional temple ritual dance form in Malabar) in the traditional attire and went round to call each by name, receive offerings and shower blessings on them. Members, irrespective of their religion and caste, participated in the *Theyyam* ceremonies without any reservation. Sayed of Malappuram presented the image of Indira Gandhi for the fancy dress and spoke in Hindi saying that she was watching the words and deeds of every one. Two detunes applied for remission by submitting apologies. They were Parambath Gopalan of Panur and Advocate Girish of Kozhikode. A.K.Raghavan Nambiar, brother of AKG was allowed paroles when AKG's health reached a crisis situation. On January 25, 1977 all the political detunes who had been taken into custody during the Emergency were released. The Government declared the date for conducting the General Elections.

7.6.21 Defeat of Stalwarts

Everybody knew who were the people who had openly fought the imposition of Emergency and murder of democracy. When election was announced, there was a feeling that all those who suffered greatly during the Emergency had a better chance to win the elections. For Kannur Parliament seat, the CPI (M) chose O.Bharathan, the veteran trade unionist, though many had preferred K.P.Gopalan. K.P.Gopalan was a *Kulapathi* (chieftain) of the Communist movement in Malabar and was as famous as AKG and K.P.R.Gopalan. They were known as KP, AKG and KPR. There was no inch of land in Malabar that had not been touched by K.P.Gopalan's feet. He had worked for laying the foundations of the Congress in Malabar. But later in his life Congressmen had denounced him. He had been physically assaulted by authorities as well as by political parties. But K.P.Gopalan stood like a rock. In 1957 he was the Minister for Industries in the EMS Ministry. When the CPI split, he remained with the parent party. But during the days of the Emergency he realized his mistakes.

The United Front of Congress, CPI, Muslim League, Kerala Congress, RSP, PSP and NDP decided to field C.K.Chandrappan of the CPI against O.Bharathan of the CPI (M). Bharathan felt that the veteran leader K.P.Gopalan would have been the right candidate against Chandrappan. It may be noted that during the Emergency, C.Achutha Menon was the Chief Minister of Kerala while K Karunakaran was holding the Home portfolio in the ministry under him. K.P.Gopalan was sidelined because of his old age and ill health.

The Kannur Parliamentary constituency consisted of Azhikode, Kannur, Edakkad, Irirkur, Peravur, North Wayanad and Koothuparamba. In all these regions the working class was a dominant segment of voters. Stories of repression during the Emergency were widely circulated. At the national level, leaders like Jagajivan Ram, Nandini Sathpathi and Bahuguna were leaving the Congress Party. Bharathan's campaign was in full swing. K.Sudhakaran of the Organization Congress extended his full support to Bharathan and avidly worked for Bharathan. Later K.Sudhakaran joined Indira Congress called Congress-I and became a Minister in the cabinet headed by A K Antony in 2001. In the course of this, he also became anti-communist and a terror to the CPI (M) in Kannur.

Father Vadakkan, who was in the frontline of the anti-communist Liberation Struggle in Kerala during 1959, was the third candidate in the Kannur Parliamentary constituency. When counting was completed C.K.Chandrappan had defeated Bharathan with a margin of 13000 votes. Bharathan had consolation since Indira Gandhi, the chief architect of Emergency had also been defeated in the election. While all over India voters expressed their verdict against Indira Gandhi and Congress-I, Kerala stood apart as the only State that supported the Congress-I. All the 20 parliament seats and 110 of the 140 assembly seats were won by the Congress-I led United Front. During the 1950s and 1970s, thus the people/voters in this region exhibited an unexplainable deviant political behaviour. Kerala became a political paradox.

7.6.22 Struggles in Public Sector Units

In old North Malabar the only mechanized modern industry was the Common Wealth Trust factories. The Aaron Mills of Pappinissery inspired it. The dominant industrial activities were, however, concentrated in handlooms, and bidi and cigar. A reference has been made earlier about the great historic Aaron Mill Struggle. Samuel Aaron and his family had substantially contributed to the industrial development of Malabar. They had started the Baliapattanam Tiles, Kolappuram Mill, and Hindustan China Clay Works in Pazhayangadi, Kannapuram and Nileswaram. Though a Congress leader, Samuel Aaron was unwilling to give workers in his factories their legitimate dues. He never liked the intervention of trade unions and this sparked off a number of struggles.

When Samuel Aaron became old, he could not personally look after his large industrial empire. Those who assisted him went on their own ways causing severe economic drain to the establishments. When the China Clay Unit was on the verge of closure, Samuel Aaron was sad. He vowed that he

would arrange to pay his workers full wages till it was closed. But conditions deteriorated. Liabilities of the unit mounted. Wages were not paid for months. Negotiations failed. On January 13, 1975, the Hindustan China Clays was closed. Workers began a struggle at the entrance of Samuel Aaron's house. Though it began peacefully, the struggle soon became violent. Police intervened several times and it created serious law and order problems. T.V.Thomas, the Industries Minister, took earnest interest in working out a formula for resolving the dispute. But meanwhile, the Emergency was declared and all kinds of struggles were prohibited.

In spite of the Emergency the undertaking given by T.V.Thomas was carried out. In March 1976, the Government of Kerala took over the Hindustan China Clay Works under the Law of Industrial Relief Undertakings. In this, P.P.Mukundan of the CPI and pro CPI trade union centre AITUC played an important role. The Government freezed all the liabilities of the company for three years. Arrears of Wages, Bonus and PF were also freezed. For three years workers were not to get any increase in the current level of wages and benefits. This decision invited strong protests but the workers soon realized that the factory started functioning and their jobs were secure. The public sector unit of Kerala State Industrial Enterprises (KSIE) managed the factory. The CITU, AITUC and INTUC nominated one representative each to sit in the Advisory Board of the factory to help the management to run it properly.

By 1983 the Company taken over by KSIE wiped out all its past liabilities and started making profit. Workers were paid their arrears in full. Once the company started growing rapidly, some relatives of Samuel Aaron began manipulative strategies to bring it under their control. They used all the political influence they could command. But the 600 odd work forces led by the CITU, AITUC and INTUC unions stood firm like a rock and the company continued in the domain of the public sector. After the Assembly elections of 1982, E.Ahamed of the Muslim League became the Minister of Industries. He knew the background about the government take over of the Hindustan China Clays. In 1983 the Government brought a new bill to transform the Relief undertaking into Kerala Clays and Ceramics Products as a Government of Kerala enterprise and it became a model public enterprise n the State.

7.6.23 Struggle in the State Farm at Aralam

The Government of Kerala with Soviet aid started the State Farm at Aralam in Kannur district. Spread over 12500 acres of fertile land that was originally under the ownership and control of A.K.Kunhimayan Haji and family. The proposal to set up the State Farm there was subjected to several

objections in the early 1970s. Aralam was a remote place notorious for infections diseases and possessing little infrastructure and communication facilities. Iratty and Peravur were the nearest human habitats. The population of Aralam consisted of *adivasis* (tribals) and immigrants who had reached there in search of cultivable or habitable land. They were at the mercy of wild animals. It was in such a place that the Government decided to set up a State Farm.

Unfortunately, those who were recruited to work in the Aralam State Farm were denied their legitimate rights and wages. They were not treated as "workers" in the real sense. A day's work extended to 10-15 hours and that too without any lunch or rest intervals. Work usually concluded after sun set. The farm supervisors and other officials treated the workers as their slaves. Naturally, this kindled a desire for an organization of workers. During the Emergency, a number of workers and tribal family members were evicted from the farm. When the Emergency was lifted, the left leaders in particular decided to mobilize the workers into a fight against exploitation and injustice.

O.Bharathan visited the spot and reported the facts he observed to Kunhikoya Sahib, the then Collector of Kannur. The Collector came to the Farm as scheduled and interacted freely with the people there. Fully convinced about the problems of the workers and inmates, the Collector took speedy action. Later the organization of workers in the Farm collectively raised the demand for parity in conditions of work and wages with those in comparable employments. But no immediate settlement of the demands was made and consequently the Farm began to lose heavily. The Farm Management was not in professional hands. The civil servants and bureaucrats who handled management of the Farm took an unhelpful and cruel approach to the issues. The workers' unions waged incessant struggles and legal battles at the level of the labour court, High Court and even the Supreme Court. The Farm Management did not comply with court orders. Conciliation conferences were held in Kannur, Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram and later in New Delhi. The Government was unsympathetic. It said that no increase in wages could be offered to Aralam Farm workers since that would create a cascading effect on the wages of workers in other State farms elsewhere in the country. The Government was not prepared to run the farm with financial loss and it made it clear that, if pressurized by the unions, it would order its closure.

In the Conference held in New Delhi, representatives of the Farming Corporation and Ministry of Agriculture and top officials participated. They unanimously pointed out that the Aralam Farm, during its 18 years of operation, had made only losses and under these circumstances, they would suggest its closure. When the trade union representatives were told that they

could return home after collecting the closure notice, O.Bharathan, who was representing the CITU unit in the Aralam Farm, exploded by retorting that he had not sent his 18 year old son from his home on the ground that despite his efforts to help the boy in all adversities, he had not contributed anything to his father. This kindled some rethinking on the part of the Government. Later a Conference was held at the FACT Guest House at Udyogamandal where all the parties to the dispute expressed readiness to make some compromises to save the Farm from a closure. The workers were given a major portion of wage arrears.

The problem with the Aralam Farm was that the Farming Corporation of India did not treat it as directed by the Union Ministry of Agriculture. O.Bharathan sought the intervention of E.Balanandan, CPI (M) Politburo member and Member of Parliament. Balanandan held talks with Chathurananan Misra, the Union Minister. At Balanandan's instance, Bharathan prepared a detailed memorandum on the history and problems of the Aralam Farm, and met the Minister, who promised immediate action on the matter. He offered to hand over the Aralam Farm to the Kerala Government and hold a fresh conference of all parties to resolve the issues. During 1996-97 the Aralam Farm made a profit of Rs.50 lakhs. At the conference, when Bharathan demanded that the profits should be distributed to the workers, Chathurananan Misra with a smile commented that the profits should be shared between the owner/employer and the workers. The State Government failed to take any initiative on the suggestions of the Union Minister. Consequently the Aralam Farm continued to be a symbol of State negligence and a disgruntled lot of suffering workers.

7.6.24 Valiyangadi Episode

In the *Valiyangadi* (Big Bazar) the *mooppans* (jobbers) enjoyed the right to engage any one he liked. The Muslim League leaders controlled the labour market here and they were not prepared to allow the entry of the communists. But the communists mobilized the workers in *Valiyangadi* and formed the Commercial Employees' Association. In the trade in coconuts, the Gujarathi Seths had an upper hand and most of them were engaged in hundi business. They used the services of *mooppans* as their intermediaries. No one dared to question the Seths. Workers had to pay a certain sum to the Seths to get work. The communist led union through incessant struggles ended this malpractice. It also succeeded in securing a Festival Allowance to the workers.

7.6.25 Struggle in Kerala Soaps

When the Kerala Soaps commenced operation in Kozhikode, there was no formal or systematic recruitment policy. When the bell at the gates is rung, the Watchman of the Company would appear before the work seekers assembled at the gates and he used to select some among them for work. This practice led to corruption, since some of the work seekers started bribing the watchmen to get into the company. Here again trade union activists intervened and put up a demand that work should be offered to as many as possible on rotation basis. Mukundan, the Director of the Company, conceded this demand. Later the workers could also get an increase in their wages.

7.6.26 Peeling Workers' Struggle

The conditions of work and wages in prawn and fish peeling sheds in Kozhikode in the first half of 1960s were inhuman. These peeling sheds were concentrated in West Hill and Vellayil. Workers were paid only 10 paise per Kilogram. One Market Avaran, a notorious *goonda*, was holding the workers to ransom and every one had to regularly make cash payment to him. He insisted that the workers should not hold any flag or shout any slogans. But at one point they told him that they have a leader by the name K.M.Kutty Krishnan. Soon there was a direct confrontation between the Avaran and the union leader. The workers held a big rally in the Army Command Ground to protest against the injustice and later they marched to the Collectorate and offered Satyagraha. Ajitha, who later turned a Naxalite leader, had joined the agitation shouting slogans. Finally the issue was settled. Besides, the peeling workers also secured a festival allowance of Rs. 10 per head.

K.M.Kutty Krishnan started to work in the AITUC, but for a short period shifted to the CITU, but now he is back in the AITUC fold again. He remembers the guidance and inspiration he received from A.V.Kunhambu, K.P.R.Gopalan, N.C. Sekhar, AKG, E.C.Bharathan, Nedukandy and Mohamed Koya of Kozhikode, and E.R.Nair and E.P.Gopalan of Malappuram and C.Kannan of Kannur. Kozhikode in the 1980s and 1990s is now witnessing closure of a number of industrial units like Gwaliyor Rayons, Western India Steel Company, Kunnnath Textiles, Puthiyara Soap Works etc. The Steel Complex is grappling with gross under utilization of capacity giving hardly 30 days of work to its employees. But they come and simply collect their emoluments and leave.

K.Moosakutty is another leading trade union worker of Kozhikode. Though hailing from a Muslim family, he joined the Kisan Sabha under the Communist Party of India at the age of 18. This prompted the religious elders

to ostracize him from the Muslim Community and the Mosque. He concentrated in trade union work mainly in the rubber plantations segment at Puthuppady and Thamarassery. His entry invited retaliation by the estate owners who openly announced that they would end the life of Moosakutty.

7.6.27 Jeerakappara Struggle

The Jeerakappara struggle of 1968-69 was note worthy. It was triggered off by large-scale eviction of tenants by landlords. The union activists were not allowed to move freely in the estate area. In early 1969 the estate was locked out. *Goondas* were let loose. The struggle by tenants and estate workers soon got transformed into a popular upheaval. The estate owners organized a *Desaraksha Samithy* (Save Country Committee) to attack union activists. Tension was mounting at Kunnamangalam, Koduvally and Adivaram. Many were injured on both sides, but luckily no one was killed. The INTUC was supporting the estate owners, but the AITUC and the CITU stood united and their unity created an exodus from the INTUC. In subsequent clashes an estate owner and a watchman were attacked.

7.6.28 Mylampara Case

In the Mylampara assault case during 1970-71, two CITU activists were attacked. They lay unconscious in the medical college ward for a long period. C.Achutha Menon was the Chief Minister of Kerala and K.Karunakaran was holding the Home Ministry. AKG and EMS appealed to the Government for resolving the issue. Those lying unconscious in hospital were charged in a murder case and the court had given them the death sentence. The case became famous since the union took it on appeal to both the Kerala High Court and the Supreme Court. At last the President of India, V.V.Giri, intervened and ordered clemency to the accused. He had signed the order just a day before he relinquished the position as the President. During this tension-ridden period, an attempt was made to kill K.Moosakutty, now a top CITU leader by estate owners' *goondas* using a jeep to hit him. But he survived this attack.

K.Moosakutty considers Chathunny Master as his political guru. During the National Emergency in 1974, Moosakutty was arrested under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and confined to jail for about 21 months. On his release he contested election from the Koduvally constituency but was defeated by the Muslim League candidate. But in 1982 he won the elections from Beypore and became an MLA.

At one time there were 37 criminal cases registered against Moosakutty since he always fought injustice. One instance is note worthy. R.P.Hussain Haji was a wealthy landlord who was an unquestioned king of Thamarassery. He never wanted any rival to emerge in the area. One of his favourite past time was to create terror among the innocent people and force them to surrender prospective brides in the family to him before they could be married off to their grooms. This was going on unquestioned by people who were terrorized by Haji's men. Further Haji used to send his henchmen to destroy crops in the farms owned by others. One day he ordered the traders and merchants in the Puthuppady Panchayat not to sell rice, provisions and other goods to the workers of the State Farm. Naturally the trade union had to intervene and held a struggle and at the end the Haji had to accept defeat. The Haji was later arrested and put in jail under the COFEPOSA. But the *goondas* of the Haji showed their might by attacking Moosakkutty's house. He is also currently an important member of the State Committee of the CPI (M) and one of the vice Presidents of the CITU state unit.

T.Ayyappan, O.J.Joseph and A.V.Kunhambu had inspired several trade union activists in the Kozhikode area. This also helped them in strengthening the cadres of the Communist Party of India in the early years. After the split of CPI, initially the AITUC did not split. But when the AITUC supported the theory of "class cooperation", many belonging to the younger generation got frustrated and there were elders like EMS, AKG, O.J.Joseph and Azheekodan Raghavan who openly supported the theory of "class conflict/confrontation". They wanted a trade union centre built on this theory. Thus the CITU was formed. This group in Kozhikode strengthened their hold on the workers in several industries like Motor transport, Tiles, Toddy and head load through several struggles. Ayyappan, Kunhikannan, T.V.Velayudhan, M. Vasu and Imbichikku played an important role in this.

7.6.29 Struggles in the Mavoor Rayons

When writing this, the largest private sector industrial unit in the State of Kerala, the Birla Group's Gwalior Rayons factory at Mavoor, had been just wound up. The terms relating to the closure of the factory were finalized at a meeting of the management and trade unions on July 7, 2001. Both parties agreed that the company would be deemed to have been wound up with effect from June 30, 2001. It must be noted that the Mavoor factory had suspended production on May 10, 1999 following pollution related controversies. It is significant that no one attributed labour issues as a cause for the closure. The consensus on the closure issue was reached at the end of marathon parleys initiated by the Kerala Labour Minister, Babu Divakaran, son of T. K Divakaran, the veteran and most respected trade union leader.

E.T.Mohammed Basheer (STU), Aryadan Mohammed (INTUC), T P Ramakrishnan and Elamaram Karim (CITU), K.Gangadharan (BMS) and GRO Vasu represented the various unions of employees of the factory. For and on behalf of the Grasim Management, Sushil Agarwal and Prasanna signed the agreement. The following were the specific terms of the agreement⁴².

- (i) Employees will get 40 days' wages for every year of service completed as well as every year of service remaining.
- (ii) In addition they will be given a special pay of Rs. 27,500 each.
- (iii) The employees will get these payments before July 23, 2001.
- (iv) The trainees and probationers in the company will get a compensation of one-lakh rupees each.
- (v) Employees retiring between July and December during 2001 will get an ex-gratia payment of Rs.10,000 each (in addition to the usual compensation).
- (vi) All employees will be given Rs.1000 each as uniform and footwear allowance.
- (vii) The bonus for 2000-01 has been fixed at the minimum rate of 8.33 per cent. The bonus will be paid before July 31.
- (viii) The company will disburse the provident fund and gratuity payable to the employees.
- (ix) Employees whose children are studying in nearby schools will be allowed to occupy their company quarters till the end of this academic year. The school, managed by the company on its campus, will run till the end of this academic year by the Parents' and Teachers' Association (PTA) at the school. To defray the expenses of running the school, the company management will pay the PTA an allowance of Rs. 200 for each student.
- (x) Employees using the company quarters beyond March 31, 2002 will be charged a rent of Rs.1500 each.
- (xi) As per the agreement, all court cases relating to the suspension of production at the factory will be withdrawn by the trade unions. Cases involving disputed age certificates of some of the employees will, however, continue.

After suspension of production in May 1999, the management had submitted a closure application to the Government on August 23, 1999 under section 25 (o) of the Industrial Disputes Act. The reason cited was "raw material shortage", and not labour troubles. The State had rejected the petition

as well as a review petition filed subsequently by the management. The Government had then referred the issue of the closure of the company to the Industrial Tribunal, Kozhikode. These cases, as well as a case filed by the trade unions in Indore court, were to be withdrawn by the parties concerned as per the Agreement. This was the first of the major industrial disputes to be settled by the new UDF led Government in which the Labour Minister, Babu Divakaran, he himself being an active trade unionist, took the initiatives to conclude a very unique agreement through conciliation.

7.6.29.1 The Story of Mavoor Rayons

The Mavoor Rayons Factory was about four decades old. It was set up at the initiative of E.M.S.Namboodiripad, the Marxist leader and Chief Minister of Kerala. At that time he was criticized for negotiating with the Indian capitalist industrial house of the Birlas. The factory was set up with an investment of just Rs.16 crores in 1962 and at the time of its closure it had assets worth Rs.1000 crores. The Kerala Government gave 200 hectares of land in Pulpampuram in Mavoor Panchayat on the banks of River Chaliyar. Besides, the Government committed to supply raw materials (mainly bamboo) from forests at concessionary rates, besides, electricity from the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB). The company was expected to produce wood pulp, which is used for further processing in other Birla companies in North India. Once upon a time the employees of the Mavoor factory were one of the highest paid in the State. The monthly wage bill was around Rs. 2 crores. The company in certain years used to pay high bonus even to the extent of 42.5 per cent. The company contributed large sums to Government in terms of sales tax and excise duties. It built a large township at Mavoor, which was about 21 kilometres away from Kozhikode. Soon Mavoor saw the generation of indirect employment to supplement the workshop in the Rayons Factory. At the time of closure the company had 1300 workers, 300 officers and 16 trainees and probationers. The company was allowed to acquire 30000 hectares of forestland in Nilambur to grow trees to ensure raw material. Luckily the Government later decided to acquire it. On an average, 500 truckloads of raw materials used to reach the Mavoor factory per day. After submitting the closure notice, the factory stopped production. However, it continued to pay wages to workers. Finally, as per the agreement reached with the trade unions, the company was ready to give away Rs.60 crores as compensation for closure. Compare this with the initial investment of Rs.16 crores made by the company and several hundred crores of rupees profit the company had extracted from Mavoor. It was clear that the Birla Group had made substantial gains by starting the Mavoor Rayons Factory in 1962 and closing it in 2001. But Malabar lost one of its largest industrial undertakings.

7.6.29.2 Early Issues

The conditions of work and wages in the early years of the Mavoor Rayons were pitiable⁴³. In the construction stage the company had about ten thousand workers, skilled and unskilled, drawn from different parts of the country. The daily wage rate was Rs.1.25. During lunchtime, the workers were given rice gruel prepared in large concrete tanks. There used to occur a number of accidents and injuries at the work site. The number of lives lost in accidents has not been counted. No compensation was paid to the victims. In the first year of the construction phase itself the workers formed trade unions. One of the construction contractors was the Navbharath Engineering Company. One day Koyakutty, a welding helper, during work accidentally fell from the top of a Tank and was killed on the spot. The workers called off work at the site. Next day they boycotted work, held a silent march and passed condolence resolution. This incident led to the formation of a strong trade union in the Mavoor Rayons at the initiative of Mathew G.Karot, K.M. Mohammedali, C.V.Kumaran and N.Damodaran. It was called the Gwalior Rayons Pulp Factory and Construction Workers' Union.

7.6.29.3 First Strike in Mavoor

The Union conducted its first official strike in June 1962. The main demands were increase in wages, medical aid to workers involved in accidents, prevention of destruction, by security staff, of temporary sheds put up by workers for the accommodation of their families. The strike lasted only just one day because Colonel P.T.Rajan, the Chief Executive of the company readily agreed to negotiate and settle the issues. In the same year in October the union held another struggle and earned a fifty paise increase in daily wages.

By the end of 1962, the construction phase was coming to an end and the company had started steps to recruit regular staff with a view to commence production. As expected, workers employed in the construction phase was given notice of termination. Hundreds of workers were to be sent away. In a highly politically conscious and charged Kerala environment, it created an explosive situation. Unrest spread among the workers. At this time D.Unmunni, M.J.George, P.Bhaskara Menon, K.M.Kunhavaran, K.Sankara Pillai, P.P.Sulaiman, K.Chandu and other activists mobilized the workers to resist unwarranted termination of services.

7.6.29.4 AITUC Union

E.K.Nayyar was the District Secretary of the Communist Party of India in Kozhikode. The Party discussed the seriousness of the situation that was developing in Mavoor and decided to depute E.C.Bharathan, Kallat Krishnan, M.P.Vasudevan Nambissan and Advocate K.Bhaskaran Nair, experienced trade union leaders, to guide the struggle there. Under their initiatives, the first trade union in Mavoor was got affiliated to the AITUC. Due to the incessant pressure from this affiliated Union, the company agreed to take a sympathetic view of the workers employed in the construction phase and to absorb as many as possible in suitable vacancies.

7.6.29.5 Emergence of I.N.T.U.C. Union at Mavoor

Finding that the AITUC had taken roots in Mavoor Rayons, K.P. Kuttikrishnan Nair, M.C.Karunakaran and K.P.Nair of the INTUC formed a union there. Though initially there was no inter-union rivalry, the workers soon got divided on political lines, one section becoming pro-Communist and the other pro-Congress. This sowed the seeds for misunderstanding and frequent skirmishes. In spite of that, the management could sign the First Long Term Settlement on October 27, 1963.

7.6.29.6 The First Long Term Settlement, 1963

The sole architect of this historic long-term settlement was the veteran industrial relations expert, P.N.Krishna Pillai. Using his official position as Labour Commissioner, he guided the conclusion of this settlement. Advocate K.Bhaskaran Nair and D.Unnunni represented the AITUC, while K.P.Kutty Krishnan Nair and K.G.Mathew represented the INTUC in the negotiations. Gohal Rajendrapal signed the settlement on behalf of the company. The settlement was reached after several days of negotiations. This was the first experience of management in a Birla company where the trade unions held the upper hand in marathon bargaining duly assisted by a pro-Labour Government and a Labour-friendly Labour Commissioner.

7.6.29.7 Issues crop up again

The long-term settlement did not bring all round peace. Issues soon began to crop up. At that time around 10000 workers employed in bamboo yard, Chipper, Pulp shed loading, chemical loading and unloading were under contract work. The trade unions argued that all of them were directly involved

in the production process and therefore they should be brought under the muster roll of the company. The management refused to concede it and it triggered a number of small and big struggles. The police arrested several union activists. In one unique incident, those who had been arrested were got released and after garlanding them with red garlands they were brought from the police station to the company gates in company vehicles. Then only the workers had commenced their work.

The trade unions in Mavoor Rayons had to wage individual struggles for secure canteen facilities, uniform, medical check up etc. During the early years these unions did not have own offices, adequate working funds and paid office staff. But the situation changed when the union movement in Mavoor Rayons got consolidated on winning the confidence of dedicated workers. This was not sustained long since the movement got subdivided and fragmented. One after another most political parties in the State vied with each other to form a union and get it affiliated to them. The split of the CPI and later the AITUC was a major shock to the rank and file pro-Left workers. Naxalites led by GRO Vasu formed a radical union. The Swathantha Thozhilali Union (STU) founded another. All this created a fertile ground for inter-union rivalry. Large number of struggles, some year-long ones, strikes, hunger marches, sit-in demonstrations, *gherao*, *dharna*, picketing, *road-roko*, *rail-roko*, filling the jails etc. were reported from Mavoor Rayons regularly.

7.6.29.8 Threat of Pollution

In 1962 when the Mavoor Rayons was set up, people of Kerala in general and those in Mavoor in Kozhikode in particular knew nothing about the issue of pollution. Kerala is famous for its high density of population and its crowded homestead habitats. High literacy and awareness level of the people soon drew attention to the polluting Mavoor Rayons. When the Company commenced production, polluted water and effluents of the factory were allowed to flow freely into the nearby Chaliyar River without going through prior anti-pollution treatment. Public protest backed by the trade unions made a big impact. The management then agreed to construct a two-kilometre pipeline into a distant point of the river. But that too was the untreated effluent.

When a massive popular movement against the polluting company started, C.Achutha Menon, the Kerala Chief Minister convened a Conference at Ramanilayam Guest House in Thrissur in 1974. The Conference reached an agreement under which the company would take the effluent by a pipeline to Chungappally about seven kilometres away from Mavoor. Since Chungappally portion of the Chaliyar River always confronted saltish water,

people were not using that water for drinking. The company agreed to establish an effluent treatment plant at a cost of Rs.5 crores. The plant was to be built and supplied by the famous Boyili Company.

According to one version, after the above plant was put into operation, the pollution level had come down to the permissible level and the Pollution Control Board of the Government and Company Management were constantly monitoring the level jointly. Besides, the monitoring committee headed by the Revenue Divisional officer (RDO) also regularly monitored the pollution level. Dr.Achuthan, an expert in the field and Chekkoo, the convener of the Chaliyar Protection Samithi were members of this committee.

Though water pollution was broadly contained, doubts were expressed about the high level of air pollution caused by Mavoor Rayons. A Commission headed by Dr.Sen Gupta had made some useful suggestions to tackle air pollution. One was the raising of the height of the Chimney. Another was treatment of dirt and residue that often got accumulated. The level of air pollution had to reduced on a war footing. The company then pointed out that their financial position did not suffice to undertake the measures. The trade unions started asserting that the Company had to find the money for the pollution control.

7.6.29.9 Conflict of Interests

The Mavoor Rayons touches on the daily life of a number of stakeholders. The workers wanted the factory, the source of their livelihood, to continue for long without any problem and for this the company had to invest money on pollution treatment. The workers here were supporting hundreds of families. The factory created a large number of subsidiary employments to many. However, the water pollution of the Chaliyar river destroyed the livelihood of hundreds of traditional country fishermen who used to depend heavily on this river for their livelihood. The local people of Mavoor found that the Chaliyar River, an important source of drinking water, was denying them safe drinking water because of the influx of effluents into it. Air pollution from the factory had increased the incidence of asthma, cancer and other life-threatening diseases. The conflict of interests was increasing day after day. The warring sections organized popular rallies, demonstrations, and, movements to strengthen their respective problems and positions. The trade unions, irrespective of their ideological differences, stood united and argued that factories could not be closed on account of pollution. They wanted to protect the employment of their worker members. They formed united Grasim Employment Coordination Council. Many political

parties extended their help to it. Memoranda were prepared, demonstrations and marches were held to save, protect and sustain the Mavoor Rayons.

7.6.29.10 The Outcome

When the situation and the conflict of interests became critical, the management decided to close down the factory several times. In one instance the factory was closed for 39 months putting the workers into desperate destitution. During this period fourteen workers were reported to have committed suicide. People of Mavoor, Kozhikode and the whole of Malabar had, till this day, not recovered from the shock. When support for sustaining the Mavoor Rayons became strong, the Chaliyar Protection Samithi, which was demanding the closure of the factory, started withdrawing from the scene. Soon the workers of Mavoor Rayons realized, that the Chaliyar Protection Campaign had been drawing inspiration and support from the Birla management. The management turned out to be the Villain of the drama. They closed down the factory on the plea of lay off for undertaking maintenance work and secured permission and clearance from the State Labour Department. The lay off commenced on May 10, 1999. Later on August 23, 1999 the company invoked Section 25 (O) of the Industrial Disputes Act and applied to the Government for permission to permanently close down the Mavoor Rayons. The Government Labour Secretary examined the case and reported that the points raised by the company were baseless. So the Government refused the permission to the company for closure. The company submitted a review petition and that too was rejected by the State Government. The matter was then referred to the Industrial Tribunal, Kozhikode.

Meanwhile the Birla management decided to hand over the Mavoor Rayons to a benami company called Moonlight of Indore, Madhya Pradesh and sought legal permission to do so for the Indore Bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court. At this point the Kerala Government and the Mavoor Workers' Coordination Council joined as parties to the case. There were also cases filed before the Kerala high Court on the various disputed issues in Mavoor Rayons. The case under Section 25 (O) of the Industrial Disputes Act was aimed at to circumvent the payment of compensation wages to the affected workers. The proposed benami transaction was also meant to achieve the same result.

The management gave wide publicity that a major reason for closure of the factory was shortage of raw materials. But the trade unions refuted it. According to them, there were 142000 tonnes of wood and bamboo in the company's godowns. Besides, they could also secure the allotment of past

two years from the Government. In short, the company was assured of two year's stocks of raw materials for its operation. The company used the policy of liberalization of imports as a ploy. According to it, import of pulp would be cheaper than producing it at Mavoor Rayons. The State Government also stood helpless in countering the stand of the company.

The trade unions in Mavoor Rayons had established a high level of unity when the livelihood of their members became threatened. They argued that the company started with Rs.16 crores but today it has assets worth Rs.1000 crores. No one could find logic behind the move by the Birlas to sell the company to Moonlight of Indore for just Rs.21.5 crores. Under this circumstances the Kerala Government could take over the Mavoor Rayons for a higher price and make the payment to Birlas in Government bonds. The company could be saved if such a political decision was taken. Mavoor had great tourist potential and the construction of the Kavanakkal Regulator-cum-Bridge on Chaliyar could create a pollution free environment of air, water and habitat.

But lack of appropriate and timely action by the State Government strengthened the hands of the Birlas and they tightened their decision to bring Mavoor Rayons to a permanent closure. At this point, when the closure became a concrete reality, workers lost all hope. The only alternative was to choose a second best position. Therefore, the trade unions stood united and made a hard bargain to get maximum compensation for workers. Even after the settlement for closure of Mavoor Rayons was signed, many felt that with that much money paid as compensation, the Birlas still had a good bargain. Otherwise, they would not have closed down the factory. Unresolved questions still hover around. Will the Kerala Government allow the Birlas to cash in their assets in the State and take them out of Kerala on a long lasting basis with no plan to return to this land. Of course, they might be finding it difficult to ignore the contributions to their financial prosperity by the toiling workers of the Mavoor Rayons. The involvement of GRO Vasu in the Mavoor Struggle is discussed elsewhere.

7.6.30 Struggles in Malappuram

The Malappuram District is an industrially backward region. However, a few struggles could be documented. Malappuram consists of Ponnani, Tirur, Kottackal, Manjeri, Perinthalmanna and Nilambur. Former Ponnani and Eranad taluks were included in this new district. These taluks had a notable socio-political history. The Congress as well as the Congress Socialist Party was very active in this region. In 1942, the main functionaries of the CSP had formed the Communist Party. It organized anti-Japanese Committee and

Balasanghoms. It was during this period that P.C.Joshi of the Communist Party of India visited Kondotty in Malappuram. Under his inspiration, young activists like Saithalikutty, now a prominent leader of the CPI (M) and the CITU went to work among the harijans whose staple diet happened to be toddy. Kondotty Thangal was a rich feudal lord of that area and enjoyed great support from the British authorities. Thangal used to maltreat the poor harijans as his slaves and these unfortunates did not enjoy any human rights. Under Thangal's influence, the authorities directed the shops not to sell sugar and kerosene to the harijans. The Communists took up their case and held a march of harijans to the Tehsildar's office. Govinda Menon, the Tehsildar then agreed to sanction half a pound of sugar and a quarter measure of kerosene to the harijans. He also directed his office to arrange for delivery of the required quantities to the shops for sale to the harijans.

7.6.30.1 Kondotty Bidi Workers' Struggle

The Yogi Bidi Company had several branches in and around Kondotty. Though the branch license was in the name of Fathimakutty, her husband Mammad Master was virtually in charge of running it. Mammad dismissed one worker from the Company and the Kerala State Trade Union Council (KSTU) took up a dispute. This was taken up by the Labour Department. The Company did not act. The issue was then referred to the Industrial Tribunal at Kozhikode. Mammad did not comply with the summons sent to him and used to produce medical certificate. Though he did not enter the hall for appearing before the Tribunal, Mammad was moving in the veranda outside listening to the proceedings of the Tribunal. The trade union activists brought this to the attention of the Tribunal and the latter ordered the police to take Mammad into custody. The case went up to the Labour Appellate Tribunal (LAT), which held its sittings in Madras. Kallat Krishnan, Thankamony and Saithalikutty represented the union. The LAT award finally went in favour of the dismissed worker and he was taken back. The case Fathimakutty Vs Kondotty Bidi Workers' Union became a popular one.

The workers of Malappuram could never forget the sacrifices made by Kunhali Aboobacker. A former ex-service man, he mobilized the working class in Malappuram. He organized a cycle march in Eranad and hundreds of workers from East Eranad attended it. D.C.Namboodiri of Kanhangad assisted him. After leading several working class struggles, Kunhali became a martyr when he was shot and killed by assailants employed by estate management. Mention must be made about other activists like Koya Kunhu Naha, Gangadharan, Edakkot Mohammed, Appakkoya, Nadukandy Mohammed, K.P.Mohammed Koya, K.V.M.Kutty, N.T. Kunhali, and P.T.Bhaskara Panicker. They were active members of the Malabar Committee and Panicker

was elected the first President of the Malabar District Board, which even today is considered as the first democratic government in this part of the country.

7.6.31 Struggles in Nilambur

It was in 1956 that disturbances arose in the Aspinwalll Company at Pullengode. This Company had Rubber estates. K.Kumaran who founded the first INTUC union in the area had mobilized the workers of the Estate. The workers in the Edivanna Estate were under CPI (M) control. There used to be frequent clashes between the activists of INTUC and CPI (M)/CITU. In one such a clash, Kumaran was injured and his place was taken over by Aryadan Mohammed, who later became a Vice President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) also the Minister for Labour in the Kerala Government. His mentors in the trade union movement were K.Kumaran and P.N.Nambissan.

In 1962 the INTUC union conducted a struggle to secure a settlement with the estate managements. At that time the rate of contribution to Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) as laid down in the statute was 6.25 per cent. But the union could settle the rate for 8.33 per cent and this was a record and the first in India.

7.6.31.2 Chulliyode Incident

In 1967 the Chulliyode Estate witnessed intense inter-union rivalry between the CITU and the INTUC. The CITU colluded with the management and got a few INTUC workers dismissed from service. CITU blacklegs filled their place. The CPI (M) was in government at that time. The INTUC union led by Aryadan Mohammed took up the dispute. Kunhali, a strong CPI (M) activist, led the CITU union. The clash between the unions led to the murder of Kunhali and a case was charged for murder. The case was that it was Aryadan who used a gun to shoot at Kunhali. Though the dispute was settled through adjudication, the CITU blacklegs were denied wages. Perhaps this must have instigated some developments leading to Aryadan being accused of the murder of Kunhali.

7.6.31.3 Murder of Kunhali

There are conflicting versions about the murder of Kunhali, the CITU and CPI (M) leader ⁴⁴ the murder case went on for some time but finally the

court declared Aryadan innocent. Aryadan's version was as follows. The Chulliyode estate was located in Amarambalam Panchayat. Following the inter-union rivalry, a number of workers had left the CITU union and joined the INTUC union led by Aryadan. At that time, he was also the President of the Kozhikode DCC. The CITU workers crossed over to the INTUC when they were denied their due wages. When Aryadan reached Pullangode, he was informed that there was mounting tension in Chulliyode. Aryadan immediately informed the Sub Inspector and the latter arranged to send a few constables to the trouble spot.

The INTUC office at Chulliyode was functioning from the first floor of a shop. The CITU activists were planning to raid the INTUC office and attack Aryadan and his colleagues. It was during the confusion that a gunshot was heard and people were shouting that Kunhali was shot dead. The CITU and CPI (M) supporters then forced the closure of the shop and the INTUC office atop from outside and started pouring kerosene to put it on fire. Since there was heavy rain, their action fizzled out. Soon armed police reached the spot, dispersed the angry crowd and arrested Aryadan Mohammed, charging him with the murder of Kunhali.

7.6.31.4 Aryadan Mohammed's Arrest

Wide publicity was given to the arrest of Aryadan Mohammed. He was remanded to the Kozhikode Sub jail where he spent nine months. He was denied even the kind of food, which was being given for the Naxalite detainees. Following the arrest of Aryadan, the CPI (M) commenced a vilification campaign against Aryadan and the Congress. Vehicles fitted with loud speakers went around Nilambur, Manjeri, and, Malalppuram announcing "*Marxist leader Kunhali MLA murdered by Congress leader Aryadan Mohammed – Arrest Aryadan and hang him to death*". The media campaign spread to Kozhikode too. Aryadan, after the arrest, was first taken to the Nilambur lock-up and Congress leaders K.Karunakaran, and C.M.Stephen visited him. Karunakaran, at that time, was the Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Legislative Assembly. M.P.Gangadharan Congress leader and Advocate at Nilambur prepared the bail petition.

Kunhali and Aryadan were political rivals and this was used to strengthen the case against Aryadan. Kunhali had functioned as Panchayat President and later had become an MLA and also the Chief Whip of the CPI (M) group in the Assembly. One version was that a few workers of Chulliyode Estate had left the INTUC and Kunhali took the initiative to form an AITUC union to absorb them. After some time these workers left the AITUC and rejoined the INTUC. The dispute arose when the estate

management refused to pay these workers their wages. Born in Kondotty, Kunhali had become a member of the Communist Party in 1946. While remaining in the underground, he was arrested in 1948 and confined to jail lock-up till 1951. During the Chinese invasion of India, Kunhali was again arrested. While remaining in jail he contested the elections and became an MLA. In 1967 elections also Kunhali was elected to the State Assembly.

After Kunhali's murder, the CPI (M) had accused Aryadan Mohammed as the chief accused. But the paradox of politics was such that the CPI (M) later campaigned for the victory of Aryadan in the Assembly elections in 1980 as a result of new political alignments. The body of Kunhali was buried in Kalikavu and the CPI (M) activists had then vowed that they would seek revenge for his murder. Saina, the widow of Kunhali and sister of K.T.Mohammed, the well-known drama and scriptwriter, initially thought that the CPI (M) accusation was correct. But soon the CPI (M) activists identified the real murderer of Kunhali and eliminated him through another crime. When the CPI (M) came forward to campaign for Aryadan's elections, Saina was shocked and she reacted strongly. When the CPI (M) found that Saina's stand would torpedo their political intentions, they asked Saina to change her stand. This shift in the CPI (M)'s strategy of reversing their accusation on Aryadan Mohammed and then campaigning for his election was indeed a notable episode of Kerala's murky and unprincipled politics.

7.6.31.5 Suspicion cleared

K.T.Mohammed had shifted from Kozhikode to Kalikavil to be with his sister Saina and her four small children and console them in the time of tragedy that befell Kunhali's family. To contain the anti-CPI (M) reactions of Kunhali's widow, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, E.K.Nayanar, Chathunny Master, Imbichi Bava and Suseela Gopalan (AKG's widow), top leaders of the CPI (M) made several visits to Saina's house. Since she was unrelenting, finally M.V.Raghavan a tough warhorse of the CPI (M) at that time in Malabar intervened to impress her that the Party's interests are more important and had Kunhali been alive, he would have campaigned for Aryadan since it was the Party's decision. K.T.Mohammed was always a strong supporter of progressive movements including the left political parties. But ultimately the CPI (M) succeeded in changing the views of both Saina and her brother K.T.Mohammed.

K.T.Mohammed asked whether it was in the fitness of things that the CPI (M) brought Aryadan for a face-to-face meeting with Saina and her family to flag off the election campaign in Nilambur. But the CPI (M) was not

for it, since it thought that it might lead to severe emotional outbursts. However, such a meeting did not take place.

According to Aryadan Mohammed, Kunhali was shot dead by somebody aiming at him from a nearby shop veranda. Aryadan and his associates were actually sitting in the first floor office of the Party and the INTUC. The Court that examined the case in details found no tangible evidence for giving its verdict against Aryadan. Later events disproved the innocence of Aryadan as the electorate sent him to the State Assembly continuously for seven times. Aryadan even got an absolute majority of votes in the CPI (M) dominated Chulliyode segment of the constituency.

Aryadan Mohammed and K.T.Mohammed were close friends and even after Kunhali's murder, the bond of friendship continued to be strong. According to K.T.Mohammed, Kunhali, his brother-in-law, was a hero and a true communist always willing to say, "come with me" whenever any one approached him for help. Kunhali never wanted his followers to walk in front. He led them from the front.

Kolakkad Parakkal Madhavan Nair, who was the CPI (M) Nilambur Mandalam Secretary at the time of Kunhali's murder, was a close associate of Kunhali since 1948. According to him, Kunhali on the fateful day had gone to Chulliyode to pacify his followers and workers in the estate. On his return he spoke to some of his colleagues. When he was getting into a jeep, somebody focused a lighted torch at his face. Kunhali asked who the person was. Within a few seconds, a gunshot was heard and Kunhali fell to the ground. There was commotion all around. As if pre-planned the crowd of CPI (M) activists and few anti-social elements started pelting stones at the first floor office of the Congress and the INTUC, where Aryadan was holding a meeting of his activists. As mentioned earlier, the crowd started pouring several tins of kerosene and tried to put the office to fire. Luckily due to heavy rains, the office was not burnt down and Aryadan and his activists were not injured. This eyewitness, Madhavan Nair later resigned from the CPI (M).

The above events constituted an important landmark in the history of trade union movement in Nilambur and a turning point in the course of inter-union rivalry and inter-party politics of Kerala. Another episode which has had similar dimensions was the murder of Azheekadan Raghavan, a top CPI (M) leader in Thrissur allegedly as sequel to group wars within the CPI (M), though the CPI (M) tried its level best to put the blame on the naxalites and single out A.V.Aryan, a former top leader of the Communist Party and CPI (M) and who later severed all his connections with the CPI (M).

7.7 THE MOVEMENT IN PALAKKAD

Palakkad has recently emerged into a growing industrial town with a large cluster of modern industrial units functioning from Kanjikode. The proximity to Coimbatore was an added advantage to Palakkad. There was a time when the entrepreneurs expressed a strong preference to Kanjikode over Coimbatore. But labour troubles in Kanjikode put an end to this early enthusiasm. The tragedy of Palakkad is that most of the traditional industries in the area had declined substantially for various reasons. However, any one who studies the trade union movement would be drawn to the golden movements of working class struggles here.

During the early 1940s the bidi industries in Palakkad taluk employed about 15000 workers and the bidi making units were concentrated in Palakkad town, Pudunagaram, Wadakkancherry, Pudukkad etc. R.V.G, and Lion Brand Bidis had their market mainly in Ceylon. The Chedi Brand was targeted at the Pollachi market. The tile industry was located mainly in Shoranur and Ottappalam and the Common Wealth Tiles was one of the oldest companies in this field. Another major traditional industry in Palakkad was Safety Match Box making spread over Palakkad and Alathur. Soon Shoranur saw the establishment of Kumar Industries. There were also a few textile mills. But the trade union movement in the area was nurtured by not only the workers in the bidi, tiles, safety match box and textile units, but by the inspiration drawn from the struggles led by railway men in Olavakode and Shoranur and also by the farm workers in Chittur, Alathur and Palakkad proper. In short, a study of trade union movement in the Palakkad region cannot ignore the enormous inter-linkages among struggles in various segments of the local economy.

7.7.1 The Bidi Struggle

In the bidi industry the going wage rate was eight *annas* (half a Rupee) for 1000 bidis. In 1941 the bidi companies unilaterally reduced the wage rates to seven and a half *annas*. The workers had a shock since even eight *annas* was insufficient to make both ends meet. P.Balachandra Menon, A.K.Ramankutty, Narayanankutty Menon, R.Krishnan and Kunhiraman Master were the leaders who tried to mobilize the bidi workers in the 1940s. Among them Narayanankutty Menon had resigned from a covetable government job, that of a Tehsildar (Revenue Officer), to join the Congress movement. He later left the Congress to join the Communist Party. P.Balachandra Menon belonged to a very rich aristocratic family and he too had joined the Communist Party. A great organizer, a skilful collective bargaining expert, and well-versed in legal matters, Balachandra Menon was a

gem of a trade union leader devoting his entire life to the cause of the working class.

In 1943 the Government imposed a ban on the Communist Party. In spite of this, the Communists collaborated with like-minded Congress workers like Sankaran Pillai, Mannadiar and Haneefa Haji. The bidi workers started a struggle demanding restoration of their wages immediately. The police blocked the workers and made a lathi charge. P.A.B.Kunjumon, Muthu and Moosa, bidi workers got arrested and several others injured. Soon the struggle transformed itself into a political struggle. The leaders who were in underground could come out only by 1943. During this period, P.Krishna Pillai, AKG and EMS visited Palakkad and that gave an opportunity to establish a common link in the struggles in Palakkad with those in Malabar and elsewhere.

7.7.2 Tile Workers' Struggle

The tile industry in Palakkad spread over Shoranur and Ottppalam was notorious for sweated labour conditions including low wages, long hours of work and inhuman treatment by employers. A typical scenario in the Common Wealth Tiles was found really shocking. The workers in this factory had to travel long distances from their places of habitat commencing their journey in the wee hours of the morning. They used to carry lighted bunch of dry coconut leaf in their hands to find out their way. After work they used to reach house by late night usually around mid night. At work they had to collect clay from distant sources and bring it to the factory. In this process, during a workday they used to walk several times between the factory and the place from where they collected the raw material, clay. The technology and work processes were crude. The average wage was around one and a half anna per day. It took nearly four years to form a trade union in the tiles industry. P.P.Krishnan E.P.Gopalan, Kunjunni Nair and Kongothu Krishnan were the early leaders of tile workers.

As soon a trade union was formed, the police would arrive on the scene because the trade union of workers was treated as a nuisance and expected to generate law and order problems. In the Common Wealth Tiles, as in other units, women were employed for cutting the edges of tiles before they were sent to the kiln. At this point the superiors used to abuse the women workers and if they protested they would be burdened with heavy workload. This sparked off a protest and finally a one-day strike. When the trade union was formed in the Common wealth Tiles only six workers had initially joined it. Whenever a worker joined a trade union he was victimized. This kept the workers away from the unions. The leaders had to go around and meet and

cajole workers to join unions. There was a time when workers would run away on seeing a leader trying to approach them. Initially P.Krishna Pillai and P.Balachandra Menon had to work hard to mobilize the workers and create interest in joining trade unions. Soon workers began to realise the advantages of putting up resistance. It was reported that it took four years for attracting six workers to come forward agreeing to become members of the trade union in Common Wealth Tiles.

The next notable struggle in the Common Wealth Tiles at Olavakode was a Bonus dispute. It lasted 96 days. In spite of the slogans *Thozhilali Samaram Thottitilla – Thotta Samaram Kettitilla* (Trade union struggle have never failed – History has not recorded any failed struggles) this struggle fizzled out. However, the management agreed to give a small hike in wages.

7.7.3 Railwaymen's Struggle

One of the earliest struggles in the Railway establishment at Olavakode integrated the union movement in Palakkad. The salary of a gangman was Rs.12 a month. They demanded a modest increase in their salary. The Railways began victimization as soon as negotiations failed. Many were dismissed or suspended. Ananthan Nambiar and Kalyana Sundaram were leading the struggle. The workers in other establishments rallied behind the striking gangmen. At the end the Railways agreed to settle the issue by raising the salary to Rs.26 a month by Notification.

7.7.4 Farm Workers' Struggles

Palakkad is a major Rice Bowl of Kerala and perhaps has the highest concentration of farm workers in the State. In the 1940s, the wages were paid in kind, usually one *Edangazhy* (a measure) of paddy. In some areas this was raised to one and a half *Edangazhy* of paddy. Of this the farm workers, used to exchange half *Edangazhy* paddy for dried fish. The remaining paddy was hand-pounded to get rice with which they prepared *Kanji* (gruel). Farm work in those days started early in the morning before sunrise and went on till sunset. When going to work, babies and small children used to be taken to the field. They would be deposited in the shades of nearby trees. They would be administered small quantities of toddy or arrack so that they would not cry or shout to disturb work. Some women farm workers were found to evade the eyes of the farm supervisors or agents of the landlord and rush near their babies to breast feed them. In some cases, when they were caught in doing so, the landlords gave them severe physical punishment.

In those days one *anna* fetched 12 *Edangazhy* of paddy but soon it came down to 10. Money or cash was in critical shortage and could not be seen circulating. Farm workers and others found one *anna* a very attractive amount. When trade unions were formed they lost job or were victimized and their dream of earning even that one *anna* vanished.

In Palakkad the system or arrangement of “*Maatta Peedika*” (a kind of exchange market based on barter) came into existence during the construction state of the Malampuzha Dam. Farm workers of Palakkad, Alathur and Chittur constituted the workforce in the Dam. The off-season unemployment was a major factor for attracting the farm workers to this work. Under the “*Maatta Peedika*” system the farm workers who were paid wages in kind would exchange a part of the paddy into other goods that they required. The shopkeepers who arranged the “*Matta Peedika*” used to exploit the farm workers in the exchange deal. The farm workers could not protest. But once they started getting work at Malampuzha construction site they were paid cash wages and realized the advantages of it. This inspired them to demand payment of cash wages for farm work too. This strengthened unionisation as trade unions of farm workers started struggle for cash wages all over Palakkad. In short, the Dam construction transformed the outlook of the farm workers, improved their material conditions and strengthened their class-consciousness.

7.7.5 Agrarian Relations

Both the Congress and the Communist were in the forefront of class mobilization of farm workers in Palakkad. Names of P.Balan of Congress and P.Balachandra Menon and V.Krishnadas, the communists, need special mention here. After the passage of land reforms and Agricultural Workers' Act, significant changes occurred in the structure of agrarian relations in Palakkad. Farm workers and tenants had been organized and held strong domination. However, the system of wages in kind continued. The tenants became landowners and the difference between the tenant and the farm workers became marginal. The farm workers did not like the transformation of the erstwhile tenants into landowners. Soon the former improved their material conditions of life. This was reflected by the improved social and economic status of the new class of tenant-turned-land owner and even the dowry rate among their families went up steeply. The increase in the price of paddy from a mere Rs.600 to Rs.1500 per cart caused this transformation. At the same time the erstwhile landlords got pauperised.

7.7.6 Nenmara Struggle

Among the various agrarian struggles in Palakkad, the one at Nenmara in 1976 is notable. This struggle took place in the farm of Krishnan Chettiar who had about 600 workers under his employment. Though the Government had notified a wage of 7 and 8 *Edangazhi* of paddy, Chettiar was paying only 4 and 5 *Edangazhi* for Female and Male workers respectively. The unions demanded the implementation of the notified rates. It was finally raised to 6 and 7 *Edangazhi*. During the course of the struggle false criminal cases were registered against union activists. One case in dispute went up to the High Court. As days passed farmers in Palakkad complained that cultivation was not profitable due to several factors like unremunerative prices, high wages and high cost of inputs. Person day employment declined. Many farm workers who had migrated to the Malampuzha area seeking construction work there soon became unemployed when that work was completed. In this context of large reserve army of farm labour had no other choice than enter the segment of head load workers. This must have happened around mid 1980s. Tractorization of farm work was throwing more and more male farm workers into unemployment. Conditions of farm workers continued to worsen.

7.7.7 Other Notable Struggles

Palakkad, unlike in many other areas, had witnessed working class struggles and marches in which the participants used to display both the Congress tricolour flag and the Communist Red flag together demonstrating a sense of unity. Even today, remarkable degree of unity and coordination among trade unions of all affiliations is seen in Palakkad. Lately the Swathantha Trade Union (STU) has also entered the union movement in Palakkad in a big way. Top leaders in Palakkad include P.Balan and K.Appu of INTUC, A.N.Yusuf, Vijayan Kunissery and Thennilapuram Radhakrishnan of AITUC, P.Unni, Saidalavi and K.K.Divakaran of the CITU and V.Krishnadas of the AICTU. Names of Kongassery Krishnan, Sankaran, Gopalan, P.P.Krishnan, P.M.Aboobacker, Sundaram, Venu and Sankara Pillai should also be mentioned. Vijayaraghavan who later became Editor, *Kerala Kaumudi* daily in Thiruvananthapuram had played a major role in the struggles conducted by the motor workers against the management of TBT Company.

Several struggles had been reported from Kumar Industries, Sankar Tools, Srinarayana Industries (Shoranur), Nirmal Gas Factory, The BPL Unit at Kanjikode, The Instrumentations Limited, Pecot Mills and Malabar

Cements. Most of these struggles were for settling bonus and wage disputes. Since 1980s labour intensive units in Palakkad have been closed one after another.

In this context, special mention must be made about the struggles in the BPL, Instrumentation Limited and Pecot Mills. The BPL unit of T.P.G.Nambiar was established at Kanjikode with much fanfare and many considered it as a first step in the accelerated industrial development of the State. The unit started to manufacture electronic equipments and components. In the beginning itself, around 1980, the CITU under the leadership of V.Krishnadas attempted to form a trade union there but it fizzled out. In 1981 the INTUC union was formed. At that time the minimum starting pay of an employee in the unit was Rs.150 a month. When the INTUC union started a strike demanding an increase in pay, the management retaliated by retrenching 15 workers. This added vigour to the workers' struggle. The company then declared a lock out. The matter was referred to the Labour Court, which awarded Rs.300 as minimum pay. Today the workers in BPL are earning high emoluments. The company had professional management and it expanded its operation by setting up new subsidiary units. All in all the BPL employs about 3000 workers.

The Instrumentation Limited is a Government of India enterprise and has all the disabilities of a PSU. During 1974-75 a great misunderstanding emerged between the Management and the trade unions. Major A.K.Dhingra was the Chief Executive and he worked wonders with industrial relations in the Unit. He was a strict disciplinarian and wanted workers to contribute their best to the PSU. On account of inter-union rivalry leading to some degree of indiscipline among workers, the management dismissed K.N.S.Pillai and one Kurup, two employees. Despite violent struggles and a police lathi charge, the Management stood firm and did not take back the dismissed workers. Finally, the struggle fizzled out. This was a big turning point in the trade union movement in Palakkad. In the struggle almost all the senior leaders of trade union movement were involved, but they could not secure a victory.

In 1981 the Pecot Mills witnessed a struggle for Bonus. The Management initially offered 33.33 per cent bonus but the trade unions demanded 36 per cent. The strike lasted 9 months and at the end the unions agreed to settle for just 8.33 per cent. This was another big set back for the union movement and it demonstrated clearly the futility of making unreasonable demands.

The private Motor Transport industry in Palakkad was fairly large with about 50 per cent of buses in the State operating from there. The employees in this private sector industry did not enjoy minimum wages or job security.

Working conditions were worse. Naturally, trade unions emerged to protect the employees. A number of small and large struggles had occurred in this sector.

Another, sensitive spot was the head load workers' segment. In the early years, this segment witnessed physical clashes between traders/employers and workers and also among workers belonging to the different unions particularly between those belonging to the STU and the BMS. Indeed the head load workers were looked down by the public on account of their indecent language, abusive behaviour and unreasonably high wage demands. The trade unions while organizing them did not make any attempt to bring about improvements in their life, life style and social behaviour. But gradually, a change was effected when the head load labour market got structured on account of regulatory legislations and moderation on the part of the trade unions. Today, no violent physical clashes are reported. All disputes are negotiated and settled peacefully.

But Palakkad, as is the case in several other centres in the State, is facing a severe economic recession. Most of the labour intensive units have been closed down and some among those, which remain, are constantly under the threat of closure. The rural economy of Palakkad is virtually shattered. Traditional industries like Bidi, safety match box, handlooms and other unorganised industries are near collapse. The bidi industry has virtually vanished from Palakkad. The fleet owners have faced losses. Big private motor transport companies no longer exist. They have been fragmented into small operators and on an average running one or two vehicles. This has fragmented the motor workers union movement too and consequently the unions lost the bargaining power of earlier years. On the whole, Palakkad economy is facing a real economic crisis in the fag end of the twentieth century.

7.8 THE RISE OF THE S. T. U

It was December 8, 1951 when K.M.Seethi Sahib, proposed that the working class should not become a tool in the hands of political parties. He envisioned a non-political organization of workers cutting across caste and community/religion capable of maintaining an independent character to fight for the cause of workers. K.M.Seethi Sahib later served as the Speaker of the Kerala Legislative Assembly.

On May 5, 1957 an organization incorporating the spirit of independence was formed at Kozhikode with S.M.Haneefa Haji (President), K.Chathu Nair and M. Moosa Haji (Vice Presidents), K.M.Hamza (General

Secretary) and C.T.S.H.Ahdal Thangal and P.K.Serkhan (Joint Secretaries) and N.P.C.Bava (Treasurer). The Advisory Board consisted of Arangil Sreedharan, Advocate P.M.Padmanabhan, C.K.Govindan Nair, Dr.Major Sundaram, and P.K.Sankaran Kutty. Thus the Swathanthra Thozhilali Union(STU) was initiated. One of the first struggles conducted by the STU was held on March 26, 1956 when its members registered a protest against the principle "One Industry One Union" proposed by the Minister Bhakthavalsalam in the Madras Assembly.

7.8.1 Bidi workers' march

In September 1957 the STU held a march from Manjeri to Kozhikode demanding Re.1 as.14 as wages for 1000 bidis. On October 1, 1957 the marchers held a dharna before the Collectorate. It called on the government in Malabar to implement the same wage as was given to bidi workers in the Travancore-Cochin State. A Memorandum was submitted to P.K.Nambiar, the Malabar Collector. The struggle lasted two weeks and at the end it was settled when E.M.S.Namboodiripad, the Chief Minister of Kerala declared uniform wage rates for bidi workers in the entire state.

7.8.2 Hand Cart Workers' Struggle

STU was in the forefront of the struggle by hand cart workers held on December 2, 1957. A settlement was reached before the Labour Officer and as a result hand cart workers were granted an increase in their wages to Rs.2.25, besides an extra Rs.2 for the inconvenience and increase in the work load and hardship caused by the One Way Traffic regulation on the streets in the bazaar area. In this struggle about 201 workers were arrested. In early 1962 too, the handcart workers of Kozhikode were forced to wage a similar struggle. When 72 male workers were arrested and taken to jail, female workers belonging to the STU took their places. This struggle lasted a month with regular picketing and *dharna*. Finally employers agreed to settle the issue by granting the workers a 12.5% increase in wages.

The STU directed its members to contribute a day's wages to the National Defence Fund during the Indo-China War in 1962 and Indo-Pak War in 1964. During the latter the STU asked its members to work extra days on Sundays. In Kargil War also STU members spontaneously came forward with a day's wages as their contribution.

In 1959 the State Committee of the STU elected E.S.M.Haneefa Haji as the President, P.K.Abdul Majeed as General Secretary and Moosa Haji as Treasurer. Since then, E.S.M.Haneefa Haji (1962), K.Avukader Kutty Naha (1963), P.K.Serkhan (1970), K.K.S.Thangal (1975, 1979), K.K.Abu (1982, 1986, 1991) and Advocate K.N.A Khader (1998 -) had adorned the position of the President of the STU State Committee. P.K.Abdul Majeed, M.Mohamed Ashraf, U.A.Beeran, K.Abdul Rahman Master, E.T.Mohammed Basheer, Ahmedkutty Unnikulam, T.Hamsa, U.Poker and C.T. Ubaid had functioned as the Secretary of the STU.

Today the STU had a sizable number of followers in Coir, Cashew, Handloom, Private Motor Transport, Head load, Fishery, Fish vending, Bidi and Cigar, Plantations and the Public Sector Undertakings like KSRTC, Civil Supplies Corporation, KSEB, Valayar Cements, Kerala Automobiles etc.

7.8.3 Other Struggles

The notable struggles organized by the STU include the march from Manjeri to Kozhikode Collectorate by bidi workers (1957), hand cart struggle in Kozhikode (1957), the Vehicle march from Hosangady in Kasargodee to Thiruvananthapuram (1985), the strike at Malappuram Spinning Mills (1985), the agitations in Mavoor Gwalior Rayons (several times during the 1980s and 1990s), Solidarity struggle in support of striking State Government employees (1985), agitation against the Kerala Essential Services Ordinance (1985) and the struggle against State Government's move to bring the Bill on Trade Union Recognition. Besides trade union activities, the STU also held campaigns for promoting communal harmony, Relief against natural calamities, adult education, welfare amenities etc. In 1990 the STU passed a Resolution on "Workers' Power for Secular India" and held more than 1500 public meetings to spread its message all over Kerala. When communal fanatics demolished Babri Masjid Shrine, the STU held a campaign raising the theme of "Workers' Power for Secularism". This message was spread through the public meetings held in the three zones of Kerala. Similarly the STU also held statewide campaigns for Prohibition. On July 6, 1999 the STU held a big seminar at V.J.T.Hall at Thiruvananthapuram to discuss the theme "Secularism, Protection of Working Class Interests and Trade Union Unity". Thus the STU tried to prove to be a non-political and non-communal trade union centre that emerged in Kerala since 1957 thereby posing a threat to the other trade union centres which enjoyed a longer historical tradition in the State.

Today the STU is a major force in the Malabar region. In Kozhikode, the STU has been promoting trade union unity and working as partner in

various trade union coordination committees in Head Load work, Motor transport and Construction sectors. In the Kozhikode Steel Complex the STU came first when a Referendum was conducted among workers. In this company, the STU succeeded in terminating the practice of agents disbursing wages to two hundred odd Bihari workers and got them the benefit provided in the labour laws.

7.9 REMINISCENCES OF LEADERS

In this section we give the reminiscence of a few leaders who played a major role in the history of the trade union movement in Malabar.

7.9.1 C. Kannan looks back

C. Kannan had the distinction of holding the position of the President in the State Unit of the CITU since its inception in 1970 till he was unceremoniously removed from that position by the CITU conference held at Alappuzha during November 29 to December 1, 2000. On that occasion C.Kannan had said: "*I have been told to go, but I have not been told why I am being removed. It is not wrong to remove a person but he should be told why he is being removed*". Past 86, Kannan always had stood for the independence of the CITU as a working class and mass organization. He had also stood for internal democracy in unions and always expressed his opposition when the CPI (M) made several attempts to interfere with the day to day functioning of the CITU. The CPI (M) top leadership knew very well that they could not take strong disciplinary action against C.Kannan since he was a strong force in the party, the CITU and public life of Kannur.

A seasoned communist and trade unionist C.Kannan was affectionately called "C" by all who came to associate with him. A strong willed activist "C" was known for his simple Spartan life style. He was in the thick of the communist and trade union struggles from his early life and had close association with P.Krishna Pillai and AKG. According to him, the trade union movement in Malabar dates back to early 1930s. Chakkara Chettiyar had founded the Madras Labour Union covering all sections of working class. The first trade-based trade union in Malabar was the Kannur Tobacco Workers' Union. Soon several trade unions were formed in Kannur, Pappinissery, Feroke and Thiruvannur among workers employed in handlooms, bidi, timber, cotton mills, tiles, plywood etc. P.Krishna Pillai and K.P.Gopalan were the leaders behind this. Another important activist was Potheri Madhavan Vakil, a Congressman.

7.9.1.1 Entry in to the Movement

On August 8, 1934 C.Kannan, who was a bidi worker, got elected as the Joint Secretary of the Tobacco Workers' Union. In 1936 a union was formed in the Commonwealth Mills by K.P.Gopalan whom Kannan still consider as his political *guru* (revered teacher). Kannan cites the Bidi strike of 1937 for an increase in wages and also provision of work tools. At that time wages varied between five *annas* and 10 *annas*. One of the other demands was the provision of clean work place for workers to sit and work. The strike held in December 1937 was a great success. The bidi production was coming fully under the factory system and Mangalore based companies owned most of the factories. Kannan's brother too was a bidi worker while his uncles worked in Cotton Mills.

In 1935 K.P.Gopalan started a hunger strike in front of the Tiruvannur Cotton Mills. Union activists were deployed to picket toddy shops. The entry of blacklegs led to some confrontation. Meanwhile K. Damodaran formed trade unions in Ponnani. During 1938-39 P.Balachandra Menon, a member of a rich aristocratic family of Palakkad, had jumped into the union movement sacrificing everything in his life. He was a great organizer and inspired the working class. He concentrated first in educating the workers about their legitimate rights and also duties. He was a skilful negotiator much sought after for bringing about settlements of issues.

N. C. Sekhar, P. Krishna Pillai, K. K. Warrier, C. H. Kanaran and K. V. Kunhambu, according to C.Kannan, were the leading spirits behind the formation of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). The trade unions at the instance of the CSP called for a General Strike in Malabar during December 1937. In the next year the workers in the Commonwealth Company launched a struggle. The average wage then was only one rupee. The demands were for a war allowance, a DA linked to cost of living and an increase in basic wages. The DA was conceded.

7.9.1.2 Networking of Movements

The CSP, the Youth League, Library Movement, Peasant's Movement and Teachers' Movement got interlinked in Malabar since the late 1930s. In the private school teachers' movement, leading roles were played by P.R.Nambiar, T.C. Narayanan Nambiar, P.V.Kunhiraman Nambiar and others and through several struggles the teachers secured freedom to form their unions, better pay, security of job and also right to participate in politics.

In November 1939 along with K.Damodaran, C.Kannan was taken into custody under the Defence of India Rules (DIR) and remanded to prison for a period of 14 months. Kannan was shifted from prison to prison at Coimbatore, Rajamundhry and Vellur Central Jail. He jumped (escaped from) Vellur Jail along with AKG.

During the Quit India movement, C.Kannan endorsed the line of the Communist Party. He remembers the unifying role of P.Krishna Pillai who acted as a common link among communists and trade union activists in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. In 1946 the handloom workers in Malabar went on a strike. Citing large war orders, they demanded higher wages and incentives. Another demand was for “*Ucha Kanji*” (rice gruel to be given for workers during lunch interval) or “*Kanji Kasu*” (cash payment in lieu of rice gruel). The unions also demanded the strict implementation of the provisions of the Factories Act and a lunch interval.

7.9.1.3 Aaron Mill Struggle

The Aaron Mill strike, the reference to which was made earlier, was a notable milestone in Kannan’s life. During this strike Kannan had close association with Sardar Chandroth Kunhiraman Nair, who was then functioning as the volunteer captain of the KPCC. In 1946 EMS was the KPCC Secretary. The management of the Aaron Mills declared that if the workers struck work, they would be paid no wages. C.Kannan was the President of the Mill Workers’ Union. The strike lasted 110 days. Funds began to flow from all over India to support the workers who were on strike. Soon the strike transformed itself into a great political strike particularly because Samuel Aaron, the owner of the Mills was a Congress leader and a strong noted anti-communist. Congress leaders like Kelappan and Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon supported Samuel Aaron’s stand. Finally the dispute was referred to arbitration and it was subsequently settled. Since the Aaron Mill strike was treated as a political struggle, those who participated in it were made eligible for freedom fighter’s pension. One interesting dimension of the struggle was the emergence of Kelappan and Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon as strong enemies of workers.

On September 15, 1940, there were violent struggles in Kalliasery and Morazha. Inspector Kutty Krishna Menon was killed in one of the encounters. Menon had brutally handled many workers in the Aaron Mill strike and the workers had kept this in their heart till they got an opportunity to retaliate. According to C.Kannan, the peasant movement in Malabar was stronger than the trade union movement. There used to be intermittent clashes between the landlords and peasants and in all these the police sided with the landlords.

Several farm workers and tenants were arrested and ill treated in prisons. It was during this period that V.R.Krishna Iyer, a leading lawyer of Thalassery, came forward to offer legal aid to them.

7.9.1.4 Desa Raksha Samithy

In 1947 many including C.Kannan were taken into custody for forming a “*Desa Raksha Samithy*” (Defence Committee) and giving training in arms to activists to plan a direct confrontation with the Malabar Special Police (MSP). The authorities segregated and notified several places in Malabar as danger zones and people had to secure permission and a pass to move from one zone to another. The police raided houses of suspected communists even on the day of *Sradha Day* (auspicious day being observed in memory of diseased) of Mahatma Gandhi who fell a martyr in Delhi. Many activists went underground. Those who did not boldly went around forming self-protection committees.

7.9.1.5 Salem Jail Mutiny

On February 13, 1948 there was a mutiny led by the political detainees in Salem jail. The police fired at them and 22 detainees lost their lives. In the struggle C.Kannan was injured. The Minister for Jails visited the detainees and ordered the removal of the wounded into separate cells for treatment. Among those killed in the encounter, Kannan makes a special mention about Gopalan Kunju, Melath Sankaran and Kunhikannan. Kelappan registered strong protest against the police repression in Salem Jail.

7.9.1.6 Fight Against repression

C.Kannan was held in prison till 1951. AKG took up the issue of civil rights in the law court. But authorities continued its repressive measures. They directed the police to raid trade union and communist party offices and destroy records and documents kept there. Since Kannan and others remembered the Registration Numbers of their trade unions, they could be revived when the repressions came to an end. Kannan has said that the treatment meted to them was worse than that under the British Rule. In 1951 in several encounters with the police at Pazhassy, Sivapuram, Maniyankunnu and Kavumbhagom about 40 activists lost their lives. In the elections to the Malabar District Board, P.T.Bhaskara Panicker was elected. In fact, the Malabar District Board constituted the first elected organization for governance led by communists who enjoyed a majority in the Board. The

Board provided excellent service to the people in the field of school education, library movement, land reforms, police policy and labour policy.

7.9.1.7 Split in the CPI

C.Kannan turned his memories to the events in 1964 when the CPI split, leaving the AITUC unaffected. At that time the State President of the AITUC was P.Balachandra Menon and Assistant Secretary was K.A.Rajan. In 1965 the conference of the AITUC affiliated State Transport Employees Union held at Alappuzha witnessed some dissenting voices. Some of the radicals in the ranks of the CPI (M) were in prison on account of their views on Chinese invasion on India during 1962. In 1967 C.Achutha Menon of the CPI was leading a coalition government in Kerala. During this period O.J.Joseph of CPI (M) organized a meeting of transport workers who were kept out of the AITUC led union. They asserted that they should have a separate union. If that was not feasible, they should be taken back into the AITUC led union. The AITUC leaders were not willing to concede their demand. It was at this point that CPI (M) decided to give a green signal for forming the KSRTC Employees Association led by C.Kannan as its President. C.Kannan was then an MLA. He called a meeting of his supporters in the conference hall of the MLA Quarters. In the meeting there was a violent clash between the CPI and CPI (M) groups. There was a third group, the extremist Marxist group, led by K.P.Kosalaramadas. Next day C.Kannan met the Speaker of the Kerala Assembly and apologized for the developments in the MLA Quarters. Thereafter such meetings were banned inside the quarters. According to C.Kannan, the State Unit of the CITU actually was born with the founding of the KSRTC Employees' Association. In Malabar the almost the entire block of AITUC workers joined the CITU, said Kannan. The elders in the Party really did not want a split to happen and they continued to remain in the CPI and the AITUC. Today the CITU has more than 750,000 members in the State of which more than 150,000 are construction workers.

C.Kannan felt sad on the growth of inter union rivalry and intervention by political parties in the day-to-day functioning of trade unions. According to him, one solution would be a law regulating conditions for trade union recognition. A minimum 20 per cent membership could be insisted as a condition for union recognition. Kannan did not hesitate in mentioning that even the LDF Government in which the CPI (M) had a major role failed to bring about the legislation on trade union recognition, though at the initiative of trade unions, the idea of referendum has gained popularity. One good example of cooperation between AITUC and CITU was the Tata Oil Mill Workers' Union where the workers elected K.A.Rajan of AITUC as their

President and V.B.Cherian of the CITU as the Secretary. But unfortunately such examples are few.

7.9.1.8 Split in the Kerala Unit of the AITUC

During May 8 – 10, 1970 the Kerala unit of the AITUC held a convention as a prelude to its annual conference, which was scheduled to be held at Goa. The Kerala convention was held in Kozhikode. Though the CITU had not been formally launched, the rift in the AITUC had already emerged on the surface. The Kozhikode convention was attended by a large number of delegates who did not support the official stand of the AITUC, and, therefore, they were being treated as a group that rejected the revisionists. The AITUC red flag had the symbolic sign “TU” on it. But in the Kozhikode convention this group displayed a red flag with a white circle in the middle and the symbol “TU” was put in the centre of the circle.

The convention commenced on May 8, 1970 at Comrade Krishna Pillai Nagar (Kozhikode Town hall) and was inaugurated by B.T.Ranadive. C.Kannan raised the red flag. The meeting was controlled by a presidium consisting of A.K.Kamalakshy, leader of coir factory workers of Vayalar, C.Kannan, the then President of the District Committee, Kannur, and P.Gangadharan, union leader from Ernakulam. P.K. Kunhirama Poduval, the President of the Reception Committee gave the welcome address. AKG was present on the stage. The Red Flag for the convention was brought to the venue from Parassala, south of Thiruvananthapuram by a team led by Parassala Sivanandan.

On the concluding day of the convention, a largely attended public meeting was held at Mananchira Maidan. The Kozhikode convention elected C.Kannan as the President, O.J.Joseph and P.Gangadharan as Vice Presidents, E.Balanandan as General Secretary, O.Bharathan and K.I.Rajan as Joint Secretaries and A. Peter as Treasurer. T.Ayyappan, P.Kunhikannan, M.Vasu and T.S.Velayudhan were nominated from the Kozhikode district. The so-called revisionists in the AITUC always stood for cooperation and not class based confrontation. The group that met in Kozhikode stood for revolutionary class struggle. After the Kozhikode convention, the forces against the official group in the AITUC gathered strength and at the Calcutta session, the rift in the AITUC transformed into a clear split leading to the formation of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Kozhikode had thus the honour of taking the initiative in the formation of the CITU, though the inspiration for that was given by the formation of the KSRTC Employees’ Association in 1969 with C.Kannan as its President. Thus Kozhikode became a landmark in the history of trade union movement of Kerala.

7.9.2 I.P.Krishnan remembers

I.P.Krishnan is one of the oldest living trade union leaders of Malabar stream of the INTUC. He had left school in 1938 to join the Sri Subramonian Company as a handloom worker. He remembers T.V.Ananthan and P.V.Chathu Nair, his co-workers and activists of the AITUC union in the Chirackal Taluk. K.P.Kumaran, Pamban Madhavan, and, M.T.Kumaran were also his close associates. Pamban Madhavan was the political guru of I.P.Krishnan. He used to conduct study classes for Congress workers. T.V.Ananthan had formed a novel “*Atmathyaga Sanghom*” (Association of persons willing to surrender their soul for some good cause) in which I.P.Krishnan actively participated. He feels elated when he thinks about the meeting held in front of Rajeswari Mills and addressed by Madhava Menon and Kuttimalu Amma, the venerable Congress leaders. When the idea of a *Bahujana Prasthanam* (popular movement) there was an open clash of words between Pamban Madhavan and P.M.Kunhiraman Nambiar on the one side and Madhava Menon on the other. The meeting had to be adjourned and shifted to a nearby school.

7.9.2.1 Deseeya Thozhilali Union

In 1942 a meeting held in Kozhikode made a call for “*Swathanthra Bharatham*” (Free India). It also saw the formation of a *Deseeya Lok Sangh* (National Popular Organization), an organization of youth. A *Deseeya Thozhilali Union* (National Trade Union of Workers) was also formed with Pamban Madhavan as President and O.Raghavan Nair of Kozhikode as Secretary. In a struggle conducted by this union, police arrested K.P.Kutty Krishnan Nair, N.T.Kumaran Master and O.Raghavan Nair. In Kannur, Quilandy Kumaran’s name has to be given special mention. He is considered as the *guru* of K.Karunakaran, one of the founders of the Kerala INTUC unit. When Kumaran was suffering from chronic TB, it was Karunakaran who took special interest in providing adequate medical treatment to him.

The British administration in Malabar treated the *Deseeya Thozhilali Union* as anti-British and used every opportunity to curb its activities. When Pamban Madhavan was released from jail he was given a grand reception at Kozhikode Town Hall. When German Nazi forces attacked Russia, the Indian Communists considered it as *Janakeeya Yudham* (People's War). Appukoya became a volunteer captain of the communists during this period. This Appukoya later joined the Congress.

7.9.2.2 Kerala Labour Congress

During 1943-44 I.P.Krishnan joined Sadanandan and Company as a worker. Always clad in Khader, he organized a trade union there at a time when Pamban Madhavan founded the Kerala Labour Congress with T.V.Ananthan as its Secretary. Soon in the Common Wealth Company a trade union was formed with the initiative of L.C.Gopi, Sekharan, K.P.Kutty Krishnan Nair and K.Kumaran, the latter two being President and Secretary respectively. In 1948 the Handloom Workers' Congress was formed in the Standard Cotton and Cloth Weaving Company with K.P.Kutty Krishnan Nair as President, P.J.Mathai as Secretary and I.P.Krishnan as Joint Secretary.

The first anniversary of the Kerala Labour Congress was held at the Ganapathy High School ground in 1945 where Abdur Rahiman Sahib raised the flag. He was an activist of the Forward Block and he was then arrested on account of this link with the Forward Block and confined to jail for five years. He was totally opposed to the activities of the Muslim Majlis, which was demanding a separate Pakistan. Kelappan was then the President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC).

In May 1947 the second anniversary of the Kerala Labour Congress was held at Badagara under the Chairmanship of P.T.Kunhirama Kurup. While Pamban Madhavan was elected President, I.P.Krishnan, C.E.Bharathan and K.Kumaran were elected to other offices in the Kerala Labour Congress. When the INTUC was formed in 1948, the union at the Standard Cotton and Cloth Weaving Company was affiliated to it. At that time the State Committee of the INTUC had B.K.Nair as President and K.Karunakaran as the General Secretary. G.S.Dhara Singh was the Vice President. At the Alappuzha convention of the INTUC held in 1950, I.P.Krishnan was elected as the Vice president. When he shouted *Inquilab Zindabad*, many were taken aback, but Abid Ali the National President of the INTUC asked him to carry on. I.P.Krishnan remembers the North Indian Sherwani dress of B.K.Nair who had come all the way from New Delhi to Kerala with the instruction to organize the INTUC in the State. It was a time when trade unions were a monopoly of the communists. In Alappuzha they were so strong that B.K.Nair had to confront many ordeals when he, as a one-man army, plunged into the business of penetrating the communist fortress and establish a base for the INTUC in Alappuzha.

7.9.2.3 Work of B.K. Nair

B.K.Nair always spoke about "one industry – one union" and highlighted the harmful effects of multiplicity of trade unions. However,

I.P.Krishnan, K.Kumaran and few others had large reservations about it. B.K.Nair was instrumental in building up trade unions in the High Ranges. In those early days reaching Devicolom and Munnar was unthinkable due to non-availability of motorable roads and vehicles. B.K. Nair had to trek the hills fighting malaria and blood sucking leeches. Further, even after reaching the estates, it was difficult to mobilize the Tamil Workers. The companies and their staff prevented anyone coming from the plains from entering the estates visiting the workers' lines (quarters) and speaking to workers. But Nair achieved the unachievable. He reached the High Ranges, moved and lived with the workers, spoke to them and gradually mobilized them to come forward boldly to join his trade union, the first of its kind in the region. The Communists reached Munnar a few years later. Until then, the INTUC had a monopoly in the region among the estate workers. K.Karunakaran extended physical and moral support to B.K.Nair and together they worked in the High Ranges for a long time.

7.9.2.4 Growth of INTUC

Meanwhile, I.P.Krishnan said that INTUC had spread its wings in Malabar with the guidance of A.V.Kuttimalu Amma's brother A.V.Radhakrishna Menon and V.M.Raghavan. The Waynad Estate Workers' Union was one of the first INTUC unions in the plantation sector in Malabar. C.K.Govindan Nair founded the District Estate Workers' Union. The year 1952 saw the Cumbily struggle, the struggle for getting woollen blankets for estate workers. Rajaji was the Chief Minister of Madras at that time. K.P.Kutty Krishnan Nair, who defeated EMS in the Elections, was the Law Minister in Rajaji's Cabinet. During the struggle, K.Kumaran went on a hunger strike. When it entered the 28th day and Kumaran's life was in great danger, Rajaji was on a visit to Kozhikode. Rajaji was not prepared to intervene in the struggle saying that let Kumaran die. Padma Prabha Gounder, MLA and father of M.P.Virendra Kumar, appealed for Rajaji's intervention. I.P.Krishnan led a delegation to Kozhikode Travellers' Bungalow, where Rajaji was camping. C.E.Bharathan and T.Prabhakaran accompanied Krishnan. The police stopped them at the second Railway Gate. Padmaprabha Gounder met Rajaji and informed him about the danger to the life of K.Kumaran who was a loved figure and known as Quilandy Kumaran among the estate workers. Rajaji after realizing the genuineness of workers' demand settled the issue on the spot by directing the estate managements to supply a pair of woollen blankets to all workers in their estates with immediate effect. Telegrams were sent to all concerned about it. The hunger strike and exposure to the weather had made Quilandy Kumaran a chronic TB patient. It was

K.Karunakaran who arranged for sending him to the TB Sanatorium at Mulankunnathukavu.

7.9.2.5 Study Classes

In 1956 the AICC organizers in Malabar were sent to Kozhikode and Shoranur for study classes as a residential programme. While the AICC gave Rs.45, the rest of the expenditure was to be met by local sources. These study classes covered such subjects as Politics, Economics, Trade Unionism, Industrial Disputes Act, Marxism, Gandhism, Mind and Matter etc. The objective of the camps was to build committed cadres and leaders. I.P.Krishnan was an active organizer of these camps. The camps could help in the emergence of able activists like Aryadan Mohammed who later became the Minister of Labour in Kerala.

In 1963 C.M.Stephen, B.K.Nair, K.Karunakaran and G.S.Dhara Singh guided the INTUC in Kerala. In those days the trade union activists who were going here and there in conducting organizing work used to be paid Rs.200 per month as an allowance so that they would not be falling into corrupt practices and every such activist had to report to his trade union general body the actual amount received by him through donations from the members or the public. In short, every rupee was fully accountable. I.P.Krishnan today continues to be active by guiding trade unions in the Kozhikode area and is ably supported by his colleagues like Haji Sadirikoya and others. I.P.Krishnan remembers his election contest of 1967 in the Beypore constituency as the Congress candidate. He was opposed by a seven party united front and he was defeated but did not lose his earnest money deposit. He had been a member of Minimum Wages Committees and the Industrial Relations Committee for Textiles. Being an elder leader of the INTUC, he was feeling sad that the union movement including the INTUC were deviating from the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi.

7.9.3 K. P. Kumaran remembers

At the age of 14 K.P.Kumaran, the elder leader of the AITUC in Malabar today, became a handloom worker. He soon plunged into the Congress movement and freedom struggle. He participated in the salt Satyagraha and picketing of toddy shops as a volunteer. K.P.Kovettan made him a volunteer. During the picketing of a toddy shop, the shop owner poured a pot of toddy on to the head of Kumaran. That only hardened his decision to fight injustice.

7.9.3.1 Thozhilali Sanghom

It was during 1930-33 that a *Thozhilali Sanghom* (union of workers) was formed. Its beginning was a spontaneous struggle held in Kakkad when workers demanded a small increase in their wages. Several factory units had been set up in Kannur, Thalap, Chirackal and Azhikode. Following that, branch unions were formed and most of the activists were Congress workers, though there were a few radicals or communists. These branch unions gave Kumaran some training in public speaking. In 1934, the Chirackal Taluk Handloom Workers' Union was founded and Kumaran was elected as its first Secretary. The President of the Union was Kuttithura Krishnan Nair.

7.9.3.2 Meeting P. Krishna Pillai

Kumaran remembers an important day in 1934 when two men entered the factory where Kumaran was working. They were activists of the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and had come for collecting some funds from workers for a meeting to be held at Kannur. One among them was P.Krishna Pillai. It was he who inspired Kumaran to become a true Communist. In 1939 Kumaran became a member of the Communist Party and during 1934-39 he acted as a trusted volunteer for arranging safe shelters for communist party leaders and also exchanging important communications among them.

7.9.3.3 Hakawaka Struggle

During the Second World War, both the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party expressed their opposition to the war. The British authorities issued warrants for the arrest of leaders and many of them decided to go underground. The authorities had arranged for recruitment to the army at Kannur barracks. The communists resented it and they launched a struggle against war. The workers, under the influence of the Communists, objected to the order from employers and the British authorities to weave Hakawaka Towels for the army. They demanded an increase in their wages. When the demand was rejected, the workers started a struggle, which came to be known as the Hakawaka Struggle. The workers raided factories, which were exploiting them by paying lower wages. According to K.P.Kumaran, the *Thukkidi Saip* (the British commander) called a conference. Samuel Aaron, the biggest employer in the area and Kumaran representing the workers, attended it. A settlement was reached under which the factories agreed to pay an increase of two *paise* per yard of towel cloth.

By 1942 the character of the War had changed when Germany invaded Soviet Union. The Communists called a secret meeting at Kannur. A.V.Kunhambu asked Kumaran to speak and present a strong case for extending support to the War in the changed circumstances in which the War had become a true anti-fascist exercise. Though Kumaran made a forceful speech, the workers could not be fully convinced about the shift of the Party's stand. It was at this time EMS brought out a pamphlet, *Peoples' War as an Instrument towards Freedom*.

Kumaran was functioning as the Secretary of the Central Trade Union Council. EMS wanted Kumaran to get the above-mentioned pamphlet published in the name of Surendran, the pen name chosen by EMS. When Kumaran approached the printing presses in Kannur, they did not accept the job since they did not want to antagonize the authorities. So Kumaran had to take the manuscript to Thalassery and got it printed there under great secrecy.

7.9.3.4 Congress-Communist Divide

When the Quit India movement started, the conflict between the Congress and the Communists in Malabar became open. The meeting convened at Narayana Park at Kannur to discuss the Quit India Resolution witnessed chaos. Kumaran started explaining the views of the Communists but P.M.Kunhiraman Nambiar interrupted by speaking loudly about the views of the Congress. The meeting ended in a clash. Similar incidents occurred in several other places.

Later the Government convened a meeting at the Kannur Town Hall to form a National War Front to extend support to the war. It was a well-attended meeting. Kumaran and his close colleague Koran attended the meeting. They listened to the speeches. Then Kumaran sent a note to the dais saying that he would like to speak. The Chairman permitted him and Kumaran spoke about half an hour. After he finished the Chairman called off the meeting. After two days, a Circle Inspector called on Kumaran and told him that the *Thukkidi Saip* (the British officer) liked his speech and wanted Kumaran to become a member of the National War Front at a good salary. But Kumaran turned down the offer. Later EMS told Kumaran that his decision was correct.

When Kumaran was addressing a meeting of workers at Adavil, he was assaulted but was protected by his colleagues. Later Kumaran shifted his activities to Kozhikode. He remembers that the trade unions and the working class in Malabar always stood in the front line in all popular struggles. In the first half of 1942 an anti-Japanese *mela* (festival) was held at Parassinikadavu.

Kumaran read out an Essay authored by EMS. The branches of activists established for furthering the anti-Japanese campaign got transformed into cells of the Communist Party.

During that period, almost all the trade unions in Malabar were affiliated to the AITUC. Kumaran and Chenoli Koran represented the Malabar trade unions at the Nagpur Conference of the AITUC and that gave them an opportunity to meet Bankim Mukherji and S.A.Dange. On their return, efforts were made to hold the meeting of the Kerala Provincial Trade Union Council. N.C.Sekhar (Secretary), K.P.Kumaran (Assistant Secretary) and R.Sugathan (President) set up its office headquarters at Kozhikode. Kumaran was in charge of the office, which functioned from a room in the Desabhimani Press building. Kumaran had to undertake frequent visits to Alappuzha, Kollam, Punalur and Kochi.

7.9.3.5 Punalur Paper Mill Union's Anniversary

Kumaran remembers the occasion of the anniversary function of the Punalur Paper Mill Workers' Union. Kumaran who was present on the occasion was asked to speak, but R.Sugathan who was in the dais warned that Kumaran was not in Malabar but in Travancore and under the very eyes and nose of the Dewan Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer. Therefore, Kumaran had to control his tongue and moderated his speech.

During the latter half of 1946 many communist activists were arrested. Kumaran was arrested in the midst of his involvement in the struggle of sawmill workers. T.K.Karunan was also arrested along with him and both of them were sent to Vellur Central Jail. Kumaran was released only just a month before India's independence and that on the plea that his mother was seriously ill.

7.9.3.6 Kozhikode Camp

K.P.Kumaran remembers the days he spent at Kozhikode and the commune type living that the communist activists led there. People like P.Krishna Pillai, AKG , EMS, T.C.Narayanan Nambiar, M.S.Devadas, P.Narayanan Nair and others were regular visitors to the office. When they were there, they lived like in a commune. They would take the plates, collect the food on it, finish eating, wash and clean the plates and retire to their vocations. Every thing went on smoothly as in a commune. There used to be discussions and debates on many political and economic issues. This was inspiring and enlightening to the younger activists.

7.9.3.7 Police Repression

Following the launching of the so-called Calcutta Thesis, police repression on the trade union activists as well as communists was in high pitch. Many went underground. Kumaran went to Mangalore in Karnataka. When a Karnataka leader of railway workers was arrested, the authorities decided to send him under escort to Kannur for keeping him in safe custody. When the plan was leaked out, Kumaran waited at the Manjeswaram railway station. With the help of some Malayalees, Kumaran could arrange for the escape of that leader. Kumaran also went to Mysore and spent one and half years in both Mysore and Bangalore.

In the elections to the Malabar District Board, P.T.Bhaskara Panicker was elected the President. It was the first democratically elected government in this part of the country. In the premises of Mele Chowla polling station in Kannur, Kumaran and four of his colleagues dared to carry the Red Flag and held a route march shouting slogans like *Inquilab Zindabad*. A few inquisitive onlookers hesitatingly joined them. In 1948 the founding father and the guiding spirit of the trade union movement in Malabar, P.Krishna Pillai, passed away in sad circumstances. This loss was colossal since Krishna Pillai was young.

7.9.3.8 Rise of Dinesh Bidi

K.P.Kumaran has seen both the prosperity and collapse of industries in Malabar. When the Mangalore based entrepreneurs closed down their bidi factories in Malabar several thousands of workers were pushed into destitution. T.V.Thomas then took the initiative to organize bidi making under the workers' cooperatives. TV was camping at Kannur. In the meeting convened by him, he announced that the Government would extend financial assistance to build up share capital for a cooperative society to be controlled by workers and bidi production would be brought under it. At that meeting, TV asked the workers who had assembled there to suggest a suitable name of the workers' cooperative. One worker suggested the name "Dinesh" and that was accepted immediately. But litigation followed later since the Company, which was producing, and marketing Ganesh Bidis contended that "Dinesh" would confuse his customers, as the two words "Ganesh" and "Dinesh" might look more or less identical. The plea before the court was, however, rejected.

Looking back his life and career, K.P.Kumaran believes that the split of the Communist Party of India had weakened the trade union movement in the country. The labour laws, particularly the Industrial Disputes Act, were beneficial to workers. In the early days, most of the Labour Department

Officers had a soft corner towards workers and their trade union leaders. The idea of Bonus as deferred wages was first mooted by P.Krishna Pillai and this was sympathetically treated by the Labour Officers.

Kumaran in the past had led several trade unions. But even now past 85 years he decided to be active and accepted the presidentship of one trade union of handloom workers and he wanted this association to continue till his death. Kumaran could not forget the days he spent in the Vellur Central Jail along with AKG and C.Kannan. AKG and Kannan jumped jail and went underground. AKG went to Tamil Nadu while Kannan was moving around Kannur. On one occasion, Kumaran wanted Kannan to appear at Narayana Park and address a gathering. This was given wide publicity. Kannan changed his dress, jumped on to the dais and spoke for 15 minutes. Thereafter he climbed down the dais, changed his dress again to fool the police who were looking for him.

7.9.3.9 Meets K. P. Gopalan

While Kumaran was moving around Mysore, he used to distribute the issues of *New Age* weekly to the activists and others who wished to read Communist Literature. One day Kumaran went for a haircut in a nearby barbershop. A Kannada speaking boy approached him and requested for a copy of the *New Age* to be supplied to an important person. Kumaran promised the boy that he would give the *New Age* next day. When the boy reappeared the next day, Kumaran gave a copy of the *New Age* and later silently followed the boy to find out who was that very important person. Kumaran found the boy delivering the weekly to an in-patient in a hospital. The in-patient was none other than K.P.Gopalan. On finding each other they were overjoyed. Gopalan was in hospital for the treatment of his eyes and he was grateful to the doctor who ignored the background of Gopalan knowing very well that the police was looking for his arrest.

But K.P.Gopalan could not be free for long. The Thalassery Police came to Mysore to arrest him. They rushed to the hospital ward where Gopalan was lying. Gopalan volunteered to accompany the Thalassery police and he thanked his doctor for his kindness. Kumaran was standing nearby but he was attired in the traditional Karnataka dress and so the police could not recognize him. Kumaran was willing to protect Gopalan. The local Bidi workers, mostly Muslims, who had assembled there were ready to intervene and make Gopalan's escape possible. But Gopalan did not agree to this suggestion and he accompanied the police with a smile on his face. According to Kumaran, this was one among the several life experiences he had which he could never forget.

7.9.4 Subramonia Shenoy remembers

Born in 1914 Subramonia Shenoy of Payyannur has a chequered political career and also deep involvement in the trade union movement in Malabar. He does not remember his exact date of birth and he has no document to reveal it since the Malabar Special Police during an attack on his house destroyed and burnt everything including his horoscope.

Subramonia Shenoy, in his teens at the age of 14, became a volunteer to distribute drinking water to the masses who had assembled to hear Jawaharlal Nehru at a public meeting in Payyannur. The speech of Nehru inspired Shenoy to become a Congress worker. Later P.Krishna Pillai gave him a copy of Jaiprakash Narain's book entitled "*Why Socialism*". This brought about a shift in Shenoy's outlook and he joined the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). He was then determined to mobilize workers and build working class organizations. The first such organization that Subramonia Shenoy founded was a trade union of 30 bidi workers of Payyannur. P.Krishna Pillai had told Shenoy that the red colour in the Red Flag was symbolic of workers' blood and the hammer and sickle were his work tools to earn a living.

7.9.4.1 First Anniversary of Morazha Episode

The above event brought Subramonia Shenoy under the constant surveillance of the British authorities. The CIDs were after him wherever he went. On September 15, 1940 in the Morazha episode a police inspector had been killed. Shenoy was not directly involved in this episode but he was listed as accused along with K.P.R.Gopalan, Vishnu Bharatheeyan, and, E.Narayanan Nayanar. P.Krishna Pillai advised Shenoy to go underground to escape arrest. It was in the post-Morazha period that Kelappan, the Congress leader, stated that the Red Flag would no longer fly in Malabar. But on the first anniversary of the episode the Communists led by Kappadi Kunhiraman decided to risk their life and hoist the Red Flag on the flag mast of the police station. The flag mast was made of one and a half inch G I Pipe. During the night the Communists put on black robes, crawled on their belly and reached the flag mast to raise and tie the flag. The police as well as the local public saw the Red Flag fluttering from the flag mast in front of the police station only when the sun rose in the morning. One could imagine the terror that was unleashed by the police when they started hunting for Communists. The police arranged a boy who was good at climbing arecanut trees, to untie the Red Flag and destroy it. There was a ban order on the Communists and their activities.

7.9.4.2 Meeting Sundarayya

In 1942 the ban was lifted. Subramonia Shenoy who had been arrested was released from jail only in August 1947. After independence, the authorities, however, continued the prosecution case against Shenoy. It was during this period that Shenoy met P.Sundarayya who instilled the proletarian line of Palme Dutt by giving him some books in the subject. The police raided his ancestral house and took away even the roofing tiles. Shenoy's sister submitted a memorandum to the Kozhikode Collector but nothing was done. When Shenoy was released from jail, somebody gave him a dhoti and a shirt.

Subramonia Shenoy's work in the trade union field was mainly in bidi and toddy tapping sectors. One of his earliest colleagues was P.Kannan Nair, a bidi worker and communist activist, who later joined the *Desabhimani* as a member of its staff. In those old days entering politics was risky in two senses. First, one would then be hunted out by police and subjected to physical torture. Second, entering politics would deprive one of all material comforts in life. But today according to Shenoy, things have changed greatly.

7.9.4.3 Deputed to Kochi

When P.S.Gangadharan, K.K.Warrier and C.Achutha Menon were arrested under orders from Dixon, the Cochin Dewan, P.Krishna Pillai asked Subramonia Shenoy and group to go to Ollur by foot and to take charge of political work in Cochin. C.Janardhanan and K.A.Rajan assisted Shenoy, in this endeavour. It was C.Achutha Menon who insisted that Shenoy should submit an application for Freedom Fighters' Pension and he himself personally collected the application from Shenoy. But Shenoy was not awarded the pension simply because he was not able to produce documentary evidence like FIR or warrant to prove that he was a freedom fighter. But Shenoy is not sad saying that getting a state pension was never an item in his agenda of service to the people.

7.9.4.4 Thirty day Fast

Subramonia Shenoy remembers the thirty day fast he undertook while in the Kannur jail. He was tortured by the police and attacked with the bayonet. The jail authorities at one point thought that the fast would lead to Shenoy's death. When the news reached the authorities, the Minister in charge of Jails intervened. The District Medical Officer used to remind Shenoy that if he died in jail, his body would be buried there itself and the outside world would never know what happened. Shenoy has a piece of

advice to the present generation of political and trade union workers. It was a simple one, that they should always sincerely work for fulfilling people's needs and show and prove that they are honest to their words.

7.9.5 Entry of R. Venugopal and the BMS

Born in 1925 in Kollengode, Palakkad, R Venugopal joined the RSS in 1942 under the inspiring influence of the RSS Pracharaks of Nagpur. Venugopal's father belonged to the Nilambur Valiya Kovilakam. In 1946 Venugopal became a RSS Pracharak and was deputed to Kannur to organize its activities and soon the responsibility of two other northern districts of Malabar was entrusted with him. When Dattatreya Dhengadi founded the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sabha (BMS) in 1954 at a convention held in Bhopal, Venugopal was assigned to Kerala to form BMS unions in the State. After undergoing a brief training in Mangalore, Venugopal started work in Kozhikode.

7.9.5.1 First exposure to Unionism

Venugopal's first exposure to trade unions was in the Tile Industry. Even now after becoming the senior most leader and working President of the all-India BMS, Venugopal stated with pride that the tile workers of Kozhikode had taught him the fundamentals of a trade union. He remembers that workers had asked him to purchase books on Labour Laws and study them thoroughly so that he could guide and work for the working class. Soon the BMS set up its unions in private motor transport, saw mills, head load workers' segment, and large undertakings like Mavoor Gwalior Rayons. The BMS, in a short period, spread its activities to Kochi industrial belt, Palakkad, Alappuzha, Kollam, Kottayam, and Thiruvananthapuram, becoming one of the largest trade union centres in Kerala. Venugopal remembers that a female worker who deserted her AITUC union first displayed the flag of the BMS in Kozhikode in 1967. As per the available data today the BMS has the largest membership at the all India level. Venugopal also worked in other States and regions. In 1990 he went to New Delhi to take up the post of Organising Secretary of the BMS. In 1995 at the Bhopal convention he was elevated to the position of the working President of the BMS.

Love and respect for the country, willingness to render sacrifices, purity in behaviour and honesty in actions, physical and mental discipline to

fight injustice are the qualities that the BMS was trying to incorporate into the trade union movement, according to Venugopal. Many like him had come to the BMS from the RSS background. BMS has declared that it would have no links with any political party or organization and would concentrate only on pure trade union goals, helping the working class to secure their legitimate rights and benefits. The cadres of the BMS are instructed to work for the country's progress and make India stronger.

Venugopal, known popularly as "*Venuettan*" mentioned a number of struggles in which he played a leading role.

7.9.5.2 Kozhikode Motor Workshop Struggle

The BMS union in its formative state organized the motor workshop workers of Kozhikode. The employers were united and refused to negotiate. The Union then organized peaceful picketing of the workshops. Venugopal was invited for a conference. While this was going on, without giving even a hint about it, a case was filed and several workers were arrested. Venugopal was taken unawares. He decided to lie down himself in front of the workshop from which vehicles were being taken out. In the confusion, one vehicle narrowly missed him and he was saved. Workers from around Kallai cheered Venugopal for his timely action and forcing the workshop to stop any further intimidatory action. The dispute was soon settled.

7.9.5.3 Opposition to BMS at Kannur

Many left unions in the Kannur district did not like a new rival like the BMS making inroads into their domain. Venugopal narrated one incident. The Ganesh Bidi factory in Kannur was closed and BMS workers suspected the hands of the CITU leadership behind it. Ajitha, the Naxalite leader and firebrand, sought the help of EMS who directed her to go to Wayanad and work among the tribals. But this was to cheat Ajitha. Meanwhile she decided to mobilize the bidi workers who were losing jobs. The RSS was also in the field and they organized two contracting companies to give jobs to bidi workers who were thrown out of the Ganesh Bidi factory. The CITU objected, but RSS and the BMS went ahead with their plans and these units functioned smoothly for three years. According to Venugopal, this happened just before the Dinesh Cooperative was registered.

Here, we have made reference exclusively to R. Venugopal's work in Malabar. He had involved in many struggles in other parts of Kerala and they have been discussed in other chapters.

7.9.6 V. Krishnadas looks back

Though hailing from an upper class aristocratic rich family of landlords in Palakkad, V.Krishnadas became a full time Communist in 1950 at the young age of twenty. One of his uncles was even a Congress Minister in the old Madras State. Krishnadas was attracted to communism through his reading and observation of grass root reality of the working class life. His brother V.Ramadas also became a communist and was in the Control Commission of the CPI (M). But due to honesty and sincerity of his character V.Krishnadas parted company with the CPI (M) when he refused to be pliable in the hands of the CPI (M) top leadership.

According to V.Krishnadas politics has cut into the trade union movement and created fissures in it. He himself became a victim of the dominance of the Party over trade union and working class organizations. Today non-traditional sectors like shop employees, municipal employees and other white collar segments of government employees, electricity board employees and teachers dominate the trade union movement. Krishnadas initially worked among bidi, motor transport and municipal workers. He was involved and led many a struggles in textiles, bidi, motor transport, BPL, Surgical Instruments Ltd., etc. He worked in the farm workers' movement too. When looking back he finds that the union movement has lost its objectives. There is high level of corruption in trade unions and the unions have become pocket organizations of politicians who have no knowledge of the industries, work processes or even the real problems of workers. In the early years, the trade unions worked for social change, reforming workers and instilling in them a sense of discipline and commitment to work. Today political issues and gains are uppermost in everybody's mind.

7.9.6.1 Leaves CPI (M)

In 1986 V.Krishnadas had strong ideological differences with the CPI (M) and he left it or was, in effect, removed by the top leadership without any notice. According to one version, the CPI (M) leadership asked him to submit his resignation. The very next day the Party newspaper *Desabhimani* announced the dismissal of Krishnadas from the CPI (M). His brother Ramadas was in the CPI (M) Central Committee. In the same year Krishnadas was removed from the post of Secretary of the Motor Transport Workers' Union under the CITU. He was not removed by the worker members but by the CPI (IM) fraction. Krishnadas had strong feelings against the style of CPI (M). Today the Party is asking the CITU union to send the income and expenditure accounts of the union to local party office for scrutiny and audit.

Those who work at the grass roots in the working class have no existence. K.P.Unni, a veteran trade unionist in Palakkad was also removed by the CPI (M).

7.9.6.2 On CPI (M) control of CITU

V.Krishnadas even today strongly feels that there was no need to split the AITUC. The CPI (M) Vs CITU confrontation was unnecessary and could have been avoided. The recent episodes of O.Bharathan, C.Kannan, V.B.Cherian and K.N.Ravindranath, the stalwarts of CITU and working class movement in Kerala and the treatment meted out to them by the CPI (M) top hierarchy have been discussed in detail elsewhere. V.Krishnadas feels that a political party should never bring a working class organization under its control. A trade union or working class organization should be open to all who work irrespective of their personal political convictions. Then only the dream of working class unity could be achieved.

7.9.6.3 Joins the CMP

After leaving the CPI (M), V.Krishnadas associated himself with the Communist Marxist Party (CMP). He feels sad about the upper class hijacking the working class organizations and the emergency of labour aristocracy and the lumpen bourgeoisie. He quoted Mao's words "*Don't worry about the colour of the cow whether it is white or black, look out only at the milk you get*".

7.9.7 GRO Vasu looks back

Hailing from a family of stonecutters, A.Vasu became a worker in the Commonwealth Textiles at the young age of 13. It was the illustrious P.Krishna Pillai who formed the first trade union in this Mill in 1939. Gopalan, a close relative of Vasu, narrated working class struggles in the Commonwealth Textiles in the early days. This made a lasting impression on Vasu. One point struck the young Vasu. It was that the workers held the red flag high while the employer had the tricolour in his hand. When Vasu joined the Commonwealth Textiles, he was soon drawn into working class struggles there led by M.K.Balakrishna Menon, O.J.Joseph, Nadukandy Mohammed Koya, K.Damodaran, P.Krishna Pillai and A.K.Gopalan. In 1947 Vasu

became a member of the Communist Party. During 1948-49 Vasu had closely interacted with leaders like John, Unneerikat Vaidyan, Gilbert, Nadukandy Kumaran, Beypore Balan and Kalathil Sekharan. Krishna Pillai was staying in Komalavilasom lodge. The factory was Vasu's classroom. He acquired the true spirit of class struggle and class-consciousness. He continued in the CPI till it split. On the advice of AKG, Vasu joined the CPI (M).

7.9.7.1 Strike in Commonwealth Textiles

Vasu became unsettled and shocked when he witnessed revisionist forces emerging in the Party. There was open conflict between groups owing allegiance to China as well as Soviet Union. In 1964 Vasu led a strike in Commonwealth Textiles and it lasted three and a half months. During 1946-64, workers of this Unit did not have any improvement in their wages. The strike ended with the Krishna Rao Award. As per the Award, a female worker, for instance, received only Rs.1-25 per yard of cloth. This is to indicate the low wages of the workers among most of who were Christian widows. During the strike the CPI-AITUC axis brought blacklegs for work. The poor women workers thought that the employer was a kind one since he was offering them jobs and subsistence. Absolute poverty forced the strikers to join work and the strike was defeated. About 49 cases had been registered against the workers by the European management of the Mills. This was followed by victimization. Advocate Bhaskaran Nair had rendered valuable service to the striking workers in many ways including defending them in the court cases.

The Award of the Industrial Tribunal had made a comparative study of wages in the textile industry. The relation between the trade union and management became worse. In 1967 when Vasu's union organized a march of workers to the Collectorate in Kozhikode, the CPI (M) party leaders did not like it, as it was a major partner in the State Government at that time, with EMS in the Chief Minister's Office. Meanwhile the judge of the Tribunal had been transferred and the new incumbent took time to understand the intricacies of the wage structure and the demands raised by the union. Fortunately, the management came forward with the offer to settle the dispute. They agreed to raise the wages from Rs.1-25 to Rs.3-75 and the new award was declared on that basis. It was valid for three years. According to Vasu, this was an occasion for rejoicing because the women workers could purchase a bit of ornament gold for the first time in their life with the arrears of wage received by them.

7.9.7.2 Entry into Naxalite Movement

In 1967 A.Vasu was attracted to the extremist Naxalite movement and associated closely with Kunnikkal Narayanan's bookstall to sell Chinese communist literature including Mao's works. Vasu believes that it was Mao who did true justice to the Marxist-Leninist line of communism, which elevated Peoples' Republic of China to the forefront of the comity of nations. Within one year Vasu decided to leave the trade union field and concentrate his activities in backward and remote villages. He went to Nilambur and chose Dolappuram sector. Soon followed the historic Thirunelli naxalite episode. Varghese, Naxlite activist was killed in an encounter. Vasu was captured and put in jail for long seven years. He continued in jail during the Emergency period (1975). After his release Vasu concentrated his attention in reconstituting and rebuilding the Naxal group from which many of the early activists like Philip M.Prasad decided to desert it. Vasu became a State Organiser and Coordinator of the State Committee of the Naxalites. Vasu today (2001) was feeling that the Naxal movement was being led by elements including petite bourgeoisies who had no prior life experience. They might possess knowledge acquired from books but with that they could not feel the pulse of the poor and exploited. In 1980 Vasu openly came out against the CPI (M) policies. He sent in his resignation from the Naxal group to its top leader K.Venu. By 1981 Vasu became a free independent activist, decided to abandon political work and began to concentrate in trade union work.

7.9.7.3 Unionisation of Hostel Employees

One of his first forays was into the mobilization of casual employees attached to the Kozhikode Medical College hostel. These helpless ones were being paid only Rs.10 per month as salary and very often they had to bear the brunt of attacks by student inmates who showed no human sympathy to them. In one such attack, an employee had to be hospitalised. A police case was registered. 1600 students confronted 100 workers. Medical College authorities as well as organizations of medical students argued that the students were running the hostel canteen, and, therefore, no employer-employee relationship existed as defined in the Industrial Disputes Act. On request from the hostel employees, Vasu formed a trade union for them in 1982 and after incessant struggles, Vasu secured for them in 1986 the protection of minimum wages. They were also brought under the Shops and Commercial Establishments Act. As a part of this unique struggle, Vasu observed a hunger strike in the campus of the Calicut University. The CPI (M) did not show a helping posture. Finally, the University Syndicate intervened and settled the dispute. After this historic settlement, all over Kerala unionisation of employees of student

hostels picked up. Today this section of employees enjoys a moderately good set of conditions of work and wages. The employees of the Calicut Medical College hostel after their successful struggle received huge sums of money as arrears.

7.9.7.4 Involvement in Gwalior Mavoor Rayons

In 1984, a group of workers approached A. Vasu and apprised him with the spread of corrupt practices, a cancer eating into the vitals of honest trade union movement in the Mavoor Rayons and also the control exercised by political parties on the trade unions. Vasu was a little reluctant but he was forced to accept their request as nearly 1500 workers abandoned their unions and came rallying to Vasu. They made A. Vasu their Secretary. The formation of the new union called the Gwalior Rayons Organisation of Workers (GRO) triggered off stiff opposition and resentment from the Company Management, other trade unions, Police and the Government.

7.9.7.5 Hunger Strike

During 1985-87, Vasu's union conducted many struggles, some of them jointly with other unions, particularly when a few workers of Mavoor Rayons living in the quarters committed suicide when the factory was going through a lock out. Workers felt even bare subsistence difficult. Governments came and went and no solution was round the corner. Vasu decided to dissociate with the Coordination Committee of trade unions when the efforts to settle the dispute ended in failure. At this stage, Vasu personally took over the struggle and started an indefinite hunger strike. On the twenty-sixth day, when Vasu was near a total collapse, the Chief Minister E.K.Nayanar intervened, offered to mediate and settle the dispute and requested Vasu to end his hunger strike. Vasu agreed but he was shocked when he heard Nayanar after the expiry of just two days disowning the offer he had made earlier to Vasu.

Vasu did not rest. He reached the gates of the Government Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram and commenced a hunger strike in protest. Another union activist commenced a similar hunger strike at Kozhikode too. The hunger strike by Vasu lasted 32 days. The Government deputed a team of doctors to examine the health conditions of Vasu every 15 minutes and report. On the 32nd day Vasu became unconscious. For nearly 5 hours, doctors tried to revive him and he was alive. Sankunyyettan, a colleague of Vasu insisted that he should a sip some saline water and call off his protest. Due to

tremendous public and media pressure, Nayananar intervened and ordered the Management to lift the lockout in Mavoor Rayons. According to Vasu, the CPI (M) did not want any union other than the CITU to get the credit for the struggle for lifting the company's lockout. But contrary to their plan, Vasu's union succeeded in the struggle.

From then on the CPI (M) as well as the CITU were colluding to eliminate Vasu from the scene and, as Vasu alleged, even from this world. Such was the attitude of these organizations of working class. The CITU succeeded in forcing 70 workers to resign from Vasu's union. During a conciliation conference held in the Government Secretariat in Thriuvananthapuram, Mandelia of Gwalior Rayons had come to sign the Memorandum of Settlement. Vasu was standing on the veranda of the Secretariat. Saboo, the local chief executive of the Company at Mavoor told Vasu that his boss Mandelia wanted to meet him and had said that without Vasu becoming a party to the settlement, he would not sign it. Vasu had a shock after a few weeks when the same Saboo was exposed for his involvement in a plan to kill him and thereby destroy his union.

7.9.7.6 Attempt on Vasu's life

One Pradeep Kumar was the sub inspector of Mavoor at that time. A stay in strike in the factory was going on in 1985. Vasu was sitting in his union office. Later he started addressing his workers by holding a meeting inside the factory premises. Suddenly the Sub Inspector drove to the meeting spot and in a flash caught Vasu and threw him into the jeep and sped away. Vasu was surprised, since the Inspector used to be always friendly whenever he had an occasion to meet Vasu. In the jeep, during the journey, the Inspector was showing a tough posture and did not talk to Vasu. As soon as he reached the police station, the Inspector angrily pushed Vasu into the lock up and ordered his subordinates to keep a close watch over him. The Inspector soon rushed out in his jeep and after some time brought a tall well-built man and shoved him into the same lock up room. After that, the Inspector removed his uniform and took out his cane as well as leather waist belt and started attacking the man viciously. Vasu could not bear the pain and agony that man was under going in the hands of the Inspector. After some time, when Vasu found that the Inspector was not stopping his brutality on the unarmed victim, rushed forward and caught the Inspector's belt and appealed to him to stop the brutality. The constables thought that Vasu was going to attack their boss. They rushed in to take away Vasu. The Inspector ordered his subordinates not to harm Vasu. Later Inspector Pradeep Kumar informed Vasu that the other person was indeed a hired killer deputed by Saboo, the Chief Executive of Mavoor Rayons. Saboo had arranged a dinner and liquor

party in the company guesthouse and paid a large sum of money to Saidalavi, the leader of a *goonda/mafia* group of hired killers.

The Inspector Pradeep Kumar had been informed by Saboo about his planned operation on Vasu and instructed him that the Inspector should prepare the FIR in such a way that the killers could escape the law. He reminded the Inspector that he had already spoken to the Chief Minister, the ministers and the Inspector General of Police about the planned operation. The Inspector being an honest and just officer vowed that he would not succumb to the pressure of a *Marwaree*, like Saboo. It was then that he made a one-man action programme to arrest Vasu and take him away to the lock up where he would be fully inaccessible to the hired killers. The Inspector Pradeep Kumar showed Vasu the double-edged dagger extracted from the killer, which was to be used as the weapon to kill him. As soon as the news of Vasu's arrest spread, agitated workers began to crowd around the Mavoor Police Station, demanding the release of their leader. The Inspector released Vasu and he told his men to see that he was not harmed and ensure that he spent a good night's sleep in the lock up. Had he narrated Saboo's plan on him, the workers might have lost all their senses and unleashed uncontrollable violence. The news did not make the Chief Minister and others happy. The IG of police issued orders to transfer Pradeep Kumar, the fearless and honest police officer from Mavoor to Nadakkavu Station in Kozhikode. According to Vasu, he has not revealed this incident either to the media or his workers yet. But he thought that he should now reveal the facts of this incident to this author who was attempting to write an objective historical narration and documentation of the trade union movement.

7.9.7.7 Vasu's Assessment of Union Movement

A.Vasu, better known as GRO Vasu, now lives in a one-room apartment on the top of Varghese Memorial Book Stall near Kozhikode Medical College. He married a woman at a late age and since both of them could not compromise, they got separated. Vasu gets his daily food from his sister's house and he spends most of his time in the book stall set up to commemorate the name of Varghese, the Naxalite who was killed by the police in an encounter. Vasu feels sad on the closure of Mavoor Rayons and the Commonwealth Textiles the unit where he had started as a worker. Today, according to him, leaders as well as rank and file have lost all values and ideology. There is total decay in public life. Left parties like CPI and CPI (M) are not making any effort to create ideological commitment and infuse it into the cadres. These parties have transformed themselves into bourgeoisie parties having close collusion with capitalists and bureaucrats to defeat working class interests. Today the white-collar employees belonging to the

middle class and upper middle class claim that they constitute an integral part of the working class, while the real interests of the lower layers of the working class are totally neglected. According to GRO Vasu, the Indian communists have failed to apply the Marxist-Leninist framework to study and understand Indian history and society. The trade unions have ceased to be working class organizations. They are being hijacked by political parties, which utilize all their energies to make the trade unions their virtual appendages. As a result, the political parties do not even permit any open discussion in the trade unions. This indeed is harmful to the basic interests of the working class, says Vasu. Indeed, this view of GRO Vasu seems to be applicable to the contemporary trade union movement in the entire state.

7.9.8 P.P.Velayudhan and Malayil Velayudhan

During our field work we were able to meet three great trade union leaders, all carrying the name Velayudhan, belonging to the older generation who have now withdrawn from active trade union work in Kozhikode. They were P.P.Velayudhan, Malayil Velayudhan and P.Velayudhan, the latter better known as Hochimin Velayudhan. A brief narration of their life and work, we believe, will throw further light on the union movement in Malabar. In this section (7.9.8), we confine to the work of P.P.Velayudhan and Malayil Velayudhan. In the next section (7.9.9), we shall take up the chequered career of Hochimin Velayudhan.

Born in 1923, P.P.Velayudhan started to work at the age of eight. At the age of 14 he joined the Malabar Spinning Mills. In those days the workers in the mill were given only *arappani* (half day's work). After about two and a half years they were given full day work at a monthly wage of Rs.5. There were about 700 to 750 workers in the mill. In 1940 P.P.Velayudhan started trade union work in the mill and was guided by P.Krishna Pillai, N.C.Sekhar, Manjunatha Rao, Achutha Menoky, E.C.Bharathan, P.K.Balan, Keraleeyan, P.P.Perumal Pillai, P.Balachandra Menon, George Chadayanmury and Chadayan. Chadayan was an expert in textile millwork. Velayudhan's first task was to look after the shifting of leaders from one safe shelter to another and function as a communication link among the leaders. Manarikkat Appootty, Ayyappankutty, Bathanam Appu and Manari Appu assisted him in this risky work. In the course of his trade union work, P.P.Velayudhan was encouraged to practise the art of public speaking and address groups of workers in small meetings.

According to P.P.Velayudhan, in the old days the trade union work was risky and arduous. Many workers refused to believe in what the leaders told them. They could not simply accept the dream world that the leaders had

told them to await. But gradually revolutionary spirit was made to become part of one's blood. There was a strike in the mill during 1935-36, which was led by P.Krishna Pillai and A.K.Gopalan. In 1947 the mill was closed. Velayudhan remembers the Venkataramaiah Award when A.K.T.M. Gupthan Namboodiripad, the Managing Director, was managing the mill. The AITUC union, the only union in the mill, registered its protest at the closure of the mill. It demanded the implementation of the Award. The struggle by workers in this context was firmly founded on the belief that unless the union takes the public in to confidence and demonstrate to them that the cause for the strike is just, the struggle would not succeed. The AITUC union conducted two marches of workers to Mangalore in the north and Palakkad in the south. C.Kannan, Azheekodan Raghavan and V.V.Kakkaliya led them. The Award, when implemented, gave the workers a minimum wage of Re.1 per day or Rs.26 per month.

For many years the mill came under unprofessional management, which did not have any expertise in running a textile mill. This continued for a long time. During the EMS ministry also the mill remained closed. K.P.Gopalan, the Industry Minister called a conference and after many rounds of discussions, the Government decided to take over the mill for a five year period. The mill reopened in 1959, but meanwhile there was a change of government at the end of the *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle) that led to the dismissal of the EMS ministry. K.A.Damodara Menon, the new Industry Minister in the Congress led government returned the mill to its original owners in 1963.

P.P.Velayudhan retired from the mill in 1984. By that time there were unions led by AITUC, CITU, INTUC and others, leading to lot of inter-union rivalry. Velayudhan remembers his participation in the march of workers to Thiruvananthapuram seeking the reopening of the mill. There was also a Jeep *jatha*. Several workers reached Thiruvananthapuram by train. They picketed the Government Secretariat. Police took them in to custody and put them up at Attakkulangara sub-jail. C. Achutha Menon of the CPI was the then Chief Minister and P.Ravindran held the Industry portfolio. The management had taken loans from financial institutions, but did not utilize the amount for modernization of the mill. The unions gave a memorandum to the Government and wanted it to explore the possibility of forming a Corporation with a textile expert as its chairman. When P.K.Vasudevan Nair of the CPI was the Industry Minister, P.P.Velayudhan (AITUC) and Oommen Chandy (INTUC) commenced a hunger strike at Kozhikode. On the eighth day PKV asked them to end the hunger strike as he was calling a conference in Thiruvananthapuram. Chathunni Master of the CITU also played a leading role in this context. The proposal made by the unions was that the Government should grant Rs.20 lakhs to the Mill and take steps to take over

the mill under a corporation. PKV told the unions that he was looking for an able chairman like Desikan. He also suggested the shifting of the Accounts Office from its present place to the Mill compound so that they will have close access to what was happening in the mill. In 1978 the mill finally reopened for operation. P.P.Velayudhan feels sad at the present state of the trade union movement and the corruption that takes place among some leaders.

The 70 years old Malayil Velayudhan had studied only up to 4th standard and after that started to work in a tile factory. There the AITUC union led by K.P.Gopalan held a struggle demanding 8-hour working day. In those days each factory had only one union each. Koruji was a great trade union leader in Feroke. Once there was a brutal police lathi charge on striking workers at Standard Tile Works and Malayil Velayudhan was shocked when Kelappan, the Congress leader openly said that the workers deserved it since they were communists. Koruji died of TB. Eranad Congress leaders had originally mobilized the workers, but soon the workers became communists. Malayil Velayudhan remembers his meeting with AKG and P.Krishna Pillai. At one meeting being addressed by AKG, the Congress workers made noise and hooted when AKG was speaking. AKG stopped his speech and retorted with similar hooting at the Congress workers. They then left the venue. Velayudhan was actively involved in the work of Tile and Ceramic Workers' Union of Feroke and the Malabar Tile Workers'Union. He remembers K.P.Gopalan and T.C.Narayanan Nambiar telling the workers and employers of tile factories that a handful of mere sand cannot be made in to clay unless the workers put in their sweat and blood in to it.

For a long time the Tile Factory Owners' Association had been demanding that the Government should declare the industry seasonal. Nobody wanted to learn more about the tile industry today. Velayudhan felt sad that even the trade unions did not want to study the intricate problems of the industry. Today the tile workers themselves do not use tiles that he makes and prefers to have a concrete roof for his house. Velayudhan also asked who gained from the closure of the Mavoor Gwalior Rayons factory. The Birlas with a small investment there extracted several times that amount of surplus from there and took that away from the State and its people with the support of the State. He got emotional and very agitated when he told this author that a worker who was not sincere to his work could not be called a worker. He cited the example of the coconut tree climber of today who just pluck the ripe nuts and collects his wages. He does not clean the top of the tree as his ancestors used to do while at work. It was due to this that Kerala came under the grip of *Mandari*, the dreaded coconut tree disease with the consequent decline in production and productivity. According to Malayil Velayudhan, the

late Communist leader K.Damodaran had stated that without a sincere worker, the country would never achieve Socialism.

Malayil Velayudhan, during his career had come into close contacts with several top Communist Party leaders like EMS, AKG, O.J.Joseph, T.C.Narayanan Nambiar, and K.Damodaran. One thing about O.J.Joseph is still green in his memory. While spending his days in the underground and shelter life, O.J.Joseph always did not want to miss consuming one raw egg a day. He would even go out without knowledge of others and return with that egg gathered from some source, even if that adventure was of great risk. EMS had stayed once in a shelter near Velayudhan's house at Chulliparambu. Those were unforgettable days.

7.9.9 Hochimin Velayudhan

As stated earlier, the true name of Hochimin Velayudhan is P.Velayudhan. His house name is Hochimin Manzil. How he acquired the name 'Hochimin' will be discussed below. Born in 1921 in a poor family, he was left alone with two sisters when his father passed away when he was just one and a half years old. However, he went to the Basle Mission Elementary School for his studies and he was very good at it. But circumstances at home were such that he was forced to take up work at coir spinning, as he and his family could not afford to pay the school fee of one *anna* (Rs.0.0625) per month. Velayudhan had no shirt to wear when he went to school and for that he was sent out and ridiculed by teachers. But the Headmaster was kind. He summoned another boy to bring a shirt for Velayudhan who was a good at studies. This enabled Velayudhan to study up to 7th Standard. Then the Headmaster, one day, told him that he had seven daughters at home and therefore was unable to support Velayudhan's further studies.

Meanwhile, Velayudhan saw what was happening in and around Kozhikode in the movement for freedom and responsible self-government and also working class struggles. He joined a team picketing toddy shops and shops selling foreign cloth. He started wearing Khadi. He secured a job in Star Tile Works as a trainee in cutting the edge of clay tiles before they go in to the kilns. His involvement in the trade union there resulted in his expulsion. He then went to Panniyankara where textile units were functioning. He secured work there and learnt all the necessary skills quickly and this was recognised by the management. But there also Velayudhan got involved in trade union work. He was then sent out. In those days there was real shortage of skilled workers. Therefore, Velayudhan could easily secure work in the Modern Textiles in the Mithai Street in Kozhikode. There also he had the same experience when got involved in trade union work. He then shifted to

Ceylon Textiles where the management was appreciative of his skills and efficiency at work. B.V.Abdulla Koya was the manager there. There also soon Velayudhan got expelled. But luckily the Labour Officer intervened and directed the management to take back Velayudhan in to service. E.C.Bharathan was of great help to Velayudhan in this matter.

After some weeks Velayudhan came back to the tile industry for work and he secured job in the Modern Tile Factory at Feroke. There Velayudhan and his friend Mohammed formed a trade union and a branch of the CPI. Both of them were arrested while moving along the roads in Meenchantha. They were sent to Kannur Central Jail and put up in the quarantine cell. Later Velayudhan was sent to the Salem Central Jail where a jail mutiny took place. In Salem Jail there were C.Kannan, Pappu Vaidyan, K.T.Madhavan Vaidyan and several others. After release from the Jail, the Party directed Velayudhan to mobilize press workers and form a Union for them. During this work Circle Inspector Sankaranarayanan arrested Velayudhan and sent him to the Nadakkavu police station. In the small and congested cell there were nine people and the officers in the police station were competing to apply their batons and shoes on each and everyone there. Velayudhan was wearing a full shirt. One police officer did not like this and he drew his revolver and asked Velayudhan for what purpose this weapon was to be used and started kicking at him.

During 1946-47 there was a general strike in the textile industry in Malabar on the issue of bonus and wage revision. O.J.Joseph was the General Secretary of the Union and Velayudhan functioned as the Assistant Secretary. The issues were referred to adjudication. M.P.Menon argued the case of the workers and in the course of which he taught the esteemed Judge the intricacies of textile work. P.Balachandra Menon had always a soft corner for Velayudhan and gave a personal care to him always. Velayudhan was selected by the Party to go over to the TB Sanatorium run by the AITUC at Baithool in Madhya Pradesh for treatment and rest as his health was eroding fast. It was T.K.Karunan of the Kozhikode Corporation Workers' Union who mobilized necessary dress and money required for Velayudhan's trip. Velayudhan spent three months at the Sanatorium.

On his return, Velayudhan was directed to look after the accounts of the trade unions and prepare them for audit. Meanwhile, he mobilized the employees of Coffee works. With the timely help of Bava, the Labour Office of the Government, the Union was registered. Koruji and E.C.Bharathan also assisted Velayudhan. The Union through struggles could also secure Gratuity for workers. It was a paradox that the same workers turned anti-Velayudhan and gheraoed him during a meeting, when the CITU was trying to capture control of the Union from the AITUC. The General Body of the Union was

called. Some wanted Koruji and Velayudhan to be sent out of the Union. When the election to the office bearers was held, one worker, a Muslim, read out a panel of names, which deliberately had excluded Velayudhan. The workers in the hall clapped their hands in support of the panel and there was no open discussion on the panel. Nobody was allowed to express his views. Velayudhan insisted that election should be held and following that tension mounted. Police soon arrived on the scene. Nadukkandy Mohammed Koya, who was presiding, asked Velayudhan whether he wanted to become the General Secretary of the Union and asked him that it would be better if he decided to keep out of the general body meeting. Velayudhan then decided to avoid any further confrontation and left the scene. This enabled the CITU to capture the Union from the AITUC easily.

P.Velayudhan had gone through several rounds of arrest and police custody and consequent physical torture. A few such episodes need to be mentioned here. While working at Modern Tile Works at Nallalam in Cheruvannur panchayat, the police arrested Velayudhan at about 8.30 am from inside the factory. When he was being taken away, Velayudhan shouted slogans and this was interpreted as anti-Government and he was charge-sheeted on this account. He was taken before the Magistrate who remanded him to the Kozhikode Sub-Jail. The hearing of the case was delayed by a few months. Later after completing the hearing, Velayudhan was sent to Kannur Central Jail. O.T.Saradakrishn, advocate, appeared for Velayudhan in this case. After two weeks in Kannur Jail, Velayudhan was taken to the Salem Central Jail. A reference to this has been already made earlier.

When Velayudhan was attending a meeting at the Union Office near the present C.H.Mohammed Koya over bridge, he was arrested along with eight other union workers. They were taken to the Nadakkavu station and lodged them in the lock-up there. Since the Sub-Inspector was absent, other police officers and constables had a field day and unleashed brutal torture on the union activists throughout the night. The workers were charged under section 17(1) of the Criminal Amendment Act and produced them before the court next day morning. Velayudhan was then remanded to the Kannur Central Jail. The Special Court delayed the hearing of the case for about eight months. Whenever the case was taken up regularly at 15-day interval, the Counsel for Velayudhan used to appear, but the Court would then defer it to a later date. This Counsel was none other than the father of Justice V.R.Krishna Iyer. Finally one day the Court, citing a judgement of a High Court nullifying section 17(1), declared that Velayudhan and his friends were to be let free.

P.Velayudhan got arrested again when he was working in the medicine manufacturing section of an Ayurvedic Cooperative Society. The arrest was for his participation in the statewide Food march and struggle led by the CPI

and the AITUC. He was arrested along with Kallat Krishnan for picketing the Collectorate.

Velayudhan had the distinction of getting dismissed from work wherever he organized workers and got involved in trade union activities. He had worked in Star Tile Works, Kallai, Modern Tile and Clay Works, Nallalam, Paramount Textiles, Modern Textiles and Ceylon House Textiles in Kozhikode. Velayudhan had participated in the sympathetic strike during the Naval Mutiny in Bombay. Velayudhan had founded several unions in Kozhikode like Malabar Highway Workers' Union, Kozhikode Coffee Workers' Union, Kerala Ayurvedic Cooperative Society Workers' Union and Kozhikode District P.W.D. Workers' Union. He had served as the general secretary of Textile Workers' Union, besides working as secretary of the P.W.D. Workers' Federation. He was involved in the Handloom Factory workers' struggle in Kozhikode taluk in 1946.

While spending his days in the Baithool Sanatorium managed by the AITUC in Madhya Pradesh, he was given exemption from the rule that the inmates should meet 50 percent of the expenses there. This was granted by the AITUC at the instance of S.A.Dange and P.Ramamoorthy who used to visit Velayudhan and enquire about his health. Though Hindi and Marathi were the languages used there, Velayudhan found no difficulty in staying there and recouping his health. For this he is very thankful for the generosity of the AITUC.

The CPI gave Velayudhan his membership in 1946. It was the late M.Kanaran, a trade union leader and journalist of Kozhikode, who conferred on P.Velayudhan the title 'Hochimin' in recognition of his life style, which was similar to the great Vietnamese leader Hochimin. Since then P.Velayudhan has been addressed as Hochimin Velayudhan. That prompted him to name his residence also as Hochimin Manzil. Today he is staying with his daughter who works in a private hospital in Kozhikode as a sweeper. He is contended that he could devote his life to the working class brothers as much as possible and this gave him strength to undergo arrests and torture in police lock-up. He had a dream of a new world for the working class, but now feels that it is a distant dream and may remain a dream for ever. In spite of his failing health, he spends his time to guide the activities of the Anganavadi at Koyavalappu, promote literacy campaigns and help school children from poor families in their studies. He had memories of participating in Deasabhiman arts festivals, presentation of folk arts, and *kolkali* (a kind of popular game/art form). He had also worked as a watcher in the *Desabhiman* Press and *Janayugam* and *Navayugam* office dispatch sections without accepting any remuneration. He had mobilized the coir spinning workers on the coastal

regions of Kozhikode. Hochimin Velayudhan is, no doubt, an unforgettable character in the trade union movement in Malabar.

7.10 ABOUT O.J. JOSEPH

Reference has been made in earlier chapters about O.J.Joseph, the charismatic trade union leader and his involvement in the mobilization of the working class in several parts of Kerala. Like P.Krishna Pillai, OJ was also born in Travancore, but spent most of his active life in Malabar and became an important link in the networking of the trade union movement and the Communist Party in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Therefore, we were in a dilemma in deciding where to include the life and career of OJ in the present documentation. After careful thought we decided to include it in this chapter on Malabar. The chief source for this documentation is the brief brilliant biographical work on OJ written by C.Bhaskaran in Malayalam.⁴⁵.

7.10.1 O.J.'s background

Born on September 17, 1917 in a poor family in Kizhakkambalam, as the son of Oorothu Joseph and Rosy, O.J.Joseph (herein after called OJ) studied in a school at Swarnath Malayil in Kizhakkambalam up to the VIIth Standard. Though he went to the St. Mary's School at Aluva, poverty and destitution at home did not allow him to carry on his studies. He, therefore, returned to Kizhakkambalam and wandered here and there. After some time, he secured work as a salesman, buying hill produce and selling it at the Aluva market. Since it was not an attractive job, OJ decided to leave Kizhakkambalam at the young age of 18 and go to Alappuzha to seek work in coir factories. After a few days of effort, he secured work as a Helper in Madura Company at a wage of 4 *chakrams* (Rs.0.14) per day. After a day's work, OJ used to spend his time in front of a Christian hotel near the boat jetty. Since OJ had left home without informing his family, his father was searching for him. Finding that OJ had reached Alappuzha, his father reached there and forcibly took him back home. But his sojourn at home was short-lived. He again went back to Alappuzha and got his job back in the Madura Company.

Soon OJ learnt the sophisticated skills of a coir factory weaver and impressed his management as well as co-workers. He was friendly to all. During this period he associated himself with the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) and started selling its weekly, *Thozhilali*, among workers. Along with K.V.Pathrose, K.K.Kunjan, P.A.Solomon, Swami Padmanabhan, and Andrew Mooppan, OJ set up a Study Centre near Kommady bridge. This

Centre, besides conducting study classes, also held training sessions in public speaking. The Centre subscribed to the *Prabhatham Weekly*, then being brought out by E.M.S.Namboodiripad from Shoranur. During 1937-38, OJ participated in the Poverty March led by Kollam Joseph.

7.10.2 OJ's worth gets recognition

By this time the great Comrade, P.Krishna Pillai and K.Damodaran recognized the talents and worth of OJ and got in touch with him. He was made a member of the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union (TCFWU). Krishna Pillai instructed OJ and a few others from the Study Centre to reach the Alathupiri Union office on the eve of Thiru Onam day in 1937. The group included, besides OJ, Kollam Joseph, P.K.Padmanabhan, K.V.Pathrose and K.K.Kunjan. It was there that they planned to launch a general strike. In the strike P.K.Kunju, P.N.Krishna Pillai, R.Sugathan, C.K.Velayudhan and V.K.Purushothaman were arrested. Workers protested and struck work and marched towards the South Police Station demanding the immediate release of their leaders. Police made a brutal lathi charge, injuring many and killing Bava, a comrade. Though demonstrations and marches had been banned, workers decided to retaliate. The Congress Socialist Party (CSP) made a great impact on the workers. K.K.Kunjan, K.V.Pathrose, P.K.Padmanabhan, P.V.Andrews, K.N.Dutt and OJ became active members of the CSP group in Alappuzha. On the direction of R.Sugathan, V.K.Achuthan was elected Assistant General Secretary and a five-member committee was formed in which OJ was included. The task of the committee was to mobilize 50,000 coir factory workers through Factory Committees and prepare them for a struggle.

Developments of 1938 had been documented elsewhere, particularly the struggle of October 20 and the march held by Accamma Cherian, police attack on K.V.Pathrose and K.K.Warrier, involvement of A.K.Gopalan, K.Damodaran and the Youth League, and the controversy on the decision of P.K.Kunju and R.Sugathan to unilaterally withdraw the struggle. After the end of the struggle, the Union Committee was reconstituted with V.K.Purushothaman as Acting General Secretary and O.J.Joseph as Joint Secretary of the TCFWU. The Party then directed OJ to go to Cherthala to strengthen the Party there.

7.10.3 OJ sent to Malabar

P.Krishna Pillai summoned the leaders to Eramallur. When they reached there, they found Krishna Pillai, T.V.Thomas and the other leaders of

the Radical Group. The meeting decided that TV would take over the Presidentship of the Kannitta Oil Mill Union and also function as the Conciliation Officer of the TCFWU. In 1940 a committee of the Communist Party was set up by including a number of CSP activists like K.K.Kunjan, P.K.Padmanabhan, P.A.Solomon, C.O.Mathew, Simon Asan and OJ. It was then that the Party decided to depute OJ to Malabar. Thus OJ reached Cheruvannur. The Second World War had just started. Many leaders of Malabar had gone underground including N.C.Sekhar who was leading the Cheruvannur Cotton Mill Workers' Union. OJ took up the leadership of that Union.

Meanwhile in Malabar trade unions and *Karshaka Sanghom* had initiated joint struggles. A Committee with K.P.R.Gopalan as Secretary was formed. On January 26, 1940 they launched a general strike protesting against the imperialist war. The Committee demanded DA linked to the cost of living index, remunerative prices for agricultural produce, opening of fair price shops and stoppage of compulsory war levy on workers and peasants. To mobilize public support to the demands, a mass campaign for gathering signatures from the public started. It was at this stage that the struggle in the Pappinisserry Aaron Mills began. September 15, 1940 was to be observed as Protest Day under the initiative of the Left dominated KPCC. The same day was to be observed as Price Control Day by the *Karshaka Sanghom* and trade unions. It was during this struggle that the Morazha episode happened resulting in, among other things, the killing of a Sub Inspector and arrest of K.P.R.Gopalan. A few days later people clashed with police at Thalasserry and Aboo and Chathukkutty became martyrs. At Kozhikode a meeting was held in which OJ and P.Sekharan spoke against imperialism and capitalism making inroads in to our land and the dangers following it. They were arrested, sentenced to one and a half year's rigorous imprisonment (RI) and sent to Kannur Central Jail and later to Vellur Central Jail. Later they were taken to Bellary where the Jail Superintendent was notorious for his brutality. The prisoners were not supplied with even the minimum food ration allowed to them and they were subjected to inhuman torture. OJ and Sekharan worked out a plan to escape from their cell. On May 3, 1941 they successfully executed their plan along with Sikkhayya of Audh and Subramaniam of Tamil Nadu. After escape O.J and Sekharan ran in a direction to an unknown destination and others ran in the opposite direction. None of them had any idea of the geography of the place. After two days OJ and Sekharan saw a railway track and walked through it to reach the nearest station. They boarded a train that had just started to move on its journey. The train was going to Hubli. When they got out of the station there, some police constables eyed them with suspicion and immediately took them in to custody. The police

made a thorough body search of the two persons and questioned them. But both of them gave such amusing stories that the police soon set them free.

OJ and Sekharan started walking until they reached Mangalore. Sekharan could easily locate one of his friends there, a bidi worker, and sought his help to take bath, change dress and move on to Malabar. They finally reached Chirackal and started to work among handloom and textile workers there. A.V.Kunhambu was the Party Secretary of Chirackal taluk at that time.

In 1943 OJ shifted to Kurumbramad taluk and took organizational work as directed by the Party. He used to go to all the four *farkhas* (revenue divisions) and organize meetings, conduct study classes and launch anti-Japanese and anti-imperialist campaigns. M.Kumaran Master was one of OJ's close associates at that time. Soon the Party directed OJ to go over to Travancore where an advance party consisting of A.V.Kunhambu and E.K.Nayanar had also reached, though the Party had been banned there at that time.

7.10.4 Imparting political education to cadres

The Party had decided that its cadres should undergo serious political education and for that study classes were to be organized. One such study class was started at Kommady in Alappuzha. Besides OJ, A.V.Kunhambu and E.K.Nayanar also took classes. Meanwhile police was informed by the CID officer Vasu Pillai about the study classes and the presence of senior leaders of the Communist Party at Kommady. Nayunar was on the hit list of the police since the Malabar authorities wanted him for his involvement in the Kayyur case. Vaidyanatha Iyer, the Police Superintendent, ordered his men to encircle the study class at Kommady. He caught each one of them and questioned them. When he was questioned, Nayunar told the police superintendent that his real name was Karunakaran and he belonged to a place called Edayazham. OJ ran away and jumped in to Vadathodu, a canal nearby. Though some police constables also jumped in to the canal they could not swim fast. OJ thus escaped and kept himself safe in a smoke chimney of a house and later reached the hut of a trusted worker comrade.

It was during this period that Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan, had declared in the Sreemoolam Assembly that Travancore was in the grip of the Communist Devil. However, he was prepared to lift the ban on the Communist Party in the State. The Dewan kept his word. Consequently, the leaders of Malabar who had sought shelter returned. Thus OJ went back to Chirackal and assumed the name 'Balan' which happened to be the name of a

distant nephew of Pandyala Kunhiraman of Kottali. After a few days of stay at Kunhiraman's house at Kottali, OJ shifted to the house of Nelliyat Govindan, a close relative of Kunhiraman at Chirackal. Soon OJ began to be lovingly addressed as 'Balettan' (Brother Balan) by all those who knew him.

7.10.5 Involvement in struggles

OJ started to work in the New Street Textile Mill at Poozhathy without revealing his real identity. He used to work a full shift like any other worker, collect his wages at the end of the day, go to the nearest pawn shop run by K.K.Ibrahim, the owner of K.K. Bidi company, buy bidis, play cards with friends and discuss several topics if he got a few willing listeners around him. Saithalavi, a constable of Valapatanam police station established a close friendship with OJ during this period.

OJ was deeply involved in the Party work at New Street and Poozhathy and activated the Vidyabhivardhini Library and Reading Room. His role in trade union work, particularly in organizing the *Kanji Paise Struggle* (Rice gruel-money struggle) by the Chirackal Textile Workers' Union was historic in every sense. The workers of the Subramania Weaving Company held a stay-in-strike demanding Rs.0.04 towards the expenses of noon meal, rice gruel. The strike came close to a direct physical confrontation between the police and workers.

In 1946 elections in the Madras State, K.P.Gopalan of the Communist Party and Manikkothu Kumaran of the Congress stood as candidates from Chirackal constituency. The Congress workers and sympathizers did not allow the Communists to conduct their campaigns peacefully. The Congress let loose their *goondas* on the Communists at Edakkad, Muzhappilangad, Chappad, Alavil and other centers. The Prakasam ministry continued to order the arrests of the Communists. OJ, who was the Campaign Committee member of K.P.Gopalan, went underground. During this period the Aaron Mill struggle had started under the leadership of P.Krishna Pillai. In the context of the 110-day long struggle OJ recruited able volunteers from Chirackal to do intensive campaign in support of the struggle.

In 1946 K.P.R.Gopalan was released from jail and he was given a fitting reception at the Mananchira Maidan in Kozhikode. OJ accompanied by P.Krishna Pillai were sitting along with the large gathering and enjoying the proceedings. But at one stage OJ suddenly appeared on the platform and made a fiery speech and then disappeared. He then went underground and remained there till India's Independence.

Following the Calcutta Thesis of the 2nd Congress of the Communist Party of India, the Congress Government imposed a ban on the Party. Following that several leaders went underground, but they continued to work for the mobilization of working class cadres and strengthening the Party. At that time OJ worked with E.K.Nayanar, A.V.Kunhambu, M.Kumaran, and K.V.Narayanan Nambiar in the Malabar Regional Committee. But soon OJ got arrested and was sent to Vellur Central Jail. On February 10, 1950 he was released. Next day the police opened fire at detainees during the mutiny in the Salem Jail. C.Kannan and M.Kumaran Master escaped unhurt, while 22 detainees lost their lives.

7.10.6 Building up of unions and Party

On reaching Kozhikode, OJ concentrated in mobilizing textile mill workers under the banner Textile Workers' Union with P.K.Balan as President and OJ as General Secretary. OJ made an in-depth study about textile industry and textile work, identified different skill categories and put out a demand to the managements that workers should be paid wages according to the skill level, workload and productivity. This was a very unique move by a trade union. K.P.Gopalan, P.Balachandra Menon, N.C.Sekhar and Kallat Krishnan supported OJ in this enterprising move.

A meeting of the Malabar Regional Committee was to be held at Mankara. So all the members took care to escape the eyes of the police. M.Kumaran Master boarded the train from Badagara, while OJ joined at Vallikkunnu. They were travelling in different compartments. On the last compartment of the train the special volunteer (nicknamed 'Tech') carried all the papers and Party documents. When Kumaran Master, OJ and A.V.Kunhambu got down at Mankara railway station at odd hours, 01.45 past midnight, they happened to be the only passengers getting down there and the police immediately took them in to custody. Fortunately, the 'Tech' decided to continue the journey by jumping in to the train to keep the Party documents in safe custody. Those arrested at Mankara were taken to the Palakkad Fort Cell and mercilessly tortured. After the first day's torture, no one could stand on his legs. After a few days they were released on bail.

In the Special Convention of the Party held in October 1951, a decision was taken to participate in the first General Elections. The Party directed OJ to go over to Travancore and work under Ernakulam District Committee and concentrate on trade union work. It was during this tenure that he took up the

leadership of several trade unions and edited and published *Trade Union*, a bi-weekly, exclusively devoted to trade union work.

7.10.7 OJ finds his bride at Neyyasserry

Neyyasserry was an orthodox Catholic Christian centre near Thodupuzha. OJ was once invited to speak there at a meeting of peasants as a substitute for Pandalam P.R.Madhavan Pillai, who was originally scheduled to speak. Jose Abraham was one of the organizers of the meeting. After OJ made a spirited speech, he stayed at the house of Jose Abraham. There OJ met his future life partner, Kathrikutty, sister of Jose Abraham. OJ devoted his energies in mobilizing estate workers. A particular mention must be made about OJ's efforts in strengthening the Kaliyar Plantation Workers' Union. He functioned as its President and Velayudhan Pillai as Secretary. This Union held a one and a half month long strike and during the entire period OJ found time to stay at Thodupuzha.

7.10.8 OJ directed to work in Transport Employees' Union

While keeping his base of activity at Ernakulam, OJ was summoned by the Travancore Communist Party Committee Secretary, M.N.Govindan Nair and Joint Secretary, S.Kumaran. They wanted OJ to take up work with the State Transport Employees' Union at Thiruvananthapuram as its Assistant Secretary. At that time the Employees' Union had T.V.Thomas as its President and K.V.Surendranath as Secretary. This Union had a chequered history discussed elsewhere. After OJ took charge in the Employees' Union, there was a historic struggle by transport employees. The State Transport authorities issued instructions to the operating staff that they should strictly obey the Traffic Rules in the Thiruvananthapuram city and at the same time adhere to the schedules and time for departure and arrival of buses. The employees felt that these two conditions could not be satisfied simultaneously as obeying the traffic rules would sometimes delay the schedules and affect the running time of buses. When the authorities tightened their hold, the employees started go-slow as advised by OJ. He had also told the employees that bonus is a deferred wage and therefore cannot be treated as a part of profit or surplus made by the concern. The authorities under direction from the State Government then made the employees of State Transport pensionable and added that since they are pensionable they have neither the right to organize a trade union nor demand bonus. But the Union stood strong with its demand for bonus as deferred wages.

The Chief Minister was adamant and refused to have any talks with the Union on the matter. This forced the Union to commence a strike on August 27, 1954. The Travancore Trade Union Council extended its support to the struggle. The MLAs belonging to the Left group strongly raised the issue in the Assembly and demanded the Government to settle the dispute. To express solidarity with the striking State Transport employees, the MLAs entered the Assembly wearing the Union Badge. However, the Government was unmoved and it let loose brutal repression on the employees. At one stage five Left Front MLAs and five employees commenced a hunger strike forcing the Government to take initiative in settling the dispute. It announced the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry to study the problems of State Transport and the issues raised by the Union. In this struggle OJ played a crucial role and the employees started regarding him as their Leader. This historic struggle, as stated elsewhere, laid the foundation for the emergence of a strong Communist Party and after the formation of Kerala, the people of the State voted the Party in to power. Thus the Ministry led by E.M.S.Namboodiripad marked the historic event of Communist Party getting in to power through the ballot box. However, following the anti-Communist Liberation Struggle, the President of India dismissed the Ministry on July 31, 1959.

On the concluding day of the Aluva Convention of the Travancore-Cochin Communist Party, OJ invited S.Kumaran, E.Balanandan and N.Sivan Pillai to his house for lunch. Since the driver of the Jeep was near exhaustion due to loss of sleep during the last few days of driving, S.Kumaran offered to drive the Jeep himself so as to reach OJ's house near Aluva. But before long, the Jeep skidded on the slippery road and turned topsy turvey and fell in to the paddy field near by below the road level. S.Kumaran and OJ were thrown out, while E.Balanandan and Sivan Pillai were lying under the overturned Jeep. But fortunately none of them was seriously injured in the accident. Balanandan and Sivan Pillai were taken to a doctor and there they told OJ that they would defer their trip to his house and also the Lunch for a later date. S.Kumaran accompanied OJ and both had lunch together at OJ's house.

7.10.9 OJ marries Kathrikkutty

On November 14, 1960 at a simple function O.J.Joseph married Kathrikkutty, the sister of Jose Abraham. OJ was then 46 years old. The marriage was held at a hall near Chenthitta, Thiruvananthapuram with out the presence of any priest from the church since the Church had already ostracized OJ and Kathrikkutty's families. The marriage was solemnized in the presence of T.V.Thomas and several workers, Party leaders and friends of OJ attended it. Saradamma took up the role of OJ's sister in the latter's absence.

From OJ's family only his father was present. The simple marriage function ended and the guests were treated with a glass of limejuice.

On the sixth day after marriage, OJ was arrested for his involvement in a peasant struggle and he was remanded to the Sub Jail for 15 days. In the elections held in 1960, Pattom Thanu Pillai of the PSP sought the support of a three Party coalition and became the Chief Minister. He could not proceed for long as divisions started appearing in the coalition and some started questioning the autocratic approach of Pattom. Appointing Pattom as the Governor of Punjab solved the problem. The offer of Governorship was bait and Pattom fell for it. R.Sankar of the Congress became the next Chief Minister. When a no-confidence motion was initiated in the Assembly against the Sankar ministry, his Government resorted to large-scale arrests of political party leaders. OJ had also an arrest warrant and sensing the danger, he decided to go underground. When T.K.Ramakrishnan, the Communist Party leader was coming out of OJ's house near Aristo Junction, he was arrested.

7.10.10 Division in the Party and OJ's stand

In 1962, during the India-China War, OJ was arrested along with several other Communist leaders of the State. Soon division had started appearing in the Communist Party on issues like Class cooperation versus Class conflict. There was also a move for forging unity between the Congress Party and the Communist Party. The Communist Party even passed strictures on its great leader, AKG. However, when AKG arrived at the Thiruvananthapuram railway station, the dissident Left group consisting of Avanamkuzhy Sadasivan, Karamana Soman, Pallichal Sadasivan, P.G.Velayudhan Nair, K.Anirudhan and O.J.Joseph gave him a rousing reception. In 1964 the Communist Party split in to two and the first Convention of the CPI (M) was held at Alappuzha.

On December 30, 1964 the Government started arresting CPI (M) activists and leaders and OJ was one among them. He had to spend 16 months in various jails. While the leaders of the CPI (M) were in jail, election to the State Assembly was held. The CPI (M) secured the largest number of seats among the parties. But the State Governor did not allow it to form a Government and the assembly was dissolved.

In the Transport Employees' Union, the AITUC leaders were alleged to have initiated measures of victimization against those who deserted the CPI to join the CPI (M). Madhavan Achary, Adima and Sisupalan Nair were expelled from the Employees' Union. C.Kannan and OJ tried to negotiate with the CPI leaders to avoid a split in the AITUC led Union. Ultimately their

efforts failed and as a result, they were forced to form the Kerala State Transport Employees' Association in 1967 with C.Kannan as President, OJ as Vice President and Kosalaramadas as General Secretary. Parassala Sivanandan, Azheekodan Raghavan and V.Viswanatha Menon were actively involved in the new Association. The leaders of the Association mobilized the ministerial staff in the State Transport to form a trade union which later merged with the parent Association, since the leaders stood strong for the 'One Industry, One Union' principle. They discouraged the emergence of craft and category unions.

OJ began to mobilize the workers in the unorganised and hitherto neglected sections of working people like Non Muster Roll (NMR) workers and casual labour in PWD, farm workers, Government Press employees, FCI godown workers and workers in the Hindusthan Latex Ltd., a public sector enterprise. In 1975, during the National Emergency, OJ was arrested. In 1981 he was elected to the Rajya Sabha. Very soon he became physically unwell and on November 19, 1991 O.J.Joseph, the great revolutionary, left this world, leaving his wife, two daughters and a son.

In summing up the life and career of O.J.Joseph, we must say that he started his political life in Alappuzha in Travancore, moved over to Malabar and was back in Thiruvananthapuram and in the process, he grew in to a tall figure in the State both in the political and trade union scene. Like P.Krishna Pillai, E.M.Sankaran Namboodiripad and A.K.Gopalan, OJ had the distinction of having travelled all over Kerala to do intensive organizational work and inspire and lead the cadres in Alappuzha, Cherthala, Kollam, Karthikappally, Ernakulam, Kannur, Thalasserry, Chirackal, Kurumbranad, Cheruvannur and other centres. While working in Thalasserry, OJ had an attack of Cholera and had to take rest at the house of the veteran Communist, N.E.Balaraj and take medical treatment from Thayyil Chathu Vaidyar.

OJ had organized trade unions in traditional as well as modern sector industries. While in Alappuzha he was involved in the mobilization of coir factory workers and in Thodupuzha and Idukki he led plantation/estate workers. In the Punalur Paper Mill, he was leading the Left trade union. In Kundara Ceramics, the workers could never forget the services rendered by OJ. In Kozhikode in Malabar, his activities were around textile and tile industries, while in Thiruvananthapuram, he was leading the workers in State Transport, Government Press, farms, FCI godowns and Hindusthan Latex Ltd. He could secure total confidence from workers whom he led since they knew that once OJ went for negotiations with employers/managements, he would definitely come out with maximum benefits to them. He was indeed a practical trade unionist. He held top positions in both the undivided AITUC and later in the CITU.

Before Kerala was formed, OJ was Vice President of the Kerala Regional Trade Union Congress (KRTUC). In 1970 he was selected Vice President of the CITU. People used to wonder how this man, who did not have higher education, could grasp the intricacies of complex labour laws and interpret them for the benefit of workers. OJ was indeed a self-made man. Once OJ formed a trade union, he would withdraw from it as soon as the junior level cadres groomed by him were ready to take charge. He would then entrust all responsibilities of running the trade union to them, promising all help from him whenever they needed it.

In Kurumbranad taluk in Malabar, OJ was Party Secretary and he built up the Party in Badagara, Nadapuram, Perambra, and, Meppattur. He led several struggles in Koothalay and strengthened the Party's hold in Chirackal taluk. During 1948-51, despite the brutal repression let loose by authorities on Communists, OJ was able to hold the Party cadres together through his work in the Malabar Regional Committee.

He was great disciplinarian and he used to get angry when party members or cadres came late for meetings. Regarding Party funds, he was very particular in seeing that the accounts were properly kept and audited. OJ used to read a lot and his study classes were very stimulating. It was difficult to stop him from making very long speeches, though they were informative and kindled the revolutionary spirit. His style of reporting to the Party committee meetings had the 'OJ touch' as they were brief, crisp and effective. One could not describe OJ as a great parliamentarian, though his speeches in the Rajya Sabha used to attract the attention of Members and they listened to them with attention.

7.11 CONCLUSION

In conclusion of this detailed documentation of the history of the trade union movement in Malabar, one is forced to say that leaders of OJ's calibre have been rare and few. In the present stage of union movement, their tribe is becoming fast extinct. One major reason for it has been too much politicisation of the union movement by leaders who fail to understand that the country and the State have democratic governments of the people, by the people and for the people. We do not have to fight a colonial master today as we used to do before 1947. The future of our people are decided by us and the necessary conditions for it have to be created through cooperation among political parties and working class and mass organizations after shedding the present confrontational postures. If this is not done, development and stability may still remain an unattainable dream of the people.

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CHAPTER VIII

UNION MOVEMENT IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

In this Chapter, we attempt to document the development of the union movement in Thiruvananthapuram, which had always been the city of action. Being the capital city, Thiruvananthapuram had witnessed social, political and economic movements and struggles by several sections of the community who inhabit this southern district as well as other regions of Kerala.

Thiruvananthapuram had witnessed unique movements like that of scavenging workers, temple employees and head load workers. The Thiruvananthapuram district had a very high concentration of coir workers and plantation or estate labour. Besides being the political capital, the city of Thiruvananthapuram and its suburbs had seen a rapid growth of printing presses including newspaper units. From the days of princely rule, Thiruvananthapuram had gone in for industrialization. Factory establishments like Rubber Works, and Travancore Titanium Products were the first to be established. Besides government establishments like PWD Workshop, Drainage and Water Works also absorbed a large work force. The headquarters of the State Road Transport undertaking, State Electricity Board and other public sector units like the KELTRON, Hindustan Latex Ltd, large establishments, are located in this city. We are aware of our limitation in scientifically documenting the union movement in Thiruvananthapuram in such a short space like this chapter.

8.1 THE CITY OF ACTION

Thiruvananthapuram had been the capital city of Travancore during the Princely Rule. All the struggles against the princely rule and the Dewan's misrule had been staged in this city. Besides political struggles, a number of workers' struggles were conducted here. Even most of the struggles originating in other parts of the State were taken to the main roads of this city and the gates of the Government Secretariat here. The State Congress in Travancore was formed here. Many meetings of political parties and trade unions were held here. Thousands of working class disputes were brought here for discussion and settlements here. Several political and trade union episodes that took place in Kerala had made their live presence felt in Thiruvananthapuram. Thus Thiruvananthapuram had a significant place in the trade union movement in the State.

The Government of Travancore had held a friendly approach to working class problems. This was evident from its initiative in nominating C.D. Ponnamma and P.N. Krishna Pillai of the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) to the Sreemoolam Assembly and the Sri Chitra State Council respectively as early as May 1937. Many had criticized this action of the State Government as a ploy to win over the union leaders to its side. But later events demonstrated that the nominated members could effectively represent the working class issues before the Assembly as well as the Council and force the Government to pass a number of labour laws. Delegations of workers had submitted several memoranda to the Government requesting for early redressal of the issues. The proceedings of the State Legislature were replete with speeches and interventions by members both elected and nominated, seeking positive changes in labour policy of the State and enactment of protective legislation.

After Independence and the integration of the State, several historic labour disputes in both Travancore and Cochin areas were brought to the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram for settlements through conciliation conferences called by the Government. One of the earliest disputes that was settled in this manner was the great struggle by the Chavara Mineral workers. In November 1948 the settlement on issues like increase in basic wage, D.A, Bonus, ending of contract labour system etc. was reached at a conference called by Parur T.K.Narayana Pillai, the then Prime Minister of the Travancore-Cochin State. Union leaders, N. Sreekantan Nair and Baby John and Labour Minister N. Kunjuraman had played a leading role in this settlement. Similarly many disputes in the FACT and Indian Aluminium Company in Aluva were also settled in Conferences held in Thiruvananthapuram. The city had been the nerve centre of all most all working class struggles in State Road Transport and State Electricity Board undertakings. And once the State of Kerala was formed in 1956, after the States Reorganization, working class struggles in the Malabar region were also brought all the way to Thiruvananthapuram for settlements. Foot marches, hunger marches, vehicle marches and demonstrations starting from northern centres culminated in Thiruvananthapuram followed by staging of demonstrations, *dharnas*, picketing and hunger satyagrahas in front of the Government Secretariat through out the year. Sometimes they led to police lathi charges and firing besides arrests of leaders and activists. During these episodes, normal life of the public in this city used to be dislocated. Students, youth and other sections of the public used to lend their support to the working class demonstrations and this often led to the enlargement of the struggle through the acquisition of new dimensions. Often they were interpreted as expressions of solidarity. However, they used to end up with the breakdown of law and order. Indeed, Thiruvananthapuram, being the capital

city of Kerala, had the distinction of being the Central hub of action for working class struggles in the State. They had become an integral part of the city's life.

Here we attempt to focus attention only on those working class struggles exclusively related to the Thiruvananthapuram district. Due to the peculiar nature of the sources of information available, it was not possible for us to strictly adhere to the chronological order in which these struggles were held. This documentation is only a humble beginning and we may have missed some important episodes and personalities.

8.2 SCAVENGERS' STRUGGLE

Scavenging workers belong to the most downtrodden sections of the community. In the early days, municipalities employed the scavenging workers to collect, transport and dispose off night soils from thousands of latrines. They were untouchables and worked from 5 am to 7 pm and enjoyed no holidays including Sundays. They did not have ration cards. Their monthly emoluments were Rs.7 in the Thiruvananthapuram Municipality. Their life and labour was deplorable. During their rounds moving from one house to another, they had to carry night soil collected in buckets, placed on their heads. They had to put the night soil in carts and they themselves had to haul them to be taken to the central night soil depot at Vallakkadavu. There, these scavenging workers, in their own cloth, had to jump into the tank and knead the night soil dumped there with their bare hands and legs for long hours until it is processed into usable manure. Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai became the saviour of the scavenging workers because he was the only leader who took up the challenge of mobilizing these unfortunate and neglected fellowmen to form a trade union and to fight for their legitimate rights and at least recognition as human beings by the society.

8.2.1 Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai

Born on August 29, 1910 as the son of Thamarassery Veettil Govindan Asan and Mannarghat Veettil Lakshmi Pillai in Panmana, Karunagappally in Kollam District, Ramakrishna Pillai completed his school education with the seventh standard. He became a regular visitor to the Ashram being run by Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai. During the Vaikom Satyagraha, Gandhiji had made a visit to the Ashram at Panmana and Ramakrishna Pillai had the fortune to see and hear Gandhiji there. Gandhiji had advised him to do harijan work, fight the evils of untouchability and liquor with instruments of non-violence and spread the message of Khadi among the people. P N Krishna

Pillai, the then Sub-Editor of *Malayalarajyam* newspaper was translating Gandhiji's speech. Ramakrishna Pillai went to Vaikom to participate in the Vaikom Satyagraha. There he met R.P. Govinda Pillai of Neduvathoor, K.P. Kesava Menon and M.K. Krishnan Nambiar who later became Agamananda Swamikal with his entry to the Kalady Adi Sankaracharya Ashram.

After his involvement in the Vaikom Satyagraha, Ramakrishna Pillai returned to the Ashram at Panmana. It was then Jawaharlal Nehru accompanied by his wife Kamala Nehru and daughter Indira Priyadarshini (who was then just 12 years old) were paying a visit to Travancore on their return journey from Ceylon. K.P. Kunjukrishna Pillai, V.Achutha Menon, C.Narayana Pillai, T.K.Narayana Pillai and Barrister A.K.Pillai, members of the Reception Committee, received them at Karamana near Thiruvananthapurazm. Ramakrishna Pillai was a young volunteer and he had the good fortune of climbing on to the footboard of Nehru's car and shouting slogans. Since there was a ban and prohibitory order in Thiruvananthapuram imposed by the Travancore Government, Nehru was not allowed to reach East Fort in Thiruvananthapuram.

8.2.2 Pillai joins Salt Satyagraha

When volunteers were directed to join the Salt Satyagraha in Kannur, Ramakrishna Pillai joined a team of 25. Ponnara Sridhar had gone to Bombay to join another team of volunteers. In the Team going to Kannur, besides Ramakrishna Pillai, K.C.Pillai and Amsi Narayana Pillai were also there. At Kannur, they stayed at Samuel Aaron's house. In the Kannur Salt Satyagraha, Venkataraman, the Magistrate, sentenced Kurur Namboodiripad, N.C.Sekhar, N.P.Kurukkal and several other volunteers including Ramakrishna Pillai to imprisonment and fine. After the term of sentence was over, Ramakrishna Pillai visited Bombay to see Ponnara. He terminated his journey at Pune and there Ramakrishna Pillai spent three months at the Servants of India Society which was being looked after by G.K.Devadhar, the Gandhian. During this stay Ramakrishna Pillai acquired the skills to become an excellent tailor specializing in making of *Jibbas*, a form of shirt for men. Ramakrishna Pillai did not continue for long in Pune. He travelled ticket less to return to Kollam.

8.2.3 Campaign against Foreign Cloth

Ramakrishna Pillai's interest then turned to the campaigns on prohibition. He was involved in this campaign with the assistance of K.P.Kayyalakkal, E.V.Krishna Pillai, C.V.Kunju Krishnan and Rama Warrier. Besides these campaigns, Ramakrishna Pillai also got involved in the

campaign for boycotting of foreign cloth and goods. C.I.Parameswaran Pillai was the President of this campaign committee and T.K.Narayana Pillai was the Secretary.

During this campaign, Rama Varma Thampuran gave a letter to Ramakrishna Pillai to go and meet Kesari Balakrishna Pillai, one of the greatest intellectuals of Kerala, who was running a Printing Press. Life of Ramakrishna Pillai revolved round Saraswathi Vilasom Hotel, Sri Kanta Vilasam and Rashtriya Hotel on the Main Road in Thiruvananthapuram. A camp for the volunteers was organized at Kannettumukku from where batch after batch of volunteers would proceed to picket shops selling foreign cloth. Ramakrishna Pillai was appointed as the volunteer captain. When the volunteers raised *Vandemataram*, the rowdies used to raise counter slogans. One day the police officer T.R.Raman Pillai and a batch of constables intercepted the volunteers at the camp and threatened them with dire consequences if they defied the ban order issued by the Government. However, next day about 26 volunteers went to defy the ban. Sivasankara Pillai, the Sub-Inspector requested them not to create trouble. Meanwhile L.A.Bishop, the Headquarters Commissioner of Police came down the Railway Station Road riding on a white horse with the intention of charging on to the crowd of volunteers. V.Nanu Pillai, a senior police officer, asked the volunteers to disperse. T.R.Raman Pillai reached the scene on a motorcycle. Police force reached there in an eight-seater vehicle and started attacking the volunteers with *lathis* (cane/baton). Volunteers were arrested and sent to the Cantonment station. There they were given a brutal treatment. A case was registered with the Court at Killippalam against the volunteers in the lock-up including Ramakrishna Pillai, N.P.Kurukkal, N.C.Sekhar, K.P.Punnan (Brunton as he was known), Ambalathara Velayudhan Nair and Manacaud Gopala Pillai. The Court remanded them to police custody at Poojappura.

8.2.4 Exposure to Scavengers' Problems

It was after the above campaigns that Ramakrishna Pillai decided to set up a Tailoring School, near the present headquarters of *Dhanvanthari Madham* Ayurvedic Dispensary near Pulimoodu. He started training harijans in this work, besides imparting them the knowledge of reading and writing. During this period Ramakrishna Pillai was exposed to the problems of the scavenging workers in Thiruvananthapuram. One day he mobilized them into a group at Chengalchoola and led a demonstration and march to the Bhakthivilas Palace, the residence of the Dewan. The police blocked the march at Vazhuthacaud junction. Ramakrishna Pillai insisted that being the representative of the scavenging workers, he be allowed to meet the Dewan. When this was conveyed to the Dewan's Office, it sent Vellangatt Raghavan

Pillai, the personal clerk of the Dewan. He told Ramakrishna Pillai that he and four others from the group could meet the Dewan. After receiving the representation and hearing the travails of the scavenging workers, the Dewan directed Bhaskaran Nair, who was then only a Travancore Civil Service – TCS – trainee in the Dewan's office to issue Ration Cards to all those scavengers who were duly recommended by Ramakrishna Pillai. It may be noted that Bhaskaran Nair in his later career had become the Chief Secretary of Kerala. The issue of Ration Cards to scavenging workers was a great achievement since that was symbolic to demonstrate that they were also citizens of the state and equal to their fellowmen whose night soil disposal constituted the means of their livelihood.

8.2.5 Karimadhom Paachi

By 1949 Ramakrishna Pillai acquired a brand name, Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai since he was running a popular tailoring school and producing and selling Khadar shirts called *Jibba* (*in Malayalam*). In 1949 he drafted a Memorandum on behalf of Scavenging Workers' Union demanding an increase in their wages and one holiday per week and submitted it to the Government, then headed by T.K.Narayana Pillai. Copies of this memorandum were sent to Gandhiji and Jai Prakash Narain. The Scavengers' Union had been formally registered in 1948, as the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation Workers' Union. It became a significant force in the union movement in Thiruvananthapuram and trade unions in other sectors and employers always sought its support in conducting their struggles. The striking power of the scavengers was unimaginably strong and they had demonstrated it more than once. If they strike for one day, the latrines in Thiruvananthapuram would start overflowing and life of people would become miserable as they themselves could not handle the night soil and dispose it. In one of the struggles by scavengers, the authorities imported Tamilian scavengers but the revolutionary minded scavenging workers countered them. They included such illustrious activists like Karimadhom Paachi and Vettukathi Chappayyan. Paachi was a unique lady brimming with communist revolutionary spirit. She got the replica of the Red Flag with its hammer and sickle etched in the skin of her breast and she used to tell her colleagues and leaders how proud she was in carrying this symbol close to her heart. Unfortunately, the present writer missed a golden opportunity of meeting her and recording her reminiscences about the good old days of scavengers' union movement. She passed away in 2001 as a trade union firebrand but remaining unknown and unrecognised by today's leadership in the movement.

8.2.6 Anirudhan's reminiscences

K.V.Surendranath and K.Anirudhan of the Communist Party had close association with Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai, particularly in getting involved in the organizing work for scavengers. In the early days Anirudhan used to accompany Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai to the residential colonies of scavenging workers located in slum areas in Thiruvananthapuram. In fact, some of the slums had been specially set up to house these unfortunate fellowmen. When the leaders visited the *chauls* (Slums), the scavengers used to extend hospitality by offering them black tea with jaggery. In the beginning, the leaders could not take even a mouthful of tea because of the foul smell and unhygienic environment in the colonies. But since the tea had been served with love and regard for them, the leaders closed their eyes and took tea in a single gulp. When the authorities brought blacklegs from Tamil Nadu to meet the emergency caused by the struggle by local scavenging workers, the leaders mobilized their ranks to fight them. Karimadhom Paachi, Soudhamma, Outhi Parvathy and Vettukathi Chappayyan were some of the unforgettable activists of the scavenging workers' union. Due to their struggle and sacrifices, today's municipal scavenging and conservancy employees have secured a fairly decent livelihood and some status in the society.

Critics used to question why an upper caste Hindu Nair like Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai should lead the low caste-scavenging workers and fight for their rights and decent livelihood. The demonstrations by scavenging workers usually presented a unique scene in Thiruvananthapuram. The workers often carried their work tools like brooms, spades, buckets etc. in their hand and shout slogans. They lived in different parts of Thiruvananthapuram in clusters called colonies. Some of these colonies were located in Thamalam, Karamana, Singarathoppu, Karimadhom and some colonies were named as Pound Colony, Gund Colony and so on. At some point in time, the need for a Colony Federation arose. The members and residents of these colonies constituted important vote banks and during the elections, political party leaders used to swamp the colonies with their attractive baits and promise of rich bonanza if they were elected to power. But over the years these downtrodden sections have realised through their experience that no political party had a permanent interest on them. After the elections are over no one would visit them.

8.2.7 Struggle of Sizers and Grass Cutters

Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai did not confine himself to serve the harijans, promote Khadi and organize scavenging and conservancy workers. He

devoted his attention to promote trade unions of bank employees, head load workers, cinema workers, transport workers etc. But Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai could not forget one important struggle. It was related to the Sizers and grass cutters attached to the cavalry regiment of the police. The sizers were those workers engaged in rubbing and massaging the body of horses and feeding them as per the schedules fixed by the authorities. Grass cutters were those deployed for cutting and supplying grass to the stables. In the early days these workers were paid two *annas* per 50 kilogram of grass delivered by them. Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai thought that this was a small amount not adequate for a minimum living. He therefore, mobilized these workers and formed the Sizers and Grass Cutters' Union and demanded that they be paid at least half a rupee per bundle of grass. When the authorities refused to respond, the workers went on a lightning strike. They did not massage the horses and they also did not cut and deliver the grass. They were expecting punishment through court martial. One day Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai, their leader, got a notice from the authorities to go over to the headquarters office at Pangode. P.P.Wilson accompanied Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai. ADC Kuttan Pillai and Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai were closeted for half an hour for discussion. During that meeting the ADC told Pillai that being both Nairs, why should there be a confrontation between them. He allowed all the demands of the Union.

8.3 MOBILIZATION OF TODDY AND COIR WORKERS

Here we discuss the early mobilization of toddy and coir workers who constituted a fairly large number of work forces in Thiruvananthapuram.

8.3.1 Mobilization of Toddy Tappers

According to K.V.Surendranath, the veteran CPI and AITUC leader of yester years, the union movement in early Thiruvananthapuram was virtually monopolized by the Revolutionary Socialist Party leader N.Sreekantan Nair. The Thiruvananthapuram Press Workers' Union was his showpiece. Its members were drawn from the work force employed in the Kesari and Swadeshabhimani Presses. Ponnara Sreedhar had also formed trade unions in this sector. N.K.Kumaran, Kulathingal Pothen and a few other activists began concentrating on the mobilization of toddy tapping workers by organizing small meetings at an open maidan near the Chackai temple. The tapping workers, after a day's labour, used to arrive at the spot with bottles of intoxicating toddy in their hands to listen to the leaders. Many of them drank the toddy and started small brawls among themselves while listening to the leaders. It was extremely difficult for the leaders to attract the attention of this unruly audience. Sometimes the toddy tappers would get fully drunk and start

singing vulgar couplets. In spite of this unfavourable and unfriendly environment, the leaders persisted with their efforts at mobilizing the workers. After some weeks they in fact succeeded in forming a trade union for toddy tappers in Thiruvananthapuram. One difficulty that the organizers faced was the scattered nature of their existence all over the district and exclusive attachments of these workers in the individual toddy shop or contractor.

8.3.2 Mobilization of Raw Husk Workers

Thiruvananthapuram district with Chirayinkeezhu, Pachalloor and Kovalam as its constituent units had plenty of coconut growing areas. In all of them many people were employed in the collection and transportation of raw coconut husk called, "Pachathondu" (green husk) which was an important raw material for manufacture of coir yarn. In the initial years, it was Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair who took a plunge into this segment and mobilized the raw husk workers to fight for their legitimate rights. Till then they had been under the exploitation of coconut husk dealers and those who owned and operated the catamarans. Since Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair had already organized the workers of country craft operating in the canals and back waters under the Navika Thozhilali Union, he had the expertise to organize the raw husk workers and bring them into a common network and solidarity with the country craft workers.

8.3.3 Views of U. Nilakantan

U.Nilakantan, the octogenarian leader of Kadakkavur, remembers the brutal exploitation of coir workers and raw husk workers of Perumathura, Azhoor, Kadhinamkulam, Murukkumpuzha and Kadakkavur in the early 1930s. There was a class of middle men known locally as "Perumpidimars" who were controlling the collection of green (raw) coconut husk, their immersion in canals and backwaters for retting, processing of retted husk and final manufacture of coir yarn. Indeed, there were thus a number of different classes or categories of workers having a wide variety of skills. A large number of women workers were employed by these cruel *Perumpidimars* who forced upon them very long working hours extending from dawn to dusk and low and at times below subsistence wages. Nilakantan had seen, while he was functioning as a Teacher in Puthukurichy, working mothers sitting very close to the banks of canals and backwaters toiling on their work while small babies were bound by rope to prevent them from moving away and falling into the water. In those days the *Perumpidimars* used to supply some minimum quantity of unwholesome food to workers as their reward and avoid paying them any cash wages. The life and labour of these workers of this coir

sector were thus pitiable and inhuman. This prompted Nilakantan to join the State Congress and devote his life to the upliftment of the coir workers in the region.

Though Nilakantan was working as Teacher at St.Michael's school at Puthukurichy, on a contractual salary of Rs.25 per month, the manager of the school used to give him only just Rs.13. Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the Dewan had issued instructions that persons who were supporting the State Congress should not be given employment anywhere. Under this pretext, the school management suspended Nilakantan, who being a born rebel was just unacceptable to them. This suspension gave Nilakantan plenty of time to devote to the mobilization of the poor coir workers. In those days raw husk used to be brought to Kadakkavur region from Thiruvallom and Pachalloor. For this, country crafts were used. With his ceaseless hard work, Nilakantan could organize a number of trade unions for each category of workers engaged in the coir sector. They included among others the unions for country craft workers, husk retting workers and coir spinning and yarn making workers. Along with them he could form Copra Workers' Union, Handloom Workers' Union and Cinema Workers' Union. Nilakantan also had played an important role in organizing Coir Workers' Societies. In 1954, he contested the General Elections as a candidate of the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) and became an MLA. In that capacity he could raise the issues and problems of coir workers in the Assembly.

Nilakantan led a march of the Kerala Coir Thozhilali Union to Thiruvananthapuram and at the end of it he held a Satyagraha in front of the house of the Industries Minister, P.S.Nataraja Pillai. As a part of this the Minister was gheraoed. It was then that the Minister agreed to appoint a Minimum Wages Committee for Coir Workers and Nilakantan was appointed as one of its members. This committee recommended an increase in the wage rate from 14 *Chakrams* (half a rupee) to Rs.1 and also a variable DA. This was a major victory. When the communists entered the trade union scene, U. Nilakantan decided to withdraw from active trade union work.

8.3.4 Struggles by Coir Workers

Anathalavattom Anandan is another prominent trade union leader in the coir industry. While studying in school he had seen at close quarters several struggles by coir workers in the early 1950s. The average daily wage of coir workers was then only 8 *annas* (half a rupee). The early struggles were for raising it to 9 *annas*. Anathalavattom Anandan used to join the marches and demonstrations held by coir workers of Azhoor and Kadakkavoor initially out of curiosity. In those days no one was allowed to enter the *Muthalali*'s

(capitalists') compound. The workers were totally subservient to them who were to be revered and respected for giving them their daily bread. It was difficult for leaders to convince these illiterate workers the need for collective mobilization. There used to be frequent physical clashes between trade union leaders/front line union activists and the *goondas* of the employers. They resulted in injuries to many.

Anandan's uncle was a coir businessman but he did not like to join his uncle knowing well about the scale of inhuman exploitation of coir workers by people like his own uncle. His background on NCC cadet training in school fetched him selection to the Army but Anandan did not accept it. The uncle then asked him to take up work as a Ticket Examiner in the Railways, which also Anandan refused. This caused him expulsion from his own house. He decided to join the CPI and take up both political work and trade union work simultaneously. After working as General Secretary of the Travancore Coir Workers' Union for nearly two and a half decades, with the late Suseela Gopalan as its President, Anandan has risen to lead the CITU affiliated Kerala Coir Workers' Centre as its General Secretary. Ananthalavattom Anandan cited the following important struggles by coir workers.

8.3.5 Struggle against machines

There had been regular struggles demanding increase in the wages of coir workers. Some of them succeeded in securing some benefits. But the struggle against the introduction husk beating and defibring machines was the most notable among the struggles. The unions opposed the machines on the ground that coir being a labour intensive industry, it would adversely hit the workers by reducing the person day employment available to them. Beating the retted coir husk to extract the coir fibre was a piece of work exclusively done by women workers of all ages. Machines would displace them and suitable alternative employment was difficult to find. In the Perumathura area Muslim women workers predominated. Even fully pregnant women workers used to toil in this field.

The struggle first started by blocking the movement of green raw husk to a coir capitalist's work yard where husk beating and defibring machines had been installed. The agitated workers used force and dumped the entire consignment of husk into the backwaters along with pushing down the country craft into the deep waters. The police arrived on the scene and they opened fire on the workers, injuring many. In the confusion the workers destroyed a few machines. Finally the State Government was forced to enact a law banning the use of labour displacing machines from the coir industry. Recent debates on the chronic problems of the coir industry had revealed that

struggles like the one mentioned above to oppose the introduction of machines were not conducive to the much desired modernization and technological upgradation of coir industry. Many trade union leaders now have started feeling that they had done a mistake by opposing mechanization. But some of them continue to believe that under the circumstances prevailing in the 1950s, when subsistence work prevented starvation deaths among the coir workers, there was no alternative other than oppose any kind of labour displacing technology in the industry. It was a time when, to escape from starvation, coir workers had been forced to eat oyster meat. Several workers had been reported dead after eating poisonous oyster meat.

8.3.6 Issue of Coir workers turns political

When Kerala came under the CPI-Congress coalition Ministry led by C. Achutha Menon in 1970, the CPI (M) and its supporting trade unions affiliated to the CITU began to focus their struggles against the Government. However, this was described as a political strategy by the CPI (M) against the CPI. The CITU controlled unions of coir workers announced a Statewide agitation to highlight the problems facing the coir industry and its workers. As a first step in this direction, a Vehicle march was held from Vazhamuttom to Kasaragod in 1972 led by Ananthalavattom Anandan. Another march was flagged off from Kanhangad to Thiruvananthapuram to match it. A.K.Gopalan led a Poverty march from Kasaragode to Thiruvananthapuram that lasted 41 days during 1975. C.B.C. Warrier, P R. Vasu, Suseela Gopalan, wife of A.K.G., and Ananthalavattom Anandann participated in it as leading figures. E.M.S.Namboodiripad at East Fort received this march in the capital. The marchers had planned to forcibly enter the Legislative Assembly. While they reached the over bridge junction, the Speaker of the Assembly intervened and using his goodwill and assurances, he succeeded in appeasing the leaders. After that the coir workers in the march were asked to disburse peacefully, thus avoiding a big disaster.

8.3.7 “Job or Jail” struggle

During the Emergency days of 1977, many CPI (M) and CITU leaders were forced to go underground. However, some struggles were still taking place. The coir workers in one such struggle observed a massive demonstration shouting “Job or Jail” and “Fill the Jails” in front of the Attingal Court. When they started picketing, the police came to arrest and remove them to distant places. A large number of women coir workers participated in this picketing. When they were arrested, they told the police that they should be taken to police custody and locked up in jail so that at

least they could get some food to eat. They pleaded that this was an alternative to their real situation in which they had neither jobs nor food to eat. When the women workers were produced before the Magistrate, they repeated their plea. The Magistrate had a free exchange of views with them and finally he ordered the police to take the picketers to the jail and keep them there for two weeks. Thus with a sympathetic Magistrate the agitating women coir workers secured protection from total starvation. Another batch of male coir workers with red garlands in their neck came from Paravur to Attingal and joined the picketing but they had bottles of toddy liquor with them pleading that this liquor was their subsistence as they had neither jobs nor food. The Magistrate sent them also to the jail.

8.3.8 March to Parliament House

The CITU unions of coir workers organized a big demonstration of 1000 volunteers before the Parliament House in New Delhi to register their protest against the Government of India's decision to promote brown fibre. As years passed by, Kerala witnessed a coir industry crisis of a serious nature. A shortage of green husk pushed up the husk prices, while due to the peculiarities of the market for coir and coir products, final product prices were falling. Under these circumstances, the Government was forced to impose controls on Husk Prices. Restrictions were put on movement of green husk from one region to another. Following this people refused to sell green husk at the controlled price. The trade unions took it as a challenge and a serious threat to their employment prospects. They forcibly acquired country crafts, collected green husk, transported them to processing centres and immersed them in husk retting spots. One activist Vettoor Raman was arrested. Women coir workers picketed the police van and got them arrested. But they were released later.

8.3.9 Some Episodes

In another episode, the coir workers were picketing the Post office at Attingal. Police made a brutal lathi charge on the workers among whom a large number were women with strong determination to win their struggle. They were vigilant during the night when the leaders went to sleep. They intervened whenever the coir producers tried to move the country crafts laden with green husk to their processing centres.

In one memorable incident, a woman coir worker, instilled with a revolutionary image, forgot to take her baby along with her when she had rushed to join a group of picketers on hearing that their leaders had been

arrested by the police. Anathalavattom Anandan who was guiding the agitation, on hearing this, sent a note through a police constable asking her co-workers to bring that baby along with the next batch of picketers. Anandan has another unforgettable incident coming on to his mind. It was the case of Ambika, a young coir worker arrested in an agitation just a few days before her scheduled marriage. Since the State was undergoing an indefinite strike by the Non-gazetted Officers (NGOs) of the State Government, most offices had been paralysed so that there was no way to get Ambika a bail to enable her to consecrate her marriage with her groom. When Anandan contacted the groom and explained the situation, the latter told him that he was only too proud to have such a spirited bride who was committed to fight for workers' cause.

Today, the coir workers in Thiruvananthapuram as well as in other parts of the State have secured several benefits including minimum wages, DA, bonus and even social security measures like medical aid and old age pension disbursed through Welfare Fund for coir workers. In spite of this, the future of coir workers continues to be uncertain due to the chronic problems facing the Industry. Government Policies on Floor prices, Export prices, Import liberalization, shortage of green husk, unhealthy and unethical competition from neighbouring states, deficiencies of coir cooperatives, building up of excess stocks, general fall in domestic demand for coir, technological backwardness in production and processing, and continuation of ancient modes and instruments of exploitation have all made the life of the ordinary coir workers miserable. Consequently, the coir regions are witnessing stagnation. There is a high degree of withdrawal of workers from this sector due to relatively low wages prevailing there. While coir workers are paid Rs.50 to 60 for a day's hard work, work in the informal sector including unskilled work and head load work which require no special skills would fetch Rs.100 to 150 a day. Since the economic status of coir workers has become weak, and their hopes and dreams of getting them improved by struggles had been shattered, their interest in trade unions has already started declining. Today the coir centres have ceased to be active centres of struggles.

8.4 STRUGGLES IN THE HILLS

The hill taluks of Thiruvananthapuram District consist of Kattakkada, Nedumangad, Palode, Vithura, Aryanad and several other plantation estate areas. We document some of the notable struggles from them.

8.4.1 Market Struggle in Kattakkada

Kattakkada Balakrishna Pillai is 79 years old and had been a lone fighter against injustice against Harijans, the poor and downtrodden. In 1943 Balakrishna Pillai was attracted to the Communist Party. With the help of Sivasankaran and Madaswamy Pillai, he used to sell books published in the Soviet Union in and around Kattakkada. In those days Harijans were served tea only in coconut shells and not in cups or glasses by hotels and teashops owned by Nairs and other upper castes. The Harijans were allowed only at the backyards of the hotels. Balakrishna Pillai could not digest this kind of discrimination and ill treatment of the Harijans/untouchables. He organized the Harijans and along with them forced their entry to hotels and teashops. The owners then closed down their shops and they remained so for nearly 15 days. Balakrishna Pillai and his colleagues declared that if the shops reopened, they would force their entry into it again. Mediation efforts were initiated. Finally one teashop owner Raghavan Pillai came forward to reopen his teashop "Jagadambika" and soon others followed suit. However, some of the teashop owners became vindictive and they began to overcharge the Harijans who came to their shops. Considering these new tactics, Balakrishna Pillai instructed his harijan friends to go to tea shops, eat whatever they wanted, but pay only for a cup of tea. This new strategy paid dividends and the owners of teashops agreed to withdraw all kinds of discrimination against Harijans in Kattakkada.

Another instance of great injustice was the extraction of high amounts of market charges by market contractors from all those who made use of the market for selling their goods and wares. In those days, the revenue authorities used to auction markets to select contractors for a sum and they in turn would collect market charges and fees. The Tehsildar was always in collusion with the contractors. The Kattakkada market had been auctioned by contractor Gopala Pillai, son of Kunnathu Raghavan Pillai of Ayirappara land. Gopala Pillai then employed a few giant Muslim *goondas* to collect arbitrarily determined exorbitant market charges/fees form the poor petty producers and fisher women. These *goondas* had a notorious track record as criminals and jailbirds. As per rules, the market contractor should not collect any market fee or charge from those who bring their goods or produce to the market by head load, for sale. If any one brought two eggs for sale, the *goondas* of the market contractor would forcibly take away one egg.

In those days, fisherwomen vendors used to bring basket loads of fish carried on their heads from places as far away as Vizhinjam to the Kattakkada market. The market *goondas* would force these women vendors to surrender at least half of their consignment. Kattakkada Balakrishna Pillai then

organized a Market Struggle to put an end to these anti-poor activities of the *goondas*. Pillai mobilized a few physically well-built and daring youth and armed them with lethal weapons to make an intervention if the market *goondas* repeated their acts of extortions. Pillai openly declared that rules did not permit any one to collect charges from any one who brought their produce to the market on head load. The team of youth under the leadership of Balakrishna Pillai decided to picket the market. At a secret meeting Pillai told his team that he himself would first carry some goods on head load and enter the market and if the *goondas* obstructed, the team members should immediately intervene and using their lethal weapons attack the *goondas* to drive them away for ever from the Kattakkada market. Balakrishnan Pillai and his trusted colleague Sukumaran were the first to enter the market by carrying baskets of fish collected from the fisherwomen from Vizhinjam, who had just a few minutes back had been asked to pay the *goondas* their usual *Thalakkasu* (head fee). Following Balakrishna Pillai's sudden gate crashing into the market the members of his youth team took hold the baskets of fish from fisherwomen and carried them on their heads into the market while a huge crowd of people were eagerly awaiting the results of this big struggle. The revenue officials and police simply stood shocked at the sudden turn of events and defiance showed by Balakrishna Pillai and his team. But the Kattakkada market struggle ended on an amicable settlement that in future all market fees would be collected directly by village officials. P.K.Abdulla, the then Sub-Divisional magistrate had shown some sympathy towards Balakrishna Pillai and never took action against him.

Balakrishna Pillai had been elected to the State Assembly in the general elections held in 1954 and also in 1956. Though Pillai stood firm with the CPI, for some years, he changed his mind on account of certain internal squabbles in the party and left the CPI. In the 1957 election, the CPI chose K.C.George as its candidate for the Aryanad constituency, though many thought that, being an outsider, the voters might not support him. But if the Party chosen Balakrishna Pillai as the candidate, his success was assured. The CPI had considered one Sahadevan as an alternative candidate. One day K.C.George walked into Balakrishna Pillai's room in the MLA hostel and sought Pillai's help in his winning the Aryanad seat. He also requested Pillai to accompany him during the election campaigns and to introduce him to the voters as K.C. George, the candidate of the CPI. Balakrishna Pillai vowed that he would devote all his energies to get K.C.George elected. He made this assurance to the CPI also. But when election results were declared many of the CPI stalwarts found them miserably defeated. They included T.V.Thomas in Alappuzha, K.R. Gowri in Cherthala and K.C. George in Aryanad. When criticism arose, K.C.George strongly defended Balakrishna Pillai and told the party not to underrate Pillai's honesty and integrity and commitment to the

Party. However, Pillai soon decided to quit the CPI and within a short period gravitated to the Congress.

8.4.2 Estate Struggles

In the chapter on the union movement in the Plantations (ch.X), a number of episodes relating to estate struggles held in Thiruvananthapuram have been documented. Therefore, in this section we confine to some episodes that were deliberately left out from that chapter. One reason for this approach was that in documenting the history of trade union movement in the Thiruvananthapuram district, one could not simply avoid mentioning about the working class struggles in the plantation estates since these estates have an extensive coverage in the eastern region of the district. In fact, some of the estates here were the first to be set up in the erstwhile State of Travancore. The main crops in these estates had been Tea and Rubber. The estates had been owned and controlled by European companies as well as native companies. But in the matter of exploitation of estate labour, they were competing to excel each other.

8.4.2.1 Formative period of Unionisation

Kattakkada Balakrishna Pillai remembers the formative period of uniosation among the workers of plantation estates in the eastern regions of Thiruvananthapuram. V. Sankar and Annamma Thomas were the leading figures in the State Congress who worked with plantation labour unions. In the 1950s, the Brymore Estate was under the management of Salma Brothers. Life and labour of workers there were pitifully poor. Complaints regarding them were brought to the attention of Annamma Thomas who was then DCC member. After leaving the CPI, Balakrishna Pillai had been running the Sreerekha Printing Press at Kattakkada. Following a call from V. Sankar, Pillai decided to plunge into trade union work in the estates. V. Sankar and Pillai took a jeep and reached Idinjar. Pillai stayed there, distributed union membership forms to estate workers, studied labour laws and rules and drafted memoranda of demands for submission to the management.

8.4.2.2 Violation of Labour Laws

The management was openly violating labour laws. It paid low wages and denied legitimate dues to its workers. Sometimes, even the wages were not distributed. Under these circumstances, a struggle became inevitable. Balakrishna Pillai sold his press and spent the proceeds to help the estate

workers. He met Mathai Manjooran, the Labour Minister and requested him to visit the estate to make an on-the-spot study of the conditions. The Minister accompanied by the Labour Commissioner and the District Labour Officer visited the estate and the workers of the estate had gathered in large strength to voice their complaints. The workers told the Minister that the management had refused to make workers permanent even after they completed seven years of continuous service. Estate workers were not given maternity benefits or paid leave. The line quarters were uninhabitable with no source of drinking water. Mathai Manjooran was moved by the workers' complaints and he promised to call a conciliation conference. He asked Balakrishna Pillai not to raise any legal points during the conference. On the assurance of the Minister, Balakrishna Pillai announced the withdrawal of the strike.

8.4.2.3 Sarma agrees for settlement

Balakrishna Pillai knew that Sarma, the proprietor of the estate, was a tough person and so he decided to approach him through G.Krishnan Nair, the company's legal adviser. Soon Pillai got access to Sarma and struck up a good understanding with him. Pillai told Sarma that he would start a school for estate workers' children, but Sarma should meet the cost of teachers' salary. The good relations between Sarma and Balakrishna Pillai brought an amicable settlement of the struggle in Brymore estate and gradually conditions of life and labour there started improving.

8.4.2.4 Union's action in other Estates

The names of Alamelu and Saraswathy (sisters), Fernandez and E.S. Subbayya stand out in the history of unionisation of estate workers in Thriuvananthapuram. They attempted to form trade unions in the estates in Ponmudi and Bonakkad overcoming many adversities. But very few in the present day movement have any knowledge about them. Their life, work and contribution to the trade union movement have not been documented and that was a big loss.

8.4.2.5 Struggles in Merchiston Estate

After the formation of Travancore-Cochin Estate Workers' Union, the Birlas bought the Merchiston Tea Estate. The change of ownership was a big blow to all efforts at mobilization. The management brought *goondas* from Tamil Nadu to break up the nascent union and threaten and drive away union activists. Provoked by this anti-union move, workers, one day, pelted stones

at the Manager's bungalow. A case was registered against Subbayya and his colleague Karippur Srikumar and this case had to be fought till it reached the High Court.

8.4.2.6 Bonakkad Struggle

At Bonakkad Estate, Subbayya and Karippur Srikumar initiated a struggle for securing a second *cumbly* (woollen blanket). As per the rules, the company had to provide a second blanket if the estate was situated at a height of 2500 ft or above. The management claimed that the Bonakkad estate was situated at below 2500 ft and therefore could not supply a second blanket. This decision sparked off a struggle called second blanket struggle. The leaders commenced a hunger strike that lasted 17 days. The satyagrahis were removed to the hospital as their health conditions got deteriorated fast. The State Government referred the dispute to adjudication by industrial tribunal. Ponnara Sridhar extended all help. Meanwhile the Chief Inspector of Plantations filed a case in the High Court. During the litigation, on the basis of the report submitted by the Chief Inspector, the Government issued orders directing the company to supply the second blanket. The management then threatened that they would go up to the Supreme Court. During the struggles, some managers were gheraoed too. Ultimately the management was forced to concede the demand for a second blanket.

8.4.2.7 Travancore-Cochin Estate Workers' Union

Subbayya and K.P. Neelakanta Pillai in the formative period guided this union. In those days exclusively the tribal people, Kanikkars, who used to subsist on forest products, inhabited Kallar. They had very little contact with the outside world. When estates were set up, some of the *Kanikkars* were employed there and the management could easily exploit them. When Subbayya and Neelakanta Pillai decided to form a union for the estate workers, they had to undertake arduous journey into the deep forest facing physical risk from attack of wild animals. They built some sheds using twigs and grass for their "uncomfortable stay" in the forest. During daytime they went to the estates to meet workers. Gradually, the workers, after listening to the leaders, decided to become members of the union. This union did function for some time but soon division and dissensions arose. The office bearers were criticized for not presenting the accounts of the union before the general body. When things were found to get out of control, a new union called the Plantation Workers' Union (PWU) was registered and in this Karippur Srikumar had played a leading role. It was a pro-Congress union. The PWU extended its operations, to Brymore, Inverkad and Panayam Ponmudi Estates.

Parameswaran Pillai, Palode Ravi, Vithura Sasi, V.Sankar and Karippur Srikumar were leading the pro-Congress INTUC trade unions in the estates. Among them Srikumar has virtually withdrawn from active political and trade union work at the time of writing this. In spite of unionisation, today the conditions of estate workers in Thiruvananthapuram continue to be deplorable. Most of the Estates are near closure. They have not been providing adequate employment. They also do not pay wages for work done. Starvation deaths are reported. The workers do not have any access to health care or schooling for their children. Some trade unions have notoriously become outright pro-management organizations. Labour laws are flouted openly. Officials of the Labour Department have failed in carrying out their functions. When conciliation conferences are held, representatives of employers deliberately keep themselves absent and decisions are deferred to the disadvantage of the poor workers. Starvation deaths and suicides among estate workers are often reported in the media. Today many employers are trying to sell their estates and go away. If this happens in a big way, thousands of estate workers would be losing the only source of livelihood available to them. In one or two cases of closure or imminent closure, the workers themselves had come forward with the proposal of taking over the estate and running them by themselves. But these efforts did not succeed due to legal hurdles and shortage of funds. Given these conditions, the trade union leaders in these estates have suggested that the State Government should take some initiative to resolve the issue urgently. Otherwise the estate sector in Thiruvananthapuram would be facing a great human tragedy.

8.4.2.8 Some more episodes

Before we conclude this section, mention must be made about some episodes in estate labour struggles in Bonakkad, Ponmudy, Merchiston and Brymore. One major problem facing estate labour is that they do not have alternative source of livelihood. They do not have any land of their own. They do not have any skills other than the ones they possessed for executing the estate work.

There was a struggle jointly conducted in 1994 by all trade unions in the estates. Aryadan Mohammed was the Labour Minister at that time. As a part of the struggle, the leaders conducted a hunger strike in front of the Merchiston estate. The Government convened a meeting of the Plantation Labour Committee but no settlement could be reached there on the issue of minimum wages. Then as a result the Government demonstrated its might by Aryadan Mohammed arranging to issue a Notification. Fixation of minimum wages by Notification was a bold decision.

When a dispute arose in Bonakkad estate, the local management told the unions that they were unable to announce a settlement and pushed the burden onto the headquarters of the company at Kochi. The union leaders then took the struggle to the Kochi office functioning at the Wellington Islands and a Satyagraha was started that lasted 42 days. Finally the Labour Minister intervened and a settlement was reached.

K.T. Thomas, the owner of the Ponmudi Estate, had declared a lockout without informing the workers or their union leaders. This led to a long struggle and litigation that was taken upto the Kerala High Court and the Supreme Court. The trade unions, as a part of this struggle, took out a demonstration and a long march from the estate to the gates of the Government Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. Thousands of workers and trade union activists participated in this march held by foot. This estate was finally transferred to one Chettiarppan and for some time the estate worked well bringing great relief to the workers. The ownership of the estate changed again and for some years it was run by one Kalathil Kurian, a Railway contractor. This incident is cited here to show that some of the estate owners maintain their estates with only secondary interest. This indeed does not auger well from the plantation industry in Thiruvananthapuram since this is a peculiar problem confined mostly.

8.4.2.9 Starvation Deaths, 2001

Recently when media reported starvation deaths among estate workers, political leaders and officials rushed to the spot, particularly the Bonakkad estate and they secured unprecedented media coverage. Nobody had turned their attention to the estate workers till then who had not been getting their wages for more than 16 months. It was C.P. John of the All India Centre of Trade Unions (AICTU) who took the bold step to declare that what was happening in Bonakkad was not a mere labour issue and he was taking the issue to the State Human Rights Commission. Following this, the Commission had to intervene in the matter and quickly the Government machinery started working. The estate workers were promised interim relief, free ration, free medical care and promise of back wages and steady work. But none of these was fulfilled even after two years.

8.5 SOME NOTABLE STRUGGLES

As mentioned earlier, Thiruvananthapuram, being the capital city, witnessed a number of struggles. Some of them were related to public sector

undertakings in this locality. We make an attempt to document some of them in the following pages.

8.5.1 Transport union struggles

A major milestone in the history of trade union movement in Thiruvananthapuram was the formation of the State Transport Employees' Union by Muthukaruppa Pillai, T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai and K.V.Surendranath. This story has been elaborated elsewhere in a separate chapter (see Ch.IX). Here we do make a brief reference to some of the events. The unionisation was triggered off by an incident in which some superior officer in the Pappanamcode Workshop beat one Challappan, a worker who was alleged/accused of stealing the lunch packet belonging to another. It was T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai and Muthukaruppa Pillai who took the initiative in forming a union for the non-pensionable employees in State transport which later got transformed into the State Transport Employees' Union affiliated to the AITUC.

The office of this Union was functioning from a building near the Pulimoodu Junction. Gopalan, a painter from West Fort and Chellappan from Vakkom were running the office work. Soon K.P.Neelakanta Pillai and K.Balakrsihnan organized a rival union supported by the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP). In the formative period, the leaders like K.V.Surendranath had to work from underground or hideouts, also sometimes called shelters. One such hideout was the house of Mannanthala Balakrishna Pillai where the activists of the State Transport Employees' Union used to meet regularly. K.V.Surendranath remembers the quickness with which T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai handled certain issues and formulated strategies to bring about settlement. At one stage the members of the Union wanted T.V.Thomas to become their President and George Chadayanmury as Secretary. Pattom Thanu Pillai also once held the Presidentship, but when he became the Prime Minister of the State soon after independence, he became a born destroyer of the union by denying even the legitimate rights of the workers in State Transport.

One of the struggles that was staged by transport employees in Thiruvananthapuram was the go-slow episode. In this episode, the staff saw to it that a transport bus took four hours to make the trip from East Fort to Sasthamangalam junction knowing well that driving a bus at a slow pace would definitely damage the engine of the bus. This episode happened during the period of Pattom's Government. Pattom set in motion a series of repressive measures. There were lathi charges and police firing at several places, killing a few and injuring several. It was one of the darkest days in the

history of union movement in the State. A more or less comparable period was during the period when R.Balakrishna Pillai was holding the Transport portfolio. But by that time there were a number of unions in State Transport besides the State Transport Employees' Union. One of the significant impacts of the unionisation of transport employees was the feeling that other sections of government employees could also organize unions to protect their interests. Trade unions spread to government employees, shops and commercial establishments, Electricity Board and employees of banks, colleges, schools, water works, universities and cultural institutions. Thiruvananthapuram became the chief centre of such activities and networking among unions.

8.5.2 Struggle by Salt Pan workers, 1953

In the southern district of old Travancore-Cochin state, Kanyakumari, there were a number of small and large saltpans called *Uppalams*. The conditions of work and wages in them were very bad. Socialist leader, T.S.Ramaswamy was the first activist who was attracted to these *uppalam* workers and he, after several attempts, succeeded in mobilizing them into a trade union. His position as an MLA carried some weight and respect. But when attempts to establish direct negotiations with the wily *uppalam* owners, T.S.Ramaswamy, had to start a hunger Satyagraha in the beginning of the second week of May 1953. This Satyagraha was also meant to register a protest against the insensitivity of the State Government. Ramaswamy commenced his hunger Satyagraha in front of the office of the PSP.¹ According to him, the *uppalam* workers were carrying on their struggle for well over two decades but it was recently that they had formed a union for collective struggle. In 1951 the Government had called a tripartite conference and a settlement had been reached. However, this had not been implemented even after a lapse of two years. When the trade union applied pressure on account of Ramaswamy's hunger Satyagraha, the Government agreed to appoint C.S.Lakshmanan Pillai as a Court of Enquiry. The struggle had whole-hearted support of the PSP in which Ramaswamy was an elected MLA. The leader of the PSP, Pattom Thanu Pillai himself had given an ultimatum to the State Government when he addressed a public meeting at the Pazhavangady Maidan.

On the basis of the assurance given by the Government, Ramaswamy ended his hunger Satyagraha. Panampally Govinda Menon assured Ramaswamy that before he left for Geneva to attend a meeting, he wanted to see Ramaswamy end his Satyagraha. The Thiruvananthapuram Mayor, Balakrishnan Nair and Congress leader Sivathanu Pillai had worked very hard to bring pressure on the Government, which agreed to withdraw all cases registered against the workers and the union leaders.

The so-called industrial dispute in the *uppalams* did not end since there arose a writ appeal filed by T.V.Krishna Iyer. His argument was that the State Government had no right to interfere in the activities of *Uppalams*. Only the Central Government could initiate the proceedings of a Court of Enquiry. The dispute was thus continued, pushing the workers back into their old conditions.

8.5.3 The historic Hunger Strike of N. Sreekantan Nair

The gates of the Government Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram have witnessed innumerable working class struggles, demonstrations, *dharnas* and hunger strikes even from the days of Princely Rule. Among them a few need to be mentioned as they were of very great historic significance. One such was the hunger strike conducted by none other than the veteran N.Sreekantan Nair. As mentioned elsewhere, he started his political and trade union work in Alappuzha in the 1930s and later deputed to Kollam to organize trade unions in Kollam. After this, he concentrated his work in Kollam, later parted company with the Communists, and established the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) and then the RSP. His heroic struggles particularly the A.D. Cotton Mill episode and the subsequent Chavara Mineral Workers' march to Kollam have been discussed elsewhere. When associates on both sides breached the unity formula agreed jointly by T.V. Thomas and N.Sreekantan Nair, both of them were sad at the turn of events.

N.Sreekantan Nair got elected from the Kollam-Mavelikkara dual constituency to the Parliament as well as from the Chavara constituency to the State Assembly, but he decided to go to the Parliament. However, he was very active in the trade union movement. Parur T.K.Narayana Pillai headed the State Government. Panampally Govinda Menon was holding the Finance and Labour portfolio. In both Thiruvananthapuram and Kollam the trade union movement was dominated by RSP supported unions and Panampally was looking forward for an opportunity to cut the RSP to size. The Communist Party and the AITUC unions had also started functioning after the ban on them was lifted. They started violating the TV – Sreekantan formula and went on forming rival trade unions posing a serious threat to Sreekantan Nair's unions and creating a number of inter-union clashes. During that time there was a mass popular agitation in Chavara against the evil effects of unscientific illimenite sand mining and the local people wanted N.Sreekantan Nair to take up their cause. This almost synchronized with the Government's move to enter into a settlement with minority unions. This really provoked Sreekantan Nair and he announced that he would commence a hunger strike before the Secretariat Gates.

Once the hunger strike started, the Secretariat gates and surrounding places were transformed into a tension-ridden battlefield. People came in large numbers to see him and offer their greetings and support. Many of them spent their nights along with him in the Satyagraha shed. People kept vigil through out 24 hours. Every day evening popular rallies and public meetings were held. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, P.Kesavadev, K.Balakrishnan, C.N.Sreekantan Nair, N.S.P.Panicker, T.P.Gopalan, T.K.Divakaran, Baby John and Prakkulam Bhasi were the regular speakers. One evening a large group of coconut tree climbers paraded the main road in Thiruvananthapuram holding high their work tools. The leaders appealed to all those workers who had been engaged in struggles in their respective establishments to stop them temporarily and rally around Sreekantan Nair's historic hunger strike before the Secretariat. According to K.C.Vamadevan, the workers of Travancore Textiles in Nemom did not follow the directive. One Chithira Madhavan Pillai led the struggle there. When Sreekantan Nair saw Madhavan Pillai near the *Samara Pandal*, he beckoned him to come closer. When he came closer to Sreekantan Nair, the latter gave him a strong blow to his neck shouting at him why he did not follow the directive to call off all struggles. At this Madhavan Pillai was reported to have advised Sreekantan Nair, with great respects, that since the hunger strike had crossed the five day mark, he should give greater care to his health.

The *Blitz Weekly* of Bombay used to give detailed coverage to Sreekantan Nair's hunger strike along with photos. In an evening meeting, P.Kesavadev reminded Panampally that he should not light his cigarette as he was sitting in a fireworks godown, implying that this style of handling Sreekantan Nair's hunger strike was to be changed immediately. On the eighth day of the hunger strike K.C.S.Mani, the adventurist who had slashed the cheeks of Sir C.P.Ramaswami Iyer, called Panampally over the phone and told him that he had come to Thiruvananthapuram just to "see him" and asked him to take immediate steps to settle *Sreekantan Chettan*'s demands.

During the hunger strike, the communists including T.V.Thomas held a campaign alleging that Sreekantan Nair's agitation lacked mass militancy and therefore it should be defeated. However as days passed by the Government realized that they cannot wait for long and took steps to settle the issues. Soon Sreekantan Nair called off his hunger strike.

8.5.4 Struggle at Rubber Works

Thiruvananthapuram Rubber Works was a prestige project of the Travancore State. Here N.Sreekantan Nair formed a trade union and since then the Dewan Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer was waiting for an opportunity to

destroy it and at the same time eliminate Sreekantan Nair and leaders like him who were openly questioning his actions. Indeed Sreekantan Nair was at that time very active in the movement for Responsible Government. His anti-Dewan and anti-Maharaja speeches were provocative. Sreekantan Nair's trade union work was being assisted by people like K.Balakrishnan, K.Pankajakshan, Bhaskaran Nair and K.R.Chummar (who later became the Resident Editor of *Malayala Manorama*), all of them being activists of the KSP.

When the employees of the Rubber Works commenced a struggle to get some of their grievances redressed, the Dewan took a tough stand and threatened their union that he would close down the factory and make the life of the employees miserable. It was in this context that Sreekantan Nair openly challenged the Dewan. Nair declared that if the Dewan closed the factory, he would see that the factory was burnt and its ashes immersed in the nearby Arabian Sea. On hearing this challenge, the Dewan became quiet and realised that he was handling a dangerous person and therefore should be more tactful in future.

During the days of the EMS Ministry (1957-59), the RSP leaders alleged that Communist Party was indulging in sinister campaigns against the RSP leadership at the same time trying to extend their influence on the working class of Thiruvananthapuram, most of whom being under the RSP leadership. This approach of the Communists led to frequent confrontation between the two groups in several units including the Rubber Works. The RSP unions were having a monopoly in Water Works and Drainage, Rubber Works, and PWD Workshop. The Communists and their Government together tried to create issues like denying certain benefits to workers belonging to the RSP Union. These workers were subjected to police cases and brutality.

In the Rubber Works, the RSP unions had been banned during the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle. It may be remembered that it was K.C.S.Mani who had attacked the Dewan Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer forcing him to leave Travancore and N.Chellappan Pillai and Manacaud Velayudhan Nair, both workers and activists of the RSP union in the Rubber Works, had assisted Mani. In the late 1957, the Communists formed a black leg union in the Rubber Works. They influenced the Government to retrench a few worker activists of the RSP union and nominees of the communist leaders filled their places. The RSP union objected this to and they went on a strike. The communists used the police to break that strike. The Government did not direct the State Labour Department to intervene in the matter. K.Pankajakshan was leading the RSP union.

8.5.5 Hunger Strike by K. Pankajakshan, 1959

The Thiruvananthapuram Rubber Works (TRW), popularly known as the Rubber Factory used to witness frequent struggles by its workers. One such long struggle occurred in the second week of April 1959. To press the demands of workers, their leader K.Pankajakshan of the RSP-UTUC union started a hunger Satyagraha on April 10, 1959, in front of the official residence of the Minister for Industries. The Government did not take any constructive initiative in bringing a settlement of the issues. On the seventh day of the hunger strike, the police was instructed to arrest Pankajakshan and he was remanded to custody.

The workers then decided to take the struggle to the Government Secretariat gates. On the first day of the struggle there, the workers blocked the official car of T.A. Majeed, the Minister. Every day the picketing continued and the struggle crossed the 32-day mark². Union activists like P.S.Chandran, M.Sreedharan, Rajasekharan, K.Gopala Pillai and Thankappan Nair picketed the car of Minister K.C.George. Pankajakshan, even after he was taken into custody, had decided to continue his hunger strike. After a few days in hospital, he was removed to the Poojappura Central Jail and subjected to forced feeding.

On April 22 the RSP activists raided the Legislative Assembly and disrupted its proceedings for about seventy minutes. The Government deployed the Reserve Police to arrest the union activists. About 33 were taken into custody for disrupting the Assembly. They had shouted “*Inquilab Zindabad*”, “*RSP Zindabad*”, “*Save the life of comrade Pangan*”, and, “*Rubber Factory struggle zindabad*”. The slogan shouting in the Assembly hall was executed under the leadership of Muttambalam Sreedharan Nair. Before the activists were arrested, the speaker met them in his chamber and discussed their issues.

Following this episode, the Government became sensitive and the Industries Minister agreed to have a conference with the RSP leaders like T.K.Divakaran, Prakkulam Bhasi and K.Balakrishnan. The Government agreed to refer the dispute in the Rubber factory to adjudication. But Pankajakshan was continuing his hunger Satyagraha in the Central Jail. The picketing of official cars of Ministers continued. One should note in this context the political situation prevailing in the State at that time. The Liberation Struggle to bring down the EMS ministry was going on. The RSP had joined hands with the anti-communist forces to achieve this end. In short, the Rubber factory struggle and Pankajakshan’s hunger strike were highly politically sensitive issues.

8.5.5.1 Blood-stained Thursdays

According to K C Vamadevan, the RSP leader, the RSP had to conduct violent agitation against policies of the communist government led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad during the period 1957-59³. He alleged victimization of the RSP activists by the CPI. Instead of contributing to the building up of consolidation of left forces, the CPI was adopting a clear strategy to annihilate the RSP though it had openly supported the Education Bill, Land Reforms Bill and the Industrial Relations Bill proposed by the EMS Ministry. But the CPI adopted anti-labour policies and strategies to expand the control of the AITUC unions in the State. They put out the propaganda that any one who was opposing the CPI were agents of the feudal landlords and capitalists.

The RSP felt that the CPI led Government was not adopting a sympathetic approach to the working class struggle in Chavara Titanium, Cashew Industry, Water Works and Drainage establishment, Rubber Factory, PWD Workshop and Plantations. The CPI government had also let loose the police against the workers and union activists engaged in these struggles. At Kuryathi Drainage section, the police made a lathi charge on striking workers. In the Rubber factory the AITUC brought blacklegs to defeat the UTUC led strike and picketing. At Pasumala estate the police resorted to firing on agitating workers. The UTUC demonstrated its protest against these policies.

It was during this period that the RSP leader T.K.Divakaran decided to coordinate all working class struggles being led by the RSP and the UTUC and take the initiative to offer hunger strike in front of the Government Secretariat. In the Assembly the Food Minister K.C.George was alleged to have involvement in large-scale corruption linked to the purchase of Rice from Andhra. The RSP took this as an important issue and led a torch light procession to his official residence at Barton Hill. Mullassery Manoharan was leading it. To highlight the Party's concern over the continuing hunger strike of Pankajakshan, another torch light procession was led to the official residence of K.P.Gopalan, the Industries Minister at Thycaud. There the activists clashed with the police. In the confusion, the uniform of Circle Inspector Parameswaran Nair was burnt. N.Sreekantan Nair, the top leader of the RSP was the guiding spirit behind this incident.

The next day the police raided the RSP office at the Bakery Junction. The struggle began to spread rapidly. The struggle in the Chandanathoppu Cashew Factory in Kollam and the consequent police firing led to loss of life to Raman and Sulaiman two workers there. The RSP activists made a violent march to the official residence of T.V.Thomas, the Labour Minister at his Park View Bungalow. The big march commenced from East Fort and provocative slogans describing T.V.Thomas as a bloodthirsty demon were put

out. Thousands lined up on both sides of the main road to witness the march and there was speculation that any thing might happen when the march reached Park View near the Museum. The march was flagged off from East Fort and Chala Khader first led it. The Party had decided to launch simultaneous marches from other centres like Manacaud, Poojappura, Peroorkada, Pettah, Cahckai, Veli, Vanchiyoor, Vallakkadavu and Chenthitta. All of them proceeded as planned and the police found it difficult to manage them. At that time the police did not have modern wireless equipments or walkie-talkie as in the present day. Several marchers were, however, arrested.

The Liberation Struggle led by Mannath Padmanabhan was at its peak. It had also reached the gates of the Government Secretariat. But the RSP made it clear that though they were opposed to the EMS Ministry, they would not join hands with Mannam. Finally an understanding was reached that Thursdays would be exclusively set apart for the struggles, marches and demonstrations by the RSP. On other days Congress, PSP, Karshaka Thozhilali Paprty, Catholic Congress and Nair Service Society (NSS) would hold their protests. The Karshaka Thozhilali Party (KTP) leaders were Father Vadakkan and B.Wellingdon. Besides the leaders, housewives, student activists were also joining the Liberation Struggle.

The RSP led protests were thus staged on Thursdays and the main venue was the Collectorate at Vanchiyoor. One Thursday many, who used to regularly stand to witness the agitation by the RSP workers, thought that since the previous night's rains had converted the ground into a cesspool, the agitators might not force a picketing. But contrary to their expectations, twenty-five volunteers of the RSP led by Yadukulakumar fell on the ground by joining their hands and picketed the Collectorate, though their dress was dipped in the mud and the cesspool. The police force did not want to intervene for that would definitely spoil their clean uniforms.

The Government finding that the RSP agitators were militant decided to bring the Malabar Special Police (MSP) on to the scene. Finally the MSP personnel after great effort, succeeded in lifting the RSP volunteers from the muddy ground for taking them into custody. They could not be properly identified when they were brought to the Magistrate Court due to the mud all over their face and body.

8.5.2 State wide march

Meanwhile the RSP activists commenced a march from Kannur towards Thiruvananthapuram. N.Sreekantan Nair led it. He had declared that he and his volunteers would raid the Government Secretariat. During this time

the police had fired against anti-communist activists at Angamaly, Cheriyathura and Pulluvila causing loss of life to many. Hearing the news about these incidents Jawaharlal Nehru rushed to Kerala and made enquiries about the law and order situation. He wondered how a Marxist Revolutionary Party like the RSP was opposing the CPI led Government. N.Sreekantan Nair, T.K.Divakaran, K.Balakrishnan and Baby John explained the views of the RSP and wanted the Central Government to intervene. Within a few days the Law Minister, V.R.Krishna Iyer's car was blocked by RSP volunteers at Kollam.

One Thursday the RSP had planned to stage a big protest march to the Collectorate at Vanchiyoor. The most important volunteers were K.C.Vamadevan, Venugopalan, K.Pankajakshan, Azeez Sahib, Sukumaran and Poojappura Unni. They were prepared to fight to the last and resist the police. The volunteers broke the police cordon and jumped the railings and entered the Collectorate compound to start picketing. The police let loose violence and in it a major role was played by the MSP forces. Collector A.S.Menon who ordered the lathi charge and was witnessing it from the first floor of the Collectorate lost consciousness on seeing the degree of violence done by the police. The news spread like wild fire. Shops and commercial establishments in Thiruvananthapuram were closed. In the evening a public meeting was held at the Pazhavangady Maidan to condemn the police attack on the RSP volunteers. The speeches by K.Balakrishnan and C.N. Sreekantan Nair had moved the large gathering to tears.

8.5.6 Some more struggles

There occurred a series of struggles by workers under the RSP-UTUC banner. Titanium Products, Water Works, Drainage, Rubber Works, PWD Workshop and Estates witnessed them one after another. At Kuriyathi striking Drainage workers were lathi-charged. When the police fired on striking workers led by CPI-AITUC union at Pasumala, the RSP-UTUC unions demonstrated their protest. According to the RSP leaders, the Communist Party Government had openly retorted saying, "Why the RSP-UTUC should question our Government ordering the Police firing on our workers". The struggles by the RSP led unions during 1957-59 saw the hunger strikes by T.K.Divakaran and K.Pankajakshan.

The RSP unions demonstrated their protest against the police firing at cashew workers at Chandanathoppu. They held a march to the residence of Labour Minister, T.V.Thomas. The march commenced from East Fort. The Government had imposed ban on torch light marches. But the RSP leaders issued a call to their ranks to break the ban. Similar protests were made in

several other locations in Thiruvananthapuram. In this connection, the names of certain activists could not be ignored. They were Chala Khader, Kesavan of Drainage Works, Fitter Gangadharan of Water Works, K. Thankappan, Chakka Soman, M.K.A. Azeez, Meera Sahib, Amir Hamza, Yadukulakumar, Madhavan Pillai, P.C. Pillai, K. Prabhakaran Nair, Poojappura Unni, G. Kesavan, H.P. Khan, B. Appukuttan, A.M. Saly, G. Raghu, Pankajan Nair, Sukumaran Nair, Velappan Pillai, Appu Pillai, Sivasankaran Nair and Sukumaran Nair.

8.5.6.1 Strike in Drainage Division

In 1957 the authorities unilaterally cut the wages of the workers in the Drainage Division in Kuriyathi. The workers were led by the RSP and they refused to accept the reduced wages. The police rushed to the scene when the Engineers in the Division could not leave their offices. Police ordered the workers to allow the Engineers to leave. The workers under the leadership of G. Kesavan declared their defiance. Police then used force and held a lathi charge. K.N. Sukumaran, the RSP leader rushed to the scene and he was also beaten up by the police. The workers then held a march to the residence of E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the Chief Minister. When the wounded workers were shown to the Chief Minister, it was reported that he told them that the *lathi* (baton) in the hands of the police was meant for beating lawbreakers. It was not a hockey stick, he had added.

8.5.6.2 Strike at Chackai Engineering Workshop, 1957

In spite of the TV-Sreekantan Formula on trade union unity among left trade unions, both the AITUC and the UTUC, having organic links with the CPI and the RSP respectively, had been organizing rival unions in several establishments. Such an establishment was the PWD Engineering Workshop at Chackai. According to the Unity Formula, there would only be one union in an establishment to represent the entire body of workmen. The method of secret ballot would be used to find out the most representative union. But both the CPI and RSP leaders in most establishments due to misunderstanding among the top leaders violated the Formula. Further the fact that for a long time, the workers in most industrial establishments in Thiruvananthapuram had been brought under the control of the RSP leaders. This must have provoked the CPI leaders who encouraged the setting up of rival AITUC unions. Thus was set a clear ground for inter-union clashes.

One such violent clash occurred in the PWD Engineering Workshop⁴. The RSP led workers were conducting a sit-down Satyagraha outside the

workshop and they had started picketing of the main gates. Another section of workers who were not joining the struggle, made an attempt to enter the workshop by circumventing the picketing. This led to an open clash and at least eight workers were hospitalised with injuries. Since women workers were involved, the authorities had to call in some women police constables too. The strike was for wage revision as well as regulation of workload.

8.5.7 The C.P.W.U

The City Press Workers' Union (CPWU) was one of the oldest trade unions in Thiruvananthapuram. Kulathingal Pothen was its President and Peroorkada Bhasi served as its Secretary. K.N.Sivanandan, an important activist of late 1940s was made the Techman and his main job was to act as a liaison with the leaders of the Communist Party who had been forced to go underground and move from one secret shelter to another. During the period of Punnappa-Vayalar struggle, the CPWU was legally banned. Sivanandan was an employee in the *Kerala Kaumudi* Press. Knowing his connection with the communists, the Editor of the newspaper dismissed him from the Press. One additional reason for the dismissal was his irregular attendance at the Press.

Sivanandan's dismissal caught the attention of Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai, leader of then Indian Socialist Party (ISP). Sympathizing with Sivanandan, he contacted K.Balakrishnan, son of C.Kesavan, the great State Congress leader and former Chief Minister. Balakrishnan was a brilliant political figure in the left socialist movement, a colleague of N.Sreekantan Nair, and the founder of the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP). Unfortunately Balakrishnan passed away at an early age.

Such veterans like Ponnara Sridhar, N.C. Sekhar and N.P.Kurukkal had guided the CPWU. The Union had witnessed changes in its political affiliations. Indeed Thiruvananthapuram has seen shifting loyalties and affiliations in most of the trade unions functioning here. Sivanandan is now running the Minerva Press that employs about 15 workers. He started a Printer's Association, which now has grown into the Kerala Printers' Association with him as its President. The technology in the printing industry has been changing fast creating some obsolescence and labour redundancy. Sivanandan during his trade union work had participated in several struggles like the State Transport strike of 1954, Farm Workers' agitation of 1956, High Court struggle of 1956 and had been in jail for more than three and a half years. He had worked with the KSP, CPI and CPI (M) and also in the trade unions in Travancore Titanium Products (TTP) Ltd., PWD Workshops, Food Corporation Depots, and also in the Raw Husk sector.

8.5.8 RSP control on trade unions

Reference had been made elsewhere about the close links between the activists of the students' movement and those in the political and trade union movement. Student leaders like K.Balakrishnan, P.C.John, G.Venugopal, K.Pankajakshan, P.K.Vasudevan Nair, K.Anirudhan, Jayanthan Nair and a host of others later became active in the political movement. Some of them moved into the Communist Party while the majority of the rest opted for the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP) and later into the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). The leadership of N.Sreekantan Nair acted as a powerful magnet in attracting a good number of the student leaders to the RSP. Sreekantan Nair personally assessed the calibre of each one of them and chose some of them as his trusted lieutenants. Since there was a ban on the Communist Party, its activists could not operate openly. This gave the trade union field almost exclusively to the RSP and they formed trade unions in many sectors and establishments in Thiruvananthapuram.

The workers of the Thiruvananthapuram Rubber Works once had elected R.Sugathan as their leader. But since Sugathan was spending most of his time at Alappuzha, he could not attend to the problems of Rubber Works. It was then that workers approached N.Sreekantan Nair and he gladly accepted the request. Besides Sreekantan Nair, A.P.Pillai, K.Balakrishnan, P.C. John and G.Venugopal led the other trade unions. P.C.John was working as a teacher in the Salvation Army School before he took up full time trade union and political work. The Thiruvananthapuram Labour Union was a major trade union of the old days having its operation in both the Rubber Works as well as in the Government owned PWD Workshop. In later years this Union split into two. K.Balakrishnan and G.Venugopal led one of the historic struggles in the PWD workshop and at that time C.Kesavan, Balakrishnan's father, was the Chief Minister. Kesavan did not show any hesitation when he ordered the arrest of his son for breaking the law of the land.

The *Vividha Thozhilali Union* led by P.C.John, K.Pankajakshan and K.Balakrishnan controlled the workers employed in the Chalai and Valiyathura godowns. The *Thiruvananthapuram Navika Thozhilali Union* also came under the control of the RSP. The *Vividha Thozhilali Union* was the banner under which the workers of the Titanium Products Company had been mobilized. It was a British Company then, which was unsympathetic to unionisation of workers. The Company had filed several criminal cases against union activists and victimized many ordinary workers on one count or the other. During the days of the organisation of the All Travancore Trade Union Council (ATTUC) as well as in the post Punnapra-Vayalar period, an

attempt was made to unify all left oriented trade unions under a single banner. But personality and ego clashes among leaders stood in the way. Unfortunately this triggered off violent inter-union rivalry between the AITUC unions and the RSP led unions. This inter-union rivalry got reflected mostly in the establishments located in and around Thiruvananthapuram. It was in that context that the famous TV-Sreekantan Formula was advanced. According to it, whenever an industrial dispute occurred involving common interests of the working class, the unions irrespective of their affiliations or political leanings, would present a common front. But in spite of this Unity Formula, rivalry between the AITUC and RSP unions continued to grow. This became very apparent when the RSP organized a new union at the Thiruvananthapuram Government Press where already an AITUC union was functioning though their top leaders were in underground due to ban on the Communist Party. Similarly, contrary to the spirit of the Formula, T.V.Thomas of the AITUC helped to organize a rival union, namely the Commercial Staff Association against the Mercantile Employees' Association, which was one of the oldest, registered trade unions in the State.

The RSP then violated the unity formula by founding the Mechanical Workers' Union in the Central Works of the State Transport. The stronghold of the RSP in Travancore Titanium Products, Rubber Works and PWD Workshop was soon shattered by the AITUC founding their rival unions in them. During the Liberation Struggle of 1958-59, the RSP did not directly involve in it, as it had not treated the CPI as their born enemy yet. But the policies of the EMS Ministry really provoked the RSP and its trade unions. As a result, several struggles were conducted by them and some of them led to violence and police firing as the one that happened at Chandanathoppu in Kollam.

When the RSP leader K.Pankajakshan became the Labour Minister, he tried to find a permanent solution to the problem of multiplicity of unions and inter-union rivalry by formulating a Trade Union Recognition Bill. But many criticized the Bill saying that the Bill if passed would create trade union dictatorship. But even to this day Pankajakshan strongly believes that legislation cannot bring about a final and permanent solution to this problem.

The other strongholds of the RSP/UTUC unions in Thiruvananthapuram were in Lakshmi Textiles at Karamana, Travancore Textiles, Chalai Head load workers segment, Water Works and Drainage Departments, and PWD NMR section. During the period of Panampally Govinda Menon's Government, Menon had personally taken the initiative in founding blackleg unions in many sectors and establishments in Thiruvananthapuram. Soon the RSP led unions had to fight with not only

AITUC unions, their traditional rivals, but also with the newly founded INTUC unions.

8.5.9 Private Motor Workers' Struggle

The private motor transport industry in Thiruvananthapuram was under the control of a few bus owners and their companies like the RKV, KMS, MV, Morning Star, KMKS and RKL. In the early years the working hours of the motor transport workers were from 6 am to 2 am with uncertain and irregular rest intervals between them. Wages were extremely low and no bonus was paid. K.V.Surendranath took the initiative to form the Thiruvananthapuram District Private Motor Workers' Union. He served as the President and Anirudhan was made the Secretary. The Union launched a struggle that lasted 120 days and this was held at the gates of the Government Secretariat under the guidance of Surendranath.

Kunjikrishna Pillai, the then Labour Commissioner called a conciliation conference to discuss the issues. The employers did not cooperate. The issues were then referred to industrial tribunal. Meanwhile the activists of the Union were arrested and sent to lock-ups. The then Inspector General of Police N.Chandrasekharan Nair was unsympathetic to the workers who were brutally treated in the lock-up. At this stage T.V.Thomas intervened and the Union called off its agitation. When T.V. became a Minister in the EMS Ministry, he ordered that all those private motor workers whose services had been terminated by the bus operators during this 120 days struggle be absorbed in the State Transport Service.

8.5.10 Handloom Workers' Struggle

Balaramapuram and Nemon were important centres of production of traditional handloom cloth. One of the oldest trade unions in the region was the Handloom Workers' Union that recently celebrated its Golden Jubilee. The handloom industry was always facing recurring crises and they often triggered off working class struggles. Fakhir Khan, one of the oldest living trade union leaders in this sector remembers a great struggle caused by a combination of shortage of yarn and fall in demand for cloth. The shortage of yarn suddenly pushed up the price. The supply of yarn was subjected to state controls. This prompted all those who received the quota of yarn at the subsidized price to resell it in the black market. For instance, a bundle of yarn of 80 count purchased at Rs.50 could be easily sold for Rs.300. This difference forced handloom workers to purchase yarn and then sell it instead of working to convert the yarn into cloth. Thus several handloom weavers

were losing their jobs causing poverty and deprivation to spread widely among them. Fakhir Khan tried to find out a solution for it. He organized a Yarn Distribution Committee with Neyyattinkara T.K.Narayana Pillai as President and himself as Secretary and broke the monopoly of yarn trade controlled by 2 or 3 traders. P.A.Kasim, the State Textile Commissioner extended his full support to the Committee. A major struggle by starving handloom workers was thus avoided due to the timely intervention of the Union as well as the initiative of its leaders.

8.5.11 Students' Agitations

In those hectic days of the 1940s, students were joining the freedom movement in large numbers. In Travancore they were in the forefront of the movement for responsible government and worked hand in hand with the leadership of the State Congress. Many of the leaders of the student movement later graduated into political movement as well as trade union movement. Thiruvananthapuram in this matter was a centre of action. The Dewan had imposed curbs in the functioning of the Travancore University Students Union and the leaders decided to revive it. K.V.Surendranath in this context is reported to have asked K.Anirudhan who had just joined the Intermediate Course in the University College to meet M.N.Govindan Nair, the communist leader who was hiding in a shelter in Thriuvananthapuram. At that time Anirudhan was a sympathizer of the KSP group and his house at Kannammoola was a meeting place for these leaders. Anirudhan, however, met MN who asked him whether he could take up the challenging task of reviving the University Students Union against the Dewan's wish. MN directed Anirudhan to go to the Cooperative Home Lodge behind the Government Secretariat to meet Sunny Sebastian and Chandranandan. This meeting led to the possibility of merger between the Students Wings of the KSP and the Communist Party of Travancore. Alikunju Sastri from Sanskrit College, E.A.Fernandez of Mar Ivanios College and Pandalam Kesavan Nair of NSS College Pandalam put their heads together. A connecting link was the son of Thycaud Subramonia Iyer, the famous lawyer.

They decided to hold a students' march to the University Office and hold demonstrations demanding the early revival of the University Students Union. The march was to start from Pattom Palace Junction. The Dewan imposed a ban on the march and the students decided to defy it. The associates mentioned above joined Anirudhan. Besides, P.K.Vasudevan Nair and R.Balakrishna Pillai, student leaders, also joined the march. The police stopped the march and the leaders were arrested and taken to the lock-up at Cantonment Police Station. Idiyan Narayana Pillai, the Circle Inspector was notorious. But Clower Kuttan Pillai, the Head Constable showed some

sympathy to Anirudhan and P.K.Vasudevan Nair and bought them tea. Many of the marchers had fled from the scene on seeing the police. During the stay in the lock-up the student leaders, with their shirts removed, were taken to the RDO-cum-Magistrate across the road passing through the St. Joseph School and General Hospital Junction. The students would line up to see this procession. The leaders were kept in the lock up for 32 days.

After they were released, the Dewan announced the revival of the University Union and election to the body was to be held soon. Meanwhile the unity between the KSP and Communist students wings had been broken. The KSP wing put up P.C.John and the Communists put up Anirudhan as their candidates. The unit convener of the Communist group was Venkataramanan who in his later life secured the first rank in the IAS Examination and retired as Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. When his selection to the IAS cadre was at the point of rejection by the Central Government on the basis of police enquiry about his connection with communist movement, it was the Maharaja of Travancore who took the initiative of writing directly to the Home Minister and getting Venkataramanan his IAS. Venkataramanan had served as tutor to the princesses of the Kowdiar Palace of the Maharaja. In the election Anirudhan defeated P.C.John and was elected as the President of the University Students Union. Meanwhile the Communists had started a Save Education Campaign led by Subhadra (wife of K Govinda Pillai, the CPI leader), Kulathala Pandarathil, Kumarakom Sankunny Menon and Kartha of Perumbavoor. Malayattoor Ramakrishnan and M.J.Hassan had contested for the post of Arts Club Secretary and the son of Malayali Rama Kurup defeated both of them. The leftist students leaders declared that they would not allow the inauguration of the Arts club in spite of the mediatory efforts by Prof. N.Krishna Pillai and Prof. S.Gupthan Nair of the University College. It was decided to create some disturbance to drive away the students from the Arts Club function. T.K.Velayudhan Nair (TKV), who was responsible for organizing bank employees in Kerala later, and his friends collected a water snake from Oolampara pond. Paripoornam, who later had joined judicial service and retired as Chief Justice of the Patna High Court was another student activist who brought chilly powder to the venue to disturb the Arts Club function. These acts were no doubt anti-democratic but under the prevailing conditions of rivalry among students the activists justified them. These developments were stated here in order to show that the student's movement and the struggles in the State had brought into the forefront a number of leading personalities in the public life of the country. This was made possible because each one of them after playing a role in the student's movement chose an area for later work and career and strived for excellence in it. Unfortunately, in recent days the student's movements have failed to

throw up such eminent public men to serve the society at large. The recent tendency was for the student leaders to graduate themselves up and specialize to become full time political leaders and trade union leaders. Students with intellectual brilliance and academic excellence now are not attracted to the student's movement and as such the quality of leadership in this movement has been going down as days pass by.

8.5.12 About S.Varadarajan Nair

On October 14, 2002, the working class in Thiruvananthapuram would be observing the thirteenth death anniversary of a great leader. They can never forget the services rendered to them by the veteran trade union and political leader, S.Varadarajan Nair. He was the son of Dewan Rajagopalachari and Ammukkutty Amma. He started his political career as a devout Gandhian and State Congress worker. The Communists and the KSP/RSP groups controlled the union movement in Thiruvananthapuram in its early days. It was Varadarajan Nair who made the presence of the INTUC felt in the region. He led the INTUC union in the State Transport, which was the bastion of the Communists for a long time. In spite of strong resistance from the Communists, Varadarajan Nair was able to attract a sizable number of transport employees to the INTUC. The soft-spoken Varadarajan Nair could easily establish close rapport with the other union leaders in the State Transport when issues concerning the employees cropped up. He always stood for principles.

Varadarajan Nair always wanted the trade unions to be independent and wanted the unions to have their own independent office premises instead of depending on political party offices. It was at his initiative that the INTUC Union in the State Transport secured its office premises at Manjalikkulam Road in Thiruvananthapuram. He had also led the INTUC union in the State Electricity Board, which was as not strong as its counterpart in the State Transport. The workers of the Government Press were being given scales of pay comparable to those in State Government service. But Varadarajan Nair argued that the Government Press is engaged in production and sale of materials like the government gazette and therefore the workers in the Government Press should be made eligible to get bonus. Varadarajan Nair was a skilful negotiator and never compromised on principles. This character put him above several others in the union movement as an exceptional personality among leaders.

Varadarajan Nair held high positions in the KPCC as well as in Government. He served as the Finance Minister of the State. Varadarajan Nair had his own style of preparing the Budget and he was very particular that

specific details on budget proposals would be placed before the full cabinet only a few minutes before he moved in to the Legislative Assembly. It is said that it was he who first sanctioned Dearness Relief to the State pensioners. He regularised the services of employees engaged in the Malaria Eradication Programme and in this he got assistance from one Kunjan, a scheduled caste employee. He also initiated the noon-meal programme for Primary School children in the State.

Though he had inherited fabulous ancestral wealth from his parents, Varadarajan Nair always led a Spartan life style. During his long political and trade union career he lost a good part of that wealth on account of sacrifices and devotion to the people whom he had served. When he became the Finance Minister, he was forced to shift to the official residence. But he then vowed that his wife alone would stay with him there, leaving his five children, three daughters and two sons, to stay at the ancestral house. He never allowed his children to travel in the State car or use official vehicles. On laying down office of the Minister and till his last days, Varadarajan Nair never had a car of his own. One of his sons, Prathapachandran became a prominent leader of the Kerala Students' Union and later did the editor's job at *Veekshanam*, the official newspaper of the Congress Party in the State till its closure. Prathapachandran also followed the footsteps of his father in mobilising workers in Thiruvananthapuram, particularly in Travancore Titanium Products Ltd., HORTICROP, SIDCO, Vijayamohini Mills and KSIE Cargo Complex. Looking back on the trade union movement, Prathapachandran felt that today's leaders lack sincerity and devotion. Though he is currently one of the Secretaries of the State unit of the INTUC, a number of faction groups have emerged within it. According to him, his father, Varadarajan Nair, being a principled man had lot of differences with Pattom Thanu Pillai in earlier days and with K.Karunakaran in later years. But these differences never affected his personal relationships.

8.6 UNIONIZATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES

The unionisation of government employees was strongly resisted by authorities saying that they did not come under the Trade Union Act and that they had no right to organize collectively as per the Kerala Service Rules (KSR). Several activists in the NGO union movement like M.K.Narayanan Chettiyar and seven of his close associates were removed from State service. When the communist ministry led by E.M.S.Namboodiripad came to power, all of them were reinstated without break of service. During the period of National Emergency, another brilliant NGO Union leader, E Padmanabhan, was arrested under the Defence of India Rules and locked up in jail for about 19 months. Thevalakkara N.Sreedharan Pillai was another reputed leader of

the Government employees who worked ceaselessly for strengthening the NGO Union, one of the most powerful associations of Government employees in contemporary Kerala. In this present work, we do not wish to document the union movement of government employees as well as teachers in the State since that alone would require a mammoth effort. However, we attempt to give a bird's eye view of this movement.

8.6.1 The Beginning

The formation of Travancore State Congress inspired government employees to come together and organize the Travancore NGO Federation and the All Cochin NGO Association during 1938-39.⁵ Another important source of inspiration was the Madras NGO Association formed in 1920, which was operating a branch office in Malabar, and this organisation had secured official recognition by the Madras Provincial Government and treated as a body representing government employees. After Independence, the Travancore NGO Federation extended its activities to Cochin area, while the All Cochin NGO Association continued to function as an independent organization.

The leaders of the Malabar NGO Association issued a call for struggle demanding an increase in the pay scales of State Government employees consequent on the revision of pay scales of Central Government employees. But the strike was dropped when the Government branded the leaders as Communists and started victimizing them. Following this the Government employees in the Travancore State held a meeting at Chengalchola in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram City and decided to form the Travancore NGO Association. This Association grew rapidly and within a short period secured a membership of 26000 employees. The Government did not like this and it issued an order that stated "*Any government servant who is or becomes a member of an association of government servants which is not recognized by government shall be liable to be suspended or removed from the service*". The Government directed to dissolve the existing unions not complying with the above order.

8.6.2 Post -1947 developments

The post war inflation and the consequent economic hardships created lot of discontent among the government employees. The Travancore-Cochin NGO Federation took up their cause and it submitted a memorandum to the Government but the Government not only rejected it but ordered termination of services of the leaders who were leftists or communists in their political

ideology. Union activity came to a grinding halt. This provided a big opportunity to the non-communist leaders to go ahead with forming a separate organization, The North Kerala NGO Association in 1957, while the All Cochin NGO Association changed its name as Central Kerala NGO Association. The Government headed by the CPI leader E.M.S.Namboodiripad reinstated the dismissed leaders in the service in 1957.

In 1955 some left leaders formed the Kerala Ministerial Staff Union, mainly comprising of ministerial staff of various departments in the Travancore-Cochin area. After the formation of the Kerala State, the Travancore-Cochin NGO Federation became Kerala NGO Federation. This organization demanded preparation of a common seniority list of employees who originally belonged to Travancore, Cochin and Malabar government service. A committee was appointed to settle the issue and it succeeded in the matter. The North Kerala NGO Association demanded the removal of the ratio for promotion between graduates and non-graduates.

8.6.3 Demand for a Single Organization

Leaders of the North Kerala NGO Association felt the need for a single organization for non-gazetted employees. The matter was discussed with the Kerala NGO Federation, Kerala Ministerial Staff Union and Central Kerala Association. Several separate conventions were held. They reached some understanding that Kerala needed one union for Secretariat Employees, one for non-Secretariat NGOs, one for teachers and one for last-grade servants. The ad-hoc committee was set up to draft the constitution and bylaws. Finally the Federation of Kerala Services Organization (FKSO) was formed as an umbrella organization with K.Chellappan Pillai as President and E.J.Francis as General Secretary.

In 1962 a Convention was held at Thrissur with the object of forming a single NGO union for the NGOs, working in non-secretariat departments. It was in this meeting that the Kerala NGO Union was formed. In July 1963 it submitted a memorandum demanding Central Government pay parity, increased DA and an interim relief. Though the Government appointed a Pay Commission in 1964, the NGO Union started preparing for a show down and it gave a notice for an indefinite strike on January 5, 1967. Besides Central Pay parity, it demanded scrapping of confidential report system, revision of Kerala Service Rules (KSR) and granting of trade union rights to government employees. The strike was called off as a result of mediation of T.C.N.Menon, a leading pro-CPI trade union lawyer. Though it had been agreed that there would be no victimization on participants of the strike, the Government went back on its promise and dismissed a few leaders. When

EMS became the Chief Minister for a second term leading a United Front of CPI (M), CPI, Muslim League, RSP, Samyukta Socialist Party, Kerala Socialist Party and Karshaka Thozhilali Party, all the dismissed leaders of the NGO Union were reinstated. The Government also agreed to grant DA at the central rate and appoint a Pay Commission.

8.6.4 Politicisation of Unions

Since the workers' trade unions in Kerala had been organized on political lines, it was imperative for organizations of government employees also to fall in that groove. When the Government implemented the Pay commission Report in 1969, one group of members left the NGO Union expressing their dissatisfaction and demanding immediate rectification of certain specific anomalies. The NGO Union supported the stand taken by the EMS ministry and so the above group decided to leave it. Today most service organizations have clear-cut links with the feeder political parties in the State.

8.6.5 Formation of Joint Council

The structure of non-gazetted employees displaced several categories of staff spread widely over various State Departments. The interests of these categories were not homogeneous and each category compared its pay scales and service conditions with those of other categories. The mere fact that the NGO Union represented employees covering all the categories was no consolation when one viewed things from the narrow angle of individual movement of government employees. Therefore, it was felt that a single body like the NGO Union could not handle all issues of different categories equitably. Besides, one could not remain blind to the fact about the enormous power that category unions like the Kerala Land Revenue Officers' Association, Civil Supplies Staff Association and the Ministerial Staff Association of the Education Department. Under these circumstances, some leaders of the NGO Union and some members of the NGO Federation met at Thiruvananthapuram and set up an ad-hoc committee for the formation of Joint Council of State employees in 1969. Its aim was to function as a joint forum to deal with the issues having common nature and to settle all disputes between category associations. E.J.Francis, the former President of the NGO Union, was elected to lead the new Joint Council. This Joint Council soon came under the control of the CPI.

In November 1969 when the CPI leader C.Achutha Menon became the Chief Minister, the CPI-led and supported Joint Council submitted a Memorandum of Demands and called for a strike on November 5, 1969. The

Chief Minister convened a conference and most of the demands of the striking employees were conceded. However, the ministry was forced to resign on August 1, 1970. After the elections, another coalition ministry came to power with C.Achutha Menon as the Chief Minister. It was during this second term in power that Achutha Menon introduced the most dreaded weapon of "*Dies-Non*" based upon the principle "No work No pay" to handle the strike by NGOs and teachers demanding interim relief to employees. In March 1973 the CPI (M) supported NGO Union went on a strike demanding pay revision and interim relief of Rs.100 per month. Since the CPI was leading the State Government, the CPI supported Joint council did not join the strike. This strike lasted 54 days and it was the longest ever in the history of public service employees in the State. The division in the union movement of the employees led to a situation that forced the NGO Union to unilaterally call off the strike.

8.6.6 Birth of NGO Association and others

The course of the strike caused a vertical split in the Joint Council, some alleged that the top leaders of the Joint Council siding with the Government cheated the ranks. Those who left the Joint Council decided to form the NGO Association under the leadership of Karunakaran Pillai. He was responsible to bring a pro-Congress influence on the new organisation. When the Congress Party split into Congress (I) and Congress (A) led by K.Karunakaran and A.K.Antony respectively, the NGO Association also began to split along the same lines. Those who had left the parent organization of the Indian National Congress earlier had formed the Kerala Congress, which in subsequent years split into more than three separate groups led by K.M.Mani, P.J.Joseph, T.M.Jacob and P.C.Thomas. In 1976 the Kerala Congress (the undivided party) formed the NGO Front. The Janatha Party unit in Kerala formed the Kerala NGO Centre in 1977. One faction initiated the formation of Kerala NGO Sangh. The RSP and the UTUC did not have any hold on government employees. But once much smaller political parties started forming organization of government employees and to keep them under their wings, the RSP decided to join the fray and began to extend full support to the formation of the Kerala Government Employees Union in 1991. Apart from these, a few hundred category associations of Government employees are now functioning in the State of Kerala. For instance, when the Pay Revision Committee of 1998 invited organizations of government employees to submit their views to the Committee in writing, 372 organizations responded⁶. They included a few organizations of government pensioners also. The structure of the union movement of government

employees shows the existence of Central Organizations and a large number of category organizations affiliated to the former.

8.6.7 Interface with the Government

The governments in Kerala led by many political parties and their coalitions from time to time had been found to be always pro-labour and both blue and white-collar workers had been given a sympathetic treatment in matters of improving their conditions of work and wages/salaries. In Industry, the employers used to grant recognition to trade unions of their workers/employees for the purpose of conducting direct negotiations and collective bargaining and settle all issues amicably. The system of Tripartism, in which the State played a constructive facilitatory role, only strengthened this pattern of relations.

For government employees also the Government could not take a different view. Since the Government itself was the employer, there was scope only for a bipartite relation. To enable good and effective bipartism, the Kerala Government took the initiative to grant recognition to those organizations of government employees who satisfied certain specific conditions. These conditions included:

- (a) The organization must ordinarily consist of distinct class of government employees and must represent 25 percent of the total strength of that class or 50 persons, whichever was higher.
- (b) Personnel not in the service of the government should not be office-bearers of the organizations.
- (c) The organizations should not be formed on a territorial or communal basis.
- (d) No service organization should ever affiliate with a federation, which did not satisfy the above conditions. They were also not to make any link with political parties.

The Government made it clear that violation of the above conditions would result in de-recognition of the organizations. The organizations were also directed not to use the services of any political party to represent their interests or issue any publication without prior sanction by the government. They were also prohibited from supporting candidates for election or maintaining political funds. The organizations were to submit regularly copies of rules governing them and the annual statement of accounts and list of members.

8.6.8 Central Organizations

The most important central organizations of government employees in Kerala today are the following:

Kerala NGO Union (1962), Joint Council of State Service Organizations (1969), Kerala NGO Association (1974), Kerala NGO Front (1977), Kerala NGO Centre (1977), Kerala NGO Sangh (1980) and Kerala Government Employees Union (1991). Besides there are a few Fronts like State Employees and Teachers' Organization (SETO) consisting of 36 unions functioning in various departments and autonomous bodies. The Congress Party supports the SETO. The NGO Union supported by the CPI (M) has formed another Front called the Federation of State Employees and Teachers' Organization (FSETO).

8.6.9 Attitude of Governments

As mentioned elsewhere the governments in Kerala had always been sympathetic to the organizations of its employees. This was evident from the kind of immunity extended to the office bearers of the organizations. The immunity included: (a) immunity from transfer for the President and Secretary of recognized organization; (b) Office bearers of recognized organizations would be permitted to avail eligible leave for organizational activities. This immunity had given the leaders ample time to build up their organizations. Some of the organizations had become cash rich through membership fees, subscriptions and donations and had come to possess rich assets in terms of land and building. They had also set up mutual aid funds by mobilizing resources through contributions from members. They had also inspired the setting up of a number of multi-purpose cooperative societies. Several cultural festivals and welfare activities are conducted by most organizations of government employees.

In India the practice of collective bargaining does not exist in civil service. However, in the Central Government as well as in several State Governments, a forum called Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM) has been constituted. The aim of the JCM was to promote negotiation and settlement of issues relating to pay and other service conditions of government employees. The JCM is not a mandatory body, but it can make its recommendations to Government for perusal. In Kerala, there is no JCM though the government employees are aggressively unionised. As the service organizations have strong official support, the decisions are more politically significant.

8.6.10 Strikes

As per the Conduct Rules, the government employees in Kerala are restrained from taking part in strike. The Rules stipulate that “*No government servant shall engage himself in any strike or incitement thereto or in any similar activities.... Government servants should not engage themselves in any concerted or organized slowing down or attempt of slowing down government work or in any act, which has the tendency to impede the reasonably efficient and speedy transaction of government work Concerted or organized refusal on the part of the government servants to receive their pay will entail severe disciplinary action*”⁷. The Service Rules also prohibit the service associations from resorting to any strike or threat of strike as a means of achieving its purpose or for any other reason.

Although the rules and regulations are against strike, the government employees in Kerala have been resorting to strike activities. The organizations often issue strike notices. But, on more than one occasion, they held lighting strikes as well sympathetic token strikes. Several forms of agitations like *Dharna*, Picketing, Pen Down Strike, demonstrations and marches, shouting of slogans, *gheraos*, and hunger Satyagraha had been resorted to by the service organizations of government employees in Kerala.

The following had been the most important recent struggles by government employees and they had been ruthlessly handled by the governments in power irrespective of the political party or parties in coalition.

May 1967: 56 daylong strike by Junior Engineers and up to Chief Engineers. In this struggle the Government headed by E.M.S.Namboodiripad used the Defence of India Rules (DIR) and arrested the Engineers and imprisoned them along with criminals, charged for murder. A lady Superintending Engineer, P.K.Thresia and another Senior Engineer Alexander were arrested after raiding their residences after mid night.

1968: Government employees strike demanding restoration of benefits that had been entailed. E.M.S.Namboodiripad, the Chief Minister had a tough time in dealing with this strike and at one point he was alleged to have declared that the people of Kerala would directly confront the striking employees.

1969: Government employees from Peons to Additional Secretaries went on strike.

- 1971: Government employees and teachers were in strike and several of them were arrested under the DIR and the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA). This time it was a government led by C.Achutha Menon of the CPI supported by a coalition of other political parties.
- 1973: C.Achutha Menon had to confront another struggle by government employees and he had to take extreme measures like dismissal of 110 employees, besides using the draconian laws, DIR and ESMA. It was during this struggle that the Government introduced *Dies Non*, (No work No Pay) principle. When a Congress government led by A.K. Antony came to power in 1978 these employees whose service had been terminated, were reinstated. It was in 1973 that the Government used a iron hand to put down the long strike by employees of the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB). The Government arrested employees from Linemen to Chief Engineers. Some of the senior engineers even escaped from the State and went underground to save themselves from arrest. M.N.Govindan Nair of the CPI was the Minister of Electricity.
- 1975: Government employees were on strike and the ministry headed by E.K.Nayanar of the CPI (M) had to use the DIR and the ESMA.

8.6.11 Struggle of 2002

On February 6, 2002, the government employees and teachers had commenced an indefinite strike when the Government led by A.K.Antony and the United Democratic Front (UDF) unilaterally announced the immediate abolition of certain benefits the employees were enjoying for a long time. The Government made it clear that these drastic measures had to be taken due to the fiscal crisis facing the State, which was made more complicated, by a serious economic crisis affecting the life of every common man in the State. When the UDF Government led by A.K.Antony replaced the Left Democratic Front (LDF) Government led by E.K.Nayanar, a White Paper on the State Finances had been issued. It presented the bad picture of state finances and indicated the urgency of cutting the level of public expenditure. Meanwhile, the State Planning Board was reconstituted. The Board informed the Government that 75000 to 80000 staff in Government was in surplus. It

recommended drastic measures like non-filling of retirement vacancies, no creation of fresh posts, re-deployment of surplus staff, voluntary retirement scheme, stay-off service at reduced salary, closure of certain sections and departments, reduction in the number of public corporations and boards, freezing of leave surrender encashment, reduction in the terms and rates of pension commutation etc. The organizations of employees registered their strong protest and in this there was strong unanimity among the organizations that supported the UDF as well as the LDF. Inter-group/faction fighting among the organizations and leaders were forgotten as they felt that they were fighting a battle not just for themselves but also for all the working people who were faced by the complex threats of liberalization, privatisation and globalisation. They rightly argued that the government employees were not responsible for the crash in agricultural prices (particularly Rubber) as this development was obviously an outcome of New Economic Policy and Reforms being implemented by the Central Government. But the tragedy was that its advisers were misleading the State Government on this issue. Meanwhile, through official pronouncements and public speeches, the ministers were preparing a battleground for open clashes between vested interest groups. For instance, the Government had stated that they would recruit the unemployed on daily wages and on contract to replace the striking employees. Students and parents would take on the striking teachers. Farmers under organizations like the INFARM led by a Christian Priest, Father Mathew Vadakkemury had openly come out against the striking employees. The Antony Government had taken the strong strand that it would not take back the steps already taken in curtailing certain benefits of the employees and if necessary would use the ESMA against them. In the first two weeks of the agitation several employees and senior officers had been arrested and suspended from service. From February 6, most government offices and schools had remained closed. Picketing, dharnas, marches and demonstrations and hunger strikes had been undertaken. The trade union centres were planning to launch a sympathetic strike. The Government was in a fix. Service organizations of employees having open allegiance to the political parties belonging to the UDF were in the forefront of the struggle. The NGO Union backed by the CPI (M) was treating this struggle as a larger political issue and as a part of their larger struggle against economic reforms. They had alleged that the Government of Kerala led by A.K.Antony had surrendered to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and accepted the conditionalities that Bank had indicated for giving a massive loan to the State. In fact, the ADB had chosen Kerala as one of the few focal states in the country to set up its shop/offices with advisors to help the state governments to implement drastic public expenditure reforms. Whether these conditionalities were appropriate to the situation in Kerala continue to remain a controversial issue. However, some allege that the ADB would torpedo the positive central achievements of

the Kerala Model of Development. At the time of writing this, the struggle that started on February 6, 2002 was still continuing at the time of writing this, almost paralysing offices and schools.

8.7 UNIONIZATION OF TEMPLE EMPLOYEES

Across the length and breadth of Kerala, one could see several Hindu temples, small and large. Though a few among them were family-based/owned temples, the majority of temples had been brought under the control of Dewaswom Boards constituted by the State Government. The temples had a unique workforce. Those who were engaged in conducting temple poojas were invariably Bhrahmins or Namboodiris. Others were engaged in various activities related to the day-to-day running of temples. They included those who made garlands, prepared various kinds of offerings, kept the temple and its premises clean, managed the temple elephants, and, lighted the temple lamps, while a few others were engaged in an assortment of jobs. They had no regular wage or pay and whatever was paid was just adequate to meet their subsistence. They worked long hours too. They had neither job security nor income security. In short, they did not enjoy any degree of social protection and were being exploited by the Dewaswom Board office staff as well the Board Members. Today we have the Travancore Dewaswom Board and Cochin Dewasom Board. Here we attempt to document only the struggles of employees coming under the Travancore Dewasom Board.

8.7.1 The Beginning

The leaders of the RSP were the first to come forward with a bold plan to mobilize the temple employees coming under the Travancore Dewasom Board. A union was then formed in 1964. It submitted a Memorandum of Demands to the Dewasom Board and declared that if the Board did not take a positive approach, the Union would be launching a direct action until the demands were met.

8.7.2 Commission of Enquiry

Those in charge of the Board saw sense in the Union's demands and agreed to appoint a Commission headed by Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai as the Chairman. P.S.Nataraja Pillai and K.R.Narayanan were the other members. The Commission made a detailed objective study on the conditions of the temples, their revenue and financial position and also the special

problems relating to the work and wages of the temple employees. When the Commission submitted its report it recommended an interim relief of Rs.5 to all employees. The Union then announced that it would defer their direct actions for the time being, though it was not fully satisfied with the Report. It suggested certain modifications to the recommendations of the Commission. But when finally the Board started implementing the recommendations of the Report, it violated the understanding that the union had with the Board. Some actions of the Board were repressive in character.

Mankuzhy Madhavan was the President of the Travancore Dewasom Board and he was staying at Poojappura, a suburb of Thiruvananthapuram. The General Secretary of the Employees' Union accompanied by about hundred employee members staged a march to the residence of Madhavan and they offered a day's token fast. Madhavan tried his best to dissuade the workers from offering a hunger Satyagraha before his residence. But the Union turned down his request⁸.

8.7.3 Suggestions of the Union

The Union had given a letter to the Board on August 9, 1966 suggesting the modifications to the recommendations submitted by the Commission. But the Board did not care to give even a reply. The Union submitted another letter on September 8, 1966 for the follow up. It demanded that the Board should stop acts of victimization like suspension and punishment transfers of employees. Another demand of the Union was that the Board should include the cost/value of cooked rice offerings at the temples (usually called *Padachor*) in the salary of the employee, besides granting them HRA and DA to them. The Union wanted these enhancements from the Onam month's salary.

The Board was really annoyed at these demands and it informed the Union that it could not oblige them and pay the enhanced rates before Onam. Meanwhile, the Board started disbursing the salary to its office staff before Onam and the Union of temple employees took it as a clear discrimination. The Board and its office staff singled out the union activists among the employees and subjected them to harassment in the form of transfers. The action of the Board only strengthened the angry posture of the Union. The Central Committee of the Union met at Alappuzha on September 9 and decided to offer a hunger Satyagraha on the auspicious day of *Thiru Onam*. The Board President took this as a direct attack against him. The struggle was launched and it soon spread to all temples located in Vaikom, Ettumanoor, Kottayam, Thiruvalla, North Parur, Kottarakkara, Aranmula, Varkala and Ambalappuzha and others. Following this, temple employees held

demonstrations in most of the group offices at Thiruvananthapuram, Karunagappally, Vaikom, Ettumanoor, Kottayam, Thiruvalla, Thrikkariyoor, Parur, Kollam, Kottarakkara, Varkala and Ambalappuzha. On November 14, a new phase of the struggle was to commence. Excepting those who were engaged in opening the sanctum sanctorum, lighting the lamps and distributing prasadam offerings to devotees, all employees were to strike work. The RSP leader K.K.Kumara Pillai led the demonstrations of the employees in front of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple at Fort in Thiruvananthapuram. They numbered at least two thousand but they did not hold any flags. K.C.Vamadevan and K.V. Sreedharan went around to assist Kumara Pillai. Shouting "*Chalo Chalo Dewasom Board*", the temple employees raised interesting slogans to indicate their plight. "*We are unable to perform poojas on empty stomach; Jail or wage*" was a typical slogan. Police marched in the front and the behind the employees.

8.7.4 Employees desert the march

The State of Kerala was then under the President's Rule. The authorities under the Governor's Orders had arranged strong police barricades and the police were fully armed to deal with any situation. The police took some members in the march into custody and took them to the cantonment police station. According to K.C. Vamadevan, who was accompanying K.K.Kumara Pillai on the front line of the march, many employees were deserting the march on the way on various pretexts like their ardent desire to worship in the wayside temples. But those who went to worship never returned to rejoin the march. As the number of participants in the march thus went down, the march reached the Museum Junction on the way to Nanthencode where the Board had its headquarters. At the Museum Junction, the march lost a few more participants pleading that they could not resist their natural urges to pass urine. Many of them went into the Museum gardens and disappeared forever. When the march finally reached the Head Office of the Travancore Dewasom Board, there were hardly 312 employees out of the original contingent of 2000 employees. All the 312 employees were arrested.

8.7.5 Struggle of 1974

Following the nation-wide agitation of working class and observance of Demands Day in July 1974, the Employees Union in the Dewasom Board started planning for another struggle. It organized campaigns in all the Dewasom Groups during August 1974. During August 20-22, the employees held marches and demonstrations before the offices of the Assistant Commissioners and paralysed the functioning of these offices. At

Thiruvananthapuram the agitation led to stone throwing and police lathi charges. At Thiruvalla, Neyyattinkara and Karunagappally the Assistant Commissioner offices got paralysed. From August 26, the struggle was concentrated before the Board headquarters. But it was called off temporarily since the Board President suddenly went away after cancelling the meeting of the Board scheduled to be held in the office. However, a team of agitating employees who had come all the way for Karunagappally and Aranmula groups led by M.N.Krishnankutty Panicker decided to *gherao* the Dewasom Commissioner and his office staff including the Board Secretary at their office till 5.30 p.m. The matter was discussed at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Union and it decided to chalk out a detailed action plan for future struggles. One decision was to instruct N.Sreekantan Nair, the President of the Union to seek a meeting with the President of the Dewasom Baord. But the Board authorities did not dare to have a meeting with such a strong leader like Nair. The Union then had no other alternative than go ahead with direct action. The Union purchased a Jeep and a public address system and decided to hold a statewide campaign touching all the Group Dewasom offices. K.Sadananda Sastrri, Mundakkayam Viswam and Ambalathara Sreedharan Nair led this march and campaign from December 15, 1974 from Parassala, south of Thiruvananthapuram. It went all the way to North Parur via the National Highway and returned to Thiruvananthapuram via the M.C.Road touching all group centres on their campaign movement. It took 41 days to complete the campaign. Hundreds of small and large meetings were held to propagate among Dewasom employees, whether unionised or not, about the urgency of a struggle to resolve some of their problems. The march received allround support from the activists of the RSP, UTUC and Progressive Youth Federation (PYF).

On January 1, 1975 the temple employees everywhere through out the State held protest demonstrations in front of the temples soon after the completion of the morning poojas. Volunteers held a 24-hour hunger strike without affecting the poojas in the temples. This attracted public's sympathy and support. Following this, the scope of the struggle was extended with commencement of Satyagraha in front of the offices of the Board headquarters and selected group offices. Volunteers from various Dewasom groups participated in the Satyagraha turn by turn. The Board members, fearing obstruction and inconvenience by the volunteers, decided to keep away from the Board office. The State Unit of the UTUC issued a call to all unions affiliated to it to extend support to the struggle by Dewasom employees and express their solidarity with them. Since no meeting could be held in the Board office at Thiruvananthapuram, the authorities decided to hold the meeting at Thiruvallam under total secrecy, but the employees came to know about it. They rushed to Thiruvallam under the leadership of

Mundakkayam Viswam, G.Narayanan Potti and Ambalathara Sreedharan Nair and successfully foiled the attempt to hold the Board meeting. After a few hours of confrontation, police from the Vizhinjam police station reached the spot and took 18 activists of the Union into custody and allowed the Board members to disperse.

The Union then shifted its activists to the residence of the Board President to hold picketing. There also the police arrested about 48 volunteers and the court remanded them to police custody. The authorities were planning to get the struggle by Dewasom employees prolong indefinitely to enable them to break the struggle and destroy the Union. The Board started suspending several employees from service. It also resorted to many measures of victimization and sent signals to employees about using more stringent measures against them. Meanwhile, finding that their struggle was not going to end in the immediate future, several employees and activists voluntarily started withdrawing from the struggle. At some places some altercation between different groups of employees were reported.

8.7.6 Siege at Board Office

The leaders of the Union decided that they should somehow hold all Dewasom employees together. The Satyagraha being conducted in front of the Board headquarters was intensified and members of the central committee began participating in it. T.M.Prabha, the State Secretary of the UTUC, inaugurated this phase of the struggle. The satyagrahis stayed in front of the office lying on the road and cooking their own meals there. As days passed by without any respite in sight, the Union learnt about the Board's plan to hold a meeting at the office on April 4, 1975. The Board members kept this as a top secret and began to stealthily enter their office rooms much before 10 am on that day. But by 10.15 am, several batches of volunteers of the Union got into the corridors of the first floor of the Board Office and blocked the two doors leading to the Board Room. K.Sadananda Sastri, G.Narayanan Potti and C.K.Kumaran Nair, leaders, were in the centre of action. The struggle of Dewasom Board employees that started on January 27 had thus crossed 68 days. The protest staged by the employees in the inner sanctorum of the Board management sent shivers and shock waves all around the Board members as well as the office staff. The volunteers sat and lay on the floor creating a human chain by holding each other's hands or legs. No body from outside could make a move to the Board Room where the members had been closeted as in a jail cell. A large contingent of police arrived on the scene led by Bhuvanendran Nair, City Assistant Commissioner of Police. He requested K.C.Vamadevan, RSP-UTUC top leader who was present there, that he should somehow help the police to resolve the stalemate. But Vamadevan got

emotional and told the police officer that he could shoot the volunteers who included innocent temple priests who were fighting for their legitimate rights, human considerations and freedom from exploitation by Board officials. After some hesitation, the police was ordered to use some physical force and arrest the volunteers. They were then taken to the Cantonment police station. But they were soon released and most of them rushed back to the Board Office. At the Office gates, the struggle continued for many more days. On November 14, 1966 when the Dewasom employees got arrested first, some of them had run away fearing arrest. But in April 1975 they were a different kind, willing to struggle till they secured their goal.

8.7.7 Union's Mother - Story of Lakshmi Amma

K.C.Vamadevan in his reminiscences highlighted the story of Lakshmi Amma of Ettumanoor who was respected by all Dewasom employees and treated by them as their "*Amma*", Mother. During the first struggle held in 1966, Lakshmi Amma had actively participated in it. She got arrested and remanded to custody for picketing. She was released from police lock up after 12 days thinking that the struggle had been settled. But on knowing that the struggle was going on, instead of going home to see her family, she immediately rushed to the residence of the Board President to join the union volunteers who were offering the Satyagraha there. She saw the makeshift kitchens the volunteers had set up to cook rice and tapioca mobilized through donations from shops and residences in the city of Thiruvananthapuram. She then decided to stay on with the volunteers. She surrendered the small amount of cash given to her by the jail authorities on the day of her release. She joined the Satyagraha again. This time Lakshmi Amma was arrested and remanded to custody for another 14 days. Before she boarded the police van, she stood silent for a minute as if she had forgotten something. She summoned K.C.Vamadevan to come to her side and told him that she had left a small cloth bag brought from her house at Ettumanoor, under the Table in the Union office and this bag contained a small paper packet in which she had kept a small gold chain. She requested Vamadevan to take the chain and sell it and use the money as her humble contribution to meet the cost of rice gruel for her colleagues who were still conducting the struggle. It was indeed a great saga of sacrifice. The struggle by the Dewasom employees, however, ultimately succeeded and those low level of employees like Lakshmi Amma could secure ex-gratia pension of at least Rs.75 a month.

8.7.8 Sreenivasan Potti's transformation

A reference was made earlier about the composition of the temple employees. There were a section of employees belonging to the Namboodiri and other Brahminical castes who were in charge of the poojas in the temples. They were the purohiths, and in every sense, very orthodox, innocent and extremely sensitive. They had an allergy to politics and never had the courage to become a member of a trade union, or join a protest march or demonstration and shout slogans in front of a crowd. In those days (1966), therefore, the RSP-UTUC leaders had to organize rehearsals to train the temple employees how to do various acts like slogan shouting, picketing and so on. It was an arduous job for the leaders.

Daily the Union required a complement of at least 15 volunteers recruited from the temple employees to conduct picketing and court arrest. From day one, the leaders discovered that more and more employees were backing out. One reason was of course their fears about police treatment and uncomfortable and sometimes a painful stay in the jail. Another reason was the inability of the Union to supply modicum of food to the satyagrahs until they were arrested and taken to the jail. Gradually the number of volunteers in each batch of picketers came down from 15 to 5 or even below.

One day while K.C. Vamadevan and K.V. Sreedharan, the RSP leaders, were sitting in their room at the Kerala Bhavan Lodge, two senior activists, Narayanan Potti and K.P. Kurukkal ran up to them to inform that they could mobilize only just three volunteers to do the picketing on that day. Hearing this Vamadevan suggested that if they, Potti and Kurukkal, also agreed the number could be raised to five. Though they agreed to the suggestions, Sreedharan objected to this. Finally after a quick consultation among themselves, Vamadevan and Potti took a taxi car and proceeded straight to the Peroorkada temple. On reaching the spot, they saw the *poojari/purohith* of the temple, Sreenivasan Potti, was just coming out closing the temple after morning poojas. He had in his hand a bunch of keys to the temple and a tray of plantains. They also saw Sreenivasan Potti's son returning home after attending his tutorial classes. Vamadevan was counting numbers and asked Sreenivasan Potti and son to get into car. They just obeyed the leader without anticipating what was in store for them, though they were curious to ask the leader about this journey. Vamadevan asked the taxi driver to rush to Nanthencode where the Dewasom headquarters was housed. On reaching the Board office gates, the leaders asked Sreenivasan Potti and son to get down and immediately join the group of three volunteers who had been patiently waiting for commencing the picketing. A car carrying some Board Members and officials were coming out from the Board's compound. The group of

three original volunteers jumped forward and shouting “*Inquilab Zindabad*” laid themselves on the pathway. Then only Sreenivasan Potti, the innocent *Purohith*, came to know that he and his son were brought in the car by the leaders for joining the picketing struggle. Being a good Brahmin and a *purohit*, the first slogan that he shouted was “*Bhagavane Krishna*” (Hi Lord Krishna)

As usual, the police stationed there arrested all the five picketers. Sreenivasan Potti told the police the whole truth and pleaded for sparing his son at least from the arrest. The police obliged and they took only four of the remaining into custody. They were produced before the court and it ordered imprisonment of the four volunteers for 14 days. The leaders never visualized the trauma that Sreenivasan Potti had to undergo in the lock up in the sub-jail. When the jail authorities asked the inmates of the jail to sit on the floor one by one for their evening meal, Potti refused saying that till that day he had never eaten anything from outside his *Illam* (residence). The Jail Superintendent tried his best to change Potti’s mind, but the latter was adamant. The Superintendent informed K.C.Vamadevan and sought his help in the matter. Vamadevan rushed to the sub jail but Potti was unwilling to change his stand. In those days prisoners themselves usually prepared the meals supplied to the prisoners and at that time there was no Brahmin prisoner other than Sreenivasan Potti in the jail. The authorities could not allow Potti to cook his meals separately. Vamadevan thought that Potti’s firm stand would lead to starvation and subsequent complications. With the special permission of the Jail Superintendent, Vamadevan could arrange a packet of bread from a nearby bakery and supplied it to Potti. Next day also Potti refused to sit along with other fellow prisoners to take the meals and the Jail Superintendent did not allow the supply of bread to Potti that day. But a really hungry Sreenivasan Potti was forced to sit along with other prisoners, mostly belonging to other and few lower castes to share the meal consisting of *Kanji* (rice gruel), and *Pushukku* (curry). The leaders heaved a sigh of relief. But looking back they felt sorry that temple employees like Sreenivasan Potti had left the Dewasom Board service without enjoying any enhancement of pay, allowances and other service benefits which the Union could extract from the Board after the successful completion of their long struggle. But Sreenivasan Potti might have felt contentment in finding that the trauma he underwent during the 14 day life in the jail had ultimately led to better conditions of work and wages of his fellow employees in the Dewasom Board.

In the history of the trade union movement in the state, the unionisation of scavenging workers and also of temple employees constituted two great unforgettable sagas and the various struggles conducted by them under able leaders were responsible for raising their social and economic status among

other segments of the working class as well as among the general public in the State. Thiruvananthapuram could definitely take full credit for this.

8.8 STRUGGLES IN K.S.E.B

We do not intend to give a detailed documentation of the struggles held in the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) for that would require at least a full chapter. However, we focus here on some struggles whose centre of gravity was the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram.

8.8.1 The unions

The KSEB has several trade unions, some of which are craft and category based⁹. Most of them have some affiliation with political parties and their leadership is controlled by leading political figures. An attempt was made in the second half of 1960s to unify all the craft/category unions to strengthen the bargaining power of the working class. The KSEB Engineers had only a single union in early years. In 1968 it split when the Graduate Engineers formed a separate association with T.K.Krishnan as its President.

8.8.2 Attitude of Management

From 1968 onwards, the Government of India had been frequently using the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) and Central Reserve Police (CRP) to handle strikes in essential services like the Electricity Boards. In KSEB due to lack of professional management and frequent intervention by Government and political leaders, there arose misunderstandings leading to breakdown of relations between the Board and its employees. The Board by statute is an autonomous body but in Kerala the Minister of Electricity had subjected the Board to remote control. This had opened up a floodgate of political influence on all decisions taken by the KSEB. In most years an IAS Officer had held the Chairmanship of the Board and he being a nominee of the Ministry must act according to his master's directions. From early days the KSEB management showed a preference to hold talks with craft/category unions and this led to their unprecedented growth. The Central Trade Unions have been fighting against this policy from the beginning. The management also discriminated against those unions supported by opposition political parties. The union leaders closer to the ruling party used to be given several concessions like off duty.

8.8.3 Strikes, 1970, 1978

In 1970 the Graduate Engineers in the KSEB held a 65 daylong strike on the issue of wage and salary revision. Several activists were arrested. During the Emergency, the KSEB witnessed another long strike for 52 days and this was again on the question of salary revision. The strike of 1978 was notable. Soon after Karunakaran left the Chief Minister ship on account of his alleged misdeeds during the Emergency, A.K. Antony had just taken over the leadership. But because of the unique political changes in Kerala, there was another change in the composition in the Ministry with P.K. Vasudevan Nair of the CPI becoming the Chief Minister.

The strike commenced in the first week of May 1978 and the Electricity Workers' Association mainly led it. In Kannur and Thiruvananthapuram districts the strike led to sabotage on 11 KV lines. The strike commenced mainly because there was inordinate delay in completing a negotiated long-term settlement in the KSEB. Following the sabotage on power lines, 172 activists of the CITU affiliated Workers' Association were arrested from different parts of the State. But sabotage of the power lines continued on the third day of the strike. The power supply got snapped in the 66 KV Chengulam – Idikki, and, Ettumanoor – Palai lines. The Government ordered the suspension of 14 Assistant Engineers. The State Committee of the CITU issued an appeal to all trade unions in the State to rally behind the KSEB workers. By May 12, 1978, the Government stated that the striking employees had sabotaged or damaged 142 power lines causing breakdown of electricity supply in the state.

Meanwhile the Electricity Board Thozhilali Union led by B.K.Nair, the INTUC leader, announced that its members were joining the struggle from May 15. In the ensuing days of the strike, besides the power lines, the strikers also damaged a few transformers. However, a new dimension emerged in the strike scenario. There was another union of KSEB employees led by the Congress MP and INTUC leader Vayalar Ravi and a campaign to denigrate the union led by senior leader B.K. Nair was initiated. The Chief Minister issued a warning to Government employees that it would handle them with an iron hand if they attempted to launch a strike in support of the KSEB employees. Vayalar Ravi asked the CITU to unilaterally withdraw their strike and request the KSEB to expedite a negotiated settlement. E.Balanandan, President of the Workers' Association and top leader of the CITU and CPI (M) rejected Vayalar Ravi's call. Balanandan told the media that if there were further delay in concluding the negotiated settlement, he would call for a statewide general strike and even a *Bundh* if necessary. The leaders of the UDF made an attempt to intervene and bring about a compromise. Failing

that, the Government made preparations for meeting the *Bundh* by requesting for additional armed constabulary from other states and the Centre. The *Bundh* was scheduled to take place on June 15 and the Indira Congress was expected to join it. But P.V.Sankaranarayanan, the INTUC leader asked the INTUC led workers not to participate in the *Bundh*.

When the *Bundh* commenced, power supply failed in Badagara, Kannur, Kasaragode and Mananthavadi line network. Thiruvananthapuram also was in darkness. Labour Minister Oommen Chandy then took the initiative to commence negotiations with the representatives of the KSEB employees. As a result, on June 23, 1978 the striking unions affiliated to the CITU, AITUC and INTUC called off the strike, thereby, opening up the way of an early-negotiated settlement.

A close analysis of the above struggle by KSEB employees brought out the following important points. Though the strike was initiated by the CITU led by E.Balanandan of the CITU, it secured whole-hearted support from BMS led by K.A.Sivarama Bharathi, INTUC factions led by V.P.Marikkar and B.K.Nair, STU led by Janab E.K.K.Muhammed and also by S.C.S Menon, the veteran independent trade unionist. Government employees, teachers and student organizations also supported the struggle. One issue in the struggle was a general one affecting the entire working class in the country. It was the anti-worker character of the Report submitted by the Bhoothalingam Committee. The working class was also opposed to the new Industrial Relations Bill and policy, which aimed at curtailing the legitimate rights of workers to unite and launch collective action.

8.8.4 Factions within INTUC

The struggle also brought different factions of the Congress and the INTUC into an open confrontation. The official INTUC declared that it would have no link with the Indira Congress. But in the Kerala INTUC, C.M.Stephen, President, P.R. Francis, Vice President and V.P.Marikkar, one of the secretaries were loyal to the Indira Congress, leaving the other three Vice-Presidents, one General Secretary, Treasurer and two Joint Secretaries of the INTUC deciding to remain with the Congress (Organization). While the INTUC having its links with the Indira Congress supported the strike of 1978, other leading INTUC leaders like P.V.Sankaranarayanan and C.G.Janardhanan opposed the strike particularly when it led to sabotage and damage to power lines and transformers putting the public to great hardships. It was also alleged that in some places, broken power lines caused burn injuries and death of innocents due to electrocution.

There were a few other notable struggles in the KSEB. In 1973 the employees had gone on a strike demanding a hike in DA. In some places the struggle became violent on account of inter-union rivalry. One worker was stabbed to death. There were three other martyrs, Ravindran of Thiruvananthapuram, Thevan of Ernakulam and Unniyankutty of Malappuram. But their trade union came forward to give total income security to their families.

8.8.5 Period of turbulence

The 1980s was also period of turbulence in the KSEB, particularly when R.Balakrishna Pillai, who in his early career started as a trade union leader but who subsequently became a strong anti-labour leader, held the Electricity portfolio. According to the CITU, Balakrishna Pillai was bent on destroying the union movement in the KSEB and at the same time destroy the KSEB itself. During the struggles, he used to interfere in the day today affairs of the KSEB and made KSEB management non-functional. He opposed any move for a negotiated settlement. But Karunakaran, the then Chief Minister took just the opposite view. Even the CITU leaders preferred Karunakaran's posture and diplomacy for bringing about quick settlement. Since the Congress Party led the Government, Karunakaran the Chief Minister wished the INTUC to withdraw from the strike. But the INTUC did not accept this and so the Government had no alternative but to use the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA) against the striking employees of the KSEB. Vayalar Ravi was leading one of the major INTUC unions and S.Varadarajan Nair another top INTUC leader was functioning as the Chairman of the Joint Action committee. M.S.Rawther, another leading activist of the INTUC was arrested when he was coming out of the Cliff House, the official residence of the Chief Minister, after attending a conciliation conference there, on the alleged charge of deploying dynamite explosives on KSEB installations. Such was the confrontation between the Congress led Government and Congress supported INTUC unions.

8.8.6 Politics and Factions

Over the years, the union movement in the KSEB got divided and fragmented on the basis of politics. Excepting a few general industry unions, the majority were caste/craft/category based. The INTUC itself has more than one trade union affiliated to it and led by different leaders who went usually at each other's throat. In 2001, the Indian National Congress in Kerala had at least four distinct groups, most of them splinter ones led by some old and young leaders. However the major groups are led by K.Karunakaran and

A.K.Antony and are called Congress (I) and Congress (A). However, such a clear division had not come in the State unit of the INTUC. But the present President of the State INTUC unit, Suresh Babu is reported to be a close ally of the Congress (I) group. After the demise of leaders like C.M.Stephen, P.V.Sankaranarayanan, S.Varadarajan Nair and V.P.Marikkar, and, withdrawal of senior leaders like B.K.Nair from the scene, the INTUC did not have dynamic leadership as in the earlier years. Splinter groups of INTUC centred on individual leaders began to appear and sometimes, unfortunately, in the same undertakings. Most often these splinter groups took opposing stands even on common issues. This was what happened in the KSEB.

8.8.7 Joint Struggle

The CITU union in the KSEB claims to possess a membership of 12000 members. It raised more than Rs.70 lakhs for constructing its own building for housing its office as well as for providing guest rooms for its members and families at a central location in the city of Thiruvananthapuram. The foundation of the building was laid by its President E.Balanandan and when completed it was opened by EMS Namboodiripad. Today this union had become financially strong. The AITUC union in the KSEB is the next biggest general union. In the recent past these two unions had launched a number of joint struggles. They were fully aware about the urgency of an issue-based unity among all trade unions. This has led to the formation of a unity platform, and a National Campaign Committee. In 1990 a sponsoring committee was set up to create a National Platform for transforming the working class into a dynamic driving force to lead a people's movement for saving the nation.

E.Balanandan, V.B.Cherian and K.O.Habib led the CITU union in the KSEB. Among them V B Cherian was pushed out by the CPI (M) leadership both from the Party as well as the CITU. This aspect had been discussed elsewhere in some detail. Besides the leaders mentioned above, others also inspired the CITU union like Peerumade K.I.Rajan, T.K.Krishnan of Nattika, Anirudhan and C.Balakrishnan. J.Chitharanjan, K.A.Rajan, K.C.Mathew, M.Sukumara Pillai and A.N.Rajan led the AITUC union having close links with the CPI. A.C.Jose, Thampanoor Ravi and M.S.Rawther led the INTUC union. Vayalar Ravi had also another union. Kosalaramasadas was the President of at least three trade unions in the KSEB. On many occasions one central issue of debate among all the trade unions was the advisability of having internal leadership in the unions, particularly because the majority of employees were technically qualified and educated. Unlike in the early phase of the KSEB's growth, today's employees are reported to be more trade union conscious and capable of managing their own affairs through constructive

collective bargaining. Thus a strong cadre of internal leadership has emerged in the KSEB in recent times. But according to some veterans, this was not a good development since the new set of internal leaders would be concerned mostly with their own self-interest and this is not conducive to the growth of a broad based class-consciousness.

The left unions in the KSEB had extended its solidarity and support to sister organizations in other public sector units including the Posts and Telegraphs. They are fully aware that Electricity is a basic strategic industry and as such needs lot of modernization and restructuring. But the media campaign that these trade unions are against restructuring is damaging their reputation. Hence there is a controversial debate on Power Sector Reforms. Almost all the unions in the KSEB agree that staff utilization in the undertaking is very low. Transmission and distribution loss is found to be heavy. Tariff structure is not rationalized. There is a complaint that the KSEB is overstaffed but the people in the technical wing say that this applies only to non-technical ministerial staff. While trade unions agree to urgent restructuring and reform they are strongly opposed to privatisation of the KSEB.

8.8.8 Kosalaramadas looks back

K.P.Kosalaramadas, now past 70 years old, was once a terror to employers in Thiruvananthapuram. But today he is a man with a certain amount of disappointment writ large on his face simply because the vision he had when he started trade union and political work had been shattered by several events in the history of modern Kerala. Son of K.P.Das, a respected Congress leader of yester years, Kosalaramadas held strongly to certain principles, which according to him were right, whether others accept it or not. In his younger days he used to be a frequent visitor to the Rashtriya Hotel (where the Travancore State Congress was born), C.Narayana Pillai's Khadar Store and used to closely interact with leaders like Puthuppally Raghavan, K.C. George, Dr.Sukumaran and Ulloor Gopi at the Luke's shop in front of the Government Secretariat.

Kosalaramadas soon caught a fancy for Communism and Marx-Engels and Lenin. He worked for the Communist Party and did lot of groundwork in the founding of the NGO Union. He organized the Museum Contingency Employees Association with Kattayikonam Sridhar as President and himself as Secretary. He remembers Panampally declaring openly that as long he was in power he would not allow both trade union organization and prostitution with all the contempt he could command with his words. He ordered the dismissal of 80 employees from the Museum. When the Government changed

and the State came under the Governor's Rule, it saw reality and reinstated all the employees. Kosalaramadas reminded that the right to organize which was not allowed by a democratic government was now being granted by the Advisor to the State Governor without workers undertaking a big struggle.

After the fall of the EMS Ministry in 1959, caused by its dismissal by the President of India, the communist movement underwent a big transformation for the worse, according to Kosalaramadas. There arose ideological clashes. The emergence of revisionism in the party benefited only the bourgeoisie. Fascist tendencies began to grow. Very often group wars were not ideology based, the object being getting into political power. Party started acquiring enormous wealth and assets, and, in the process, core segments of the working class were totally neglected by leaders of both the Party and the trade union movement.

In the State Transport and the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) there were no rules governing the service and terms of employment of Non-Muster Roll (NMR) workers. Kosalaramadas took up their case and mobilized them through a number of struggles and today they have become part of the establishment. In the State Transport, Imbichi Bava the Transport Minister, in 1967 had a field day when he decided to replace the staff owing allegiance to the Kerala Congress leadership, by men from his own party the CPI (M) through making appointments violating the established rules. Kosalaramadas had raised his strong objections to this action. Similarly in KSEB and the Kundara Ceramics he criticized some of the decisions by the CPI (M) ministers and as a result the CPI (M) decided to eliminate Kosalaramadas from both political as well as trade union movement. But his unique style of functioning and the rebel nature of his character, both in words and deeds, attracted many sections of the working class and they sought his help and guidance. But wherever he entered, the CPI (M) tried to create obstacles. When Kosalaramadas succeeded in increasing the wages by Rs.500 for NMR workers in KSEB through a negotiated settlement, the CITU was not happy with it. They saw to it that the benefit earned by the workers was recovered as early as possible. Pinarayi Vijayan, the CPI (M) leader, was adopting a strategy for giving a shock to Kosalaramadas but it miserably failed because of the timely intervention by the Accountant General who cited the Kerala Service Rules to stop recovery of the benefits already disbursed to workers.

When Kosalaramadas secured an increase of Rs.1600 in the emoluments of workers in the English India Clays, during 2000, the CITU came out to defeat it by demanding an increase of Rs.2000. But their strategy did not succeed. The ideological clash between the CPI (M) and Kosalaramadas has not ended. For some years, Kosalaramadas was very actively involved in the CPI (ML) group and was even described as an insider

of the Naxalite movement. But today he is leading the India-China Friendship Society and does active networking with such leaders like A.V. Aryan, who was considered as one of the severest critics of CPI (M) and as one who had a strong grouse against E.M.S. Namboodiripad.

One of the important events in Kosalaramadas' career was the struggle that he led in the KSEB during 1964 when Kerala was under President's Rule with the veteran leader V.V.Giri as the Governor. When the strike in KSEB commenced, the Government used the Essential Services Maintenance Act to ban the strike and ordered the dispute to be referred to compulsory adjudication. The KSEB management dismissed about 2000 employees. Giri could not shut his eyes to this as he was very sensitive to labour disputes and totally opposed to adjudication. The union led by Kosalaramadas submitted a Memorandum to V.V.Giri. He directed the Chief Secretary to discuss the issues with the leaders. A settlement was possible on many issues, leaving a few ones for arbitration. Chandu Nair, the Chairman of the KSEB, was instructed to carry on negotiations with the unions. The CITU used black legs during the strike and they, most of them being untrained to do skilled electrical work, caused a serious risk to human lives. Kosalaramadas' union went to High Court pleading for the issue of direction to the KSEB as well as the Government of Kerala to give an early decision on the demand for regularization of MNR employees. The litigation went on for some months. When the Emergency was declared Kosalaramadas was taken into custody and he had to spend nearly two years in jail.

Kosalaramadas is now busy with his work in the India China Friendship Society, but he is a dejected leader particularly when he looks up the contemporary scene in the Kerala Society. According to him, the quality of political and trade union work has deteriorated beyond repair. There are no genuine working class struggles to day. The white-collar bourgeoisie dominates today's so-called "working class". Bureaucracy has lost its backbone. Workers have no faith on their union leaders and leaders do not trust them. Who leads and who is led are mostly unclear. Workers and their unions are forced to sacrifice their basic interests for the benefit of their political party bosses. In the political party and in the trade union there is no democracy. The communists have lost their revolutionary character and now they move more closely with the rich classes. Ideology has been thrown to the winds. Kosalaramadas strongly believes that those who love and respect their fellowmen alone can become a true communist. In today's world their tribe is fast getting extinguished.

8.9 STRUGGLES IN KELTRON

Considering the unique structure of Kerala Society and Economy and its rich endowment of educated manpower, the State Government invited K.P.P.Nambiar to help the State to launch an ambitious Information Technology (IT) venture. As a result of this the State established the Kerala State Electronics Development Corporation (KSEDC) and under it a chain of KELTRON enterprises was set up in several places in Kerala including even in some industrially backward districts like Kannur and Malappuram. KELTRON commenced with production of television sets and at one stage the KELTRON brand had captured a very big share in the colour TV market. Under Nambiar's guidance, KELTRON had gone into large-scale diversification into such areas as microelectronics, industrial electronics, electronic counters etc. Unfortunately, with changes of government, shifts and reversals in the State Policy and the departure of K.P.P.Nambiar from Kerala, KELTRON began to face a decline and today at the time of writing this, it is struggling for survival. Though some proposals for restructuring KELTRON are on the anvil, no concrete steps have so far been taken to save it.

8.9.1 Unionisation

KELTRON, being a State owned Enterprise (SOE) had been facing a number of trade union struggles, which according to some observers have been responsible for the rapid decline of the enterprise. In 1976 KELTRON had no formal registered trade unions. Wages and salaries were low as compared to similar undertakings elsewhere as well as in state civil service. Victimization by management was a regular phenomenon. The management used to impose very cruel punishment on employees. Those who had reported late for work even by one minute would be punished with a cut of half a day's wages. Middle and lower cadre of management personnel who were acting like the notorious Kangaris of old days enforced this type of punishment. The top management never knew what was happening at lower levels. The style of overall management was least professional.

One of the first incidents in the KELTRON was the spontaneous protest by employees who decided to register a complaint about the extremely poor quality of food served in the kitchen. V.J.Joseph, the INTUC leader in KELTRON remembers the protest demonstration by employees who started breaking food plates. These employees were served with notices of warning and threat of punishment. Those who were displeased with this, informally assembled on the lush grounds of the Kanakakunnu Palace located very close to KELTRON head office at Vellayambalam and discussed in small groups

about the possibility of forming an organization of employees. Since most of the employees were fairly educated and skilled they had a white-collar culture that forced them to look at trade unions with an unfriendly manner. Those who were discussing the formation of a trade union did not get any help from the well-established trade union leaders of Thiruvananthapuram. Hence the initiative had to come from the employees themselves. Finally on March 8, 1976 the KELTRON Employees' Union was registered with great difficulty. Though KELTRON had 400 employees at that time, to get the signatures of a minimum seven members was not easy. When the Union's promoters approached the employees, they would give some excuses to keep away. Finally the hurdle was overcome when they got seven employees willing to put their signatures.

8.9.2 Era of Struggles

The era of struggles in KELTRON started in 1977 with an 11-day strike called by KELTRON Employees' Union on the issue of revision of wages and salaries. The strike was withdrawn when the management agreed to give a salary increase of Rs.70 a month. V.J.Joseph who was leading the Union had made a speech in one of the meetings of employees. Somebody taped this speech and produced it before the company's Personnel Department. But some insiders in that Department advised against taking action and victimizing V.J.Joseph on the basis of this.

In 1978, the Union submitted a demand for Bonus. Meanwhile, there were signs of political influences penetrating the union. Some members of the union shifted to another union formed by the CITU. This new union also raised a bonus demand. Both the unions had quoted the figures of rising profit as a reason for demanding higher bonus. A strike was started that lasted 44 days.

The CITU union's plea was that since KELTRON's profits had increased from Rs.3 lakhs to Rs.5 lakhs, the difference of Rs.2 lakhs should be distributed as bonus to its employees. P.K.Vasudevan Nair of the CPI was the Industries Minister in the Government headed by A.K.Antony of the Congress. Oommen Chandy of the Congress was holding the Labour portfolio.

When no signs of an early settlement were seen, Aryadan Mohamed of the Congress and the INTUC agreed to mediate. The Government then called a conference. At that conference the CITU union raised a new demand that besides 8.33 per cent bonus, employees should be given Rs.100 as advance and if the management failed to comply with this, the issue of bonus for the

year 1977-78 should be referred to adjudication. V.Krishnamurthy, the then Labour Commissioner was asked to clarify the legal positions. V.J.Joseph of the Employees' Union submitted to the Government that his Union was ready to sign a settlement and that the CITU union alone would not able to continue the strike as it had only a small minority control among KELTRON employees. As expected, the settlement was signed on a Saturday and on the coming Monday almost all the employees promptly reported for work. This gave an opportunity to the CITU union to campaign against Jospah's Employees' Union saying that the settlement that had been signed had virtually let down the employees and so a reply should be given to those who had cheated them. But this campaign did not have the expected result.

In 1981 there was another struggle in KELTRON which was purely instigated by party politics. The CITU union accused the Employees Union members as blacklegs when the company management declared a lock out. There was a pro-naxalite group in the CITU union in KELTRON that opposed both the LDF government led by E.K.Nayanan as well as the CPI (M) as a political party. The lock out lasted 69 days. It was a bad period for the KELTRON employees from every point of view. The Government at that time was led by E.K.Nayanan of the CPI (M) while the Industry port folio was handled by P.C.Chacko of the Congress. In KELTRON, the workers and employees in the early years did not want any outside leader to lead their unions. But soon the CITU union went in for K.N.Ravindranath and the Employees' Union opted for INTUC affiliation with Oommen Chandy as its President. But one remarkable thing about these leaders was that they never interfered with the day-to-day functioning of their unions leaving the employee members complete freedom to discuss their issues and formulate their policies.

According to V.J.Joseph, in the early days the activists of the Employees' Union were more involved in the union's work. Since the Union was short of funds, trade union notices and memoranda were mostly handwritten and copies of the same were made using carbon paper. These notices were distributed to the employees at the entry gates. Many of the employees used to accept these notice with some reluctance. Today trade union meetings have become stylish and conducted with pomp to make political speeches. Once KELTRON started declining the unions in it also have become weak and less active. Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS) has been implemented in KELTRON and several employees had opted for it.

8.10 MOVEMENT OF HEAD LOAD WORKERS

There is a certain amount of obscurity regarding the origin of unionisation among head load workers in Kerala¹⁰. According to Vijayakumar, during 1936-38 an attempt was made to organize head load workers in Thrissur. It was known as the "Daily Workers' Union". Another attempt was made during 1945-46 to form a union at the Thrissur Foodgrains Depot. But this union did not function in an organized basis, nor did it take pains for getting registration¹¹. The circumstances that led to the formation of both the unions were unknown. The Administration Report of the Labour Department of the Government of Travancore for the year 1948 reported the existence of one head load workers' union at the end of July 1947. The second union, which got registration in Travancore, was in the Thiruvananthapuram Port. Though this union got registration on June 25, 1948, it was cancelled on June 15, 1955. By 1950-51 there were eight head load workers' unions functioning in the State. The rapid growth of unionisation of head load workers, however, commenced only after 1970. In 1976 there were 79 registered unions of head load workers in Kerala with a total membership of 3904. By 1985 it increased to 613 and 38276 respectively.

8.10.1 Varthaka Thozhilai Union

The first union of head load workers in Thiruvananthapuram was in the Chalai Bazar. T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai, a socialist party leader, led it. The name of the union was Varthaka Thozhilali Union. Originally this Union was meant to accommodate the accountants employed in the grain shops at Chalai. The first officially formed and registered union in the area was the "Vividha Thozhilali Union" affiliated to the UTUC backed by the RSP. This was during 1950-51 under the leadership of RSP leaders P.C.John and K.N.Sukumaran. In the early phase, the members of the union were attached head load workers employed at various wholesale grain and provision shops, engineering industry and Titanium Products Company.

8.10.2 Vividha Thozhilali Union

During this period, the Sabhapathy Coil Street was the nerve centre of business in Chalai market. About fifty merchants had their shops in the street of which the majority were wholesale dealers in grain and provisions. Two to seven head load workers were attached to each one. At the northern end of the Sabhapathy Coil Street a factory, called Travancore Sugars and Chemicals

Ltd., was functioning under British management. The workers and staff of this company had their own unions. Since the market was adjacent to the factory, the union leaders and workers in this factory had direct contact with the workers employed in the market. According to Vijayakumar, the attached workers had a very long working hours and their wages were meagre. Sufficient number of unemployed workers was available there in the area and they were prepared to undercut wages and eager to grab some work and earn something. This often caused some insecurity to the attached workers. Moreover, some of the attached head load workers came from Vallakkadavu where one union of head load workers was already functioning. These factors paved the way for the formation of Vividha Thozhilali Union in which about 150 attached head load workers joined as members.

Unionisation of workers paved the way for the formation of merchants' organizations in the area. The merchants began to victimize the workers by suddenly terminating their service even without prior notice, and recruiting new workers from the reserve army of the unemployed in their area. The Union protested and held a strike demanding reinstatement of the retrenched workers, increase in wage rates and payment of bonus. The strike continued for 40 days. During the strike physical clashes between the Union activists and men hired by the merchants were a regular feature. At last, the matter was referred to the Industrial Tribunal for adjudication. The Award was in favour of the Union. The merchants went on appeal to the High court, but it dismissed the appeal. So by the end of 1952 all the retrenched workers were taken back. Wages were raised and a four per cent bonus was paid.

8.10.3 Racketeering Unionism

The Vividha Thozhilali Union soon became powerful after the success of the strike. Its membership increased. Though leaders of the RSP led the Union, the rank and file workers began to function as a "*goonda set*" always coming to help the political party with their militant muscle power. The merchants were indulging in black marketing to create artificial shortages of essential goods and making some extra money out of it. The workers knew this and they demanded a due share in it. Under pressure, the merchants yielded. But that brought a black mark on the Union. The situation developing in this context was similar to that of "racketeering unionism".

8.10.4 Change of Life Style

As days passed by, head load workers improved their level of earnings. In the past most of them were leading a hand to mouth existence. When

family members, particularly the spouses knew that their husbands or fathers were earning more, wondered why they were denied a share in the prosperity. But the bulk of the wages earned went to liquor shops and gambling dens and the family was deprived of. This prompted the family members to visit the office of the trade union and make appeals to the leaders to help them. At this, the union leaders directed its members to open savings accounts with the Chalai branch of the Cochin Commercial Bank. The passbooks were kept with the Union Secretary and the workers began to deposit a portion of their wages in the Bank. Withdrawals were allowed only with the knowledge and permission of the Union. However, this system functioned only for a short period.

8.10.5 Revival of Varthaka Thozhilali Union under HMS

For some time the first union the Varthaka Thozhilali Union had become non-functional. T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai, its founder tried to revive it during 1952-53 under the banner of Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), he being a socialist. But it could not make any impact on head load workers as majority of them were under the RSP union. The RSP formed a new trade union namely, Thiruvananthapuram Jilla Chumattu Thozhilali Union.

8.10.6 Rise of AITUC Union

The popularity of the RSP union among head load workers and their increased deployment in political clashes motivated the AITUC to form its own union among head load workers. The All Kerala Head Load and General Workers' Union was thus formed in 1960. Naturally this created a division in the ranks of the Left. This was an outright, violation of the understanding reached by the top leaders of the RSP and the CPI namely, the TV-Sreekantan Unity Formula. Both of them wanted to establish strong bonds of unity of all left forces to fight for labourer's rights. But the so called much publicized TV-Sreekantan Formula was openly violated by both the RSP and CPI and the trade union centres affiliated to them.

8.10.7 Hunger Strike of K.N.Sukumaran

The year 1951 was an important landmark in the head load workers' movement. Sukumaran Nair, a rice merchant of Chalai was also functioning as a head load worker as well as a known union activist belonging to the RSP group ¹². Rajappan, Kunju Kunju and K.N.Sukumaran were his close associates. Plumber Appukkuttan Nair was a top functionary of the Union.

The merchants of Chalai Bazar had an association called the Chamber of Merchants and T.M.Subramonia Pillai was its Secretary. Pillai triggered off a dispute when he terminated the services of a few head load workers and the RSP union took it up. Negotiations failed. The same fate happened to conferences called by the State Labour Department. At this juncture, K.N.Sukumaran offered to start a hunger strike in front of Subramonia Pillai's shop. It was a period of incessant working class struggles in several industrial establishments in and around Thiruvananthapuram. The major struggles were going on in the Rubber Works, PWD Workshop, Lakshmi Textiles, Travancore Textiles (in Nemom) and a few Tile factories. Every day evening there took place huge marches and demonstrations by striking workers and also public meetings. But the centre of focus was K.N.Sukumaran whose health was deteriorating day by day due to his resolve to fast until death. The State Government did not give any indication of an initiative to refer the dispute to adjudication as a way out. Physical clashes took place at several places between workers demonstrating their support and sympathy to K.N.Sukumaran and merchants who were resisting the struggle.

When the hunger strike of Sukumaran reached the eleventh day, tension mounted. It was at this juncture that the great RSP leader N.Sreekantan Nair declared that he was going to offer hunger strike before the Government Secretariat to fight for the cause of working class struggles in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Chavara, Alappuzha and Mundakkayam. The conditions of Ambalathara Janardhanan, who was spending sleepless nights in the Satyagraha Pandal (Shamaina) to keep company with K.N.Sukumaran also had started worsening. Once Sreekantan Nair commenced his hunger strike at the Government Secretariat, leaders wanted to find out a way to end Sukumaran's fast. K.C.Vamadevan and P.C.Pillai were entrusted with the task to do it. The police was keeping aloof and did not come forward to arrest K.N.Sukumaran and remove him to the jail.

On the twelfth day of fast, friends and relatives assembled around Sukumaran as they were expecting that the worst might happen. K.C.Vamadevan and P.C.Pillai took a last minute decision without informing others. They went to the defiant merchant Subramonia Pillai's house and knocked at his door. They had carried the famished K.N.Sukumaran with them and placed him on the ground near the *Thulasi Plant Mandap* in Pillai's courtyard. The leaders told the inmates that they did not want that Sukumaran's life should end in front of his shop, but it should be at Pillai's house *veranda*. They added that Pillai would be the most appropriate person to arrange for the cremation of Sukumaran's body. The women in Pillai's house seeing and hearing this started to cry aloud. At this the leaders left the scene. Within half an hour, the police reached the spot, took Sukumaran and

Ambalathara Janardhanan into custody. The hunger strike of K.N.Sukumaran thus ended.

8.10.8 Adjudication of the Dispute

As soon as K.N.Sukumaran was arrested, the State Government acted quickly. P.N.Krishna Pillai, the then Labour Commissioner intervened and referred the dispute to adjudication. K.N.Kunju Krishna Pillai was the adjudicator. After hearing both sides, he pronounced an Award. Under this, Subramonia Pillai, the merchant, was directed to reinstate all the workers whose services he had terminated. The workers were to be paid a bonus at 4 per cent of their earnings. The Award suggested to the State Government that a Law should be enacted to regulate the head load labour market and employment and create a machinery to prevent and settle disputes in this vulnerable segment in an amicable manner.

8.10.9 Rift in the AITUC

By the end of 1960s, rift in the AITUC had emerged. Several clashes between different groups of head load workers were reported from Chalai Bazar. The left wing communists formed a separate union, namely, District Head Load and Shop Employees Association in 1969. The Association was quite aware of the fact that only by using physical force they could establish their presence in the Chalai market.

8.10.10 Arrival of F.C.I. Godowns

The Government of Kerala set up the subsidized Public Distribution System (PDS) and following that a sub-depot and godown of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) were opened at Chalai to distribute the food grains to ration dealers. The newly set up District Head load and Shop Employees Association demanded that the loading and unloading work in the FCI sub-depot should be entrusted to the unemployed workers who were hanging around the Chalai area. The FCI could not agree to this.

During December 1969 under the leadership of Chalai Bhaskaran Nair and Perunthanni Soman Nair a group of about 70 workers clashed with the workers at the FCI depot and tried to forcibly capture the “right to work” there. Street battles followed but the attempt to capture the “right to work” by the leaders did not succeed.

8.10.11 End of monopoly of RSP/UTUC

After the above incident, the situation in the Chalai market worsened. The monopoly of the RSP/UTUC led union of head load workers ended in early 1970, with the murder of one of its members in the area by rival groups. The UTUC led union faced many defections in its ranks. It did not and could not retaliate against the murder. The morale of the UTUC workers began to vane and for their existence, they began to join the other left unions. The formation of the CITU gave a fillip to it. The District Head load and Shop Employees Association changed its name to District Head load and General Workers' Union and got it affiliated to the CITU. The Thiruvananthapuram Jilla Chumattu Thozhilali Union ceased to function after holding the monopoly of the head load workers' labour market for nearly two decades.

8.10.12 Emergence of the INTUC

The INTUC emerged in the head load labour segment in Chalai market only after the mid 1970s, even though its City General Workers' Union had been formed in 1969. In 1973, exclusively for the head load workers in Thriuvananthapuram, the INTUC formed a union namely, Thiruvananthapuram Jilla Chumattu Thozhilali Congress. Varadarajan Nair, the veteran INTUC leader was the guiding spirit behind this move. Its early organizing workers were drawn from the Youth Congress wing. Thus young blood was infused into the mobilization of head load workers. Naturally the elders who had held control over the head load workers and the left movement did not relish the entry of Youth Congress men making inroads into their domain. Some leaders of the Congress-led Kerala Students Union (KSU) also helped in the organizing work among head load workers. Their style of functioning and dynamism attracted workers to the INTUC. The presence of top congress leader K.Karunakaran was an inspiring force in this. Soon clashes between workers belonging to the CITU and the INTUC became a daily affair. Each one was trying to acquire a bigger share of control over the head load workers. The declaration of National Emergency during 1975 provided the INTUC with the right conditions for its penetration and advancement. Kerala was then having a coalition ministry headed the CPI leader C.Achutha Menon. But the Home portfolio was in the hands of the Congress leader K.Karunakaran, a veteran in the trade union movement who knew how union power and control could be strengthened.

8.10.13 Ups and Downs in the Movement

The INTUC soon brought new workers from distant places to Chalai and even forcibly displaced some of the CITU workers. The CITU union knew that its existence was of no use. They formulated a strategy with some long run considerations in mind. They asked their members to join the INTUC union if they wished. It led to a situation when some workers decided to pay subscriptions to both the CITU and the INTUC affiliated unions. But as soon as the Emergency was withdrawn, majority of workers went back to the CITU. In short, the INTUC could not break the power of the CITU in Chalai. Meanwhile the City General Workers' Union (INTUC) changed its name to Thiruvananthapuram Jilla General Workers' Union in 1976.

The INTUC office at Manjalikulam Road was the hub of activity for the young trade union activists drawn from the cadre of Kerala Student's Union (KSU) and the Youth Congress. Varkala Kahar, Thampanoor Ravi, Palode Ravi and G.Karthikeyan were the few upcoming leaders from this group. Some of them used to meet at Statue Restaurant as well as the Gandhi Hotel near Chalai to formulate their strategies and action programmes to effectively counter the CITU cadres in the head load labour market. One day when Varkala Kahar and his colleagues were going to the General Hospital Junction after a meeting at Statue Restaurant, CITU cadres attacked them. On another occasion when Varkala Kahar was sleeping in his room at Gandhi Hotel, the CITU activists attacked him but due to timely precautions he could save his life. Today Varkala Kahar gets nightmares of that struggling period of establishing the INTUC control on Chalai head load market. Through his devotion and hard work, Kahar had been rising steadily in the INTUC hierarchy to become the President of the Kerala State Federation of INTUC Head load Workers' Union. His trade union work had made Varkala Kahar a permanent gastro patient.

Palode Ravi remembers the day when an INTUC unit of head load workers were formed in the Thampanoor area against threats of attack from the rival CITU group. The lodge where Ravi was staying was attacked. But the young leaders and activists were determined to counter the CITU and establish a niche in the head load labour segment. The INTUC soon could establish their units in the Chalai Kothuval Street, which was one of the largest segments of head load labour. Now the INTUC leaders claim that they have the largest following/membership in Thiruvananthapuram. The top leaders like Varadarajan Nair, K.Karunakaran and Vayalar Ravi had given the youth elements in the INTUC the necessary leadership. The INTUC cadres had been created and they were actively carrying on trade union work in the head load labour market in Thiruvananthapuram.

8.10.14 Division in the Congress

Following the aftermath of the Emergency the Indian National Congress split into Congress (Indira) and Congress (Organization). In Kerala the split led to the division of Congress (I) led by K.Karunakaran and Congress (A) led by A.K.Antony. The former consisted of the team of leaders who vowed allegiance to Indira Gandhi. The latter consisted mainly the young blood that openly questioned the misdeeds of Indira Gandhi during the National Emergency in particular. Naturally this split in the Indian National Congress had its repercussions in the INTUC and the two groups began to move in two directions. The Thiruvananthapuram Jilla General Workers' Union went with Antony Congress and the Thiruvananthapuram Jilla Chunmattu Thozhilali Congress with Indira Congress.

The coming together of the two factions of the Congress in the early 1980s did not have much effect on the INTUC led unions. They continued to function in the Chalai market as two separate entities under different leaderships, but continued under the single banner of the INTUC (I) as it was called thereafter. Meanwhile in 1984 the Thiruvananthapuram District Head load and General Workers' Organization was formed by the leaders of another faction, the Congress (S) group.

8.10.15 Unique features in head load labour segment

Unionisation of head load workers in the Chalai market in Thiruvananthapuram was stimulated by several factors like low wage rates, unsteady employment, absence of permanent right to do work, pitiable conditions of work and victimization by employers. The Chalai market used to witness frequent tensions when groups of new workers converge to the area, undercut wages and take way work from those who were doing work for a long period there. This made the existence of head load workers at stake. So to have security of employment and fair conditions of work and wages, the head load workers had to join trade unions. With the formation of unions, the law of the jungle that prevailed in Chalai was replaced by a more structured relationship. However, as more unions with political affiliations appeared, clashes and street battles became a regular feature. Dispute over the right to work triggered such confrontations. The formation of the CITU accelerated the trend in using muscle power called "*"Pathal rashtreeyam"*" (baton politics) which became the usual style in this labour market segment.

8.10.15.1 Closed Shop

By the mid 1970s, a system of “closed shop” emerged in the head load labour market. Under this system, membership in a union is required as a condition to get the right to work. Each union began to issue uniforms to their members and they were to be identified as belonging to the different unions by the colour of their uniforms. Soon for acquiring the right to work, a head load worker should first join a union and secure a uniform. Due to acute unemployment and demand for head load work, malpractices emerged. Very high black market prices had to be paid to secure the uniform from the union. According to some reliable sources, the so called “Entry Fee” charged by some head load workers’ union has come to rule in the range of Rs.50, 000 to Rs.1 lakh per uniform. This evil led to the emergence of another evil in the form of “*benami*”. Under this system, one pays the entry fee, secures the uniform, which is the symbol of the right to work, and transfers that right to another for a higher price. Thus the first person collects a premium for not doing any useful work. Unfortunately, all these evil practices take place with the knowledge of top leaders who when asked would merely express their helplessness. Thus agents and middlemen have appeared in the union movement tarnishing the good name it had in the early days.

8.10.15.2 Ghost Money

Since the nature of head load work is casual, the earnings of workers were inadequate for subsistence. With rapid unionisation, some increase in wages was secured through negotiations and conciliation settlements. But as days passed, the head load workers refused to become civilized and principled and leaders failed to exercise control over them. This led to use of muscle power and threats by union members without sanction from their leaders. Thus extortion of unreasonably high wages, threat of physical violence against merchants, employers, lorry and truck operators and even general public became a common phenomenon in the head load labour market. As days passed by this phenomenon called “ghost money”, “*nokku kooli*” and kickbacks became a universal one. “*Nokku Kooli*” refers to wages demanded for loading and unloading work by the uniformed head load workers, if merchants, employers or household customers who want to get the work done by their own trusted workers. The uniformed head load work would simply collect the “*nokku kooli*” and leave the scene without creating further troubles. In cases like these, usually neither the police nor the labour department officials dare to intervene.

Those traders/merchants who employed their own workers in loading, unloading and stacking work in their shops and godowns and directed to employ only the unionised head load workers in the area. In certain market centres, the unions unilaterally earmarked certain areas as their monopoly territory. This led to frequent clashes between rival unions on the question of territorial control.

8.10.15.3 Psychic cost

The situation became uncontrollable and sometimes causing serious law and order problems. The police and the RDO and the District Collector were frequently forced to intervene and settle disputes when the Labour Department failed in their efforts. The head load workers' unions and their members began unilaterally dictating wage rates, the workload, bonus, holidays, fringe benefits etc, causing delays in executing work, high wage bill and cost over-runs putting extra financial burdens on the employers. Naturally, they shifted this additional burden onto the consumer. The situation became worse when organized groups of head load workers even started interfering with the freedom of ordinary households/citizens to carry small loads of purchases from shops and transporting their personal effects. The situation was the worst at construction sites where trucks come to load and load materials and machinery. All this pushed up the "psychic cost" of employers¹³.

As mentioned earlier, those who wished to engage their own workers were allowed to do so, if they paid a sum of money unilaterally fixed by the unionised workers for just keeping away from the scene of work. If that sum were not paid, the unionised workers would show their "true colour" which included among other things the use of abusive language and damage to goods, materials and machinery. Even big companies which had to get their expensive and sophisticated equipments and materials to be loaded and unloaded could not avoid paying the ghost money/ *nokku kooli* for the safety of their equipments and physical existence.

8.10.15.4 Job regulating machinery

In the initial stages of unionisation among head load workers in the Chalai market, the unions acted as a job regulating machinery. Till the mid 1970s, unions reported to "Quickie" strikes in settling terms of conditions of work and wages. Since the employers, mainly merchants, were also organized under their associations like the Chamber of Commerce, stiff competition arose between them and the unions. Excessive use of muscle power and

threats and intimidation sometimes produced quick results. However, by early 1980s, centralized bargaining appeared in the grain market in Chalai called *Arikkada* (the rice market). But some unions did not want to abandon the use of muscle power.

The head load workers in the State were not governed by the existing statutes like the Factories Act, Shops and Commercial Establishments Act and Industrial Disputes Act. Given the nature of work, there was difficulty in establishing definite employer-employee relationship as in organized industries. In the 1960s and 1970s these head load workers in major towns and other urban and commercial centres got organized under trade unions. Following the suggestion made by the Kunjukrishna Pillai Award cited earlier, many felt that time has come for enacting a legislation to regulate the head load labour market. Thus in 1978 the Kerala Head load Workers' Act was passed. The Act aimed at regulating the employment of head load workers in the State and to make provisions for their welfare, for the settlement of disputes in respect of their employment or non-employment and for matters connected therewith¹⁴. Later in exercise of the powers conferred upon the Government under sub-section (1) of Section 13 of the Act, the government made a scheme, namely, the Kerala Head load Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare) Scheme, 1983. It was brought into force in areas specified in the schedule to that scheme. Chalai market was thus included under the scheme and was first implemented there in June 1984.

This scheme covers registration of both head load workers and employers, pooling of workers, centralized allocation of available quantum of work and disbursement of wages based on the rates notified and adjusting the wages against the advance amounts paid by the employers. After registration, the workers are divided into various groups or pools depending on the nature of work and the system prevailing in the locality. The disbursement of wages are made to workers only through the local committees, specifically constituted for that purpose, for ensuring the payment of the notified rates and thus facilitate regulatory functions. Prior to the scheme, the workers were paid wages directly by the employers. But after the commencement of the scheme, the wages are disbursed through the Committee. A levy at the rate of 25 per cent of the wages payable by the employer and at the rate of 10 per cent from the workers are collected to defray the cost of administration of the scheme and welfare of the workers. For this every employer has to deposit an approximate amount payable to the workers as wages for a week and it will be credited into the individual account of the employers maintained by the Committee. On execution of the work, a statement of work done is prepared in triplicate in Form No. B called the Work Cards. In this the particulars of quantum of work done, amount of wages, levy, and number of workers engaged etc. are recorded. On receipt of this card, the amount of wages

payable to workers and levy thereof is debited from the employer's deposit account.

The total wages earned by the registered workers in the Pool present for the day are divided equally among the workers who executed the work on the day. If a worker was absent for work no wage was payable. At the end of the month, the Committee works out the total amount of wages to be disbursed and the Committee arranges its disbursement not later than 7th of the succeeding month.

The Act is administered by a 15 member tripartite State Level Board, consisting of equal number of representatives of workers, employers, and, the Government. One of the members is nominated as the Chairman. From 1988 onwards the State Government has appointed a non-official member representing head load workers as the Chairman from time to time. The Chief Executive is always a senior official of the Labour Department deputed from the office of the Labour Commissioner.

8.10.15.5 Welfare Scheme

The provisions of the Kerala Head load Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare) Scheme 1983 were first implemented in June 1984 on an experimental basis in two divisions of the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation. Now it has been extended to all District headquarters, major municipal areas and even in some of the Panchayat areas where there is considerable amount of loading and unloading work to be executed. As on March 31, 2001, there were 29965 workers in the Live Rolls of the 116 Committees and sub-offices of the Board and the total average monthly wage disbursements come to around Rs.6.98 crores. In 1999 separate welfare schemes were formulated for the benefit of the two district groups of head load workers, namely, the Attached Group and the Scattered Group. The scheme for the Scattered Group of workers was intended mainly for the welfare of the head load workers who are engaged in bus stands, boat jetties, junctions, forest coupe and spread over various places including villages and who do not have identifiable permanent or regular employers. About 30842 workers have been registered under the scheme.

The Welfare Fund for head load workers extends several benefits to its members. They include Bonus, Holiday Allowance, Educational Grant to workers, Hospitalisation and Medical Assistance, Scholarship to children, Distress Relief, Marriage Loan and Grant, Family Welfare Assistance, Death Ex-gratia, Festival Advance, Invalid Pension, Terminal Benefit, Special Superannuation Assistance, Special Death Ex-gratia, House Construction

Advance, Family Planning Assistance, Calamity Relief Plan, Multi-purpose Loan and Pension. It may be noted that the amount of Pension is ranging from Rs.200 and a maximum of Rs.2400 per month based on their length of service and wages earned. In case when a pensioner dies there is also a provision for payment of a Family Pension at Rs.100 per month. One notable feature of this Welfare Fund is that no Government contribution is extended to this Board and the Board and Committees meet the entire expenses on Welfare and administration from the levy collected.

8.10.15.6 Change in Life Style

With the implementation of the Regulatory Scheme, the socio-economic and cultural status of the workers covered under the Scheme is reported to be improving. The Board conducts programmes such as Sports, Games, Arts and Cultural competitions at the Committee and the State level. As the head load work has been brought under some regulation, most trade centres are fairly peaceful. Major disputes are rare. Members have started bank accounts and regularly deposit their savings in them. Some banks are extending loans to them for purchasing consumer durables. Many have taken life insurance policies for them and their family. They are showing great interest in the education of their children. On the whole their life styles, language and culture have undergone remarkable improvement since the Act and the Welfare Fund came into effect.

However, a recent study based on field survey has given a slightly different view¹⁵. It says “It is also a fact that the comparatively high wage rate earned by head load workers was not reflected in the household’s living standard due to the fluctuation in their employment and income”. The study has made a number of other important observations. In an area like Chalai in Thiruvananthapuram where the Scheme has been introduced, the Local Committee acts as the de jure employer. The Committee thus assumes the role of service provider and the traders and other business people who utilize the services of the workers become the service consumers. An examination of the expenditure incurred for these welfare measures revealed that the wage related benefits like bonus and holiday wages and the terminal benefits account for about 87 per cent and all other welfare measures account for only 13 per cent of the total expenditure on welfare schemes. What is note worthy here is not the volume of assistance but the fact that there exists a number of social security measures to help the households to increase their capacity to bear risks and to improve their human capital through better education and medical facilities.

8.10.15.7 Some Peculiarities of the Chalai Market

The study by Vijayakumar cited earlier states that the Chalai market is a multi-commodity daily market handling a large variety of agricultural and industrial commodities. It is mainly a terminal market and most of the goods are brought in trucks from places outside the area. On an average daily 100 to 150 trucks of goods arrive in the market with seasonal variations. The head load labour market at Chalai is segmented horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, it is segmented into Attached, Unattached and Scattered and also based on the commodities handled such as food grains, vegetables, provisions, textiles, hardware, etc. Vertically, head load labour market is divided into head load worker proper and *Attimari* worker. *Attimari* workers who do stacking work constitute about 25 per cent of the total registered head load workers in the Chalai market. The *attimari* status was acquired by the most powerful among the unattached workers as they get more wages for lighter work. Further, in the absence of any rational allocation of workers, the Chalai market has witnessed the coexistence of pools with large surplus labour with pools deficient in labour. The categorization of head load workers as *attimari* and “others” is against the spirit of the Scheme and this, according to the study, has created many problems in the head load labour market. Many have come out with adverse criticism about the functioning of *Attimari* workers. One major complaint against the workers is that they demand extra money from the truck drivers and traders in various forms like *mamool* (speed money), *Chayakasu* (tea cash) etc., which is against the provisions of the Scheme.

Other malpractices are the following. When loaded trucks are parked near shops or godowns for loading or unloading, the workers leave the work area after marking their attendance. On such occasions, the traders are forced to employ their own attached workers or proxy workers for which they incur additional expenses and at the same time they are forced to remit the scheduled wages to the local committee in the name of registered workers who had earlier reported for duty and marked their attendance on that day. There is also widespread practice of collecting wages in cash from the employer without reporting to the Committee. The study by Kutappan and Nair found that only about 50 per cent of the volume of head load work from the Chalai market is actually reported to the local committee. Since the Committees do not exercise their role effectively, the traders have practically no control over the handling of the goods brought for them. It is the workers who decide how and when to load or unload the goods from the trucks. The study, however, concludes on a bright note. It says that despite the short comings, the implementation of the Head load Workers’ Welfare Scheme in the Chalai market has gone a long way in improving the work atmosphere in

the market and also the standard of living of workers. Cases of work related disputes have gone down considerably since the right to work and wage rate is fixed. Indeed, those who were involved in unionising the head load workers in the Chalai market in the early years and who led innumerable struggles against exploitation can now look forward with a sense of pride about their influence on the State to implement notable Best/Good Practices here ahead of many other states in the country. This was reflected clearly in the National Seminar held jointly by the National Commission on Labour and the Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment (KILE) at Kochi during August 23-24, 2001 where delegates from other states expressed their great appreciation on the achievement and even described it as the Kerala Model of Social Security, which could be, replicated elsewhere. But they forgot one thing that this great achievement was made possible by mobilization and unionisation of a class of workers by undergoing great risks and hardships by selfless leadership.

8.10.15.8 Future Plans of Welfare Board

The Head load Workers Welfare Fund Scheme has drawn up some immediate future plans. The Board has decided to computerize the functions of the Board and the Committees and around 80 offices through a Local Area and Wide Area Network. There is a proposal for constituting a Risk Fund by collecting 2 per cent additional levy from the employers to provide the benefits to workers under the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1923. An enforcement wing is to be constituted for handling issues of implementation, violation of rules and checking indiscipline and mal-practices. The formation of a Code of Conduct for head load workers is also under way to enable the Board to have better control over the regulatory responsibilities exercised by the Board. The Government led by the United Democratic Front has also initiated to pass a legislation to regulate the head load labour market in order to make Kerala investor-friendly. Babu Divakaran, the present Labour Minister belongs to the RSP (B) group and is a committed trade union leader and he is the son of the veteran trade unionist and working class leader T.K.Divakaran. However, the new initiative has met with opposition from not only the Left trade union centres but also the State unit of the INTUC and BMS.

8.11 FISHERMEN'S STRUGGLES

Kerala, with its long coastline and large number of rivers and backwaters is rich in fishery resources. These resources had been sustaining a sizable number of households engaged in fishing and fishing trade. Members of these households belong to Latin Catholic, Hindu *Araya/Dheevara*,

Muslim and other backward communities. Over the years these communities did not register adequate socio-economic development relatively to other communities. The penetration of capital into the fishery economy brought along with it complex forms of exploitation of the fishing community and the community was pushed into a process of marginalisation and pauperisation. Several social scientists decided to describe the fishing community as belonging to a unique class of “*outliers*” who were never touched by the forces of socio-economic development that enveloped the rest of other communities in the State¹⁶. In fact this community, the *outliers*, had initiated a number of protest movements and struggles against their exploiters and in the process they formed collective organizations, used effectively instruments of mobilization and secured some gains. Since the 1990s the fishing community had been exposed to globalisation, multi-national capital, and new forms of exploitation. Both indigenous as well as multi-national capital had over exploited fishery resources. It was in this context that activists like Father Thomas Kocherry initiated a great resistance movement. We do not wish to document the entire movement of fishermen and fish workers in the present study. Instead we focus on the work of Fr. Kocherry and his contribution to the field of fishermen’s struggle.

8.11.1 Father Thomas Kocherry

Father Thomas Kocherry has become an international figure in the field of work relating to the mobilization of traditional artesanal fishermen under a real trade union banner. Born in 1940 at Changanacherry in a family with a Kuttanad background, Thomas was one of the eleven children to his father, an employee of *Deepika*, a newspaper of Kottayam. After his graduation, Thomas Kocherry decided to devote his life to the pursuit of social justice. During the Bangladesh War he went on his own to refugee camps and on his return started working among fishermen families in Poonthura village in Thiruvananthapuram in consultation with the local Bishop. Fr. Thomas Kocherry learnt that the priest who preceded him had virtually clashed with the local fisher folk. In 1977 Fr. Thomas Kocherry organized the Boat Workers’ Union and became its President. In one of the struggles by this Union, he went on an indefinite hunger strike before the gates of the Government Secretariat. The issue was settled amicably when the Fisheries Minister, Avkadarkutty Naha called a conciliation conference. On the basis of his assurances, Father Kocherry withdrew the hunger strike.

8.11.2 Era of Clashes on the Sea

In the second half of 1970s, there arose frequent clashes between workers of the mechanized and traditional fishery sectors. Fr. Thomas Kocherry then organized the *Kerala Swathantra Matysya Thozhilali Federation* (KSMTF) and it had its members not only from the Latin Catholic Community, but Muslims and Dheevara community. In 1978 he led a struggle by the National Fish Workers' Union against Coastal Zone Regulation introduced by the Government of India. In 1984 following the controversy on monsoon trawling, the Government set up the Kalavar Committee to report on a viable formula to resolve the ongoing dispute between the traditional and artesanal fishermen on the one side and mechanized boats and trawlers on the other. This Committee wanted the number of trawlers to be cut, but none of the recommendations of the Committee was implemented.

When the Government imposed Monsoon Trawling ban, there arose strong opposition from the boat owners of Neendakara near Kollam. They were then exempted from the ban under the influence of Baby John, who was a Minister in the Kerala Government at that time. To protest against this, Fr. Kocherry and Joychan Antony went on a hunger strike. The Government also appointed another committee headed by Babu Paul, Government Secretary. His report suggested the imposition of both zonal regulation as well as net regulation. Since the basic issue was not resolved, the Government appointed another one-man committee under Dr.Balakrishnan Nair, a well-known Aquatic Biology Scientist. He recommended a three-year ban on a trial basis. But the Kerala Government ordered only a 45-day ban on mechanized trawlers. By this time, Fr. Kocherry has been elevated to the national scene and his networking with other movements led by social activists like Medha Patkar, Sunderlal Bahuguna and others brought him great reputation as a social activist.

8.11.3 Some Struggles

One of the famous contributions of Fr.Kocherry to social activism was the Kanyakumari march organized by him under the banner of National Fish Workers' Union against the setting up of the Nuclear Plant at Koodamkulam. About 25000 people and activists participated in this march. Subsequently, Fr. Kocherry was instrumental in organizing a number of struggles against the entry of Joint Ventures and MNCs in the fishery sector. In response to these struggles, the Government set up the Murari committee. Among the 21 recommendations of this Committee, one was the cancellation of licences

given to the Joint Ventures and enactment of a suitable law to protect domestic fishermen.

8.11.4 Fight against Aquaculture

In 1991 the country started witnessing the establishment of aquaculture businesses. Fr. Kocherry, foreseeing the far-reaching implications of this on traditional fisheries as well as environment and ecology, initiated a struggle against prawn farming. Continuous struggles in different parts of the country drew the attention of the Supreme Court through public interest litigation, and the Court declared a ban on 13 activities. But the Government tried to counter it by bringing a new Aqua Culture Authority Bill. This led to the formation of the National Fisheries Action Committee against foreign vessels in our seas. Fr. Kocherry was elected the Convener of this committee. On January 18, 1996, he organized an all-India Strike.

8.11.5 National Campaign Committee

Fr. Kocherry had been a front line fighter for social justice and was keen in building up a grand alliance of the oppressed and the downtrodden. As a first step in this direction, he strived for trade union unity in the form of a National Campaign Committee. But this was not liked by the CITU, which wanted to secure the convener- ship of this committee by using its Big Brother posture. According to Fr. Kocherry, in the Indian socio-economic and political environment, setting up a real dynamic alliance was an extremely difficult task. When an initiative was taken to set up the Peoples' Health Assembly, the CITU tried to dominate it. Fr. Kocherry attended the Protest march before the WTO conference at Seattle, Prague and Washington. He believes that forces of globalisation threaten the world's poor including all sections of outliers in society like the fishermen. The 21st century must initiate a global struggle for economic independence, democracy, equity and justice. The control by the poor over water, land, sea, rivers and forests, would be the ultimate goal. These resources should be treated as common property. Fr. Kocherry believes that fishermen must have property rights over the sea and its resources and no one should take them away from the fishermen community. Fr. Kocherry functions from Thiruvananthapuram and has become an integral part of the union movement.

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Kerala Electricity Employees' Confederation (INTUC)
Kerala Electricity Workers' Union
Kerala Power Board Engineers' Association
Electricity Employees' Democratic Association
Kerala State Electricity Employees' Association
KSEB Engineers' Association

KSEB Officers' Association

KSEB Drivers' Association

Kerala Electricity Officers' Federation

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CHAPTER IX

UNION MOVEMENT IN THE STATE TRANSPORT

On October 20, 1936 the Government of Travancore declared that it was fully convinced that transport was a fundamental and supremely national need. In pursuance of this policy it issued a communiqué on the subject laying out the main principles underlying the scheme and emphasizing that “*it is the duty as well as the right of Government to take into its own hands the control and regulation of public conveyances along the main trunk road and in other selected localities in the State and to improve and organise water borne traffic*”¹. Shortly after this, a Committee designated the Transport Reorganization Committee was constituted and that Committee resolved that an expert should be appointed to work out the transport scheme. Accordingly, E.G.Salter, who was the Assistant Operating Superintendent of the London Passenger Transport Board, which was the biggest transport undertaking in the world at that time, was appointed as the Superintendent of Transport and a new department named the State Transport Department was organized. Salter arrived at Thiruvananthapuram on September 20, 1937 and assumed charge of his office.

9.1 BEGINNING

Soon after, sixty Comer Chassis fitted with Perkins’ Diesel Engines were got down from England and the mechanical staff of the Department under the close supervision and guidance of Salter erected these. Salter designed an experimental body with the cooperation of the superintendent of the workshops and this served as a model for building bodies for the remaining chassis. It may be mentioned in this connection that local workmen using local materials excepting glass and sheet iron built the bodies.

According to the *Travancore State Manual* (Vol. III), the selection of the Operating Staff deserved special mention. Drivers were selected exclusively from among those who were working on the Thiruvananthapuram – Kanyakumari route which at that time was being operated by private motor transport companies. When State Transport Department took over this route the drivers would be absorbed. The policy of the Department to entertain men with educational qualifications as conductors was unique as it helped to solve to a certain extent the problem of educated unemployment in the State, for more than hundred graduates had been inducted as conductors and inspectors.

The Maharaja of Travancore inaugurated the State Transport Department Motor Service on February 20, 1938 at Thampanoor. The Maharaja and members of the royal family ceremonially rode in one of the transport buses driven by Salter, the superintendent, accompanied by 33 other buses carrying guests along the main road from Thampanoor to the Kowdiar Square in front of the Royal Palace. Regular service to and from Thiruvananthapuram commenced from the morning of February 21, 1938. Within a short period the state transport service showed perceptible signs of an unqualified success. The saloon-bodied buses with rear entrance and gangway in the middle with first class seats upholstered in leather accommodated 23 persons each in the maximum of comfort. In those days, the State Transport buses departed and arrived at scheduled timings as laid down in the Time Table. A parcel service was also introduced in conjunction with the passenger service. In order to facilitate the working of the parcel service, the strength of the crew was increased to three by the addition of a parcel clerk, and the conductors who were previously working in the line were absorbed in this capacity. Gradually over time the State Transport Department expanded and extended its services throughout the State. Several bus depots were set up. The Central Workshop set up at Pappanamcode, near Thiruvananthapuram to build bodies for the bus chassis, employed a large number of native traditional carpenters, blacksmiths and artisans who possessed native skills in plenty. In the early years they used their own tools and implements for executing their work. It was with great difficulty that a change was effected and modern standardized tools and production procedures were introduced in the workshop. At one time the central bodybuilding workshop could build a minimum of one bus a day. But due to various reasons and particularly due to lack of professional management and political support the operation of the workshop deteriorated and the management was forced to get the bus bodies built by private companies in Tamil Nadu. The State Transport Department of Travancore, which had enjoyed self-sufficiency and self-reliance gradually, lost these qualities. The situation further deteriorated when the Kerala State Transport Department subsequently got transformed into the Kerala State Transport Corporation (KSRTC) in 1966. This transformation into a corporation did not bring about any qualitative change in the management of the enterprise. One major weakness in the organization was the emergence of multiplicity of trade unions and lack of professional management. In fact the trade unions in the organization determined the destinies of the undertaking. We attempt below a brief narration of the trade union movement in the State Transport, which started, with the birth of the first trade union in it in the year 1946.

9.1.1 Birth of the first Union

One day in August 1946 a young revolutionary of Thiruvananthapuram convened a small meeting of employees of the State Transport Department at the LMS Hall near Pulimoodu Junction to discuss the possibilities of forming a trade union called the Travancore State Transport Non-Pensionable Employees' Union. The young revolutionary was K.V.Surendranath, a gold medallist from the Madras University and a dynamic activist of the Communist Party of Travancore². Following the Punnappra Vayalar revolt the Party had been banned and Surendranath, lovingly known now as *Asan* (master) also went underground. Though the idea was mooted about forming a Union, nothing concrete happened. Following this T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai of Nagercoil, a socialist activist took the initiative to form a Union with Muthukaruppa Pillai as its president. T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai held the position of the Secretary of the Union. At that time Nagercoil and Kanyakumari were parts of Travancore and State Transport bus service had been started first by linking Thiruvananthapuram and Nagercoil. Both the centres had the largest transport depots employing a vast number of employees. In those days the preference of most college graduates was to join the State Transport Department as an employee.

Veteran leaders like T.V.Thomas who held the position of President till his death had guided this first trade union, though in later years several other rival unions appeared on the scene. Others who had led the Union were prominent personalities of the CPI like P.Balachandra Menon, George Chadyanmury, N.C. Sekhar, K.C.Mathew, K.A.Rajan, and, P.S.Srinivasan. K.V.Surendranath had served as the secretary of the Employees' Union for a long time and he and T.V.Thomas had the longest tenure in it.

The Kerala State Transport Employees' Union is one of the most important trade unions, which have created history. A major landmark in its history was the total strike of 1949 demanding freedom to organise a trade union. This strike completely immobilized the transport services in the Travancore-Cochin State. The entire working class of the State who joined the strike on the second day to express their solidarity wholeheartedly supported it. The student community also joined the sympathetic strike on the third day. So the whole populace of the State was with the union.

The State transport workers were patriotic enough to stand united under the union's flag irrespective of their political colour. They were responsible and conscious of their jobs and polite and service minded towards the travelling public. This union had a historic role in the trade union movement in the State. Two of its presidents T.V.Thomas and Pattom Tanu Pillai were Minister for Transport and Chief Minister of the State

respectively. While T.V.Thomas did his best to raise the status of the employees and their material conditions, Pattom Thanu Pillai at one time attempted to destroy the union due to political reasons. He rejected the memorandum of the Union while he was the Chief Minister in 1954. The paradox was that this memorandum had been prepared by the Union, while Pattom himself was leading the Union as its president.

In the two incidents mentioned above the employees had tasted victory and this brought them some confidence that they would be able to fight ill treatment and injustice meted out to them by the top functionaries of the State Transport Department. On the other hand, the officers of the Department thought that they should put a noose around the employees at the earliest and bring them under their total control. They, therefore, launched a series of retaliatory measures. To counter them and create self-confidence a campaign was executed by K.V.Surendranath, K.Gopalan and a few others trusted activists.

9.1.2 The first Strike, 1947

The Transport Employees' Union launched several struggles including the one for securing the right to organise a trade union. In the early days the transport was a State Department. Unlike in other State Departments, the employees of this Department did not enjoy any fixed working hours, leave benefits, job security and pre-determined pay scales or structure. The top officers of the Department had a field day and using their discretion they appointed employees, dismissed them without assigning any reasons, fixed salaries and sanctions arbitrarily and cutting them, effected punishment transfers and besides they physically attacked and abused their subordinates too. The employees suffered these conditions but they were waiting for an early opportunity to fight against injustice.

One day in January 1947 a Foreman of the Central Garage physically assaulted a cleaner. On hearing this, the employees spontaneously struck work even without a leader telling them to do so. This was the first known struggle in the State Transport. The strike was called off when the Foreman volunteered to tender a public apology to the cleaner. In June 1947 Ramamoorthy, the Deputy Director was alleged to have assaulted another cleaner. Then again the employees struck work until the Deputy Director tendered an apology. Perhaps a strike by employees in a State Government Department was a sensational event.

9.1.3 Strike of 1949

The workers of the State Transport Department held a meeting of the All Travancore Executive of their Union under their President S.V.Muthukaruppa Pillai. They held a strike ballot and 97.16 per cent of the members were in favour of launching a strike³. It was therefore decided that if the Union did not receive a favourable reply to the Unions' Memorandum of Demands within 30 days, the workers would launch a strike. On receiving the Memorandum, the Transport Minister promised that his Government would agree to accept the legitimate demands of the workers.

On finding that the Government would not be sympathetic to them, the Union decided to call for a token strike from 04.30 to 10.30 in the morning of September 21, 1949. They indicated that the bonus payment announced by the Government was too small. The Government started taking measures to operate the scheduled trips without any hitch. The token strike ended by 09.30 and the Union asked its members to accept whatever bonus was disbursed and still stick to their stand that it would be treated only as a part payment. The Secretary of the Union informed that the salary paid to workers / employees in the State Transport in Madras State was almost double of what was being paid to their counter parts in Travancore⁴.

When the strike officially started on September 25, 1949, the atmosphere was lukewarm with only a few employees participating in it. Picketing and arrests of employees were reported from Aluva, Kottayam and Kollam. At Thiruvananthapuram, the State capital, employees took out marches and demonstrations and held a public meeting. In several bus depots unemployed fresh hands were recruited to man the services. Some were recruited from the military as drivers. No untoward incidents were reported from anywhere from the state. At Thiruvananthapuram, the Transport Department officials claimed that more than 50 percent of employees had rejected the strike. At Pazhavangadi Maidan, a public meeting was held in which trade union leaders like Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai, Nanthancode Bhaskar, S.S.Chettiar, Fernandez and Saraswathy Amma spoke. Many were arrested in Aluva (15), Kottayam (35), and, Kollam (18). At Alappuzha, the strike was reported to be a total failure.

On the second day of the strike, picketing was intensified. There occurred many incidents of stone throwing. The Government ordered a ban and prohibitory order on public meetings and marches and demonstrations by transport employees for a period of seven days. In defiance of the prohibitory order, the Union held a public meeting at Pazhavandadi Maidan on September 26, 1949 and police made a brutal lathi charge to disperse the crowd of employees and sympathizers. Stones were hurled on the car of the

Rajapramukh, the erstwhile Maharaja of Travancore. The Government then gave an ultimatum to the striking employees and extended the ban and the prohibitory order to more centres. The students of the S.M.V.High School near the Over bridge Junction held a demonstration in support of the State Transport Strike and the police arrested a few of them. Meanwhile Pattom Thanu Pillai and Narayana Pillai issued statements criticizing the anti labour policies of the State Government. At Alappuzha the Communist controlled trade unions of coir factory workers observed a token strike to demonstrate the unity and solidarity of the working class. Students from all over Travancore boycotted classes and many institutions had to be closed down. In Thiruvananthapuram the scavenging workers led by Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai, Railway Porters, workers of the Government Press and the PWD workshop extended full support. The Government had no alternative other than call a conference. E.John Philipose was the Transport Minister. K.K.Chellappan Pillai and Abdul Aziz, MLAs, met the Minister and requested him to call the Secretary of the State Transport Department for a conciliation conference. They wanted the State Transport Department should be restructured with the support and involvement of the Union. On the last day of September, the Union agreed to call off the strike when the Government announced its decision to refer all demands of the Union to a tripartite conference at an early date and also to disburse a total sum of Rs.2.5 lakhs as daily bata to workers⁵.

When the Union felt that the Government was not implementing its promise, the Secretary of the Union, T.S.Ramaswamy commenced a hunger strike⁶. The Government also did not disburse the sum promised. It was going ahead with primitive victimization on union activists and sympathizers. The Government has not shown any signal about convening of a conciliation conference at an early date. Soon Velayudhan Pillai of the Alappuzha unit of the Union joined T.S.Ramaswamy in the hunger strike. A public meeting was held at Thirunakkara Maidan in Kottayam. It was presided over by N.Govindan Unni. K.Chandrasekhara Pillai, V.K.Kuttan, Denison and Balakrishna Pillai spoke. It was announced that some of them would commence a hunger strike in Kottayam if the Government did not take a favourable decision on the demands of the Union.

On December 7, 1949 fortunately the hunger strike ended. The Government agreed that the striking employees would not lose their seniority on account of their strike. The problems of daily rated employees were to be sympathetically treated. Very soon a conference would be called with Chief Minister, Transport and Labour Ministers, and representatives of the union, besides Joseph Mundassery and K.Karunakaran. As soon as T.S.Ramaswamy ended his hunger strike, those who had gone on hunger strike at Aluva, Alappuzha, Kottayam and Kollam also ended their hunger strike. The Government conceded many demands of the Union at the Conference held on

December 11, 1949. Operating staff would be paid daily bata. Mechanical staff would be paid, besides good attendance allowance, a monthly salary instead of daily wages. Daily rated workers would be given an enhancement of 3 *annas* (less than 25 paise or a quarter rupee) and annual increment of 4 *annas* (a quarter rupee) in their wages. T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai, after ending his hunger strike, decided to temporarily withdraw from active public life on account of his unsatisfactory conditions of health. After returning to Nagercoil, Ramaswamy, however, continued to get involved in working class struggles in Kanyakumari region.

9.1.4 Ramaswamy Pillai remembers

T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai was one of the co-founders of the first trade union in the State Transport in Travancore. After his retirement from active public life, he had been resting at his home in Nagercoil when this author met him in 2000. Born in 1918 in the Village Theroor near Suchindram in Kanyakumari district, now in Tamil Nadu, educated in Nagercoil and Intermediate College and the Law College in Thiruvananthapuram, T.S. Ramaswamy was drawn into the socialist movement at a young age. In 1942 he was elected the Vice-President of the Students Federation. When the British arrested prominent national leaders on August 8, 1942, Ramaswamy held a protest march at Lucknow and got arrested. Ramaswamy's exposure to trade union work started in Lucknow when he was taken to Bathikatala in Lucknow, which was being converted into an aerodrome by employing sweated labour. He was not good with his knowledge of Urdu but picked up the feelings of the local working class.

Ramaswamy read books on the Economic History of India and one by Radhakamal Mukherjee impressed him greatly. The environment of intellectual liberalism and the love for the downtrodden prevailing in Lucknow stimulated him. He started believing that Marxism was the philosophy of history. There used to be open debates on social, economic and political issues. He remembers the day when workers in Lucknow went on a lightening strike on hearing the demise of Mahadev Desai, the loved private secretary to Mahatma Gandhi. Ramaswamy was arrested and detained for 4 months in police lock-up.

Ramaswamy wanted to continue and complete his education, which had been broken off in the midst of his wanderings. He met Dr. Krishna Bai, the grand daughter of Sir T.Madhava Rao. She introduced Ramaswamy to Dr. Lohia and Achuth Patwardhan, and Acharya Narendra Dev. They asked him "*are you going back to the University while we are fighting for freedom?*". He then gave up his studies, married an orphan girl of hardly 14 years of age

and began full time political and trade union work. He went down to Coimbatore and Mettur. One Surendran had mobilized the workers of Mettur Chemical works. The *District Panchayat Thozhilali Sanghom* of textile workers of Coimbatore had a membership of 500,000 workers. Mill owners tortured N.G. Ramaswamy, revered by mill workers. T.S.Ramaswamy picked up the rudiments of trade union work from Govindan and Veluchamy. He established close contacts with leaders like P.Ramamoorthy, Jivanandam and M.Venkataraman. Ramaswamy learnt the rudiments of labour laws from R.Venkataraman (who became the President of India later), S.Viswanathan and Mohan Kumaramangalam. It was at this time that Jayaprakash Narain instructed Ramaswamy to take up trade union work in Travancore and Cochin States where N.Sreekantan Nair was playing a leading role in the union movement. Though a Keralite Ramaswamy was not fluent in Malayalam and due to this slight handicap he chose to do trade union work in Nagercoil. He worked with the trade unions of workers in saltponds, Tea Estates, shops and commercial establishments, Pioneer Bus Transport and Municipality as well as mineral companies at Manavalakuruchi. While working with the Sanitary Workers Union, Ramaswamy found the prevailing corrupt practices among officials who were collecting Rs.10 from each worker. With the support of Muthukaruppa Pillai and G. Ramachandran, Ramaswamy could end the corrupt practice and forced the officials to return the amounts to the scavenging workers. Ramaswamy soon became a hero among the scavenging workers. This made him win the general election to become an MLA.

When Ramaswamy shifted his trade union work to Thiruvananthapuram, he found Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai had already become the unquestioned leader of the scavenging workers. Madaswamy was assisting Jibba Ramakrishna Pillai in trade union work. Ramaswamy remembers one *Thandan* Velu Pillai (strong willed) who was number two in the State Transport Department hierarchy. Pillai had sent out a few of the porters working in the State Transport and when they protested they were got arrested. However, the very next day they were released. Thinking that Ramaswamy was behind the porter's protest, Velu Pillai got him arrested too but did not remove him to jail and kept him to sit up on the floor of the lock-up. Neyyattinkara T.K.Narayana Pillai was shocked to see Ramaswamy sitting on the floor of the lock up. He intervened and informed the Police station authorities that the Chief Minister wanted to see Ramaswamy and if the latter was willing, he should be immediately taken to the Assembly buildings. That action set things right and Ramaswamy became a free man.

When Ramaswamy wrote a letter to Parur T.K.Narayana Pillai, demanding freedom of association to the State Transport workers, E.John Phillipose, the Transport Minister enquired whether employees of the Railways and the Posts and Telegraph departments were enjoying the freedom

of association. After convincing the Minister about his genuine demand, Ramaswamy travelled through out the State to meet State Transport employees for mobilizing and unionising them.

The 1954 strike by State Transport employees, according to T.S.Ramaswamy, was a great milestone in the trade union movement in the State. When the Union served a strike notice, E.John Phillipose, the Transport Minister asked the Union first to withdraw the notice. Ramaswamy sought the advice of Ashok Mehta, the Socialist leader. He was advised to hold meetings with the employees at their work spots. So he went round, spoke to groups of employees and appealed to them to participate in the strike, refuse to work and adopt non-violent methods. Before the strike commenced, Ramaswamy met E.John Phillipose. The minister served him tea but told him that the Government was going to declare the strike as illegal. The Union would be given a week's time to withdraw the strike notice. The Government had received job requests from 5000 unemployed educated youth. He promised that he would not order the arrest of T.S.Ramaswamy though he knew that the latter was behind the strike move.

Ramaswamy and other union leaders were determined to go ahead with the strike. Buses stopped plying. Students boycotted classes in support of the strike. Other trade unions declared their solidarity with State Transport employees. The strike in State Transport thus got transformed into a General strike. Muthukaruppa Pillai was in Nagercoil. Two workers, one of them the brother in-law of a police constable, were attacked. Ramaswamy went to the Ministers office. Panampally Govinda Menon was there. The Minister agreed to visit the injured in the hospital. By evening the Minister was willing to reach a settlement. Ramaswamy informed all units of the State Transport about the good news and the strike was withdrawn. The salary of the employees was raised and daily bata was introduced to operating staff.

T.S.Ramaswamy was very close to many leaders of Travancore and Cochin. He singled out his association with Pattom Thanu Pillai, Muralidhara Marar (his classmate at Lucknow), Parur T.K.Narayana Pillai and Nesamani. In the late 1940s Pattom really wanted to join Ramaswamy's socialist group. At one point Ramaswamy wanted Pattom to become the President of the State Transport Workers' union. Ramaswamy had only heard about T.V. Thomas. While he was MLA, Ramaswamy moved a no-confidence resolution while V.Gangadharan was the speaker. Nesamani had formed the Tamil Nadu Congress. M.N. Govindan Nair was in the Azad Hotel and he advised Ramaswamy to go to Nagercoil as the Police had opened fire there and the situation was fast deteriorating.

The political situation in the State was fluid. In the Assembly the Congress had 45 MLAs followed by 45 for the United Front, 8 for Tamil Nadu Congress, 19 for the PSP and there was one independent, the remarkable witty Chazhikkadan. T.V. Thomas was pleading with the Government for the release of those detainees booked by the police for their participation in the Punnapra Vayalar revolt. T.V. wanted Ramaswamy to make a demand on this in the Assembly. Ramaswamy felt that Pattom was more brutal than Sir C.P. in arranging repression on those who opposed him. K.C.George, the Communist leader, invited Ramaswamy for a meeting with leaders like T.V.Thomas, R.Sugathan, K.C.Govindan and K.R.Gowri Amma. It was there he met T.V., who, according to him, was the gem of a gentleman. Later on Ramaswamy's invitation T.V.visited Kanyakumari district and spoke at several meetings to the workers of the Salt Workers' Union.

Looking back to his trade union work and looking at the contemporary trade union movement, T.S.Ramaswamy felt sad. According to him, in the past, working class was united, strong and respected by the general public. Ramaswamy has strong faith in Marxism but does not agree with the current style in which the followers practice Marxism. He believes that if the demands of the working class were legitimate, their struggle would always succeed. According to him, the workers should not go after political parties. Trade union work should be taken up as a social service with honesty and integrity. Today's working class was not powerful as it should be.

9.1.5 Leaders of Employees' Union

The State Transport Employees' Union, the first union in the State Transport Department, had been led by a number of veteran trade union and political personalities of the State. They included T.S.Ramaswamy Pillai, Muthu Karuppu Pillai, K.V.Surendranath, N.C.Sekhar, T.V.Thomas, K.C.Mathew, K.A.Rajan, P.S.Sreenivasan, J.Chitharanjan and others of the older generation and ably supported by second level leadership by Vakkom Ravindran, P.Venugopalan Nair, A.P.Achuthan Pillai, N.P.Achuthan Nair, P.Prabhakaran Nair, Satyarja Panicker, K.Gopalan, K.V.Chellappan and G.Balakrishna Nair. Some among the latter group were employees of the undertaking. In 1997 the Employees Union celebrated its Golden Jubilee. Indrajith Gupta the then Home Minister in the United Front Government at the Centre inaugurated the Jubilee celebrations. Binoy Viswam was Vice President of the Union in 1997 while J.Chitharanjan was President. Since Chitharanjan was also functioning at the top level of the all India AITUC in New Delhi, G. Balakrishnan Nair held the post of Working President. The Employees' Union was an industry union affiliated to the AITUC. and, has always opposed the formation of category and craft unions. However, in

1965, a number of members of this Union left the organization and joined the KSRTC Employees' Association, which got affiliated to the CITU.

9.2 THE STRIKE OF 1954

The State Transport Employees' Union soon came under the control of the Communists and got affiliated to the AITUC. For a long time, T.V. Thomas and K.V.Surendranath functioned as its President and Secretary respectively and guided its growth. During their tenure several struggles were conducted and one such struggle became an epoch making one in the history of the trade union movement in Kerala.

9.2.1 Drivers on lightning strike

On December 18, 1953 the drivers in the State Transport depot in Kollam launched a lightning strike following an attack on one of their colleagues by a police inspector at Alappuzha. The strike soon spread to Alappuzha and Aluva. The Government directed the Assistant Superintendent of Police of Alappuzha to enquire into the incident and assured the Union that action would be taken against the culprit. The strike ended at 3 am on December 20⁷.

9.2.2 Memorandum of Demands

During the first half of August 1954, the Union had submitted a memorandum of demands and the leaders finding no response from the authorities were planning for a strike. Initially they realized that the employees were not enthusiastic. In 1954 S.Varadarajan Nair had formed a rival union and it was affiliated to the INTUC. This was opposed to a strike and warned the employees that they should not succumb to the strategy of the Communists. But T.V.Thomas was firm and because employees had total faith in him they agreed to join the strike. In those days the conductors had to wipe and clean the seats, Drivers had to wash the buses and clean them, and, mechanical staff had to keep the garage and premises clean. Srinivasa Iyer, the Transport Director, issued directions to this effect. However, the main demands of the union were (i) Wages and salary revision based on a study by a Minimum Wages Committee. (ii) Employees who completed six months of continuous service should be made permanent. (iii) Bonus based on the principle of Deferred Wages should be granted⁸.

The Government rejected the demands and informed the Union that it was not prepared for any negotiations and settlement. It described the strike as politically motivated as it was led by communists and not by employees. The PSP led by Pattom Thanu Pillai and the RSP joined hands in condemning the decision of T.V.Thomas. In spite of the media campaign, the Union organized a public meeting in Thiruvananthapuram with M.N.Govindan Nair presiding. At the place of meeting several were arrested. The Government demanded written apology from striking employees and notified a deadline for them to report for duty, failing which their services would be terminated. Seeing the tough stand of the Government, many employees returned to work. By noon on August 30, 1954 the Department operated most schedules.

9.2.3 Leaders decide to strike

Taking into account the turn of events, A.K.Gopalan and P.T.Punnoose, top communist leaders reached Thiruvananthapuram. It was decided that T.V.Thomas, four MLAs and five senior employees of the State Transport would commence an indefinite hunger strike till their demands were settled. AKG made an appeal to the Government to settle the issue. He also sent a telegram to both J.B.Kripalani and Ashok Mehta, the All-India Socialist leaders to intervene. As there was no response from the Government, T.V.Thomas, Kottayam Bhasi, R.Prakasam, M.P.Menon and T.K.Krishnan MLAs along with five senior transport employees commenced the hunger strike on September 2, 1954⁹. A big public meeting was held at Kottayam. However, the media reported that more and more employees were reporting for work in most bus depots and many were submitting letters of apologies as a condition for reinstatement in service.

9.2.4 RSP leaders' intervention

Considering the situation, the RSP leaders, N.Sreekantan Nair and T.K. Divakaran started conciliation and mediation efforts. Though T.V.Thomas was not disturbed, the police removed the other satyagrahis and dropped them at their respective native places but soon they returned to the Satyagraha pandal. R. Prakasam was arrested. Labour Minsiter was P.K.Kunju. Panampally Govinda Menon, the leader of the Congress Legislature Party took up the strike issue and held discussions with the Minister as well as T.V.Thomas and M.N.Govindan Nair for resolving it. It was proposed that if the Government came forward to appoint an Enquiry Commission to study and report on the restructuring of the State Transport Department, the Employees' Union might agree to withdraw the strike. One of the demands of the Union was to get the right to organize legitimised by the Government.

All these years the Government was holding the view that State Transport is a Government Department and therefore its employees have no right to organize into a union and that they are subject to the service and conduct rules of the State Government employees. The Government agreed to refer this issue to the Labour Department of the Government of India for advice. By this time Achuthan as the Labour Minister took the place of P.K. Kunju and some assurances were given in the floor of the Legislative Assembly. The Government's stand was that the employees of the State Transport could not be treated as workers under the Industrial Disputes Act. "*Those who make bricks are workers; those who prepare and write accounts are non-workers*", this was the philosophy behind the Government's approach.

9.2.5 Pattom remains unsympathetic

Every body had thought that Pattom Thanan Pillai who was a co-founder of the first trade union in the State Transport would take a sympathetic view on the struggle of 1954. But at one point, he even refused to meet trade union leaders to listen to what they had to say. The pro-labour MLAs had raised the issue in the State Assembly. A.K.Gopalan and P.T.Punnoose had raised the issue of the state transport struggle in the Parliament but the speaker did not allow a discussion on it. It was after this that these leaders rushed to Thiruvananthapuram to meet Pattom Thanan Pillai. The Government continued with its repressive measures. Veliyam Bhargavan and K.T. Jacob were two leaders of the CPI who fell victims of police brutality during this struggle.

Even after the settlement of the dispute and withdrawal of the struggle by the Union, Pattom refused to release those in police lock-up. Another struggle had to be launched to get them released. The Union opened relief camps at several places with the wholehearted support of the public for nearly two months to offer medical aid and treatment. It was reported that an ayurvedic physician of Chirayinkeezhu, Viswambharan Vaidyan, extended his oil massaging service to the transport employees who had suffered irreparable damage to their body. In fact as a gesture of goodwill from the Union, T.V.Thomas gave a suitable reward to Viswambharan Vaidyan at a public function.

9.2.6 The impact of the strike

The strike of transport employees held in 1954 was a historic milestone in the trade union movement in the State. It made a lasting impact on the white-collar workers, especially the Non-Gazetted employees (NGOs). It

revived and strengthened the union movement among white-collar workers and employees of Government and semi-government departments and employments. For instance, the Museum Contingency staff, Non-Muster Roll (NMR) workers in the State Public Works Department, employees of the State Electricity Board, Teachers (in government, and aided schools and colleges) etc., went ahead with unionisation.

The transport strike created dynamic effects. It was not a regional struggle. It touched all segments of the working class and strengthened the demand for a pro-labour government. This must have contributed to the great success of the CPI in securing an absolute majority to form the world's first democratically elected communist government led by E.M.S.Namboodiripad in 1957. The media had then flashed "*Communist government through ballot box, not through guns*".

9.2.7 An unpublicised dimension

Though the strike by State Transport employees held in 1954 was considered a historic event that turned out to be a popular struggle, one dimension of it need to be pointed out in this context. The struggle became inevitable when Pattom Thanu Pillai, the Chief Minister rejected the memorandum of demands submitted by the Employees' Union, the very memorandum that had been prepared with his own active involvement while he was holding the presidency of the Union earlier. Once the struggle started, the initial enthusiasm of the transport employees could not be maintained after a few days. At many centres, employees were seen returning to work and enough volunteers could not be mobilized to picket the buses. At this point the Communist Party and the Kerala unit of the AITUC decided to take up the struggle. Party activists came to the forefront and led the struggle.

At Chadayamangalam, party leaders like Veliyam Bhargavan, now a top state leader of the CPI were leading the struggle and organizing picketing of the buses. Most of the participants were party workers. The police took Veliyam Bhargavan into custody and pushed him to the lock-up where as a part of police brutality, his moustache was pulled out by hand. Another leader, E.Chandrasekharan Nair, who later became Minister for Food and Civil Supplies, also became a victim of police brutality. When things were getting out of control, K. Sukumaran, Editor of *Kerala Kaumudi* took the initiative to bring T.V.Thomas, the Union president and Pattom Thanu Pillai, the Chief Minister, to a conference table.

Veliyam Bhargavan had written about those days¹⁰. According to him, the transport employees lacked the spirit to wage a struggle, since most of them could not identify themselves as belonging to a “working class”. As mentioned elsewhere, most of them were highly educated and a white-collar mentality had engulfed them. They were unwilling to come forward and shout revolutionary slogans in the presence of the general public. They could not think of picketing buses and getting arrested by the police. Spending a day in police lock-up was unimaginable and so after a day or two the transport employees lost their initial enthusiasm and started abandoning the struggle. In this context the CPI had to take the initiative. It wanted to continue the strike and at the same time mobilize the transport employees by installing in them a revolutionary fighting consciousness.

The Party knew Pattom Thanu Pillai's true character. “*Thanu Pillai Sir*” was aristocratic and had the mind of a feudal *Karnavar* (head of family). He could not digest dissent. He wanted all others to see sense in whatever he said. At the same time everybody knew that he would disintegrate on seeing the massive strength of the dissent. He had become the Chief Minister of the Travancore-Cochin State, which was his dream, only because the CPI extended its full support during the elections and got him and his party elected. But in the post-election period, he crossed over to the other side and sought the support of the Congress Party to achieve his dream. Soon he became a dictator and decided to destroy the CPI and its trade unions by using police brutality to the maximum extent.

The ban on the Communist Party was continuing and leaders and front line activists were underground but they were actively planning strategies to involve themselves in the transport struggle of 1954. Veliyam Bhargavan in his reminiscences looked back on the events in Kottarakkara, Pathanamthitta, Karunagappally and other centres. He mentioned about the unforgettable revolutionaries like Raghavan, father-in-law of Ratnakaran Ramasastry, a *Thampuran* (prince) of the Pandalam palace (a conductor of State Transport) and others. One day during the struggle this *Thampuran* was arrested along with C.Achutha Menon, K.V.Pathrose and Unnithan. *Thampuran* was taken to the Pandalam palace and he was tied to a wooden column. The police then used razor blades to make cuts in his toes and apply ground red chilly paste to it as a part of their brutality. Unnithan was given lathi blows on his toes. But both of them kept their mouths shut and did not give out the names of party leaders who were in the underground. Next day *Thampuran* was taken outside the lock-up and the constables collectively gave him kicks and blows and he fell nearly unconscious. When he was brought back to the cell, Veliyam Bhargavan was sitting there and the police had pulled out his beautiful moustache with force.

The inmates of the lock-up were supplied with food brought from a hotel at Kulakkada. When the *Thampuran* found that one day the hotel had not supplied *pappadam* along with lunch, he got wild in spite of the severe pain he was undergoing on account of police brutality on his body. *Thampuran* told his cellmates that he would throw the cooked rice on the face of the police constable. It was Veliyam Bhargavan who forced him to calm down. When Veliyam Bhargavan was rubbing the body of *Thampuran*, he found a swelling of about the size of a coconut. A part of his spinal chord also had been broken. Veliyam Bhargavan could never forget about a revolutionary like this *Thampuran* who continued in the service of the State Transport to retire as an Assistant Transport Officer (ATO). Veliyam Bhargavan strongly believed that it was the State Transport strike of 1954 that paved the way for the CPI to win a majority of seats in the first General Elections held after the formation of the Kerala State in 1956.

According to Veliyam Bhargavan, one important lesson that came out of the State Transport strike of 1954 was that the problems of the working class were also the problems of the masses. The workers constituted the instruments or spokesmen for the masses and as such they had to be revolutionary and sensitive to the demands of the masses. The workers should never think exclusively about their own problems and demands. The strength of the working class arose not only from their organization and mobilization but it should be rooted in the needs of the society. In the old days the popular masses always stood behind working class struggles because everybody was convinced about the organic link between class interests of the masses. When trade unions and working class organizations become stooges of political parties the organic link with the masses was broken. That is why in recent times those masses did not extend popular support to working class struggles. However, the members of the working class could not abandon politics. But this politics should not estrange the masses.

During the second half of 1956, the Union felt that the understanding reached with the Government for withdrawing the strike of 1954 was being violated. The Union, therefore, was planning for some direct action to put pressure on the Government. This was conveyed to the Government and the Chief Secretary promised a reply to the Union at the earliest. But the Government played a game taking inter-union rivalry among transport employees into account. The game was to divide the employees on political lines. By this time the AITUC union had stiff competition from the INTUC and RSP unions. However, looking back one could say that the State Transport employees gained considerably during the tenure the EMS ministry of 1957 and 1959 in which T.V.Thomas as a Minister.

9.2.8 Bonanza given by T.V. Thomas

Reference had been made earlier about Government's stand that State Transport employees could not be treated as "workers" as defined in the Industrial Disputes Act. When the EMS Ministry came to power, T.V.Thomas, the veteran trade unionist was holding the Transport portfolio. He used his uncommon sense of intelligence and logic to circumvent the previous government's argument. According to T.V.Thomas, for treating a person a worker, he must be performing his work that falls under the concept "industrial hours". In the State Transport so far and till 1957 there did not exist any well-defined duty schedules. There was also no system of daily bata. Promotion avenues to transport drivers were non-existent. T.V.Thomas changed the whole scenario through the introduction of specific service conditions. He introduced Duty Schedules, Rest, and Sign-on etc. to all operating staff. He developed a yardstick for ensuring promotion avenues for drivers and mechanical staff. Posts of Vehicle Examiners, Chargemen etc. were created for every 25 mechanical employees. For conductors, for over 750 km, the post of a Checking Inspector was created. By bringing the duty schedules under the definition of "industrial hours", T.V.Thomas made the employees of the State Transport eligible for Bonus defined as deferred wages. During his tenure as Minister for Transport, T.V.Thomas restored all benefits enjoyed by the employees earlier. He took the initiative to constitute a Staff Council in the undertaking to encourage joint consultations. He granted the employees both trade union rights and benefits under the Kerala Service Rules (KSR) simultaneously. Rules governing promotions were also framed.

9.3 ANTI-COMMUNIST CAMPAIGN

The period of 1957-59 was one of great turbulence in Kerala both in the field of politics as well as in industrial relations. A series of anti-communist campaigns were set in motion as soon as the EMS Ministry declared that they were going ahead with three pieces of legislation, namely the Education Bill, the Agrarian Relations Bill and the Industrial Relations Bill. A concerted effort was made by anti-communists to bring down the EMS Ministry through campaigns held under the banner of Liberation Struggle.

Speaking at the inauguration of the Kottayam unit of the INTUC union of the State Transport employees on March 6, 1958, its leader G.Chandrasekhara Pillai was reported to have declared that the Communists were not only the number one enemy of Kerala, but of the entire country. The INTUC was bent on attracting a large number of members of the AITUC

affiliated Employees' Union on to their side in the Kerala State Transport Workers Union. This Union attempted to launch some agitations to demonstrate their concern for the employees. It may be noted that the Congress, the INTUC and the Christian Church had played an important and decisive role in conducting the Liberation Struggle, which subsequently ended with the dismissal of the duly elected Communist Ministry, headed by EMS Namboodiripad. It was followed by President's Rule in the State.

9.3.1 Picketing by INTUC

A meeting of delegates of the Kerala State Transport Workers' Union affiliated to the INTUC met at Kottayam and elected G.Chandrasekhara Pillai as the President and R.Balakrishna Pillai as its General Secretary. Before this meeting held on October 12, 1959 the Workers' Union had conducted a picketing movement, which was inaugurated by the top INTUC leader, B.K.Nair. Nair was taking steps to strengthen the Kerala unit of the INTUC. Vasavda, all India Secretary of the INTUC and Khandubhai Desai, were planning to visit the State for this purpose. The President's Rule in the State was conducive to the growth of the INTUC and the anti-communist feelings were at its peak. The Sitaram Mill struggle led by the INTUC during 1958 had stimulated interest in the INTUC's campaign, as it was mainly a fight for supremacy over the AITUC union there.

On June 29, 1959 the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram saw a massive march, demonstration and picketing by workers belonging to the INTUC, HMS, UTUC, and Kochi Port Unions. R. Parameswaran Pillai, S.Varadarajan Nair, M.Kunjukrishnan Nadar, Ulloor Gopi and Pallichal Kunjukrishnan (INTUC), Viswambharan and S.M. Noohu (HMS), and, K. Pankajakshan and K.C. Vamadevan (UTUC) led the demonstration from South Fort via Thampanoor and the Government Secretariat to the Collectorate at Vanchiyoor. At Kollam about two lakh workers participated in a one-day token strike. The workers of the Cochin port also struck work. The anti-communist campaign focused attention on the repressive measures of the EMS Ministry, particularly the police firing at Chandanathoppu.

9.3.2 Political Instability

On January 22, 1964, the Transport Workers' Union activists held a Satyagraha in front of the office of the Kottayam bus depot followed by similar demonstration in other depots. At Kottayam, a major centre of power for the INTUC union, P.C.Cherian MLA inaugurated the Satyagraha. A few activists of the INTUC union started a Satyagraha in front of the Government

Secretariat at Thiruvananthapuram. During 1960-65, there was political instability in Kerala. In early 1960 Pattom Thanu Pillai led a coalition government with the Congress, PSP and Muslim League. When Pattom went away as the Governor of Punjab, the ministry's leadership was taken over by R.Sankar of the Congress. In the elections held in 1965, no party or group secured majority and Kerala continued under President's Rule till March 6, 1967. After the elections in 1967, a seven Party coalition led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad came to power. In the meantime a significant change appeared in the political picture. The CPI split into CPI and CPI (M) and EMS was representing the CPI (M). This brought about a division in the ranks of the left-inspired working class. As pointed out elsewhere, though some leaders of both CPI and CPI (M) did not want a split in the AITUC, it became inevitable because of personality clashes with in the leadership. Thus was formed the CITU as a rival to the AITUC and this was triggered off to a great extent with certain developments in the working class movement in the State Transport. The undertaking had ceased to be a State Department when it was brought under the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) with a separate Board of Management. In spite of making it a corporation, it continued to be under the grip of the Transport Minister. This was particularly felt when R.Balakrishna Pillai became the Minister in charge of transport. Though starting his career as a Congress leader, Balakrishna Pillai could not compromise with certain leaders and policies of the Congress. He broke away from the Congress and founded the Kerala Congress. This Kerala Congress split more than once in subsequent years into Kerala Congress (R. Balakrishna Pillai group), Kerala Congress (K.M.Mani group) and Kerala Congress (T.M. Jacob group) and each one of the groups formed their trade union centres in most establishments including the KSRTC. In short, the political alliances and groups soon got their acts together to split the working class on political lines and thus to weaken the trade union movement in the State.

9.4 THE STRIKE OF 1964

The strike of 1964 in the State Transport was a unique struggle and it brought out several under currents in the trade union movement on to the surface. We attempt to document some of the interesting developments connected with this struggle.

9.4.1 Surendranath's hunger strike

In January 1960, the Congress – PSP coalition government came to power in Kerala and being a patently anti-communist and anti-working class

political alliance, it let loose a series of repressive measures. The Employees Union in the State Transport registered their strong protest against this. On January 28, 1964 it commenced a Satyagraha in front of the Government Secretariat and it lasted 65 days. On March 25, they held a day's token hunger strike in all transport depots and offices through out the state. It was as a part of this struggle that K.V.Surendranath commenced a hunger strike in front of the Government Secretariat. He was then the General Secretary of the AITUC led State Transport Employees Union. P.Balachandra Menon inaugurated the Satyagraha on March 30, 1964¹¹. It was alleged that the workers showing support and sympathy to this had caused considerable inconvenience to traders and shopkeepers as well as the general public at several places.

Though the AITUC, HMS and UTUC unions in the state supported this struggle of transport employees, the INTUC kept aloof. It alleged that not only in the State Transport but also all over the State including the Plantation sector, the left unions were launching attacks on the INTUC cadres and therefore the INTUC leadership was bent to counter it. K.Karunakaran, B.K.Nair, C.M.Stephen, G.S.Dhara Singh, P.V.Sankaranarayan, K.P.Kuttykrishnan Nair, I.P.Krishnan, Varghese Thundiyil, M.V.Joseph, Sreedharan Pillai, M.C. Karunakaran and others led the INTUC campaign.

The year 1964 also saw several struggles by farmers and farm workers, factory workers, NGOs all led by left unions and organizations. The plantation sector saw a high degree of turbulence. A.K.Gopalan had started a hunger strike at Vazhathoppu to protest against Government's policy on forced evictions of small peasants and tenants and subjecting them to police lathi charge, arrests and lock-up brutality. The INTUC alleged that left political parties were engaged in struggles to make political gains. During this year several communist leaders like Pandalam P.R. Madhavan Pillai, K.T.Jacob, C.K.Viswanathan, K.M.Abraham, E.M.George, P.P.George, M.K.George and several other activists, were arrested and remanded to custody.

9.4.2 Settlement

Following the hunger strike by K.V. Surendranath, the ministry led by R. Sankar of the Congress Party was forced to call a conciliation conference and a settlement was reached on issues of an urgent character and the rest of the issues were referred to arbitration by N.Raghavan, a retired Judge. This settlement was reached on April 4, 1964.

According to the settlement, the following benefits were given to transport employees (i) Night allowance of Rs.0.80 (ii) Monthly washing allowance of Rs.2, and, (iii) Maximum number of daily rated employees limited to 16 per cent of the total staff strength. K.V.Surendranath, S.Varadarajan Nair and L.Krishnankutty signed the settlement on behalf of the transport employees and by P.I.Jacob, the chairman of the KSRTC. It may be noted that though the INTUC did not support the transport struggle led by other trade unions, the members of the INTUC union also got the benefits of the settlement as their leader S.Varadarajan Nair was a signatory to it.

9.4.3 Surendranath looks back

Born on May 24, 1925, K.V.Surendranath is better known and lovingly called as "Asan", meaning Master. His father belonged to Thuckalai in the Kanyakumari district. After his education in the Sankara Subbiah School, Karamana and University College, Thiruvananthapuram, Peshkar Dr. Subramania Iyer asked him whether he could work in the office of *Indian Thinker* being published from Kollam. During this period Surendranath met K.C.George who was functioning as the Thiruvananthapuram Branch Secretary of the CPI. The Party was publishing *People's War* and *People's Age*. Surendranath became a reporter for them besides working for *Desabhimani*.

In those days the RSP/KSP leader N.Sreekantan Nair monopolized the trade union front in Thrivananthapuram. The Press Workers' Union was the most powerful. Surendranath was attracted to the trade union movement and wanted to devote himself to the cause of the working class. During his studies for the BA Degree in Philosophy he had ample exposure to philosophical writings of Hegel, Marx and Engels and several Indian writers. His interactions with N.K.Kumaran and Kulathingal Pothen attracted Surendranath to the *Chethu Thozhilali* (toddy tappers) movement. A meeting was held near the Amman Temple at Chackai to mobilize the toddy-tapping workers. He was taken aback when he found that most of them who had come to listen to the leaders had brought with them bottles of toddy and were occasionally drinking it. Some were a little intoxicated too. But still the leaders could to some extent, create an impression on them about the necessity for collective mobilization.

At that time Kannanthodathu Janardhanan Nair was hailed as a hero for his trade union work among *navika thozhilali* group (boat workers) as well as workers employed in the handling of green coconut husks. Janardhanan Nair was also a radical socialist having contacts with Subhash Chandra Bose and others at the national level. Surendranath went to Alappuzha, the Mecca of

trade union movement. There he observed the functioning of the TCFWU and its leaders, T.V.Thomas and R. Sugathan. Since then Surendranath worked in close association with them till their end.

Some incidents in the early phase of unionisation of State Transport employees flashed in the mind of Surendranath. There was some altercation in the Thiruvananthapuram bus depot between some workers. One Chellappan was accused of stealing the lunch packet of another and following that he was beaten. At that time the office of the Union was functioning at Pulimood. At Nagercoil the affairs of the Union were managed by Muthu Karuppa Pillai who officiated as the President and T.S.Ramaswamy was the secretary. In those days the State Transport employees were having non-pensionable service. They were engaged in a struggle to make the service a pensionable one. The leaders of the Union were under close surveillance of the police under orders from the Government. However, the leaders secretly met at the residence of Mannanthala Balakrishna Pillai. It was at this meeting that T.S. Ramaswamy decided to launch a hunger strike. Surendranath remembers two persons, Fernandez, a conductor and the other one Saraswathy. Today he does not know about their whereabouts.

Surendranath was instructed by the leaders to go to the Pappanamcode workshop to do trade union work. N.N.Pandarathil too was there to help him. At this time the Union elected T.V.Thomas as the President and George Chadayamury as the Secretary, though personally Surendranath wanted T.S.Ramaswamy to continue as the Secretary. At one stage the Union had elected Pattom Thanu Pillai as the President of the Union in the place of Muthukaruppa Pillai and the workers did not relish it knowing the character of Pattom. When Pattom became the Chief Minister, the State Transport employees experienced worst days. The Union insisted that the same demands had been submitted by it when Pattom was holding the presidentship, and therefore they should be implemented. But Pattom in his capacity as the Chief Minister was the one who stood against it. He did not even like the step taken by T.V.Thomas to discuss the demands with the Managing Director of the State Transport. Workers went on a go-slow. For instance, the buses from East Fort to Sasthamangalam, a distance of about 5 kilometres took 4 hours to reach the destination. This caused damage to the engines of the vehicles. The struggle soon spread and turned violent. At Nagercoil there was police firing. Police attacked transport workers at several places. R.Prakasam launched a hunger strike, though it was soon after his marriage. K.Sukumaran tried to intervene. P.K.Kunju was the Transport Minister. Pattom was shouting that he would teach the transport workers a lesson. At last Pattom had to yield to the demands for rendering justice to the transport employees. As a face saving measure, he appointed a Commission of Enquiry headed by Velu Pillai. T.V.Thomas refused to see him. He deputed Surendranath to represent the

Union. The struggle by the State Transport employees and workers made a big impact all over the State and attracted a lot of public sympathy. In Thiruvananthapuram unionism soon was spreading to State government employees, shop employees, workers in the Government Press, Travancore Titanium Products, Rubber works, PWD workshop, hotel workers, tailors, textile and handloom workers.

Authorities saying that they have no right to form unions initially crushed the struggle by the NGOs in the State Government Service. Their leader, one Chettiyar, was even removed from service, but he was taken back when the first Communist Ministry came to power. White-collar employees in the State Electricity Board, Commercial banks, Life Insurance Corporation and Chit Fund Companies started forming unions. In short, unionisation among both blue collar and white-collar workers began rapid growth in Thiruvananthapuram after mid 1950s.

According to K.V.Surendranath, when the State Transport Employees Union was founded, its main source of strength was a set of people who had returned after their participation in the Second World War and who had seen the world outside the country. Some of them had joined the State Transport as drivers and mechanical staff. They had seen how workers in other countries had organized and made gains through struggles. Many of such war veterans had served as trade union activists. Surendranath was highly impressed by driver Prabhakaran, ex-military, who became a strong union activist and later rose to the position of the vice president of the Employees Union.

The Transport strike of 1954 made the employees conscious of their organic link with the working class. The CPI supported the strike. It stimulated working class consciousness among employees of the government employees. The strike brought together various sections of the working class like scavenging workers, workers in the Government Press, coir workers, estate workers etc. into a common platform of class solidarity. Thus the transport strike of 1954 should be accepted as a great landmark and a turning point in the history of the trade union movement of Kerala.

9.5 FORMATION OF EMPLOYEES' ASSOCIATION

Here we attempt to document the developments that led to the formation of the State Transport Employees' Association by a group of leaders who left the CPI and the AITUC. This development created strong inter-union rivalry among Left forces, which subsequently weakened the

union movement not only in the State Transport enterprise but also in the entire State.

9.5.1 Emergence of CPI (M) and CITU

Though CPI had split and the CPI (M) had become a separate entity, the top leaders of the AITUC had decided that the trade union centre would be kept intact. The CPI (M) itself came out with a public declaration that they would not allow the AITUC to split since it believed that being a true working class organization, workers holding diverse political faiths and ideologies could jointly work in the AITUC for securing the interests of the working class. However, the Bombay Convention of the AITUC held in 1966, the stand taken by some top leaders who were also in the CPI, irritated some delegates belonging to the CPI (M). The organic link between the political party and the trade union was being put to an acid test. Those leaders of the AITUC hailing from the CPI (M) group thought that the end had come, as they could no longer continue in the AITUC. As early as 1965 a division had appeared in the KSRTC Employees Union affiliated to the AITUC and as a sequel to it those who had come out of the CPI and formed the CPI (M) met separately and decided to leave the Employees Union and form the KSRTC Employees Association (KSRTCEA) with C. Kannan as its President. This action was even interpreted by the CPI (M) as blatant violation of the Party's Policy and accordingly Kannan was openly censured for causing a split in the AITUC.

9.5.2 Kannan's defiance

C. Kannan, one of the unquestioned leaders of the working class in the State did not care, as he believed that it was the employees of the KSRTC who had met collectively and elected him and no political party, not even his own CPI (M), had the right to question it. He argued that if the working class movement did not accept the line of the political party, it was the task of that political party to explain its line to the working class by continuing to work with them. Mistakes might happen on both sides, but both sides should sit together to thrash out issues. It was a folly not to attempt to follow such democratic approaches. Both B.T.Ranadive and E.M.S.Namboodiripad had strongly supported the concept of independence of working class and mass organisations. They never wanted the Party to enforce its dictates on other organisations.

9.5.3 O.J. Joseph leads Staff Federation

As soon as the KSRTC Employees Association with C. Kannan at its top was formed, a section of office employees of the KSRTC came forward to form the KSRTC Ministerial Staff Federation. They had also left the Employees' Union affiliated to the AITUC. The Staff Federation chose O.J.Joseph as its President. "O.J." as he was known was a dynamic leader who had worked in Kannur as a handloom worker and later had led the Chirackal Taluk Handloom Workers' Union. He was a self less devoted revolutionary who for some time used to move around in the fake name of "Balettan" organizing working calss struggles in different parts of the State. At one time he too had left the CPI and joined the CPI (M). When the CITU was formed, he was elected to its top executive. Indeed many stalwarts belonging to the young age group had left the AITUC to join the CITU as the AITUC hierarchy had a "geriatric" problem with older generations being left alone there. This, to some extent, had weakened the AITUC. There was also a feeling that the AITUC was not as revolutionary and militant as the newly formed CITU.

9.5.4 Behind the scene developments

There were a number of behind the scene developments that led to the formation of the KSRTC Employees' Association by the dissident group in the CPI and the AITUC. On May 8, 1965 the Employees Union held its annual conference at the Boat Crew Association hall in Alappuzha. T.V. Thomas chaired the meeting of the General Council. The meeting had been convened specially for resolving forces of dissent and bringing about unity among all members. But the dissidents took this as an opportunity to aggravate the division. The group of delegates from Kottayam requested the chair for permission to return home. When they left, a resolution expressing no-confidence on K.V. Surendranath, the General Secretary was moved by the dissident group. T.V. Thomas, who was in the chair ruled that this item was not on the official agenda and so could not be taken up. When commotion arose, T.V.Thomas declared a closure of the meeting of the General Council and he left the venue.

As soon as T.V.Thomas left, the dissident group continued the meeting with Madhavan Asari the Vice-president, in the chair. When this meeting was in the process of declaring the election of a new President, General Secretary and Office bearers, K.V.Surendranath and a few of his loyal associates secured control of the official records and Minutes Book of the Employees' Union in a dramatic move that upset the plan of the dissidents. They directed

their members V.S.Adima and others to physically resist K.V.Surendranath and his colleagues. Then there followed a clash in which K.Appukuttan of the Employees' Union official group jumped forward and hit several on the other side.

Surendranath and his colleagues rushed to the house of T.V.Thomas and apprised him about the new developments. Meanwhile the pro-CPI (M) group, the dissidents, filed a suit in court against T.V.Thomas and Surendranath and secured an interim injunction order restraining the official group to go ahead with any further action. To prevent an open split in the Employees' Union and also in the AITUC and defeat the plans of the pro-CPI (M) leaders, T.V.Thomas convened a special convention of the Union at the V.J.T. Hall in Thriuvananthapuram on June 10, 1965. The tragedy was that in spite of earnest efforts by senior leaders like T.V.Thomas, K.V.Surendranath and M.N.Govindan Nair, the split in the Employees Union and there by in the State unit of the AITUC could not be prevented.

9.6 ERA OF TURBULENCE

After the General Elections in 1967, E.M.S.Namboodiripad led a seven party coalition government in Kerala. From day one the Ministry started witnessing strong opposition on many issues particularly on the labour front. Since the CPI had split and the CPI (M) formed, the rivalry between the two groups was on the rise.

The demand for Bonus was always an annual event hotly contested by both employees and their workers. In most cases, the demand used to be made on the eve of Onam season. In the month of August 1967 too the KSRTC employees through their unions made a demand for Bonus. Luckily, negotiations for a few days brought a settlement on Septemebr 5, 1967 under which the management agreed to pay 17.5 per cent bonus, the highest ever granted to the employees so far. The KSRTC Chairman M.M.Cheriyan a CPI (M) man took the initiative in bringing about this settlement with C.Kannan, C.M.Stephen, S.Varadarajan Nair and K.V.Surendranath representing the CPI (M) supported Employees Association, the INTUC and the CPI-AITUC controlled Employees Union respectively.

9.6.1 Employees' Union serves strike notice

In 1968 too the issue of Bonus was raised. On August 11, the state executive of the Employees' Union met and decided to serve a strike notice. On the expiry of the notice period, the strike commenced with picketing and

demonstrations all over Kerala. About 500 employees observed hunger Satyagraha at the depot offices. The struggle was growing into a popular struggle with activists blocking major roads bringing State Transport services to a grinding halt in many centres. Imbichi Bava of the CPI (M) was the Transport Minister. There were several allegations against him raised both on the floor of the Assembly and outside. One particular allegation was that he was violating recruitment rules in the KSRTC and forcing the KSRTC management to appoint any one who brought a chit from him. The Employees' Union demanded that all appointments in the KSRTC should be left to the Public Service Commission and held a days' token strike.

Under pressure, Imbichi Bava called a conference and invited S.Varadarajan Nair (INTUC), George Chadayamury and J. Chitharajan (AITUC). The leaders announced in advance that if the Government failed to settled the dispute, S.Varadarajan Nair and K.V.Surendranath would commence a hunger satyagraha in Thiruvananthapuram¹². At other centres, the struggle of transport employees was being led by leaders like E.Chandrasekharan Nair, Veliyam Bhargavan, R.Balakrishna Pillai, Joseph, Kumarakam Sankunny Menon, K.M.Mani, Thiruvencoor Gopi, K.K.Srinivasan, Rajappan, K.A.Rajan, C.K.Viswanathan, Varghese, P.G.R.Pillai, K.K.Thankappan Nair, Kalyanakrishnan Nair, Joseph Koyippally, K.C. Devassy and P.P.Thampy.

The INTUC and the pro-CPI (M) Employees Association did not participate in the strike, which commenced from the midnight of December 19, 1968. C.M. Stephen of the INTUC said that he considered the strike as a reflection of the ongoing internal feuds among the communist groups referring to the CPI and CPI (M) factions among employees. During the strike, there were a number of incidents involving the activists of the Employees' Union. The KSRTC management was determined to defeat the strike by employing a large number of blacklegs to operate its services. One day K.R.Subhash and Mohan of the Union lay down on the road near the Over bridge at Thiruvananthapuram to picket a transport bus being operated by the blacklegs. The bus driver tried to intimidate the picketers by taking the vehicle very close to them and the on lookers thought that the picketers had been overrun and killed on the spot. Such was the narrow margin between the bus and the picketers. G. Balakrishnan Nair, volunteer captain of the Employees' Union at the central depot in Thiruvananthapuram had also risked his life but escaped when he jumped in front of a transport bus to picket it. Balakrishnan Nair, at the time of writing this had been serving as the Working President of the Employees' Union. Earlier he had also held the post of the General Secretary of the Union for a long period.

As a part of the struggle the activists of the Employees' Union held a march from the Union Office to the Chief Office of the KSRTC in the East Fort at Thiruvananthapuram carrying an effigy of the Transport Minister. Their plan was to burn this effigy after they reached the Chief Office. The marchers were stopped by a big police force led by the Circle Inspector *Minnal* Parameswaran Pillai ('*Minnal*' means lightening) who was a terror in those days. The marchers then burnt the effigy of the Transport Minister and most of them were arrested on the spot.

9.6.1.1 Achutha Menon's Views

C.Achutha Menon had stated that both Imbichi Bava, the CPI (M) Transport Minister and M.M.Cherian of CPI (M) appointed as the Chairman of the KSRTC by the Minister were bent on destroying the AITUC affiliated Employees' Union ¹³. Cherian was made a tool to carry out the dictates of the CPI (M). Imbichi Bava himself admitted in the floor of the Assembly that he had given direct appointments to 243 persons in KSRTC without even inviting applications. This became a big scandal. The Employees' Union, besides showing its strong opposition to the Ministers' policy, demanded the constitution of an Appeal Board to hear and dispose of appeals in the case of disciplinary action, confirmation in regular service of all those temporary employees who had put in more than 240 days of work in a year, and unification of service conditions among different categories of employees. The Joint Action Council of AITUC, INTUC, UTUC and the Drivers Union, which did not have any particular political affiliation, conducted the strike. Government used all reprehensible methods to break the strike. The CPI (M) offices were turned into recruiting offices for black legs. The Joint Action Council ultimately succeeded when the Government agreed to a settlement. The E.M.S. Ministry resigned on October 17, 1969 and Imbichi Bava ceased to be the Minister for Transport.

9.6.2 Anti CPI (M) moves

Anti-CPI (M) demonstrations were undertaken all over the State. In some of them the farmers and estate lobbies dominated by the Christian Community alleged Marxist atrocities on them. They declared openly that the need for a second *Vimochana Samaram* (Liberation Struggle) was imminent. Farmers' conventions and demonstrations were held at several places particularly in Kottayam and high land regions. E.John Jacob was their leader and he appealed to farmers and estate owners to unite and fight against the Marxists. Reverberation of this was reflected in the floor of the Assembly. Political experts predicated the fall of the EMS ministry on account of new

political realignments. On March 27, Police fired several rounds at Veeyapuram Punja Paddy region when a crowd of armed pro-Marxist farm workers tried to prevent farmers from undertaking harvesting work in their own fields. Tension spread through out Kuttanad. Soon in Palakkad there were reports on Marxist attacks on farmers. The INTUC unit of Kerala condemned these attacks. The Kollam convention of the INTUC held on May 18, 1969 and attended by T.O.Bava, K.Karunakaran, C.M.Stephen G.S.Dhara Singh, A.K.Antony (the then Youth Congress President) and Kulangara Kunju Krishnan gave an ultimatum to the EMS Government that if they did not voluntarily quit, the people of Kerala would pull them down from power.

The EMS ministry resigned in October 1969. In the new political realignment, C.Achutha Menon, of the CPI was elected as the Chief Minister in a coalition with the Congress as a major partner. This Government took an anti-labour approach and one of its actions was directed against the KSRTC employees particularly those belonging to the Employees Association backed by the CPI (M) leaders. It directed the KSRTC management to terminate the services of 614 employees on December 30, 1969. Gupthan, son-in-law of E.M.S.Namboodiripad was one among them. Another victim was the wife of the veteran trade union leader and member of CPI (M), O.Bharathan. She was working as a clerk in the Kannur Depot of the KSRTC.

9.6.3 Association strikes

The KSRTC Employees' Association protested and called for a statewide strike that lasted 32 days. At that time Azheekodan Raghavan was the President of the Association. The Association formed several Action Committees and conducted statewide campaigns for mobilizing its members. The authorities let loose repressions on the striking employees. Employees retaliated. There were reports on burning of transport buses and damage to property. Stones were hurled against buses threatening the travelling public with injury. The issue was raised in the Assembly and on several occasions, its proceedings had to be suspended. K.M.George was the Transport Minister. He offered to appoint a Commission of Enquiry headed by a Judge, but warned the striking employees that they would be forced to call off the strike due to waning interest of the ranks and rising protest from the public¹⁴. Meanwhile, striking employees agreed to attend the conciliation conference called by the Minister. However, John Manjooran the Convenor of the Action Council said that this marked only a temporary recess, but the struggle would be taken up actively by the first week of February 1970. As predicted, the strike had a fresh lease of life with employees belonging to the Association picketing buses. Every day the police was taking several employees into custody from various centres. N.K.Seshan, the Law Minister,

on behalf of the Government, announced that the Government was willing to appoint a Tribunal to examine the question of termination of service of the employees, but there was no question of it yielding to the Association's pressure.

9.6.4 Settlement

At least the Association agreed to attend a conciliation conference called by K.M.George, the Transport Minister and a settlement was reached on July 12, 1970. According to it, several benefits were given to employees, which cost the KSRTC an amount of Rs.25 lakhs. Drivers were to get an enhanced vehicle allowance. Leave was to be allowed for 15 days. K.C. Mathew and J.Chitharanjan (Employees' Union, AITUC), S.Varadarajan Nair and N. Narayanan Nair (Workers Union, INTUC), Parassala Sivanandan and Sisupalan Nair (Employees' Association, CITU) Nagappan and Sivathanu Pillai (Drivers Union) and R. Balakrishna Pillai (Drivers Union) represented the employees.

The Achutha Menon ministry resigned on August 1, 1970. In the same year the CITU officially came into existence. The CITU believed in the principles "One Industry One Union". Therefore it directed the KSRTC Ministerial Staff Federation led by O.J.Joseph to merge with the KSRTC Employees' Association. In 1973 this merger was completed, making the Association one of the largest trade unions of the KSRTC employees.

Due to complex political realignments in Kerala, C.Achutha Menon came back as Chief Minister with the firm support of the Congress led by K.Karunakaran. The latter became the Home Minister in the new political dispensation. This Ministry lasted six years during which occurred the darkest days of the National Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi.

9.6.5 Lightning strike, April 1972

In the second half of April 1972, the KSRTC employees held a lightning strike. It was led by the Employees' Association, which was targeting M.N.Govindan Nair, the Transport Minister. Achutha Menon, the Chief Minister, immediately called a conciliation conference but no settlement was reached. Soon there were reports of clashes between the police and the operating staff at some places. However, the strike did not continue for long. As per the settlement, the strike was called off. The unions agreed that those who struck work would compensate by extra days' work and the Government agreed to institute an enquiry within three days and take action

on the issues. O.J.Joseph, Adikkalathu Sukumaran Nair, R.Narayanan Nair, P.Prabhakaran Nair, S.A.Nagappan, A.T.Thomas, S.Sisupalan Nair, and, V.Prabhakaran Nair represented the employees. By this time a good cadre of internal leaders had emerged in the union movement in KSRTC. At that time Malayattoor Ramakrishnan, IAS and a great literary figure, was working as the General Manager, KSRTC.

9.6.6 Demise of eminent leaders

A number of leading lights from the trade union movement in Kerala passed away during 1975-77. They included George Chadayanmury, T.K.Divakaran, K.T. Jacob, A.K.Gopalan and T.V.Thomas. This caused a heavy loss to the working class of the State. This period also witnessed important struggles by the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) employees. The KSRTC and KSEB, the two major public sector undertakings accounted for a large share of organized work force and the struggles by them had led to considerable enhancement of their conditions of work and wages.

9.6.7 The 16-day struggle of 1973

The Kerala State had a coalition government of the CPI and the Congress and the veteran CPI leader C.Achutha Menon headed the ministry. The opposition parties particularly the CPI (M) were mobilising protest against some policies of this Government. One such protest was on the issue of food shortage in the State and the consequent rise in food prices. On September 1, 1973 the opposition parties held a Raj Bhavan march and demanded the convening of the State Legislative Assembly before September 10. The CPI (M) leader E.M.S.Namboodiripad threatened that if the Assembly was not convened before this deadline something would really happen in the State for which the Government alone would be held responsible. The Chief Minister just ignored the demand.

9.6.8 Onam and the Bonus Issue

Few days prior to the Kerala festival of Onam, the industrial relations situation used to become turbulent mainly on account of the workers' demand for Bonus and festival allowances. Sometimes this issue could be resolved with the Government and the Labour Commissioner, after some initial joint consultations, issuing some directives about the minimum bonus that should be paid to workers. Since the Payment of Bonus Act had come into force, workers were entitled to the minimum bonus of 8.33 percent. For the year

1973, the Government, therefore, announced the minimum bonus at this rate in all public sector undertakings, which were running at a loss. This unilateral decision of the Government circumvented the tradition of settling the bonus issue through direct negotiations and consultations. This provoked the trade unions and soon an agitational mood emerged in almost all the public sector undertakings.

9.6.9 Employees demand higher bonus

The trade unions in the KSRTC were the first to raise the demand for a higher bonus than the statutory minimum of 8.33 percent. They wanted to be paid bonus at least at the rate given for the previous year. They threatened that if no decision was announced immediately, they would launch a struggle and paralyse transport services throughout the State, even if the Government came forward with draconian measures like legally prohibiting the strike. Similar call for a strike on the bonus issue was made by the trade unions in the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB). Incidentally almost all trade unions having affiliation with political parties both in the ruling front as well as the opposition had come forward with a joint call for the struggle.

C.Achutha Menon, the Chief Minister stated that this threatened struggle by the “most highly paid” employees in the State was unjustified. According to him, a Driver in the Government Service was enjoying a scale of pay of only Rs.85-170 while his counter part in the KSRTC was enjoying, as a result of collective bargaining and union power, a scale of pay of Rs.135-285, besides bonus and other fringe benefits. Even a Lower Division Clerk in Government Service enjoyed only a lower scale of Rs.90-190. The same type of gross discrepancies existed in the KSEB. The Chief Minister told the Press that the principle of “equal pay for equal work” was being openly flouted in the State like Kerala, which was having the highest level of educated unemployment among the states. Under the recent Kunju Krishna Pillai Award, the KSRTC employees were going to get huge arrears of pay and on an average an employee would take home about Rs.2000 during the 1973 Onam festival. Therefore, Achutha Menon appealed to the employees not to press the demand for bonus at the previous year’s rate of 14.5 percent.

9.6.10 KSRTC offers 11.5 percent bonus

To avoid a breakdown of transport services, the KSRTC management agreed to pay bonus to its employees at the rate of 11.5 percent saying that given the present financial position of the undertaking a higher bonus was unthinkable. Already the accumulated loss of the KSRTC had virtually wiped

out a good part of its assets. The trade unions rejected the management's offer and announced that employees would commence an indefinite strike from the midnight of September 4, 1973.

9.6.11 Labour Minister intervenes

Vakkom Purushothaman, the Labour Minister, convened a tripartite conference and offered a compromise formula that the KSRTC would immediately pay the bonus at any rate between 8.33 percent and 11.5 percent as advance and the bonus issue concerning the total bonus would be kept as an open issue for further discussion with the unions for settlement at an early date by arbitration, conciliation or adjudication or any other method to be agreed on. The trade unions rejected the offer.

M.N.Govindan Nair of the CPI who was holding the portfolios of Transport and Electricity was away in New Delhi to attend the meeting of the National Council of the CPI. Therefore, the Labour Minister could not pursue the matter further. Meanwhile, the Government issued a directive to permit private bus operators to operate extra services and schedules even in the nationalized routes. Long distance bus services were stopped from 12 am on September 4 to enable the buses to return to the respective depots before midnight when the strike was to commence. The Government also ordered the closure of all educational institutions by advancing the Onam holidays by two days. These institutions were directed to reopen only on September 17.

9.6.12 Strike commences

On September 5, 1973 the strike by the employees of the KSRTC commenced. On the same day the employees of the KSEB held a one-day token strike to press their demand for higher bonus resulting in a total blackout in the State. Newspapers could not be printed. Industrial production came to a standstill. Offices and homes went without light and streetlights were off.

The AITUC Vice President J.Chitharanjan, the CPI leader, vehemently criticized the approach of the CPI led Government in unilaterally declaring the bonus in public sector units. It might be noticed in this context that a week before the present strike by the KSRTC employees, the Railway employees in Kerala had gone on a lightning strike demanding enhanced rice ration and an advance of Rs.500 for tiding over the situation of the steeply rising prices in the state. This strike had paralysed rail traffic and paradoxically even prevented the movement of goods trains that were carrying emergent supplies

of food grains to different parts of the State. It was interesting to note that while the KSRTC employees went on strike paralysing road transport services in the State, the railways had agreed to operate special trains to meet the Onam rush. The railways thought that the operation of special trains during the KSRTC strike would bring them some extra revenue that would compensate for the loss it incurred during the railway strike.

At Kottayam postal employees went on a lightning strike making the same demand as the one made by the railway men. At another end the 700 odd engineers from Junior Engineer to the Chief Engineer level belonging to the KSEB Engineers Association declared a sit down strike from September 5 for getting some issues of all India and local nature, properly redressed. The Power Board Engineers were agitating in the north Indian states on issues like parity between IAS and technical staff, neglect of technical expertise etc. In Kerala the Power Board Engineers complained that the Government and the KSEB had been neglecting their legitimate demands which were pending for a long period. Better representation for the Engineers in the Board by proper reconstitution of the Board, revision of salary structure, improving promotion chances and better staff pattern were their major demands. The Engineers Association, however, made it clear that their sit down strike would in no way affect the power distribution.

The Onam season thus started with turbulence in industrial relations with employees of the KSRTC and KSEB paralysing normal life in the State. *The Hindu* reported ¹⁵.

"The indefinite strike by about 16000 KSRTC workers and the one day token strike by about 24000 employees of the KSEB threw normal life in Kerala completely out of gear today. The strike affected industries, hospitals, newspapers, news agencies, telegraph stations, and, even the All India Radio"

9.6.13 Course of the strike

Five trade unions in the KSRTC had formed Joint Action Council with R.Balakrishna Pillai as the Convener. It may be noted in advance in this context, that it was the same Balakrishna Pillai who attempted to teach the KSRTC employees a bitter lesson through the implementation of draconian anti-labour policies when he was holding the post of Transport Minister in the Ministry headed by K.Karunakaran during 1993-94.

In 1973 R.Balakrishna Pillai in his capacity as the convener of the Joint Action Council of the KSRTC unions claimed that the employees were on

strike irrespective of the different political affiliations of their trade unions. He criticized the trip of C.Achutha Menon and M.N. Govindan Nair, the Chief Minister and Transport and Electricity Minister respectively to New Delhi to attend the meeting of the CPI Council when the State was in the grip of a total strike. Meanwhile, following a *gherao* by union activists for pressing the settlement of the bonus dispute in the Government owned Thiruvananthapuram Rubber Works, the management declared a lock out there on September 6, 1973.

9.6.14 Offer of Arbitration

M.N.Govindan Nair held a press conference on September 10 and reiterated the Government's offer to refer the KSRTC Bonus dispute to Arbitration or Adjudication. According to him, the KSRTC strike in principle had questioned the very future of public sector units. He cited that during wars, national emergencies and festivals like Christmas, nations used to declare a truce. During such periods as the Onam festival, one should, therefore, seriously think about a similar truce or cease-strike in the State of Kerala. The Government, therefore, would once again appeal to the employees to accept 11.5 percent as the minimum bonus and keep the issue open for discussion later. About Rs.1.60 crores as arrears under the previous Arbitration Award and the Onam Advance of Rs.125 per employee were to be disbursed to the employees immediately besides the promised 11.5 percent of emoluments as bonus. Under these circumstances the Minister appealed to the employees and their unions to withdraw the strike.

The Government put out a media campaign to bring certain facts to the attention of the general public. 16000 employees could not be allowed to keep the 2 crores of people of Kerala at ransom. Kerala had about 5 lakhs of fully unemployed job seekers. Another 15 lakhs possess manpower as their only resource for seeking a livelihood. The strike was creating a crisis for the governance of the state. The Liaison Committee of the Ruling Front was asked to meet urgently to discuss the KSRTC issue.

R.Balakrishna Pillai, the Convenor of the Joint Action Council of KSRTC unions and their chief spokesman, disproved the Minister's claim that the accumulated loss of the KSRTC had eaten away much of its assets. According to Pillai, compared to the previous year 1972-73, in the current year 1973-74, the revenue of the KSRTC would register an increase of 20 percent and despite that the employees were not demanding more than the previous year's bonus.

C.M.Stephen, the INTUC leader accused the management for the present crisis in the KSRTC. The system of Incentive Bonus implemented in the previous year had increased the earnings of the KSRTC. In the previous year the management had disbursed not only 11.5 percent bonus, but also an additional 3 percent as ex-gratia payment when M.N.Govindan Nair himself was the Transport Minister.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties put out the threat that if the Assembly session were not immediately convened to discuss the KSRTC strike and other issues related to the workers in Kerala, they would ask their MLAs to resign en-masse. Later the strategy was modified. The opposition MLAs announced that they would offer an indefinite hunger Satyagraha before the Assembly Hall from September 25, 1973.

9.6.15 Arguments and counter arguments

On the KSRTC bonus issue different arguments and counter arguments were raised. According to some, the Award of the Arbitrator would give the employees enhanced pay from January 1, 1973. The Government had agreed to pay bonus arrears for the period after this date at the new rates of pay so that the total bonus amount received by each employee would in effect, be more than 11.5 percent. The principle of "Arrear Bonus on Arrear Salary" proposed by the Government was not acceptable to the unions. According to them, arrear bonus for previous year and bonus at 11.5 percent for 1972-73 would be less than the bonus at 14.5 percent, so that the offer was not acceptable to them.

Meanwhile, one of the largest trade unions and the first to be formed in the State Transport, the Employees Union, affiliated to the AITUC came out with a Press Release. It stated in clear terms that the KSRTC strike was basically a working class struggle and a pure union directed strike and there was no politics in it. The KSRTC did not have at that time a balance sheet as prepared in other industrial establishments. As a result of pressure from different quarters, the management was operating a large number of uneconomic routes, which amounted to at least 60 percent of the total routes. Student agitations and others resulted in huge damage and loss to the KSRTC. Students' concession was another reason for the loss. The State Transport employees in Kerala were not getting certain benefits that were being given to the State Government employees. They included, among other things, liberal holidays and leave with wages. Therefore, the Government led by the CPI leader C.Achutha Menon should consider these factors and strive for an early settlement of the KSRTC strike.

9.6.16 End of the strike in sight

The KSRTC strike continued beyond ten days. At one of the conciliation conferences, three trade unions agreed to withdraw the strike but officially it was not done immediately as promised. The Drivers' Union controlled by R.Balakrishna Pillai of the Kerala Congress was still on strike. Another group, the Provisional Employees' Union directed its members to report for duty at their respective stations.

The private bus transport workers announced a one-day token strike on September 20. E.M.S.Namboodiripad the top CPI (M) leader threatened that the Ministers in Kerala would soon become unable to walk freely on the roads. Forty percent of the MLAs having 50 percent votes had demanded the immediate convening of the Assembly session, but the Government was not showing any positive response to it. By September 16, KSRTC services were in the process of partial restoration. The unions of striking employees started demanding that if they withdrew the strike, the management should agree to treat the strike days as eligible casual leave. Soon a settlement was at sight.

The Government agreed to give 12 days' wages as recoverable advance to all employees. The bonus packet remained at 11.5 percent of total emoluments. The Government had threatened to use the services of fresh recruits and employment exchange hands. These initiatives supplemented by pressure from the travelling public brought the settlement of the KSRTC strike on September 20, 1973.

9.6.17 Enforces 'Dies-Non'

The strike by the KSEB employees also was called off following a tripartite conference held on September 21, Under the terms of settlement arrived there, 30,000 employees of the KSEB would get bonus at the rate of 8.33 percent for the year 1972-73, besides an advance of Rs.20 to be recovered after six months. Employees would lose one days' wages. The bonus would be paid for arrears granted by way of variable DA for the period April 30, 1970 to October 1, 1971. The Chief Minister C.Achutha Menon insisted that the principle of "*Dies Non*" (No Work, No Pay) should be strictly enforced not only among State Government employees but also among the employees of all public sector undertakings. According to some, Achutha Menon, the architect of the "*Dies Non*" policy had brought about a healthy dimension in industrial relations by introducing the much needed self restraint on employees who in the past used to jump into strikes for silly reasons. However, the critics argue that Achutha Menon's policy had cut the very right of employees to strike even for legitimate causes. But whatever be

the pros and cons of this policy, the policy had continued to be in force in Kerala whether the United Democratic Front (UDF) or the Left Democratic Front (LDF) ruled the State. *Dies Non* had come to stay here.

9.6.18 Major confrontation during 1975

The KSRTC was a scene of major confrontation. On July 11, 1975, the KSRTC employees, in spite of the Emergency and repression on democratic rights, launched a statewide strike. The Government directed the KSRTC to suspend 250 employees who were on strike. The Association claimed that they had served a strike notice and had gone on strike only after the expiry of the notice period and therefore their strike could not be called illegal. The Transport Minister at that time was M.N.Govindan Nair of the CPI. Being a true Communist, it was reported that MN held the view that labour power of the workers was a commodity, which they were free to sell, or not. That was their birthright. But his ministerial colleagues did not accept this view. They wanted to curtail the legitimate democratic rights of workers. The working class thus suffered due to the intricacies of unholy political coalitions. However, the ordinary public was made to think that the Emergency was a great boon as most of the trade unions had been silenced and bus services were being run smoothly. Attendance at offices was regular and papers and files moved fast. But, though things looked bright on the surface, people lost their freedom of expression. There were some curbs on the Press. Police brutality went on unrelenting, creating terror in the minds of many. It was during this period, that the state machinery tried to crush the Naxalite movement as well as hunt out radical elements. The death of Engineering College student Rajan, son of Prof.Eachara Warrier, at the hands of State Police at a Police Camp created a great public uproar and condemnation against the ruthless policies being pursued by K.Karunakaran, the Home Minister.

After the Emergency was lifted, Kerala went in for another general election. Karunakaran who had then become the Chief Minister was, however, forced to resign on the issue of Rajan case and the Chief Ministership went to A.K.Antony. He too was forced to resign soon due to complex undercurrents in Kerala politics. It was then that P.K.Vasudevan Nair, the CPI leader, was pushed to the forefront to lead the Ministry. He too could not continue for long. On October 12, 1979, C.H.Mohammed Koya of the Muslim League took over as the Chief Minister of Kerala and he continued till December 1, 1979. Thereafter since 1980 Kerala had been witnessing the installation of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and United Democratic Front (UDF) ministry one after another alternatively on a regular basis till now. The LDF Government used to be led by its major partner, the

CPI (M) and the UDF Government by its major partner, the Congress. For a long time the Chief Ministership was held by E.K.Nayanar of the CPI (M) and K.Karunakaran of the Congress (Indira) alternatively.

In May 1978 the Ninth State Level Conference of the KSRTC Employees' Association was held and it announced that unless the wage levels were revised upwards in the shortest time, the employees would launch an indefinite strike. E.Balanandan and M.V.Raghavan were the main speakers at this Conference, which was inaugurated by Nripan Chakraborty, the Chief Minister of Triturate Conference elected M.M.Lawrence as the President of the Association and M.B.Thrivikraman Pillai as the General Secretary.

9.6.19 General Strike of 1979

June 5, 1979 saw Kerala in the grip of a General Strike called by the central trade unions, AITUC, INTUC, CITU, UTUC, STU, BMS, HMS and KTUC. The strike was intended to project the opposition of the working class in the State to the new Industrial Relations Bill proposed by the Central Government. Along with this there was a demand for minimum bonus for all working people. Private and KSRTC bus employees joined the strike. Taxis and auto rickshaws and even hotels stopped service. There was another big working class agitation demanding recall of the State Governor, Jyothi Venkatachalam, who had recommended the dismissal of the elected Government in the State. State Transport buses stopped plying. The Janatha Party stated that this was a political agitation aiming at winning votes in the next general elections. Mainly AITUC, CITU and UTUC unions led the agitation.

9.6.20 Strike of 1981

In the last week of September 1981 trouble was brewing among the ranks of KSRTC employees. In the first week of October 1981 a strike had commenced. The management decided to cut 600 schedules and recruit outsiders to man the remaining schedules. Fresh postings were made to the cadre of Assistant Transport Officer. The management had ordered that every employee of the KSRTC should wear a name badge for his or her easy identification. This was not acceptable to the Employees Union (AITUC), Employees' Association (CITU), Workers Union (INTUC) and, the Mechanical Workers' Union (UTUC). The striking employees and union activists held a *dharna* in front of the KSRTC chief office and union leaders like N.B.Thrivikraman Pillai, G.Balakrishnan Nair, P.Venugopalan Nair, K.C.

Vamadevan, K.P.Sankaradhas, G.Gopinathan Nair and Nagarajan Naidu led it.

9.6.21 Strike of 1982

The private bus transport employees conducted a long struggle in early March 1982. The Chief Minister, K.Karunakaran promised to call a conference to discuss and resolve the issues. The workers had put forward a number of demands which included formation of a welfare fund, extension of ESI and EPF benefits, merger of a fixed portion of the DA in basic pay, grant of variable DA at the rate of Rs.1.50 per point, house rent allowance at 15 percent of basic salary, enhancement of running bata and regularization of all employees who had completed 120 days of continuous service. K.M.Abraham of the Kerala Road Transport Workers Federation, O. Bharathan of the CITU and R.S. Unni of the UTUC led the agitation. The AITUC affiliated Kerala State Motor Transport Thozhilali Federation also extended its total support to the agitation. The conciliation conference did not succeed because of the strong stand taken by the employers. Besides the leaders mentioned above, others like A.Sankaran, N.Appukuttan Nair, T.V.Karthikeyan, K.Suresh Babu, R.M. Parameswaran and P. Bhaskaran participated in the negotiations.

The issues again came up in the first week of August 1983. E.K.Nayanar, (the leader of Opposition in the Assembly and CPI (M) leader), J.Chitharanjan (AITUC), K.Pankajakshan (UTUC), and, N.Padmalochanan (CITU) played an important role in taking up the cause of workers. However, the Chief Minister claimed that most of the demand raised by the unions had been granted and therefore the present strike was intended to gain political mileage.

9.6.22 Death of Leaders

On July 20, 1983 Kerala lost one of the most dynamic trade union leaders the State has ever seen in the passing away of N.Sreekantan Nair who was the driving force behind the Kerala Socialist Party (KSP), the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the trade union centre, the United Trade Union Council (UTUC). In association with T.V.Thomas, he had given shape to the TV Sreekantan Formula of trade union unity among left trade unions. On January 16, 1984, Kerala lost another tall figure in the death of C.M.Stephen who had played a leading role both in the Congress and the INTUC and had displayed his great talents in the field of public oratory, negotiating skill and parliamentary debates. On November 27, 1984, the great CPI leader of the State M.N.Govindan Nair passed away. He was responsible

for building up the AITUC presence in the trade union movement, particularly in the Kollam region. The loss of these leaders had been irreparable to the union movement in Kerala.

9.6.23 Trouble in the KSRTC, 1985

Even after transferring the State Transport undertaking from direct control of the State Government and putting it under the KSRTC Corporation, very little significant change came in the structure of labour management relations in the undertaking. The transport minister's control over its activities continued unrestricted, adding to the damage that was already done. The trade unions in the KSRTC set up a Joint Action Council to coordinate the struggle of employees.

The Action Council during the middle of January 1985 registered its strong protest against the management's decision to indefinitely postpone negotiations for wages and salary revision, to violate standing guidelines on transfer and promotion and to freeze the operation of rules and initiate anti-labour policies on employees. As a first step towards direct action, it was decided to offer a token 24-hour hunger strike by leaders in front of all KSRTC units. S.Varadarajan Nair of INTUC and V.Viswanatha Menon of CITU announced the Action Council decision.

Meanwhile, there was another group of trade unions that decided to form another Action Council of their own. They included CSI Federation, Drivers' Union, Workers' Union, Workers' Federation, DTUC and STU. They complained that the KSRTC management was denying legitimate promotion to employees, unification and codification of Leave Rules, and distribution of clothing for uniforms. Besides, it was also imposing unilaterally higher workloads on the employees. T.S.John MLA of the Kerala State Transport Staff Union, A.C.Jose MLA and P.P.Soman Nair held a press conference.

The tussle between the trade unions and management of the KSRTC continued, though attempts were made to send compromise signals but no end was forthcoming. Meanwhile, all sections of the working class in Kerala were preparing for a general struggle. The leaders of State Government employees, teachers and other sections called for a general strike on August 20, 1985. As a first step in that direction they decided to observe a Solidarity Day on August 16. The important leaders behind this move were S.C.S.Menon, S.Varadarajan Nair, J.Chitharanjan, K.Pankajakshan, K.N.Ravindranath, P.K.Sankarankutty, P.T.Rao, K.P.Kosalaramadas, M.Bava and K.K.Abu. K.Karunakaran, the Chief Minister, offered to look into the allegation of the

unions if they could point out specific instances of wrongs done by the KSRTC management. But the unions were not prepared for it. They wanted the Government to discipline the erring management of the KSRTC and decided to go ahead with their struggle.

9.7 BHARATHAN AND KSRTC

Reference had been made elsewhere about O. Bharathan's rise and fall. But here we confine to Bharathan's role in the KSRTC union movement. The KSRTC Employees Association had commenced its operation with C.Kannan as its President in 1965 but it was affiliated to the CITU when the latter was founded as distinct from the parent organization, the AITUC. C.Kannan, Azheekoden Raghavan, M.M.Lawrence and V.Viswantha Menon guided the destinies of the Employees' Association. At the same time the Employees Union, the first trade union in the State Transport was affiliated to the AITUC. Stalwarts like T.V. Thomas, K.V.Surendranath, P.S.Srinivasan and K.C.Mathew led this Union. S.Varadarajan Nair, C.M.Stephen, Vayalar Ravi, A.C. Jose and R.Balakrishna Pillai were leading the INTUC union in the KSRTC. However, some of these INTUC leaders formed factions and left the official INTUC. The long list of leaders of the State Transport employees in Kerala would look like a-who-is-who of the trade union movement in the State.

9.7.1 Bharathan inducted

During one day in 1987 soon after he was re-elected for a second term to the State Legislative Assembly from Edakkad constituency in Kannur, O.Bharathan received an unexpected telephone call from A.P.Kurian, Political Secretary to E.K.Nayanar, the Chief Minister¹⁶. Bharathan was informed that the KSRTC Employees' Association had informally decided to choose him as their President and that he should not say "No", when officially requested. Bharathan was taken back when he thought about his own ability to serve a position held previously by his mentor and *guru* (master) C.Kannan and other senior leaders. Further he knew very little about the KSRTC, a public sector undertaking and the structure of labour management relations in it. But he had some ideas about service rules, wage structure, and the social commitment a public sector or public utility concern should have. He once had attended a discussion meeting of the Association and listened to the top leaders as well employees who knew everything about the KSRTC. The employees of KSRTC constituted a rich collage of human resources and talented people. Among them were well-known literary writers, motion picture artistes and directors, legal experts and brilliant public speakers. When the Travancore

State Government brought the British expert Salter to the State to start the state transport services, most of the employees initially recruited to man them were graduates and postgraduates. This tradition continued till date. Such a composition of a class of transport workers / employees might not exist anywhere in India. That was why old feudal management techniques and strategies failed to work in the State Transport. What was required was enlightened professional management that recognized the equality of status between labour and capital.

O.Bharathan had some prior experience in Kannur with the organization of private motor transport workers. But KSRTC was different. So in the early days he had to do lot of homework and intensive interaction with employees from different sections and levels in the organization. Bharathan had stated that the Association offered him a "Kalari", a classroom, to learn more about trade union and political work. The meetings of employee members of the Association always kept high standards and quality of debates.

When Bharathan took over the destiny of the KSRTC Employees Association (KSRTCEA) its office was functioning from a dilapidated makeshift shed-cum-building attached to the office of the *Desabhimani* Press. P.K.Chandranandan of Alappuzha was functioning as the Manager of *Desabhimani*. A part of the Association Office had been let out for the CPI (M) publications unit of *Chintha*. From day one Bharathan appealed to the members of the Association, that they should have a separate office building. The members spontaneously came forward with contributions and soon the Association purchased a piece of land in Mele Thampanoor. It commenced the construction of an office building and when completed it was named the B.T.Ranadive Memorial. E.M.S. Namboodiripad inaugurated it on April 6, 1998. The building had cost the Association about Rs.38 lakhs.

9.7.2 The Strike of February 1993

In the General Elections held in 1991, the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by Congress top leader, K.Karunakaran, secured the majority and was asked to form the Government. E.K.Nayanar the former Chief Minister became the opposition leader of the Left Democratic Front (LDF). One of the first problems faced by Karunakaran was the allocation of ministerial berths to his UDF partners. R.Balakrishna Pillai had won representing the Kerala Congress (B) group. He is a talented dynamic leader and bolder than many in the leadership ranks in Kerala politics. He is known to possess a tough attitude to anything that he disapproved. He demanded a major portfolio like Revenue, Education, Finance or Industry. But when the issue was finally

settled, he had to be content with the Transport portfolio where the position of the Minister was not any way better than that of the KSRTC Managing Director. Naturally, initially Pillai registered his protest and even threatened to quit the UDF. But Karunakaran used his political skills to keep Pillai under him and made him accept the Transport portfolio. Incidentally, it may be noted in this context that Balakrishna Pillai himself was functioning as the President of the powerful KSRTC Drivers Union.

One newspaper in those days carried a funny cartoon caricaturing Balakrishna Pillai as a naughty boy trying to smash a toy transport bus, gifted by Karunakaran, into pieces. Looking at the cartoon many had forecast the dark days that were going to grip the KSRTC.

9.7.3 Draconian policies of the Minister

R.Balakrishna Pillai, when he took over as the Minister of Transport in 1991, never had any liking or respect for the long-term agreement signed in December 1990 between the KSRTC management and the unions. Though he was the President of the Drivers Union, he was bent upon to initiate anti-labour measures. He used to tell reporters who met him that some employees in the KSRTC were drawing unreasonably high salaries, some times much more than those in the IAS and IPS cadres. He instilled this spirit on the top executives of the KSRTC. One of his first steps was to ask the management to cancel all special allowances enjoyed by the employees with immediate effect. Balakrishna Pillai initiated a media campaign that the KSRTC was over staffed and the surplus staff had to be sent out for making the undertaking viable. At the same time reported vacancies were filled without resorting to the Public Service Commission or Employment Exchange routes. He asked the KSRTC management to prepare panel for each category and make appointment from them. He ordered to stop the monthly joint consultative meetings with representatives of the trade unions. Those who questioned these misdeeds of the minister were victimized. Balakrishna Pillai was colluding with a few members of the Board of Directors who were more loyal than the master. It was reported that about 13 employees of the KSRTC were forced to commit suicide because of the harassment meted out to them by the management and one among them was the private secretary to Mukund Menon, the Managing Director, a relative of Panampally Govinda Menon. A few days later Mukundan Menon, a successful and reputed management expert and who had done some good work in the KSRTC was forced to quit the undertaking because of the intervention of Balakrishna Pillai.

9.7.4 Formation of Joint Action Council

During this turbulent period, there were about thirty-four trade unions in the KSRTC competing with each other. The above struggle helped to bring about some common understanding among these unions and it generated hope for a single coordinating link representing the interests of all employees irrespective of category or craft. To a great extent the credit for this must go to the KSRTC Employees Association affiliated to the CITU.

The Government was using the KSRTC to experiment with its policy of destroying the public sector, promoting private sector, cutting subsidies and thereby implementing the New Economic Policy (NEP) at the state level to please the Central Government which was committed to implement the NEP. It was as a part of this that the salary was freezed, benefits curtailed, and, vacancies kept unfilled. The trade unions decided to demand the early implementation of the terms of settlement arrived under the Long Term Agreement of December 1990. They formed a Joint Action Council and decided to launch a strike from the midnight of February 16, 1993. O.Bharathan of the KSRTC Employees Association was chosen as the convenor of the Action Council.

In the after noon of February 16, the Association was invited to attend a conference called by the Chief Minister and the Minister holding the portfolio of Sports. This was a deliberate attempt by the Government to sow the seeds of a division in the Action Council by demonstration of its eagerness to discuss the issues with the Association at the first instance and not with the Joint Action Council. Bharathan informed the Government that unless the Action Council was invited for the Conference, he would not attend. In the evening when Bharathan was starting to go to Peroorkada to attend a meeting of transport employees the D.G.P., N. Krishnan Nair sent a top police officer to inform Bharathan that the Chief Minister Karunakaran was holding a conciliation conference in his chambers in the Secretariat at 8 pm and Bharathan should attend it.

Speculating on the possible tricks that the Chief Minister might play, Bharathan insisted on a few conditions like (i) If a settlement was not reached at the conference, the Government should not order the arrest of the union leaders. (ii) All the unions should be invited for the conference (iii) Unions would discuss the issues only with the Chief Minister, while R.Balakrishna Pillai could attend the Conference only as an observer. All the conditions were accepted by N.Krishnan Nair. The Conference commenced at 9 p.m. With out much discussion, the Chief Minister put forward a few points. They were (i) within three months all issues would be discussed and settled in a conference to be held by the Labour Minister. If necessary the Chief Minister

himself could personally intervene in it. (ii) The Government would freeze the order issued earlier on cutting down the days of leave applicable to the employees (iii) One instalment of DA would be paid along with the salary for the month of March (iv) Whenever the DA enhancement was given to State Government employees, the same would be extended to the KSRTC employees.

9.7.5 Transport Minister isolated

The decision that further discussion would be held without the Labour Minister N.Ramakrishnan and Transport Minister R.Balakrishna Pillai coming into the picture really pleased the trade unions. But Balakrishna Pillai was furious. He said, with his usual brand of audacity, that the KSRTC employees would not get even the usual salary for March and the question of DA payment would not be effected. He insisted that if the KSRTC decided to pay the salary for March, it could be given only in four or five instalments. Only after the KSRTC cleared all its other liabilities, that it would be able to take up the case of the employees "*Whoever declared the enhanced DA should pay it*", he added. Obviously, Balakrishna Pillai was aiming to hit the Chief Minister and embarrass him. He even went to the extent of saying that if the KSRTC employees really wanted to get the enhanced DA they should ask the Chief Minister.

The defiant attitude of the Transport Minister only strengthened the employees' resolve to stick to their decision to strike work. Family members of the employees joined in holding *dharnas* in front of the Government Secretariat. Soon workers from other industries and employments demonstrated their solidarity with the KSRTC employees in their struggle. On the second day of the strike, the Chief Minister again intervened. He reiterated the suggestions and offers he had made earlier for calling off the strike. He even explained to the unions that there had developed some misunderstanding among his cabinet colleagues and he would see that they were cleared at the earliest. He directed the setting up of a high level committee consisting of the Chief Secretary, Finance Secretary, Transport Secretary and the Managing Director of the KSRTC to study and report on making the KSRTC a viable venture through restructuring and improving its efficiency. Unfortunately, the Study Report was totally anti-labour. It had made recommendations which went farther than what Balakrishna Pillai was asking for.

9.7.6 Vijayachandran's Report

At this stage the Employees Association proposed an alternative study by K.Vijayachandran, a reputed technocrat and industrial consultant, who was very close to the CPI (M). The critics pointed out that this consultant had close association with top CPI (M) leaders like B.T.Ranadive and P.Ramamoorthy. In spite of this criticism, the Employees Association gave a green signal to Vijayachandran to go ahead with the study. Finally Vijayachandran submitted a well-written report on the restructuring of the KSRTC. The Association then took the initiative to disseminate the content of the Report widely by organizing a number of seminars and discussion meetings. Syamal Chakravarthy, the Transport Minister of West Bengal, Mohammed Ameen MP, the President of the All India Road Transport Workers' Federation, V.R.Krishna Iyer, the great jurist and former Minister in the EMS Ministry of 1957 (who was later made a Judge of the Supreme Court), M.K.Sanoo, the reputed Malayalam writer and literary critic, V.P.Marikkar and A.C.Jose M.P. of the INTUC, K.N.Ravindranath, V.Viswanatha Menon, and, V.B.Cherian of the CITU, P.S.Srinivasan and J.Chitharanjan of the CPI and AITUC, Thengamon Balakrishnan, and, Mukundan Menon, the ex-Managing Director of the KSRTC participated in these seminars. Along with these scientific studies and objective analysis, the Association was also concentrating on conducting mobilization campaigns among the working class in the State.

9.7.7 Violation of Terms of Settlement

As the Onam holidays were approaching, Balakrishna Pillai was planning to put the KSRTC employees in bad light and describing them as solely responsible for breakdown of transport services through out the length and breadth of the State and causing much inconvenience to the public. As per the Long Term Agreement of 1990 and also as approved by the Labour Department, the employees were enjoying the day of Third Onam as a festival holiday. But Balakrishna Pillai ordered the cancellation of this benefit. By another order the KSRTC violated an important point in the Long Term Agreement. It had been stipulated that between the eligible bonus and the Festival Allowance, the employees could get whichever was higher. According to the revised order they were to get only whichever of the two was lower. The unions took up the issue with R.Balakrishna Pillai. At each of the meetings he gave different and conflicting arguments. He told them that he had given specific instructions to the Managing Director on the matter and the unions could take up the matter with that official.

9.7.8 Towards settlement

On August 24, 1993, the union leaders met the Managing Director at his office. He expressed his helplessness. The union leaders could see his plight when he got telephone calls from the Minister one after another. The union leaders sensing the situation suddenly took a decision to start a sit-down strike inside the M.D.'s office. The news spread like wild fire. A large number of employees assembled outside the office. Some agitated employees attempted to break into the office. The union leaders declared that there could be no compromise with the management on the issue of Bonus as well as the festival holiday for Third Onam. While tension was mounting outside the office, the union leaders were having peaceful discussion with the Managing Director, Karunakaran Nair and the Executive Director, C.K.Guptan. Gupthan, son-in-law of E.M.S.Namboodiripad was the person whose services had once been terminated earlier during the Emergency in 1975, but later he had been taken back.

9.7.9 Minister turns more adamant

Leaders of various political parties and central trade unions were in constant touch with R.Balakrishna Pillai to request him to settle the strike at the earliest. But Pillai was adamant. However, the Chief Minister could not shut his eyes to the law and order problem that the sit down strike by KSRTC union leaders might create in the forthcoming days. He directed the DIG and Police Commissioner to go to the Chief Office of the KSRTC in the East Fort and take the union leaders into custody. After countering the slogan shouting union activists, the police succeeded in taking the leaders into custody and took them to the police station. After recording their names and addresses, the leaders were released. Only in 1996 that these leaders got a proper summons and arrest warrant from the Vanchiyoor Court. By that time, the UDF Government of K. Karunakaran had gone and after the general elections the new LDF Government with E.K.Nayanar as the Chief Minister came into power. Till April 1999 the prosecution cases had not been withdrawn. At least on November 4, 1994, a settlement was reached at a Conference held by the Chief Minister in his chambers. But R.Balakrishna Pillai stood like a rock, so adamant that he openly refused to implement the settlement as long as he continued as the Minister of Transport in Kerala State.

The Long Term Agreement in the KSRTC was valid till February 2, 1994. The Long Term Agreement expired on this date and the management issued a Notice to the unions reminding them about it and stating further that the benefits the KSRTC employees were enjoying during that Agreement had

automatically got cancelled with immediate effect. The unions, however, brought the Supreme Court judgment to the notice of the management reminding that even after the date of the expiry of the Agreement, the terms therein would and could not be get weakened. In this context, O. Bharathan described R. Balakrishna Pillai as a psychopath.

Meanwhile, the Accountant general had released an Audit Report, which contained some adverse remarks on the financial management of KSRTC. It said that the KSRTC had given to their employees certain extra benefits that were not covered by the long-term agreement and this had added to the financial burden of the undertaking. What the Accountant General was referring to was the benefits that accrued to the employees under the Rules of Fixation and Grade Promotions. These, however, were being given to the employees of the State Government as well those working in other public sector undertakings. Balakrishna Pillai thus got another weapon in the form of the Audit Report of the Accountant General to use against the KSRTC employees and their unions. The Government ordered recovery of all excess payments received by the employees under the Rules of Fixation and Grade Promotion with retrospective effect. It also freezed the salary to the level that existed in the month of November, 1993.

9.7.10 Intervention by LDF leaders

Considering the bad turn of events caused by R.Balakrishna Pillai, the LDF decided to send M.M.Lawrence (CPI-M), Baby John (RSP) P.S.Srinivasan (CPI) and K.Chandrasekharan (Janatha) to meet Pillai to explore possibilities of resolving the issues. But Pillai was still adamant and insisted that the unions should agree either to the freezing of the salary or recovery of excess financial benefits received by them as mentioned in the A.G.'s audit report. This was a tactical game of Pillai to divide the unions. Assuming that on an average each one of the employees had received an excess payment of Rs.600 a month, the total recovery would come to a very large sum. Some unions, constituents of the Joint Action Council, felt that this was not a big thing and so there was nothing wrong in accepting the Minister's offer. Some went further in arguing that unless employees made a little bit of sacrifice Kerala could not mobilize funds for capital formation, investment and economic development. The media also came to support this view. But very few realized that the wage and salary freeze and recovery of benefit payments already made to employees in the KSRTC would be a starting point for extending it to other public sector undertakings one by one. The KSRTC employees would be the first victims.

9.7.11 Situation gets worse

At the instance of R.Balakrishna Pillai, the KSRTC management notified all units that payment of salary from the month of March 1994 would be at the reduced rate and all the employees should accept it. This notification caused great upsets and mental anguish in the ordinary employees and some of them were anxious about the possible final outcome that was waiting for them. But some employees belonging to several trade unions demonstrated their protest by openly burning the copies of the Notification. The Joint Action Council announced that all the previous black orders of the Government as well as that of the KSRTC management would be thrown to the dustbins and the employees would pursue their own course of action.

The Action Council announced an indefinite strike from May 16 and as a first step towards that, the union leaders would offer hunger satyagraha and *dharma* in front of the KSRTC Chief Office and district headquarters and depots. All India leaders like E.Balanandan, Dr.M.K.Pandhe, A.B.Bardhan and Jaipal Reddy offered their solidarity and support to the KSRTC struggle. The hunger Satyagraha commenced on April 20 and continued till May 15.

A delegation of the All-India leaders consisting of Dr.M.K.Pandhe (CITU), U.M.Purohit (HMS), Goweshar (INTUC) and A.B.Bardhan (AITUC) met the Union Labour Minister, P.A.Sangma and submitted a detailed memorandum on the KSRTC struggle and appealed for his intervention. Sangma, on the spot itself, gave an assurance to the delegation that he would not allow the closing down of a public sector undertaking like the KSRTC. At that time the Labour Secretary in the Central Government was S.Gopalan, IAS who had previously worked in Kerala as the State's Labour Commissioner.

The INTUC leaders came to the Satyagraha pandal in front of the KSRTC chief office and assured the leaders that they would join the strike scheduled for May 16. However, two congress / INTUC leaders K.K.Balakrishnan and G.Karthikeyan were pressing for the withdrawal of the strike move. But they got isolated from the working class. The Employees' Association described this as sheer cheating on the part of these leaders.

The Joint Action Council was confident that the legitimate struggle of the workers would definitely succeed. According to the Council, out of the total strength of 25000 employees in the KSRTC only about 123 alone had reported for work during the strike. Many sister trade unions extended their full support to the struggle. The Employees' Association had spent all the money it had mobilized to construct the B.T.Ranadive Memorial Building. When this was known, the N.G.O.Union a pro-CPI (M) body of state

government employees offered a blank cheque on their bank account and asked the Employees' Association to draw any amount that it wanted at this juncture in support of the struggle.

9.7.12 Government for rethinking

At one point in the struggle by the KSRTC employees, K.Karunakaran, the Chief Minister, had threatened to use the Essential Service Maintenance Act (ESMA) against the employees. He had also stated that unless and until the Joint Action Council unilaterally withdrew their strike, the Government would not take initiative to hold any talks with them. But given the tempo of the struggle, he had a rethinking and invited the LDF leaders for a discussion as a first step before meeting the leaders of the Action Council. After this discussion with the LDF leaders, the Action Council was informed that a conference would be held in the chamber of the Labour Minister where all issues would be thrashed out in the presence of Transport Minister, Finance Minister, KSRTC officials and the union leaders and an Agreement could be signed the same evening.

The Labour Minister was assisted by his Private Secretary, T.P. Gopalakrishnan Nair (a former top official of the Labour Department), and the Labour Commissioner, M.Sivadasan. Its Chairman, N.Chandrasekharan Nair, IAS and the Managing Director, Karunakaran Nair represented the KSRTC management. But the notable absentee at this conference was the Transport Minister, R.Balakrishna Pillai. The understanding reached between the Chief Minister and the LDF leaders at the meeting held in the morning was conveyed to the leaders of the Action Council of KSRTC unions. On the basis of this understanding the Labour Commissioner had prepared a draft of an Agreement in writing. This was presented to the Action Council leaders and KSRTC management representatives for their approval and signature. But the management representatives suddenly informed that they had been instructed by the Transport Minister not to sign the Agreement. At this point the Labour Minister threatened to quit his minister-ship if the KSRTC management did not sign the Agreement within fifteen minutes. Seeing the firm stand taken by the Labour Minister, the Chairman and the MD went out of the Chamber and returned after ten minutes and without hesitation they affixed their signature to the Agreement.

The Labour Commissioner made a clarification. He said that this tripartite conference would come under the purview of the Industrial Disputes Act and the memorandum of settlement signed by the parties would be legally binding on them and any violation of the terms in it would be punishable under the law. The terms of settlement reached in the Conference were the

following (i) The KSRTC would not freeze wages and salaries and make any cut in them. (ii) There would be no retaliatory action or victimization against employees. (iii) The management would withdraw all orders and directives and notices issued during the period of the strike. (iv) Recovery from salaries made under earlier orders would be revoked and such amounts would be refunded to the employees. (v) Leave days, Fee Bus Passes, Workload and other benefits would continue in the same way as in the days prior to the strike. However, all the parties to the settlement would agree to discuss these issues and make appropriate modifications in them. Thus this Agreement became a great milestone in the history of the KSRTC. It gave the impression that the struggle by the employees had achieved a great victory.

9.7.13 Trouble continues

The employees could not celebrate a victory when the Agreement was signed, because before the ink on the Agreement became dry the KSRTC at the instance of R.Balakrishna Pillai, the Transport Minister, had taken certain initiatives, which were contrary to the spirit of the Agreement. It announced that it would not take back into service about 700 employees who had been served termination notices during the struggle and a few others who had been arrested under the ESMA and against whom police had registered cases. This decision also was made applicable to the probationers in the KSRTC. Another decision of the management was not to reopen five KSRTC workshops and eighteen bus depots that had been closed earlier. After the issue of these orders, R.Balakrishna Pillai left for an unknown place so that none could trace him or know his whereabouts.

The employees, as directed by their union leaders, had withdrawn their strike on June 3 and reported for work. When they knew the unexpected developments, they were really shocked. They started speculating about the stand that the Chief Minister and Labour Minister would take in the matter. The Joint Action Council leaders established contracts with N.Ramakrishnan, the Labour Minister and N.Krishnan Nair, IPS, the D.G.P of the State. In addition, T.M. Jacob, the Irrigation Minister and well-known confidant of K.Karunakaran was also contacted. All of them promised help to resolve the crisis. The DGP informed O.Bharathan of the Employees Association that the next day morning at 9 a.m. the Chief Minister would be waiting in his office for a meeting with him and the Chief Minister had asked Krishnan Nair to inform Bharathan that whatever he as the Chief Minister had promised would be implemented.

9.7.14 Chief Minister takes initiative

When Bharathan reached the Chief Ministers' chamber he was waiting for him along with T.M. Jacob. The Chief Minister instructed his personal staff to summon both the Chairman and the Managing Director of the KSRTC to his chamber. Within five minutes they reached the office. The Chief Minister ordered that within one hour, they should issue specific orders incorporating the settlement reached at the conciliation conference held on the previous day. The conditions that prevailed on the eve of the strike should be restored and no one should be kept out from service or victimized. Before 12 noon, copies of the order should be made available. Karunakaran demonstrated his good qualities of a committed trade union leader and at the same time took a crucial political decision to settle contentious issues of several years and bring a certain amount of peace to the turbulent labour-management relations in the KSRTC, one of the largest public sector undertakings in the State. But peace was short-lived as another crisis developed in October 1993.

9.7.15 Strike of October 1993

The KSRTC Employees Association was planning to hold its 26th Annual Conference at Kalpetta, Wayanad during September 21-23, 1993. On a few days before the conference, the KSRTC management sent notices to the trade unions of its employees indicating some of its decisions. They were: (i) Salary of all employees would stand reduced to the level that prevailed in March 1993. (ii) The excess salary amount drawn and disbursed during the period April to August would be deducted from the salary of September 1993. (iii) Benefits being enjoyed with regard to Grade Promotion and fixation of salary from the time of the settlement reached in December 1990 would be deducted from the salary of September 1993 onwards. (iv) Casual leave, Earned Leave, regional holidays, half-pay leave, national festival holidays etc. would be reduced to half with retrospective effect. (v) The usual benefits of annual increment or enhancement, revision of DA etc. would not be given hereafter. (vi) Those conductors who had received promotion to the post of clerks would return to their original posts. (vii) Holiday enjoyed on second Saturdays would be stopped forthwith. (viii) Working hours for office staff in the KSRTC would hereafter be 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., instead of 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (ix) Passes given to employees for free transport in the KSRTC buses would be cancelled.

The above decisions unilaterally taken by the KSRTC management generated all round condemnation by not only the KSRTC employees, but also by the entire working class in the State. The insiders in the KSRTC knew very well that the man behind the introduction of these draconian measures

was R.Balakrishna Pillai, the Transport Minister. He had already demonstrated his ire against the KSRTC employees during his handling of the strike in February 1993 earlier.

In a State like Kerala, where healthy industrial relations practices based on direct mutual negotiations and joint consultations had taken deep roots, the action by the KSRTC management under instigation from R.Balakrishna Pillai, created high tensions. No one could remain silent against the open violation of democracy and rule of law. Such acts had not been committed even during the dark days of the National Emergency. The rights and benefits of employees that were granted on the basis of negotiated settlements and being enjoyed by the employees for some time had been suddenly withdrawn or terminated with retrospective effect.

9.7.16 Kalpetta Meeting of KSRTCEA

During the Kalpetta meeting of the KSRTC Employees Association (KSRTCEA) the issue was discussed and a decision was taken to bring all trade unions in the KSRTC to a common platform for conducting a joint struggle. At Thiruvananthapuram the Association leaders held discussion with the INTUC leaders, K.K.Balakrishnan and G.Karthikeyan. O.Bharathan and K.K.Divakaran represented the Association. The INTUC was also for a strike but they did not want to go for joint strike with the CITU affiliated KSRTC Employees Association. Both the INTUC and the CITU sponsored strikes could go parallel and it was decided to commence the struggle from the midnight of October 25, 1993. The INTUC promised the CITU that they were prepared to go for a struggle for any long period and would always continue to interact with the CITU. They also promised that INTUC would never take any unilateral decision by itself. Decision would be taken only after due consultation with the CITU led KSRTC Employees Association. INTUC strategy was to isolate R.Balakrishna Pillai and cut him to size with the support of their revered leader K.Karunakaran. The AITUC affiliated KSRTC Employees' Union also joined the CITU in launching the struggle.

For starting the strike on October 25, it was decided to serve the strike notice on October 7, 1993. The INTUC and KSRTC Staff Union were also to serve the strike notice on the same day. The members of the Joint Action Council split into several batches and started visiting different centres in the State to mobilize workers. Soon for all practical purposes, the INTUC became a partner in the Joint Action Council. Government announced a series of retaliatory measures by using the emergency powers to notify the KSRTC as an essential service and prohibiting all kinds of direct action like strikes, marches, demonstrations, *dharnas*, *gherao* etc. Police blocked a

demonstration of employees on October 24 and took several into custody in Thiruvananthapuram. In far north at Kasargodee, 62 were arrested including T.K. Rajan, one of the Secretaries of the Association. Similar arrests were reported from other centres, all in the name of precautionary steps.

9.7.17 The strike starts

On the midnight of October 25, 1993, the strike of the KSRTC employees commenced as scheduled. The management, at the instance of the Minister R.Balakrishna Pillai started issuing press releases and notices to employees about various steps it was planning to take to defeat the strike. It threatened that it would close down the KSRTC and then set up separate autonomous and independent companies at regional level. A group of lawyers on their own reacted and these new moves by the management were questioned in courts of law pointing out that they violated the basic provisions of the KSRTC Act. The lawyers then issued a public statement on what they did. The unions were watching these developments. Next day the management ordered the termination of services of nearly one thousand employees, threatening that it was going to send out another 7000 in the next two or three days. People from different walks of life came out with statements condemning the draconian policy of the Government and the KSRTC management.

When KSRTC schedules were not being operated, the Government said that in order to ensure adequate transport services in the State they were forced to open nationalized bus routes to private bus operators and permission was given to any one who asked for it. It was alleged that the private bus operators gave attractive rewards and compensation to the authorities for giving them this golden opportunity. In spite of these draconian measures the management and the Government could not make any impression on the striking employees. Attempts to split the employees using the political card did make no impact. At one time, the drivers who were the members of the Drivers' Union led by R.Balakrishna Pillai came forward to join the strike.

9.7.18 Bharathan's Call

When the strike crossed the one-week mark, the Government took the initiative to call a conciliation conference. It was reported that Oommen Chandy, the Finance Minister and the Congress and INTUC leader was responsible for this initiative. O.Bharathan complained and asked Oommen Chandy where was he during the last one week of the strike. Neither N.Ramakrishnan, the Labour Minister nor N.Krishnan Nair, the Director

General of Police (DGP) then serving as the Managing Director of the KSRTC had shown any initiative to hold discussions with the trade unions. The union leaders collectively informed the Government that if the latter withdrew all its draconian measures, the unions would be ready to withdraw the strike. As an alternative the leaders asked the Government to call all trade unions in the KSRTC for a discussion to settle the issues.

9.7.19 Conciliation Conference

In the ensuing conciliation conference held on November 4, 1993 and attended by the Chief Minister and Ministers of Transport, Labour and Finance the terms of settlement were finalized. According to it, the deductions of salaries of employees would be stopped and whatever had been deducted would be refunded to the employees immediately. On remaining issues all steps taken by the KSRTC management would be stayed till December 17. From November 17, all the pending issues would be discussed and settled in the conference to be attended by the Ministers of Transport, Labour, and, Finance. All measures of victimization of employees were withdrawn with immediate effect.

9.7.20 Balakrishna Pillai more defiant

It was alleged that R.Balakrishna Pillai had no interest in settling the issues and he was adamant. He told the Press that he was going on a foreign trip for a few days as originally scheduled and was not willing to cancel it so as to be in Thiruvananthapuram for attending the conciliation conference and settling the issues in KSRTC. He asked the unions to continue the strike. When asked by the reporters at the airport, Balakrishna Pillai said that he did not know anything about the initial understanding between the trade unions and the Government. But he asked the people "*wait and see to know who won and who failed in the coming days*". After reaching New York, Pillai was in constant touch with the KSRTC top brass and issued daily instructions. One such instruction was to deduct an extra seven days' wages from the striking employees in Wayanad along with the wages for the strike days. But he was kind to some employees in the Kottarakkara depot because Kottarakkara was his constituency. There he instructed to exempt about 200 employees of that depot from the new directive. The apprentice workers in various establishments in the KSRTC were summarily sacked. Stating administrative convenience, hundreds were transferred from their home stations to distant centres. The salary for the month of October up to 25th, when the strike commenced, was not disbursed even after the lapse of several weeks.

On the vituperative actions by R.Balakrishna Pillai, the other ministers could only remain just passive onlookers. In spite of established convention and concrete decisions of the Supreme Court, the KSRTC management was not willing to allow the continuation of the terms of a settlement and collective agreement until the date in which a new agreement was signed. This indeed was a blatant violation of fundamental principles of industrial democracy. O.Bharathan rightly contrasted this incident with the violation of woman hood in the story of *Pancharali* or *Draupadi*, the wife of the Pandavas at the hands of Dussassana, the Kaurava prince and at the instance of his elder brother Duryodhana and that too in the presence of elders in the family like Bhishma who remained silent onlookers at the scene. However, this strike of October 1993 was a great milestone in the history of trade union movement in the State.

9.7.21 Bharathan gets isolated

By mid 1990, there emerged an ideological clash between the CPI (M) and the CITU, the political party and the class organization respectively. The Constitution of the CITU clearly stated that it would be an independent class organisation and workers who profess any political faith could become members of the CITU. It was also clarified by some top CITU leaders like C.Kannan, K.N.Ravindranath, V.B. Cherian and O.Bharathan that the CPI (M) had no right to dictate to the CITU what policies that the latter should pursue. This was not liked by the top leaders of the CPI (M) and they started taking vindictive action against these CITU leaders. What happened since then and till the Alappuzha Convention when C.Kannan was forced to quit the presidentship of the CITU have been discussed in detail elsewhere. (See Ch.XI)

O.Bharathan was one of the first victims of CPI (M) vindictiveness. Bharathan's transparency, fearlessness in speaking out his mind and his commitment to the working class interests made him unacceptable to the CPI (M) and Bharathan knew that the Party might throw him out at anytime. The employees of the KSRTC irrespective of their membership in different unions loved Bharathan and respected his honesty and integrity and held him in high esteem and regard. In the CPI (M) meet at Palakkad, the Party leaders singled out the CITU leaders for attack. Charges were made against the CITU leaders. But these charges had never been raised in the meetings of CITU Committees. Bharathan had warned that the CPI (M) was deviating from its chosen path. It did not raise its objection to the *vettinirathu struggle* (cut and destroy) struggle in agriculture, which disturbed peasant-worker relationship in the State. Under this struggle, the Party encouraged agricultural workers to raid the land and harvest and take away the crops of small and petty peasants.

This struggle had created considerable tension in the rural areas in the entire State creating thereby big-law and order problems.

9.7.22 CPI (M)'s move

When the decision taken at the Palakkad session of the CPI (M) were considered by the meeting of the Area Committee and Local Committee of the Party in Thiruvananthapuram, P.K.Gurudasan, the spokesman of the CPI (M) clarified that it was always the Party that would decide at what level a Party Member should work and what position he should hold. The KSRTC Employees' Association was planning to hold its annual conference at Pathanamthitta on September 22-23, 1998. On the 21st, the Fraction Committee of the Association met at the AKG Centre in Thiruvananthapuram. The objective of the Fraction Committee was to strengthen the Party's influence on the trade union. It was the duty of the Fraction Committee to explain the Party's policies on all relevant issues in the correct light and to propagate the same among the members of the trade union. At the same time the Fraction Committee was expected to present the problems and issues facing workers in an undertaking and canvass the support of the Party to resolve them. In short, it was the Fraction Committee that was expected to function as a bridge linking the Party and the class organization.

9.7.23 Attitude of the Fraction Committee

In 1998 the Convener of the Fraction Committee for the KSRTC was T.Sivadasa Menon who also had served as the Finance Minister in the E.K.Nayanar Cabinet. Since he became the convener, Sivadasa Menon was not able to convene even a single meeting of the Fraction Committee, even though several times specific requests were made. Not even once he had visited the KSRTC Employees' Association office in Thiruvananthapuram. He had not shown any interest in discussing the problems faced by the Association, its office bearers and members. According to Bharathan, Sivadasa Menon could never forget his past career as schoolteacher and as such he was keen in teaching others than listening to others. On the day when Sivadasa Menon called the meeting of the Fraction Committee, Bharathan was requested to go to a room where besides Menon, two others, P.K. Gurudasan and M.A. Baby were found to be waiting for him. They told him that because they loved and respected Bharathan, they thought it would be better to sound him in advance about the Party's decision that a person who was also a member of the State Committee should hold the presidency of the KSRTC Employees' Association. Since Bharathan was not a State Committee member, in his place, the Party was asking K.Chandran Pillai to

take up the post of the President of the Association. To this Bharathan made only a short crisp reply that in the past many non-State Committee members had held the post of the president of the KSRTC Employees' Association. He added that he would accept any decision of the Party but it should be acceptable to the members of the Association as well as the members of the Fraction Committee. He would abide by the decision. At this point Sivadasa Menon was reported to have reminded O. Bharathan about the letter the latter had written to the CPI (M) State Committee. In that letter Bharathan had stated that when he died, his last wish would be that his body should be draped with the Party's Red Flag. Commenting on this, Sivadasa Menon appealed to Bharathan not to become so sentimental in life. This remark was highlighted by Bharathan to demonstrate how some of the CPI (M) leaders show their regard to the Red Flag as it was a mere flag like any other flag.

When the Fraction Committee met, out of the 21 members 19 were present. All the members excepting one stoutly opposed the Party's directive. They argued that the KSRTC Employees' Association was an industry union in which employees of all categories were members and they belonged to different political faiths. Further they said that Bharathan was one among them and as such was not willing to abandon him. The only dissident member argued that if the Party's decision was rejected, the Association would lose support from the Party and therefore a crisis should be avoided. The signal was clear that the CPI (M) wanted Bharathan to vacate the presidency of the Association. But Bharathan, because of his love for the Party said that Party was like a Mother to him and he would accept whatever the Party asked him. The Party leaders terminated the meeting of the Fraction Committee suddenly and went away to attend a reception organized for the visiting Cuban delegation.

According to Bharathan, as per the convention and past procedure, the CPI (M) Secretariat had the powers to re-examine the decisions of the Fraction Committee and had a moral responsibility to follow that line. But in the present case the convention was broken. They had made the Fraction Committee as an instrument to impose its decisions on class and mass organizations. The Party was sending out a signal that it does not like any dissent. Indeed this was in gross violation of the principles that had been taught and propagated by B.T.Ranadive and E.M.S. Namboodiripad. The CPI (M) was trying to create a Master-Servant relationship between the Party and Mass organizations, Bharathan alleged with a heavy heart.

9.7.24 Bharathan gets elected

At the Pathanamthitta Conference of the KSRTC Employees' Association, Bharathan attended only the first day's session. He was physically weak and was having a high blood pressure. He was diabetic and the level of blood sugar had also risen to dangerous level. On the advice of the doctors, Bharathan returned to his home at Thottada, Kannur. Later he knew from his close friends and associates that top CPI (M) leaders from various parts of the State had converged on to the Conference venue at Pathanamthitta to propagate the Party's decision and influence the members of the Association. But they failed in their mission and Bharathan was elected. Bharathan was greatly pained because a working class organization was going to lose its right to elect a leader of their choice. On September 27, when the CPI (M) was celebrating the anniversary of the Party martyr Patyam Gopalan, its devoted activists near Bharathan's home issued a stern warning to him that if he stood against the Party's wishes he would have the same fate as Gowri Amma had earlier. K.R. Gowri Amma, the top leader of the CPI (M) defied the Party when she took up the presidentship of the trade union at McDowell Company. The Party then threw her out and she severed all her connections with the Party.

9.7.25 Bharathan asked to quit

On September 28, 1998, a few CPI (M) leaders including T.Govindan, E.P.Jayarajan, M.V.Govindan and T.K.C.Padmanabhan visited Bharathan with a message from Pinarayi Vijayan, the CPI (M) Secretary. The message informed him that he should not take up the Presidentship of the KSRTC Employees' Association. The Party was also intimating this to the Politburo and the Control Commission of the Party in New Delhi. Until a reply came from them, Bharathan should not take any unilateral decision and was requested to wait. But Bharathan told the leaders, who visited him, that he would always obey the Party but he would definitely write to the General Secretary of the CPI (M) about his feelings and what he thought was the correct stand. He informed Pinarayi Vijayan that he was not willing to create a confrontation with the State Committee.

After a few days, Bharathan came to know that the Politburo discussed his case in detail and decided to ask him to take up the presidentship of the Association. But the Kerala State Committee described that meeting of the Politburo as an informal one and stood by the point that it was not a formal official meeting and as such that decision could not be accepted. Again after a few days, the Politburo held a full official meeting and repeated the earlier

decision but the State Committee did not communicate that to Bharathan. They kept it silent. When Bharathan met Dr.M.K. Pandhe, Umanath and E.Balanandan, Politburo members at the CITU Working Committee meeting held at Ahmedabad, they asked Bharathan to go ahead and take charge as the President of the KSRTC Employees' Association. According to Bharathan, Umanath, with whom he had long personal relationship, had even advised that the former should not get into a confrontation with the Party and every misunderstanding would soon get cleared. When E.K.Nayanar, the Chief Minister met Bharathan later at Kannur, he also assertively asked him to go ahead and take charge of the Association. In the light of the above developments, advice and directions from his close associates, O. Bharathan went to Thiruvananthapuram and officially assumed charge as the President of the KSRTC Employees' Association and he was confident that it was the employee members of the Association who had elected him to that position. This was on January 8, 1999.

9.7.26 Victimization of Bharathan

The CPI (M) leadership declared that the action by Bharathan in taking over the presidentship of the KSRTC Employees' Association virtually amounted to his defiance of the Party and it was a serious issue of indiscipline. Thereafter, a series of steps were taken by the CPI (M) to victimize O. Bharathan, the democratically elected President of the KSRTC Employees' Association. The Party instructed the CPI (M) newspaper *Desabhimani* not to publish any article written by O. Bharathan. The paper banned even news items relating to him. Bharathan was removed from the Committee of Left Trade Union leaders in Kerala in the campaign for the observation of the all-India strike in the State. He was served with Notices asking for his explanations for his deeds and words.

Bharathan strongly believed that members of class and mass organizations have every right to elect their leader through well-accepted democratic procedures. It was the duty of the Party to support such a leader and respect the sentiments of the members of the organization who had voted for him. The trade union could and should never become a toy or tool in the hands of the Big Brother, the Party. It was unfortunate that due to groupism within the CPI (M), the election to the various positions in the State Committee had not been done on democratic lines. It was alleged that V.S.Achuthanandan had secured controlling power in the CPI (M) through some sabotage and manipulations.

9.7.27 Bharathan decides to quit

O. Bharathan had been analysing various alternatives available to him. He had decided to take up the presidentship of the KSRTC Employees' Association as per the wishes of the members but immediately thereafter he was planning to quit by putting in his resignation letter. But he did not immediately resign since he had to conduct the marriage of one of his daughters at Kannur. The marriage reception offered another opportunity to the CPI (M) top leaders to malign O.Bharathan further. Many of the CPI (M) leaders boycotted the marriage reception though they were his close associates. One of the Congress leaders of Kannur, K.Sudhakaran who had crossed sword with Bharathan on several occasions in earlier days came to the marriage reception though Bharathan had not formally invited him. But once he came Bharathan did not show either animosity or courtesy to Sudhakaran. He was welcomed and treated like every other guest who came there. But the CPI (M) took this incident very seriously and castigated O.Bharathan for having received Sudhakaran at the reception.

This was the crucial turning point in the life of O.Bharathan, the much-respected "*Bharathettan*" (Brother) to the KSRTC employees. Bharathan announced his decision to quit trade union and political work and related activities and withdrew into a shell. He said that he had no future plans other than take rest at his home in Thottada and devote his remaining days to reading and writing what ever he liked. He requested his friends and followers not to disturb him in the chosen domain. Bharathan passed away on March 3, 2001. Several CPI (M) leaders reached his residence to pay their last homage to the departed soul but many leading figures in the CPI (M) were noted for their absence.

9.8 CONCLUSION

We have attempted above a historical narration of the union movement in the State Road Transport Undertaking as objectively as possible. This undertaking had witnessed a number of struggles conducted by trade unions of all affiliation. The struggles exerted enormous influence on the entire union movement in the State. But to day the proliferation of unions in the KSRTC has caused irreparable damage to industrial peace as well as quality of service rendered to the public. The absence of professional management and undue intervention by the political authority even in the day to day management have brought a dark shadow on this undertaking.

9.8.1 Multiplicity of Unions in KSRTC

One of the basic weaknesses of the trade union movement in Kerala is generally considered to be the proliferation of trade unions in the same undertaking. Many factors have contributed to this state of affairs. One, of course, is the provision in the Indian Trade Unions Act, which permit seven or more workers to form a trade union. Secondly in the State of Kerala subdivision and fragmentation of political parties had been taking place for a long time. Several splinter groups, sometimes led by individual leaders within political parties, have proliferated. To strengthen their political positions, such leaders have tried to mobilize workers to follow them by forming trade unions. As a result, in certain undertakings, leaders belonging to the same political party and the same trade union centre have formed individual unions and they compete with each other. This has only split the union movement and made the working class organizations weaker. The KSRTC is a test case where at one time there were more than three dozen trade unions, the majority of them being craft, category and sectional unions. No management would be able to establish joint consultations with worker representatives in such an environment. Therefore, the proposal for conducting a referendum was mooted and it was tried in the KSRTC. The KSRTC Employees' Association took the initiative. But some major unions did not approve the way it was conducted.

9.8.2 Referendum among KSRTC Employees

The management of the KSRTC was finding it difficult to negotiate with the large number of trade unions of its employees. In the beginning the State Transport had only industry unions. But as days passed by, sectional interests raised their ugly heads. They expressed their displeasure with the leadership of industry unions saying openly that the unions have not given due attention to their demands when the unions formulate their memorandum of demands. In fact, in the State transport there are several categories of employees like Drivers, Conductors, Checking Inspectors, mechanical workers etc. Gradually each category expressed a desire to have its own category unions. Meanwhile another ugly development appeared. As mentioned earlier political parties split into several fractions centered on particular leaders, and they started to form their own unions. For instance at least three unions of KSRTC drivers were formed. Among them the one led by R.Balakrishna Pillai was reported to be the most powerful. The formation of category unions and multiplicity of unions provided the Management and the State Government adequate leverage to play one against others and get any settlement deferred. Further, experience has shown that though the

KSRTC was constituted as a corporation, its Board of Management never enjoyed autonomy. The State Government and particularly the Minister in charge of the Transport portfolio often interfered with the day-to-day functioning of the KSRTC. The interference in the internal affairs by the ruling political parties was another constraint that stood in the way of formulating a Corporate Plan for the development of the KSRTC. Its finance also depended heavily on the support given by the Government Treasury. As a result of all these the KSRTC had become totally dependent on the State Government.

In spite of category unions and multiplicity of unions, the two major trade unions, namely the KSRTC Employees' Union (AITUC) and the KSRTC Employees' Association (CITU) continued to stick to the principle of industry union and tried to keep all categories of employees within their fold. To a great extent they succeeded in their endeavour. There was a continuous demand for holding a Referendum among employees to choose a bargaining agent for the purpose of conducting collective bargaining. The demand was conceded and arrangements were made to conduct the democratic referendum first in 1986. In this the KSRTC Employees' Association (CITU) secured 33 percent support. The second referendum was conducted in 1991 and the Association secured 43 percent support. By 1991, partly as a result of the influence of Referendum, the number of trade unions in the KSRTC declined to 14. The Association was fighting the Referendum without seeking help from other unions or political fractions. This stand helped it to secure 53.25 percent support in the Referendum held in 1996.

The KSRTC Employees' Union affiliated to the AITUC did not participate in the Referendum exercise and it raised serious objection to the procedure of open voting. According to the procedure, the employees should give their choice in writing counter signed by the unit secretary of their union. The Employees Union felt that this was undemocratic. Democracy was best served if everybody followed the principle of secret ballot. But since this principle was violated, the Employees' Union decided to keep out. Consequently the majority secured by the CITU affiliated Employees' Association could not be treated as an index of their popularity among the employees of the KSRTC.

9.8.3 Preparation for another Referendum, 2002

The KSRTC management and the trade unions of employees in the undertaking had reached an understanding to conduct a Referendum among its employees at an interval of five years. At the time of writing this, it was clear to all the employees of the KSRTC that on March 24, 2002, the existing

referendum would lapse¹⁷. In the referendum held in 1997, two trade unions secured recognition as the bargaining agents of the employees. The CITU affiliated KSRTC Employees' Association had secured 45 percent of votes while the Transport Workers' Coordination Council secured 29 percent votes. As per the agreement only those unions or alliances that secured 20 percent or more votes would be allowed to get recognition to represent the employees. The Transport Workers Coordination Council (TWCC) consisted of the KSRTC Employees' Union (AITUC) KSRTC Drivers' Union, Labourers' Union, Conductors' Union and Mechanical Workers' Union. Of the last mentioned category unions, the Mechanical Workers' Union was affiliated to the RSP supported UTUC.

Due to never ending changes and splits in political parties and periodical switches of political leadership, Kerala had been witnessing complex and sometimes unethical political alliances and combinations. Today the KSRTC has 28860 employees consisting of permanent employees and a large number of reserve employees who had been selected through the Public Service Commission. The management had to prepare a complete voters' list before the new referendum was held in March 2002. As a step towards implementing the referendum, the management would freeze all transfers with effect from February 1, 2002. The KSRTC has now 31 registered trade unions and all of them have come out with a demand that they should be recognized even if they did not secure the minimum 20 per cent of the votes. Obviously, this would create a big hurdle in implementing the referendum. The new alliances among the trade unions would pose another hurdle and make the conduct of referendum impossible. The RSP had split into two causing two groups of UTUC unions. The Drivers' Union previously had Janatha Dal leadership. In 2001, the Union opted to install V. Sivakumar of Congress (I) as its President. The KSRTC Workers' Union is under the INTUC. This Union is a member of the Democratic Labour Federation and it is believed that the new leadership of Drivers' Union would join the Democratic Labour federation. A.C. Jose of the Congress and the INTUC has the Transport Staff Union. As it has been happening in recent times, there are innumerable factions in the state unit of the INTUC, which is divided on the basis of Antony Group and Karunakaran Group in the Indian National Congress. But some individual leaders in the Party had been setting up their own INTUC unions, sometimes in the same undertaking or industrial unit. These INTUC unions generally fight among themselves. In recent times new forces have entered the KSRTC and formed unions among employees. Mention must be made about the J.S.S., B.M.S., and S.T.U. Indeed they have been able to increase their strength due to the shifting stand and bickering among the major trade unions in the undertaking. However, the CITU affiliated KSRTC Employees' Union continues to be the biggest union while

the strength of the first and oldest union, the KSRTC Employees' Union affiliated to the AITUC has declined. Employees feel that the Employees' Union is not sufficiently militant as compared to the Employees' Association. Unfortunately militancy continues to be a yardstick for choosing one's union and leadership. Playing this card had been to a great extent suicidal as it caused the decline of the undertaking. The referendum to be held in March 2002 was expected to bring about new alliances among the trade unions in the KSRTC.

9.8.4 Some Unanswered Questions

Will peace and stability come to the turbulent labour – management relations in the State Transport Undertaking? Will there ever be a depoliticised environment in running the transport services to the satisfaction of the customers/public as a part of the ongoing economic reforms? Will there emerge a trade union leadership capable of bringing about working class unity and carrying social commitment that would clear people's fears and misgivings about labour in the KSRTC. No attempt is made in this study to find answers to these fundamental questions.

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CHAPTER X

UNION MOVEMENT IN THE PLANTATIONS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Very little has been written about the trade union movement in the Plantations in Kerala either by those who were in the thick of the movement or by outside scholars. Under these circumstances, a fresh attempt at documenting the history of the union movement among plantation workers was a difficult task beset with innumerable information gaps. However, we have adopted a simple methodology of collecting information and facts from available published works like Souvenirs, reports and articles in periodicals and supplemented them with oral reminiscences of leaders who had worked in the plantation sector. In addition, we have made use of news reports published in *Malayala Manorama* newspaper from the 1920s.

Among the leaders who had cooperated with us in giving their reminiscences about their work in the plantation sector in Kerala, mention must be made about B.K. Nair, KK Karunakaran, Rosamma Punnoose, P.A. Solomon, P. Ramalingam, V.N. Sivaraman, P.K. Gopalan, P. Kunhikannan, K. Padmanabhan, N. Ganapathy, M. Sankarankutty, D. Kuppuswamy, C.A. Kurian, Aryadan Mohammed, T.M. Prabha, Karippur Srikumar, Y. Thomas, and, Jose Abraham at the senior level. A number of other leaders belonging to the various central trade unions also extended their cooperation in this effort. A special mention must be made about Dr. P.H. Daniel, the chief guiding spirit behind the Estate Staff Union of South India (ESUSI) who even at the age of 90 showed readiness to spend time in providing this author with not only his reminiscences but also his various publications giving us total freedom to extensively quote them to create a coherent picture of the union movement among estate staff and workers in Munnar and High Ranges of Kerala. Dr. Daniel's description about the conditions of life and labour in the plantations was immaculate and we, as a part of this documentation work, have drawn extensively from this source. We do not claim that we have given in this Chapter a very comprehensive history of the union movement in the plantations in Kerala, but this could be a first step in that direction.

10.2 EARLY ATTEMPTS AT SETTING UP PLANTATIONS

The history of plantations in Kerala has been brilliantly narrated by S Umadevi¹. The Travancore State Manual has also thrown some useful insights into the history of plantations². It may be interesting to note that a European named Darragh in Alappuzha set up the first coir factory in 1859. At least more than six decades prior to it, the East India Company was reported to have set up a large estate to grow spices at Ancharakandy in Malabar in 1797. Two years later this estate was handed over to Mardoc Brown. Coffee, Pepper, Clove and other spices were grown in this estate on an experimental basis.

In Travancore, plantation estates were established in around 1860 in the Veli hills under the guidance and direction of Visakhamb Thirunal Maharaja and his Dewan (Chief Executive) Madhava Rao. In 1878 the Maharaja of Travancore had assigned 215 square mile territory from the land held by the Poonjar *Edavaka* (branch of royal family) in the Devicolam Taluk in the high ranges to one Sir Daniel Munro. In 1897 this estate came under the control of the Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company (KDHP Co.).

In the last quarter of the 19th century, plantations were set up in Wayanad too. The German Basle Mission had started some textile mills as well as Tile factories in Kannur and Kozhikode. In 1857 the Cochin Chamber of Commerce was started as an association of British merchants and trading houses. The leading members of this Chamber were Aspinwall, Pierce Leslie, Volkart Brothers, William Goodacre, Parry and Company, Madura Company and Harrisson and Crossfields. It was under their leadership that a large number of factories and plantations were set up in Kerala at different centres. This gave inspiration to the indigenous entrepreneurs to venture into other areas of industrial activities like Printing presses, handlooms, oil milling, timber and saw mills, boat building, fishing etc. The *Pandarappatta Proclamation* of 1865 had conferred full legal titles to tenants over land. In 1867 the *Jenmi-Kudiyam* (landlord – tenant) Proclamation helped to create a unique rural bourgeoisie class. Soon forces of capitalism were emerging. Trading profit/merchant capital was replaced by industrial capital. During this transition, economic surplus was invested extensively in the highlands of the State in starting plantations with crops like Tea, Coffee, Cardamom and Rubber. Small and big plantations emerged. Some were owned by British capital while the rest were under the control of the native capitalists. From day one, the plantations became notorious in their treatment of labour. Following it, a saga of working class mobilization and struggles became inevitable. It was in this context that we attempt to narrate the development of the eventful trade union movement in the plantations sector. As a first step in

this direction, we are giving below a detailed description of the conditions of life and labour in the plantations.

10.3 CONDITIONS OF LIFE AND LABOUR

The workforce in the estates consists of estate or garden labour (also known as estate *coolies*) and factory labour. In the early years, labour was recruited through the so-called *Kanganis* or jobbers until recently when that system was legally abolished. However, due to large-scale unemployment and easy availability of labour, the employers in the plantations had begun to reduce the number of permanent workers and had started recruiting more of casual labour. This was quite distressing. In the early years, labour was brought from neighbouring border areas of Tamil Nadu lying adjacent to the high ranges instead of recruiting Kerala labour from the mid land and coastal land.

The conditions of work and wages both in the erstwhile Travancore and Cochin were far from satisfactory. The REGE Committee had observed thus:³.

"Most of the employers rarely do more than what they are forced to do by law, and even this is evaded in several cases..... The only legislative measure in the whole of India for the direct control of labour conditions on plantations is taken by the State of Cochin by framing rules for conserving the health and protecting the interests of labourers employed in plantations in the State".

But the Minimum Wages Committee on Plantations (1952) had observed⁴:

"Plantation workers are in a sense a protected group. By force of custom and usage they get a number of amenities, the like of which few other categories of workers get. The amenities include free housing, medical aid, schools, free lunch for children, crèches, and canteens, free firewood, cumbly allowances, and recreational facilities. The per capita cost of amenities alone ranged between 20 and 30 paise a day".

This committee had conducted a Family Budget Enquiry, which showed that the average family consisted of 4.24 persons. The proportion of earners in the families was found to be fairly high by Indian standards. The average weekly income per family was Rs.18.92 excluding the money value of amenities. The average weekly expenditure of Rs.17.14 left a small margin of savings also.

The Indian Labour Gazette, reported in 1948 that the standards of medical care and general health were found to be better than in other areas or industries⁵. The general health of plantation labour was of a high standard mainly because of a healthier climate, better housing conditions and efficient medical and health facilities in the plantation centres. Major planting concerns in the State maintained Group Hospitals while others had small individual dispensaries⁶. The Mundakkayam group of planters had established a Medical Trust. A Plantation Labour Medical Advisory Board has been constituted under the Kerala Plantation Labour Rules framed under the Plantation Labour Act of 1951.

The Kerala Government had a scheme to finance a Plantation Housing Scheme. The workers in estates situated at 2500 ft and above sea level are provided with a set of two *cumblies* (woollen blankets). In estates at lower altitudes either an umbrella or a *cumbly* is supplied to suit the daily requirements of workers. Various other welfare measures have been extended to the plantation labour. For instance, in 1959 two Trade schools jointly financed by the State Government and the Rubber Board were started at Mundakkayam and Ranni. They imparted training in tailoring, embroidery, handloom weaving, carpentry and smithy. A few cooperative societies have also been set up. A scheme for providing scholarship for the children of plantation workers brought higher education within their reach. The National Commission on Labour (1969) had stated thus⁷.

"Working conditions have been as exacting as ever, though with organisation and capacity of organized labour to influence policies and their implementation and mainly as a result of the Plantation Labour Act some improvements have been registered.... The plantation worker of today is better placed in respect of educational and medical facilities. Education is free and financial assistance by way of stipends and scholarships is common. The medical service has larger coverage. While before Independence a worker got medical aid for himself, today his entire family is covered. The plantation worker is now housed better".

But what were the initial conditions of plantation labour in the estates located in different parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka (former Mysore)? To get an insight into those early days and the conditions of life and labour of workers as well as the staff in the estates, we have the graphic reminiscences of Dr. P.H.Daniel, the father figure and guiding light of the Estate Staff Union of South India (ESUSI). Past 90 years, Dr.Daniel had put in writing what he had seen and experienced in the estates since he first stepped into estate service as a Medical Officer in April 1941. Though it may look like an autobiographical narration, we were unable to collect any other source that could surpass Dr.Daniel's work in describing the conditions of life and labour in the plantations. Therefore, we have, in this work, drawn extensively from Dr.Daniel's writings and reminiscences to recreate the conditions from early days to the present. Of course, in the present, plantation labour had secured better conditions as a result of unionisation and struggles.

10.3.1 Dr. Daniel's first impressions

Dr.P.H.Daniel of the ESUSI has meticulously described the conditions of life and labour of estate workers and staff in the 1940s when he was appointed as the Group Medical Officer in Peria Karamalai estates⁸. P K Menon, the Compounder of the estate hospital took him round the estate. Dr.Daniel was shocked at the way in which the labour was housed. Their line was built like a barrack with five to six rooms adjacent to one another and had a long common *veranda* in front, while behind each room was a kitchen. But in each room there were at least two families while another family occupied the kitchen. The workers had partitioned each room into two or even three portions, by means of flattened out kerosene oil tins, gunny bags and wooden posts driven into the floor. Within such a partitioned room a family, which generally consisted of a husband, wife and two children, lived. If all the inmates of such a room were to die at the same time, their graves would take more space than the room in which they lived. The *verandas* were also partitioned into a number of such rooms.

The so-called lines and quarters were unbearably dirty, filthy and congested. Sometimes in a room besides the parents, married sons and daughters with their spouses also lived. In such cases, a portion of the room was divided into an upper berth by jungle poles and flattened sheets. The upper berth was occupied by parents and the lower berth by married children. One could imagine what kind of family life and privacy the poor workers could have under such conditions. Because of such overcrowding and intermingling of families, incest and promiscuous life was very common. This kind of life became a way of life for them and there were no jealousy and

quarrels and murders. One woman would be living with a man today; tomorrow she would live with another.

95 per cent of the workers were completely illiterate. Some of them could not count beyond 10. In the early 1940s, a male estate worker was paid 6 *annas* (Rs.0.35) and a female worker was paid 4 *annas* (Rs.0.25). Those who plucked tea leaves were paid according to the weight of the leaves they plucked. Even little children as young as 8 years old were employed in weeding tea bushes. Each estate had a primary school up to 4th class. The children would work in the fields till noon and in the after noon they would go to the estate schools. But attendance was poor and the parents never cared.

Each estate had a shop run by a *Chettiar* (person belonging to merchant caste). As the workers did not have any idea of accounts, the shop owners usually fleeced, every worker not only by charging them at high rates but also keeping false accounts. The workers would be paid only once in a year. Every week an adult worker would be paid 4 *annas* (Rs.0.25) and 5 measures of rice as *Chelavu Kasu* (money for meeting expenditure). The estate office would keep an account of the cost of these provisions issued from the estate stores and at the end of the year, these amounts were deducted from the wages due to the worker for the year.

10.3.2 Conditions of health care

According to Dr.P.H.Daniel, the conditions of health were deplorable. Skinny babies with protuberant bellies crawled all over the place in the lines amidst the poultry. The excreta of the babies and the droppings of the poultry were seen everywhere. The entire place abounded with fleas and lice. During the monsoon, when the workers came in after their work with the rainwater dripping from their *cumblies*, and blood from leech bites streaming down their legs, the filth would be increased ten fold. One has to actually see these rooms in the lines to believe how such filth, poultry, vermin and human beings could co-exist. And yet, the workers who lived in these lines seemed to be quite indifferent to the miserable conditions in which they were living. They had been housed and kept like animals for such long periods, that they had lost many traits that distinguish human character and had become very much like animals in their way of living.

Malaria was rampant especially during the months of March – June. Every worker would have been attacked by malaria at least once in a month. Every morning the *coolies* used to assemble for Muster and during the Malaria season the field staff (conductor and the assistant conductor) would pour down their throats one ounce of quinine mixture. Some of them would

not be able to stomach the mixture, and would vomit it out. The *coolies* with severe fever would be lying in their rooms and the compounder would go and give them treatment; that is pouring down the quinine mixture into their throats. When the worker did not go for work, one measure of rice would be cut from his weekly rations from the estate stores. Supposing a *coolie* was down with fever for 4 days, 4 measures of rice would be cut from his ration on Saturday. For the next week he would get only one measure of rice. In such a case, the *coolie* would be forced to go to the *Chettiar* shop and get *Ragi* or *combo* or *cholam* and make porridge for his consumption. The usual *Chelavu Kasu* of 4 *annas* (Rs.0.25) would not be paid to anyone who was absent for more than 4 days. He would have no money to pay the *Chettiar*. Sometimes he would borrow money from the *maistry* (supervisor) or *Kangany* at high interest.

10.3.3 Terms of employment

According to the terms of employment for workers, the *coolies* were engaged not by the estates, but by the *maistries*. A *maistry* would come with 25 to 100 workers in a gang. He would have to recruit them from the plains and bring them to the estate. From each worker's wages, the *maistry* would be paid a commission. In the interest of his commission, a *maistry* would try his level best to see that every worker went for work every day. Even persons with fever would be forced to go for work by the *maistry*.

When a worker came to the estate, his fate was sealed. If he were a single person, he could never hope to go back to his native place because he would have no money left after the annual settlement of his wages. Many of them would be in debt to the *maistry* or *Chettiar*, the shop owner. So unless a worker paid his debts, he would not be allowed to go to his village. If the man were married, because two persons were working, some families would be earning enough to finance their trip home. But once they go home they would never return because of the hardship undergone by them in the estate.

The *coolies* were virtually locked up in their lines and rooms. There would be a watchman around. The workers were not allowed to go out except to the work spot accompanied by the watchman. They would be given *Kanji* (rice gruel/porridge) in the morning and *Kanji* in the evening. The *maistries* would bring girls and women in their teens promising them lucrative jobs as well as bridegrooms for marriage. But when they came to the estate they would be sent to harems maintained by the *maistries*. Some *maistries* had women sub-*maistries* to help them in the above evil deeds. Both were cruel in their dealings.

10.3.4 Conditions of the Staff

The conditions of the staff, clerical or factory or field staff was not much better off. At any time, they would be thrown out of the estate. In the staff's house, there was no basement. During heavy rains, rainwater from outside would get into the house. Compound there was none, except for a small back yard. Tea bushes from the other sides nearly touched the walls. There was the case of a staff who was sent out of the estate the same day when he was found to have pruned a few of the overgrown branches of some tea bushes that blocked his foot path.

There was no *veranda* to the staff house. One-stepped directly from the rain into the sitting room. The door used to be low. Walls were not built over the doors and windows. The occupants had to block these gaps with tin sheets and gunny bags to keep out the cold. One sitting room of 10' x 12' dimensions, a bedroom of about equal dimensions, a dining room-cum-store and a kitchen completed the house. The bathroom was a small-detached shed constructed out of corrugated iron sheets. One table, two chairs and two stools in the sitting room, two wooden cots and a chair in the bedroom and a small table with two stools in the dining room completed the furniture. But there were in the house a number of deal wood boxes, which served as utility furniture. When they used them with the open side up, they serve as containers. They were turned upside down and behold they had stools to sit or tables on which they could write or even dine. There was no water connection or even a well for the house. The staff and the workers had to use the water from the open stream polluted with filth for drinking as well as for cooking.

The office staff was better off in that they had a roof under which they could work, but working hours were nearly as long. The offices opened punctually at 7 am and generally closed only by 7 pm. It was rare to see the offices in the estate close by 6 pm. But the staff was allowed half to one hour for lunch according to the will of the manager. Each office had a head clerk, a typist and one or two assistant clerks. This was the general pattern in most estates. While in the rubber and coffee estates, each office had only one head clerk and one or at the most two assistants. A tea factory had only a head staff and one assistant, while in many a rubber factories there was only one rubber maker in the staff grade. Overtime payment was unknown in the industry in those days.

In the early 1940s Rs.15 per month was the starting salary of the assistants in many company owned estates, while in other estates they were paid Rs.10. Regular annual increments there were none. If a staff was in the good books of the "master", he got an increment, otherwise none. Leave facilities were equally erratic. Some progressive companies gave a months'

annual leave, others two weeks or three weeks, while the staff working in proprietary estates got none. And there were estates where if a staff wanted leave, he had to provide a substitute at his expense. Because of this contingency, many a staff never went home for years together, especially because there was the ever present danger of the substitute getting into the good books of the estate management and the permanent man being informed that his services were no longer required. Casual leave was unknown. Sick leave was not given as a matter of right. If the staff concerned was good “boy”, he was given the necessary leave, otherwise he was simply told to clear out.

Very few major employers gave an annual bonus. But only the factory staff and the field staff were considered eligible for bonus. The other departments were considered to be spending departments and the staff working in them got nothing. There was no fixed rate of bonus, a certain sum was allotted for bonus to the staff and the Manager distributed the amount according to his pleasure. Travelling allowance, while on annual leave, was obtainable only with a very few employers. Even Provident Fund was not in existence with even major employers like Malayalam Plantations.

Security of service was practically non-existent. Staff was dismissed for all sorts of silly reasons and for no reason. When a staff went out for work in the morning he would not be sure that he would sleep in that estate the same night. It was not unusual for a staff to find on returning from work that his personal effects had been thrown out of his quarters and the house locked on the orders of the Manager. When a staff was dismissed, often he was forced to quit the estate the same day and anyone daring to harbour him in the estate would meet with the same fate. Because of such instant dismissals, staff in the old days had no personal effects beyond a simple iron trunk containing his clothes, which one could carry himself, for managers' petty mind would not tolerate that a worker from the estate should help him carry it. Fortunately, a spirit of camaraderie was widely prevalent amongst the estate staff of those days for no one knew when his own turn would come and when a staff was kicked out of the estate, he got shelter from the staff of the neighbouring estate till he found another job or till he could arrange to shift his family to his native place. Sometimes when the estate management was vicious not even the salary due to him for the days he had already worked would be paid to him and the other staff had to secretly subscribe between themselves to help the dismissed man take his family to his native place.

According to Dr.Daniel, worse than all such things described above, was the treatment meted out to the staff. They were treated like the personal servants of the Manager. They had to address the managers as “Master”, just like the butlers, cooks and *chockras* (menials). They were not allowed to hold

umbrellas or wear sandals before the august presence of the “master”. When the head clerk or head conductor wanted to see the “master” in his bungalow out of working hours, he had to go to the kitchen side of the bungalow and tell the butler that he wished to see the “master” and the “master” would come out of the bungalow and see him in the yard. In short, the staff of estates was treated as an inferior class of human beings. This sort of treatment had grown into a custom and the staff had accepted it as the order of things and did not consider it as degrading to their self-respect.

Some of the managers were cruel and used to beat the staff with their canes or kick them with their boots. But these conditions began to improve after the World War II and India was on the verge of Independence. The managers knew that when Independence came they would have to deal with Indian Officers instead of European officers and so they began to adjust their behaviour towards the staff accordingly.

10.3.5 After Independence

The younger generation of estate staff, while hailing with joy the advent of Independence, were hoping that the estates would be bought over by Indians and that the Indian employers being their own countrymen would give them better treatment than the white employers. To their consternation they were soon to learn that the colour of the skin of the employers did not have any bearing on their treatment of their workers. Soon the estate staff realized that the Indian employers were no better than the European employers. Indeed there were many who swore that European employers were definitely better.

Ministers used to make visits to the Plantation areas, visit the estates and make fiery speeches asking employers to treat their workers as dominant partners in the industry. When they departed the workers remained where they had been for the past two decades. Labour laws like the Industrial Disputes Act, the Factories Act etc. had been passed to confer on the workers rights and privileges, which they did not enjoy earlier. As far as the Plantation workers were concerned laws like the Payment of Wages Act and Minimum Wages Act had been made applicable to them. The Plantation Labour Act gave workers many rights and benefits like free medical aid, sickness benefits, maternity benefit, annual leave etc. Above all the status of the plantation workers went up, from being treated as chattels during the pre-independence days, they were considered and treated as citizens of a free country.

But strangely enough the sense of elation did not last for long. There were two main reasons for this change. First, the workers had been led to believe by leaders and political parties, particularly the Congress, that Independence would bring them all that could be desired. Hopes of workers had been raised sky high but they were disillusioned. Second, there was a yawning gap between the Ministers' promise and deeds. Naturally the staff and workers in the estates who had heard the promises of the Ministers had turned into cynics on seeing and experiencing their betrayal.

In the immediate years after the Independence, the Ministers mingled with the workers during visits to estates. The capitalist employer had to seek prior appointment to see the Ministers. The Ministers stayed in Government Inspection Bungalows where anybody could walk into them, which made the Ministers very popular and loved and respected by the workers and staff. But after about ten years since Independence, there was a big change. The Ministers became chief guests of the employers. They were fed and feasted in the bungalows of the capitalist, taken round in his car and finally seen off by the tycoon himself. The estrangement thus began between the Ministers and the estate workers and ordinary people. As years passed, this alienation became only wider. Dr.Daniel pointed out a few exceptions like K.Kamaraj, R Venkataraman, K.T.Achuthan and Devarj Urs who remained accessible to the common workers as long as they remained in office, but their number was negligible.

With the top men fraternizing with the capitalists, it was not long before departmental officers (particularly of the Labour Department) too followed the same path. According to Dr.Daniel, whenever the officers visited the estates, they went to the bungalows of the Manager first, gathered their packets of tea or coffee or other tokens of the employers' goodwill and closed their eyes to the conditions in the estates. Of course, there were a few honourable exceptions. Many labour department officials believed whatever the employers told were true facts while the evidence by the workers was taken with a pinch of salt. The feeling soon spread among the estate workers and staff that the Government was no longer theirs. Labour laws were not implemented. Ramshackle sheds were licensed as factories. Buildings unfit for veterinary hospitals were accepted as hospitals for the treatment of human beings. Buildings little better than hen coups went unchallenged as crèches. Dr. Daniel draws a fine distinction when he said: Before Independence, if the European planters wanted anything, they went and saw the Governor but after Independence, the Indian planters invited the Ministers to their bungalows, feasted them, filled their party purses with Golden lucre and got what they wanted.

The various provisions of the Plantation Labour Act had been circumvented by most of the Indian Planters mainly by the method of fragmenting the estates, so that the acreage came below that defined as Plantations in the Act. This fragmentation in most cases was only in paper. Housing conditions continued to be deplorable. However, same managements kept some show pieces for outside visitors to demonstrate their large heartedness to workers. In Kerala the fragmentation of estates had been done with a more sinister purpose. In small pieces the employers did not require any greater number of workers or staff leading to throwing the surplus manpower into unemployment. Fragmentation of estates in Kerala was also used to cheat workers and staff by denying them their legitimate dues. In fact the ESUSI had given several memoranda to the Government of Kerala seeking redressal on these vital issues. But no action had been taken to bring about any tangible improvement in the conditions of life and labour in the plantation industry.

10.4 STAFF UNIONS IN PLANTATIONS

In discussing union movement in the Plantations, one has to draw a distinction between Unions for the staff and Unions for the workers. Here we focus on the history of Staff Union in the plantation where now exists a virtual monopoly with a particular Union, The Estate Staff Union of South India (ESUSI).

10.4.1 Estate Staff Association

The conditions of life, work and wages of estate staff created an urge among them for an organization to promote the interests of their community. The employers were so powerful and autocratic that even the talk of an organization would have let loose the most violent oppression. But a few people came forward and the Estate Staff's Association of South India (ESASI) was conceived as early as on October 14, 1928. Sixteen staff from the estates in and around Coonoor in the district of Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu gathered at Coonoor and decided to form an association to promote and protect the interests of the estate staff. The Association was born on January 6, 1929 when an inaugural meeting was held at Coonoor at which forty estate staff were present and the Articles of Association and the Rules of Procedure were drawn up and adopted. The Association was registered under the Societies Act on June 17, 1929. Following this, a number of founding members of the ESASI were dismissed from their estates. Among them N.K.Christy decided to function as the first Hon. Secretary while others sought alternate employments in other estates.

10.4.2 Employers retaliate

The dismissals created terror in the minds of estate staff and many did not come forward to join the ESASI. Christy and his associates then thought that unless they enlisted the support of the planters, the Association could not survive. Thus they approached C.L.Craig of Craigmore Estate, a prominent planter of Nilgiris and he agreed to be the first Chairman of the Association. He did yeoman service to get the Association established. First the membership was limited to Nilgiris and Wayanad. V.Roses Paul took the Association to the Anamallais. Christy made a tour of all estates in Travancore and recruited members from the estates in Mundakkayam, Peerumade and Vandiperiyar areas. The Association was recognized by the UPASI in 1933. Dr. Daniel had specially mentioned the names of C.L.Craig, C.R.T.Congreve, J.F.Smail, P.V.Cheriyan, S.Joel, K.A.Thomas, J.Yesunathan, Dr.T.K.Govindan Nair and Dr.Dorai Raj in the formation and growth of the ESASI since its inception in 1929. As early as 1934 C.R.T.Congreve in his capacity as the Chairman of the ESASI had addressed a circular letter to all Planters in South India requesting them to influence their staff to join the ESASI and also to deduct the subscriptions of their staff from the salaries and to send consolidated cheques to the Secretary of the Association. That was the beginning of the check-off system in the Plantations.

10.4.3 Spread of ESASI

The ESASI was originally confined to Nilgiris, Nilgiri Wayanad, Malabar Wayanad and Anamallai areas. In 1934 a branch of the ESASI was formed in Nelliampathy in Chittur Taluk of Palakkad. The Peerumade branch was organized in 1935. It took another four years before a branch could be organized in Vandiperiyar. Mundakkayam opened a branch of the ESASI in 1945 and Thenmalai in 1951. Dr.P.H.Daniel became a member of the ESASI only in 1941 and he was appointed as the Editor of the *ESASI Bulletin* in May 1944. The ESASI functioned till 1952, though the Estate Staff Union of South India (ESUSI) was registered under the Trade Union Act in 1947.

10.4.4 Emergence of Unity

The greatest achievement of the ESASI was that it fostered a sense of unity among the estate staff, which had been scattered over the various tea, coffee and rubber estates in Travancore, Cochin, Mysore and Madras Presidency. The *ESASI Bulletin*, the official organ, served as a vehicle of

communication between various branches of the Association and the central organization. It ventilated the grievances of the estate staff and brought them to the notice of the planters. Necessarily the articles in the *Bulletin* were in the nature of appeals to estate staff and some of them had the good sense to respond, but others turned a deaf ear to them. The ESASI never succeeded in bringing about uniform conditions of service even at estate levels with the result that widely different conditions of service were prevalent with different employers even in the same area, and sometimes in the different estates of the same company. Some estates had introduced PF scheme, while it was denied in others. DA rates were different, while few did not give it. Naturally this wide disparity bred discontent among the staff. But the worst feature under which the staff continued to suffer in spite of the best efforts of the Association was insecurity of service. It often happened, that when a Manager of an Estate retired from service or was transferred to another district, the entire staff in that estate got notice of termination from the Managing Agents because "*the new Manager was bringing his staff with him*". Even with sincere efforts by some Planters connected with the ESASI, no appreciable change in the attitude of the majority of planters was brought about on issues like dismissals. This led to the frustration among the staff and many started feeling that the ESASI could not deliver the goods and it did not have "teeth" to counter planters' strategies. Some even felt that the ESASI was not a full-fledged association of estate staff and could not become so, as long as the planters were members of it. It was in this context that the Estate Staff Union of South India (ESUSI) became relevant and it soon secured acceptance by the estate staff community.

10.4.5 Estate Staff Union

The foundation of the ESUSI was laid in a bungalow of C.R.T.Congreve in the Karamalai Estate in the Anamallais. Assisted by Congreve, G.Bayzand, Dorai Raj, V.I.Chacko, and, Dr.P.H.Daniel played a big role in founding the ESUSI. In spite of the best efforts of the ESASI and support and well wishes of the planters, many basic rights like PF, DA, uniform, scales of pay, annual leave, and reasonable security of service were not obtainable with many employees, even with major companies like the Malayalam Plantations. A meeting was held at the Staff Club, Valparai on December 16, 1945 and 92 staff attended it and most of them were from the Sheikalmudi Group, Iyerpadi, Karamalai Group and Stanmore Group of estates. It was decided that the ESASI should be wound up as soon as majority of its members joined the new ESUSI and the meeting resolved to register the ESUSI under the Trade Union Act. The meeting authorized Dr.Dorai Raj, P.V.Ramakrishna Iyer, A.M.Zachariah, P.Govindankutty

Menon, A.V.Narayana Swamy, K.K.Vaidyanath and Dr.P.H.Daniel to sign the application form for registration. The meeting elected Dr.Dorai Raj as President, Dr.T.K.Govindan Nair of Moopanad Central Hospital, Meppady and P.Govindankutty Menon as Vice Presidents and V.I.Chacko as the Secretary. Among them, V.I.Chacko was one of the most trenchant critics of the Planters, especially of the European planters. But strange were the ways of providence. After a short period of two years, Chacko left the ESUSI to cross over to the opposite camp by taking the covetable position of the Secretary and Advisor of the United Planters' Association of South India (UPASI).

10.4.6 Initial progress slow

The progress of the ESUSI was very slow because most of the Estate Managers were hostile and vindictive and the staff was afraid to join the Union. Added to this, the formal registration of the Union was delayed because the then Governor of Madras who was a British, on the request of the planters, intervened and registration was summarily refused on the plea that Plantation is "Agriculture", and not "Industry". Fortunately, V.V.Giri, the great champion of the working class took up the question through the Government of India to the I.L.O., which ruled that Plantation, although it comes under 'Agriculture', was organized on the lines of industry, and hence trade union registration could be given to the Union. The Union secured registration on March 24, 1947 and the ESUSI became the first Union of estate staff in the Plantations in the whole of India.

The progress of ESUSI was very slow in the beginning. Some of the planters went all out to crush the new born Union and therefore the staff was frightened to join it. The organizers had to engage in a hectic campaign to visit the staff in their quarters after 8 pm and secretly enrol them. According to Dr.Daniel, during his campaign, he could identify at least five categories of estate staff. First, the bold type who were convinced about the necessity of becoming members of the ESUSI and readily became members. They formed just 20 per cent. Second, the category of staff, which were convinced about the necessity of a union, but were not bold enough to become members openly. This category comprised of about 40 per cent of the staff community. Third, there was the class who would never decide one way or the other. They did not want to say NO to the organizers and therefore after collecting the application form they put off paying the registration and subscription fees giving one excuse or the other. Fourth, they were stingy fellows who did not want to pay the subscriptions but were convinced that when the Union became effective whatever benefits provided by the planters under settlement would be given to them also even if they did not become members of the Union. This category constituted 10 per cent. Last, there was the anti-social

vicious group who not only refused to become members but also spied on the other staff and carried information to the Managers about who all had become members and about the activities of the Union, thus hoping to get into the good books of the planters and thus earn their favours.

10.4.7 Enmity of Planters

The attitude of the majority of planters was enmity to the Union. To many of them a trade union was nothing but a communist organization and so went all out to crush the infant ESUSI. The planters also put out a campaign by telling the staff that a trade union was only a dignified name for a Labour Union, that only *coolies* should be members of trade unions and that it was unbecoming of estate staff who were the “arm of the Management” to become members of the labour union. This strange argument found favour with many senior staff especially the field and factory staff. The Managers hostile to the Union also had told their staff that trade union registration would never be given to the ESUSI and so they never would get protection of Trade Union Act and that they would only be fools if they joined the Union. This hostile propaganda had its impact on the membership growth. Some who had joined the ESUSI revised their decision and resigned their membership.

10.4.8 Search for strong leader

Dr.Daniel and his close associates felt that the situation warranted some drastic action such as inducting a prominent personality from outside to become the Hon. President. Dr.Daniel wrote to Chackara Chettiar, who was then the President of the AITUC. But he replied that he would be glad to help if the ESUSI got affiliated to his organization. Dr.Daniel did not like this, fearing that ultimately the AITUC would take control of the ESUSI and the latter would lose its individuality and identity. So he and his associates decided to have people from their own community to become the office bearers. As an interim step one N.S.Varadachariar, a well known social worker, though not a trade unionist, was elected as the President of the ESUSI for the year 1947-48 and Dr.Dorai Raj as Hon. Secretary in the place of V.I.Chacko.

10.4.9 First Strike Notice

When the Planters found that the ESUSI got registration, they started sponsoring yellow unions. In one instance when the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation sponsored a rival yellow union, about 75 per cent of their staff

demonstrated their protest by joining the ESUSI en block. The management then retaliated and threatened to dismiss the Estate Medical Officer who had taken the leadership for it. The ESUSI took this as an unfair practice and invoked the conciliation machinery. But the management carried out their threat and dismissed the Medical Officer concerned. The ESUSI then gave notice to all the planters in the Anamallais that if the dismissal order was not withdrawn immediately, the entire estate staff in the whole of Anamallais would go on strike. This was the first General Strike Notice issued by the ESUSI and the entire staff community stood solidly behind the Union.

The Labour Officer in Coimbatore issued a Notice of Prosecution on the Management because they had issued the dismissal order while the dispute was under conciliation. The strike notice as well as the Prosecution Notice unnerved the management and they went to Madras to seek the help of Varadachariar, the President of the ESUSI. The management agreed to withdraw the dismissal order and recognize the ESUSI. This was a clear victory for the ESUSI and thereafter the planters wound up their programme of starting yellow unions.

10.4.10 ESUSI in Travancore

The Kannan Devan Hill Produce Co. Limited (KDHP) was the biggest company in the High Ranges of Travancore. James Finlay and Co. Ltd., of Glasgow, was managing it. The company was determined to stamp out the ESUSI and start their own sponsored yellow union. The ESUSI could not establish a foothold in the High Ranges. The High Range Estate Staff Association was a company sponsored yellow union. When it was holding its Annual General Body meeting in October 1947, Dorai Raj reached Munnar with the idea of meeting the staff and inducing them to leave the yellow union and join the ESUSI. But the response was feeble. In December, Dr.Daniel visited Munnar and a few loyalists of the ESUSI had assembled to hear Dr.Daniel at a meeting organized in a school building. The management and the yellow union tried their best to disturb the meeting. Then Dr.Daniel came out of the school building and started holding the meeting on the public road. In that meeting he could help form the High Ranges Branch of the ESUSI. The management reacted sharply and dismissed A.Antony who had been elected as the Branch Chairman.

10.4.11 The Antony Episode

A. Antony was the Headmaster of the company owned middle school. He was the first person to join the Estate Staff Association. When Dr.Daniel

visited to campaign for the ESUI, Antony had lent his full support to him. At the meeting called by Dr.Daniel the company had sent its Welfare Officer to watch the proceedings. To carry favour with the management, many staff that was present there went on shouting that they were not for a trade union and that too an outside union like the ESUSI. Antony and about 40 to 50 staff, mostly, youngsters felt the need for an outside organization in the place of a company sponsored yellow union. It was for this that company had dismissed Antony as soon as he took over as the Chairman of the ESUSI branch in the estate. But Antony and few others stood firm. Dr.Daniel appealed to Walker, the General Manager to cancel the dismissal. Just a month afterwards the Union had its Annual General Body meeting in Coonoor and R.Venkataraman and Madhava Menon, the latter a Minister in the Madras Cabinet were expected to attend. Kamaraj the President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Party and a few legislators were expected to attend. Dr.Daniel thought that it would be a good occasion for him to expose the management of the KDHP Company and its anti-staff policies. He also thought that in fairness he should write to the KDHP Company about his intention to speak about them in public. Dr.Daniel's letter stated that if the company did not reinstate Antony he would carry out his plan. Just before the Conference started in Coonoor, Dr.Daniel received a telegram from the General Manager to say that Antony had been reinstated. That sounded the death-knell of the High Range Estate Staff Association, the company sponsored yellow union.

The staff in Munnar started resigning from this Association and joining the ESUSI. Finally in January 1951 the yellow union stopped functioning as it decided to merge with ESUSI on the terms proposed by the latter. According to Dr.Daniel, there after R.Walker, the General Manager of the Company played very fair with the ESUSI. When Kamaraj Nadar who was then the President of the INTUC in Tamil Nadu visited Munnar to attend the Annual Conference of the High Range Branch of the ESUSI, Walker received Kamaraj Nadar and attended the Conference along with him and promised that the company would not in any manner stand in the way of the Union's activities. And as promised, the cordial relations did exist between the company and the ESUSI till the retirement of Walker.

10.4.12 Joseph Mathew's shift

The Union opened an office in Munnar and one Joseph Mathew was appointed the Regional Secretary of Munnar. He was then working in a Rubber estate called Skinnerpuram in Central Travancore. This estate later on had become notorious for victimization and dismissals of staff. Joseph Mathew's dismissal was unjustified and the Union took up the case. Meanwhile, he, at the invitation of some of his friends, went to Calcutta

seeking a job. But within five years he returned saying that he did not like the attitude of the Bengali Babus towards South Indians. He came and sought help from Bhanu, Secretary of Kerala. It was at that time that the ESUSI was planning to organize skilled workers in the estates in Travancore. So the ESUSI directed Joseph Mathew to organize them. Soon a large number of skilled workers and supervisors in the estates came forward to join the Union in Peerumade, Vandiperiyar and Central Travancore areas.

But soon Joseph Mathew left the ESUSI and registered a separate Union for skilled workers and supervisors under his leadership. Later on he converted his union into one for staff, skilled workers, supervisors and labourers. Being a good organizer he could attract a number of members to desert the ESUSI and join his union. He then started publishing pamphlets in Malayalam attacking the ESUSI and its leadership. He also used strikes to further his interests. But in course of time he found that this actually worked against his interests. He set up his headquarters in Kottayam and still had a large number of supervisors and skilled workers in his union.

10.4.13 Relation with H & C Company

The ESUSI's relation with the employers was not always harmonious with occasional exceptions. For instance, when C.R.T.Congreve tried to promote the Estate Staff Association in Anamallais, it strained the relations with the ESUSI. But when he retired he was given a farewell by all staff in Valparai.

The relations with Harrisons and Crossfield, the Agents of M/s. Malayalam Estates were not happy from the beginning, because Dr. P.H.Daniel was criticizing the company for its refusal to give PF to their staff even when many others had given it to their staff. One day Dr.Daniel went to Kollam to meet Hall, the then General Manager of the Company. Although the interview was pleasant, no result came out of it. Soon relations strained further. One Manager who was a European in Panniar Estate in High Ranges dismissed a staff suddenly. In the evening at about 7 pm, he took a lorry to the staff quarters, put the staff's wife and children along with their personal effects in it and drove the lorry to the border of the estate and left them in the middle of the road. It was 8 p.m. The staff was away in the muster when he was told that he had been dismissed and that his family had been dumped on the road. So he ran all the way down and came to the spot where his wife and children were dumped and there he found them in tears. Panniar estate was then elephant infested and it was only by the grace of God that the family was saved. The staff concerned took his family to the nearby estate belonging to the KDHP Company and some friends accommodated them for the night.

Three or four months later the Union had its Annual Conference in Kottayam, which was inaugurated by the Labour Minister. At that meeting Dr.Daniel spoke about the incident in forcible terms and requested the Minister to see that such barbarous acts were not repeated in the Plantations. The same evening Dr.Daniel addressed a public meeting in the Kottayam YMCA, which was presided over by C.Kesavan, the then President of the State Congress in Travancore. Kesavan was greatly upset when he heard about the incident and he spoke that when Independence came such European employers should be bundled out of the country. This was widely reported in all the Malayalam dailies.

A week later Dr.Daniel got a lawyer's Notice from the company asking him to apologize for what he had said before the Minister and the Congress President, failing which they would take criminal and civil action against him. Dr.Daniel consulted an eminent lawyer in Thiruvananthapuram and replied to the notice saying that no apology would be given and the company could take any action because they knew that the facts were true. Thus the relations with the company continued to be strained for some time until London became the General Manager. The emergence of good relations with London's successor, Weavers soon got transformed into extremely cordial relations when S.Samuel became the Managing Director of the Company.

10.4.14 Relation with K.D.H.P. Company

When Walker was replaced by J.B.Soutar as General Manager of the Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company (KDHP Co), the relations improved. Soutar was reserved and strict in his relationship with the staff and also with the unions. During his period the Madras Government had appointed the Wage Board for the Plantations. A detailed discussion about the Wage Board episode would be taken up a little later. As the Wage Board went on for years, an interim increase was mooted and negotiations started on it. Soutar was one of the negotiators for the Employers. The employers had a meeting and after long wrangling they decided to recommend an increase of 10 *paise* (Rs.0.10) per day for a worker. It was reported that, at this, Soutar was angry and got up to say that this 10 *paise* was a pittance and announced that he would give his workers 25 *paise* (Rs.0.25) increase. This forced everyone to follow his decision.

During his period of office, the company decided to sell 4 of the estates around Munnar town. They were very good estates. But the labour unions did nothing because they were not interested whether A or B was the employer. But the staff was greatly agitated about it. The ESUSI urged Soutar to see that these estates were not sold, but he expressed his helplessness. So the Union

started an agitation. A huge procession was taken from the staff club through the Munnar Township to the Company's headquarters office. When the procession reached there, Dr.Daniel went to see Soutar. The meeting was unpleasant and Dr.Daniel made a walk out. Seeing him the members of the procession shouted anti-Soutar slogans. The procession returned to the staff club and passed a resolution that if the sale was not stopped the staff would go on an indefinite strike. Meanwhile, in every estate the ESUSI started an agitation against the proposed sale. The company was forced to abandon the proposal. After this incident the relation between Soutar and the ESUSI remained cordial.

The next General Manager of importance in the company was Storey Dickson. Later he became the president of the UPASI. It was during his time that negotiations started between the ESUSI and the UPASI for a long-term settlement. Usually the negotiations were carried on in the Coimbatore Club, which used to be called the European Club then. After the first sitting/session, Dickson suggested that next session could be held in Dr.Daniel's house in West Venkataswamy Road, Coimbatore. Strangely the negotiation ended with the second sitting in this house. Every one was happy, as the settlement was good and quickly finalized.

The last European General Manager before M/s. Tata Tea took over the Company was M.R.P.Lappin, the son-in-law of Soutar. But Lappin was entirely different. He was always pleasant to deal with. He did not consider himself too big to hear complaints of any staff that was in distress. He was very poor and when he retired the ESUSI gave him a grand farewell. Another European Planter was D.A.Cook, General Manager of English and Scottish Wholesales Corporation Society. He was a very jovial man and the staff always loved him. Sometimes he used to visit the ESUSI office on his own accord to discuss and come to a settlement regarding some problems that had arisen. After his retirement he used to write articles in the *Planters Chronicle* under the pen name of "Mudiappan".

10.4.15 Another obstacle before ESUSI

The Tea Estates India Limited under the Brooke Bond Organization formed a yellow union called the Tea Estates India Limited Estate Staff's Association. While the High Ranges Estate Staff Association was a registered trade union, affiliated to the ESUSI, the company tried to sabotage it from within. The developments leading to the formation of the yellow union are worth narrating. In June 1947, the Company sent a circular to all its estate managers asking them to get their staff elect a "senior member of their staff" as a representative to attend a conference of all such representatives at the

Head Office of the company at Coimbatore. The staff was also informed that the object of the conference was to establish a medium for their staff to represent their grievances to their employers. So each representative took with him a head load of grievances to the conference, but at the conference, the representatives were, without any warning, given each a copy of the Draft Rules of an Association called the Tea Estates India Limited Estate Staff Association (TEILES) which was to be started immediately. They were also told that the Conference was really the inaugural meeting of the Association. They were then informed that the head load of grievances which they had taken with them would be considered if put forward through this Association.

10.4.16 ELRO-ESUSI Agreement

The company encouraged a few senior staff in whom it had confidence to become office bearers in the ESUSI. The object of the company was to further the interests of the company. Some of their senior staff lent themselves for this purpose, while others in their zeal to show themselves as super loyal to the company, started persecuting active ESUSI members. The ELRO-ESUSI Agreement, the first Agreement to be negotiated by the ESUSI with the Employers' Organization, the Estate Labour Relations Organization (ELRO) had just then been signed. On the instructions of the company, the Tea Estates India Limited Estate Staff Association, put forward some minor demands, which were not in the ELRO-ESUSI Agreement, and the company then "graciously" conceded the demands. The drumbeaters of the company association then proclaimed that their Association was able to get what the ESUSI had not been able to get and they did wide propaganda that there was no necessity for the Tea Estates India Limited staff to continue in the ESUSI, as the new Association would be sufficient for their needs.

The ELRO-ESUSI Agreement was a Gentleman's Agreement. It provided certain grades of salaries and the Managers in the estates were at liberty to give their staff whatever grades they thought fit. The Tea Estates India Ltd gave the best grades to the office bearers of their yellow association, while active ESUSI members were given the lower grades. But an Association could have only a limited number of office-bearers, and gradually discontent began to grow among the other staff of the company when they saw that only a few of the senior staff had benefited by the activities of the yellow union. Dr.Daniel and his friends in the ESUSI were ever on the watch for a dent in their armour and when they found that this discontent was growing, they passed a resolution, which said that no member of the ESUSI could be a member of any other staff association, whether it be registered or not and they called on all the staff of the Tea Estates India limited to either resign from their Association or resign from the ESUSI. The vast majority of

the juniors and a number of seniors resigned from the yellow union, thus isolating the small minority that was left behind. Consequently, the yellow union came to an inglorious end towards the end of 1959. J.L.H.Williams, the Director of the company who was responsible for fostering the yellow union, later became friendly to the ESUSI. Later as President of the UPASI he earned the goodwill of the ESUSI by helping to settle, in a spirit of give and take, many controversial points with the Employers' organization.

10.4.17 Early hiccups in ESUSI's Growth

Widely different terms of service were in existence with different employers in the estates. Even in 1947, there were employers like the Malayalam Plantations who had no PF Schemes for their estate staff. Similarly amenities like Bonus, annual leave and sick leave were not in existence with many employers. Necessarily this gave rise to discontent among the estate staff. Under these conditions the aim of the ESUSI was to establish uniform terms of service for all estate staff. This was not an easy task since the estates, big and small, individual and company owned, were scattered over the states in South India. Further the Plantation industry itself consisted of Tea, Coffee, and Rubber. Staff in the coffee estates was historically the lowest paid, while the best paid of the lot were the tea estate staff. The coffee estate owners vehemently opposed uniform terms of service of staff on the plea that coffee was not a prosperous industry like Tea or Rubber. Besides, in the Madras State alone there were over eighty tea estates, some of them being very prosperous and giving big yields, while others made only moderate profits. Under such widely different conditions, to negotiate a common agreement, for the entire plantations industry would have been well high impossible. But the ESUSI could negotiate with the UPASI.

10.4.18 Demand for uniform terms of service

In November, 1947, the ESUSI gave a Memorandum to the UPASI requesting that in all their member estates in South India uniform terms of service including uniform scales of pay, DA, Servant Allowance, Annual Sick Leave etc. should be instituted. The Memorandum also demanded the immediate introduction of PF and Profit sharing schemes for all staff. The UPASI had formed an organization called the South Indian Estates Labour Relations Organization (SIELRO) for dealing with staff and labour problems. It invited the ESUSI to meet this organization for negotiations. It had also invited ESASI. Consequently a Gentleman's Agreement was reached but it was not a signed agreement. The SIELRO circulated its content to all its members recommending the terms of service agreed. The SIELRO was also

in an infant stage and so many estates were not willing to accept the Agreement. However, from the point of view of the ESUSI, the most noteworthy part of the Agreement was that the same terms of service came into force in all estates whether it was a tea or coffee or a rubber estate. But the ESUSI was disappointed when the SIELRO could not enforce PF in estates.

10.4.19 The Agreement

The Agreement had provided for a number of grades of salary, three for juniors and four for the seniors and it was left to the good sense of the employers to fit their staff into the proper grades and place them in these grades at points according to their length of service and nature of work. But what the majority of employers did was to fix the staff at such points so that they did not get any rise in their salaries. Another ugly feature was that the favourites among the staff were given higher grades while active union workers were given the junior most grades. But what the staff gained in all the estates was in DA because the new rate was much higher than the highest hitherto paid and also in Servant Allowance which was fixed at a much higher rate than the prevailing amount. A survey done by the ESUSI found that most of the employers had not implemented the Agreement in a gentlemanly spirit. It was in this context that the ESUSI decided to raise this as an issue under the Industrial Disputes Act and get an Award. The ESUSI decided to serve a notice on all employers in the Madras State. It was thought that once an Award was obtained in the Madras State, it would be easy to get it extended to Travancore-Cochin and Mysore by negotiating with the employers.

10.4.20 Anti-union posture of Birlas

The Birlas had purchased the Sholayar Group of Estates in Anamallais in 1945. One Kashiranka was appointed as the Assistant Manager to help the General Manager who was a European. But this new man soon manipulated things and stepped into the shoes of the General Manager ousting the European. With the help of the Group's Medical Officer, Kashiranka engineered labour troubles and strikes to push out the European. One of the first acts of Kashiranka as the General Manager was to assemble all the staff and tell them that Birlas never tolerated trade unions and that in their own interests they should resign from the ESUSI. As soon as he was firmly in the saddle, Kashiranka got rid of the Medical Officer who had helped him to engineer labour trouble. He also dismissed the Field Writer who had been his tool to get rid of the Medical officer. For some days there was no Doctor in

the estate hospital. Son of a staff who was seriously ill and who had been admitted in the hospital lost his life due to the absence of the doctor. The new General Manager's persecution of union members became a talk among the public and among the planters. The above incidents created great unrest among the staff in Sholayar. Bad examples spread, probably quicker than good examples.

10.4.21 Dorai Raj's transformation

Kashiranka cast his spell on Dorai Raj who by that time had become the Treasurer of the ESUSI. There were rumours that Kashiranka was entertaining Dorai Raj regularly. Dr.Daniel warned him that too much contact with an employer who was developing into a well-known Union breaker would naturally affect his reputation as one of the strong pillars of the ESUSI. It was Kashiranka who became the gainer as his friendship with Dorai Raj gave him additional courage to persecute members of the ESUSI. Dr.Daniel later came to know that none other than Dorai Raj was drafting Kashiranka's replies to the official letters of the ESUSI.

When the Anamallais Branch of the ESUSI held its General Body meeting on June 12, 1949 Dorai Raj attended it, and to the amazement of everyone, spoke in defence of the Sholayar Management contending that the staff's son who died was not his actual son but only an "adopted son"! In spite of Dorai Raj's opposition, the general body meeting passed a resolution by an overwhelming majority requesting the Labour Commissioner to hold an open enquiry into the death of the boy.

10.4.22 ESUSI on the verge of split

Dr.Daniel took the initiative along with his close associates P.Govindankutty Menon, Dr.Narasimhan and Kumara Pillai to thrash out the differences and perceptions with Dorai Raj and after a daylong session they parted as friends. But before a month had passed, Dorai Raj had sent letters to all members of the Executive Committee accusing Dr.Daniel of unnecessarily magnifying the Sholayar affairs because of personal animosity to Kashiranka. Meanwhile, Kashiranka continued to dismiss senior staff and appoint substitute staff on daily rates of pay in their place. Dorai Raj started printing and publishing several pamphlets accusing Dr.Daniel of dictatorial methods. Some reactionary employers took advantage of the situation to try to break the ESUSI. A split in the ESUSI seemed imminent.

The Anamallai's Branch of the ESUSI decided to hold a General Body Meeting and ask Dorai Raj why disciplinary action should not be taken against him. Dorai Raj did not attend the meeting, which passed a resolution unanimously, requesting the Union to expel Dorai Raj for his anti-ESUSI activities. Dorai Raj was one of the founders of the ESUSI and he had done some yeomen service earlier and he was loved and respected. The ESUSI decided to hold an Extraordinary General Body meeting on March 19, 1950 to consider the disciplinary action against Dorai Raj. All the branches were instructed to discuss the matter fully in their general body meetings and send their delegates with definite instructions as to how to vote in the Extraordinary General Body meeting. At this meeting Dorai Raj tendered apology. Hence on the advice of N.S.Varadachari, President of the ESUSI, disciplinary action against Dorai Raj was dropped. But he was removed from the post of Treasurer and also from the membership of the Executive Committee.

Even after his removal from the offices of the ESUSI, Dorai Raj did not keep quiet. He induced 30 members of the ESUSI to resign from it and form another union under the name of the South Indian Plantation Staff Union (SIPSU). This rival union was given financial backing by Kashiranka. The members of this union used company vehicles to go to other estates for doing propaganda and campaigns against ESUSI. Dr.Daniel and his trusted associates could not tolerate this. A General Body meeting was held on September 28, 1952 and it passed a unanimous resolution to expel Dorai Raj from the ESUSI. So ended a sad chapter in the history of the ESUSI.

10.4.23 Influence of British Raj

Till 1945, the Plantations were a closer preserve of the planters. Areas like Anamallais in Coimbatore District, Highways in Madurai and Singampatti in Tirunelveli District of Madras, High Ranges, Vandiperiyar and Peerumade in Travancore and all the coffee estates in Mysore were like little kingdoms of the planters. There were no sizable towns near the areas, and, the public had no contact with the workers of these estates. The British Raj was there to help them and therefore the planters ruled like autocrats in their preserves. Before Independence the labour were illiterate and ignorant. They knew that the European employers were also their rulers, but they took this as part of the natural order of things. They went to their native villages, which were far away from the towns only once in a year and that too for short periods of 3 to 4 weeks and therefore most of them had never even heard about the freedom movement. Of course, some of them had heard about Mahatma Gandhi. But after a long time a vision of better days entered the heart of the estate labour. They started learning that through trade union

activity they could carve out a better standard of life for themselves. They also started thinking that with independence, the over-bearing attitude and behaviour of planters would change. However, according to some workers and staff, they preferred to be slaves under white masters rather than work under Indian managers. They prophesied that when the white masters left, the Indians would the very next day be at one another's throats and that nothing but chaos and disaster would result. They had been accustomed to servitude for so long that freedom was frightening them.

The planters themselves viewed the impending changes with unconcealed anger. They were probably the most reactionary part of the British in India, being the least educated among them. The British government had lent their power to the planters to cruelly exploit the illiterate workers and the Indian staff. Even laws like the Madras Planters' Act of 1902 had been enacted to help them. Social workers were not allowed to contact the workers in the estates. On one occasion V.V.Giri himself had come to Anamallais with a group of social workers. But the planters put up a barrier across the road at the entrance to the estates. Later when Giri became Labour Minister with the Government of India, he visited the Nilgiris and the ESUSI had arranged a tea party in his honour on May 30, 1952.

While replying to the welcome address, V.V.Giri mentioned about his experience of visiting the plantations in Wayanad in Malabar, which were reported to be the worst in the industry. At that time the planters had tried to influence the Governor to speak to C.Rajagopalachari, the then Chief Minister, to recall Giri from Wayanad and Rajaji had refused to oblige.

10.4.24 The rub with the UPASI

On May 14, 1950 the ESUSI gave a Memorandum to Sitarama Reddy, the Labour Minister of Madras, stating that many employers were not implementing the PF Scheme. The ESUSI requested that a Tribunal be appointed to go into the question of salaries and other terms of service for staff. Though the Minister promised help, nothing happened. Disillusioned, the ESUSI decided to force the issue and served a notice of General Strike in all estates on May 1951. The UPASI gave a reply that there would be no negotiations unless the strike notices were withdrawn. But the ESUSI refused it. Meanwhile, R.Venkataraman, the President of the ESUSI advised the office bearers to approach Kamaraj Nadar, the then President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee. Kamaraj came to the help. At his intervention, the Labour Commissioner initiated conciliation proceedings. The UPASI informed the Labour Commissioner that they preferred a Tribunal. The Madras Government then appointed a special Industrial Tribunal for

adjudicating on the demands raised by the ESUSI, which in fact was fighting for this for over a year.

The ESUSI's plan was to get an Award first in Madras and then get it implemented in Kerala as many employers had estates in both states. As soon as the Tribunal started its work, the UPASI moved the Madras High Court to issue a Writ of Certiorari to quash the reference by the Government and pending the disposal of the Writ petition; the UPASI also obtained an interim stay of all proceedings of the Tribunal. The contention of the UPASI was that the Madras Government had already fixed minimum wages under the Minimum Wages Act for the estate workers, and, therefore, it was not proper for the Government to refer the question of wages for adjudication. The ESUSI then pleaded that they were demanding fair wages and for scales of pay besides PF, Gratuity, travelling allowance etc., and, therefore, the writ petition should be dismissed. The High Court finally dismissed the writ petition of the UPASI with costs. G.Ramanujam, the veteran INTUC leader, in this case represented the ESUSI. Later the ESUSI used the services of S.Viswanathan, advocate, in arguing the case in the dispute on the financial capacity of the Plantation Industry to pay the increased salaries for the staff and wages for the workers. It is interesting to note that the ESUSI also had taken up the cause of the workers in this case. The Award of the Special Tribunal was finally delivered on September 15, 1956 giving substantial relief to the staff and workers.

10.4.25 UPASI for litigation

The UPASI did not remain silent. It filed a writ petition before the Supreme Court to quash the Award. After hearing both sides, the Supreme Court gave an interim increase of 15 per cent of basic salary with a minimum increase of Rs.10 to the staff and stayed the operation of the rest of the Award till the disposal of the Writ Petition. This would have meant a wait of another three years and besides it would have cost the ESUSI a lot of money. Since the ESUSI could not afford this, it called for a conference of all trade unions in the Plantation Industry to chalk out a plan of action. All except the yellow unions attended the conference and it was decided to request the Labour Minister of Madras to call for a Tripartite Conference of the UPASI, the trade unions and the Government to explore the possibility of a settlement. Bhaktavalsalam was the Labour Minister and he readily called a conference. After two meetings a settlement was reached with regard to workers' wages. The minister could not bring about a settlement on the demands of the staff. UPASI was adamant and seemed to be determined to wreak vengeance on the ESUSI.

Dr.Daniel then wrote to Calderwood, the European President of the UPASI requesting for direct talks. He readily agreed and a settlement was soon reached. It was to be signed by the Labour Minister. When both Dr. Daniel and Calderwood were coming to the Minister's room, the UPASI Secretary darted in and took Calderwood aside to inform him that the UPASI Executive would never accept the terms of settlement. On being briefed like this, Calderwood stated that the settlement would not be possible.

Very soon R.Venkataraman, the President of the ESUSI joined the Kamaraj Ministry in Madras as the Labour Minister. He took out a personal interest to bring about a settlement but it became clear that as long as Mitchell remained as the UPASI Secretary, no settlement would be possible. The ESUSI then decided to call for an industry-wide strike of all staff. Fortunately, Mitchell retired and D.C.Barr replaced him. Dr.Daniel got in touch with L.Aldred who was in charge of the Estates Department of Pierce Leslie and Company and S.C.F.Symonds of Tea Estates India Ltd., and G.B.Pai, the advocate of the employers before the Special Tribunal. Pai proved a valuable mediator. An Agreement was drafted and it was accepted by the UPASI. It was signed on October 28, 1957 and it was in force till March 1961. This Agreement was followed by a similar one for Kerala at the office of Menon & Pai at Ernakulam on November 2, 1957. With some modifications another Agreement was signed with the Mysore Planters' Association. Thus for the entire Plantation Industry consisting of Tea, Rubber and Coffee spread over the three states of Madras, Kerala and Mysore, the same terms of service came into force. This was a great achievement in the history of the ESUSI. G.B.Pai's successor, P.K.Kurian who worked as the Legal Advisor to the UPASI for a long period had also shown true spirit of understanding and goodwill in settling industry wide problems and cement the harmonious relationship between the UPASI and the ESUSI. However, there are critics who maintained the view that after the mid 1950s the ESUSI was transformed into a pro-employer union and lacked militancy as compared to the trade unions of workers in the Plantation industry.

10.4.26 The Wage Board interlude (1961-65)

The industry wide agreement reached between the ESUSI and the UPASI in 1957 was to expire at the end of March 1961. The ESUSI after its Annual Conference held at Munnar on June 5, 1960 resolved to submit a fresh memorandum of demands with a request to initiate negotiations. Separate notices were served on behalf of the Union to the Associations of Planters of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Mysore. By this time the Central Government appointed a Wage Board on the basis of the recommendations of the 9th session of the Industrial Committee on Plantations and under the pressure of

Central Trade unions. The ESUSI thought it as a most undemocratic decision because none of the unions in the Plantation Industry had been consulted on this matter. At that time the ESUSI was affiliated to the INTUC and the parent body had not consulted the ESUSI. When Dr.Daniel contacted the other affiliates in the Plantations Industry, it was found that they had not been consulted. So the ESUSI decided to raise serious objections against the Wage Board. Further, the experience of Wage Board for Journalists, Textile, Sugar and Cement industries was not satisfactory, as they did not settle the issues, but only created more disharmonies. Once the Wage Board was appointed, no union could agitate for increase in wages of their members and this meant that wages of workers would be freezed until the Wage Board recommendations came into effect. This process would take on an average about three years. Employers, on the other hand, faced no constraint, as the Government did not think it necessary to restrain them from declaring a lockout or change existing conditions during the pendency of Wage Board. The Central Government took another unprecedeted step by directing the State Governments that they should not refer any wage dispute to adjudication after January 1, 1960. But some employers freezed the wage rates at the 1957 level and denied annual increments to their employees.

According to the Cods of Discipline, formulated by the Central Government, bipartite agreements between employers and workers were to be encouraged. The ESUSI informed the Central Government that they subscribe to this Code and wished to have direct negotiations to reach a bipartite agreement. The Tamil Nadu Government expressed their support to the request made by ESUSI to the Central Government. The Central Government had appointed separate Wage Boards for Tea, Rubber and Coffee and this made the problem of reaching a consensus extremely difficult. R.Venkataraman, the Labour Minister of Tamil Nadu contacted his counterparts in Kerala and Mysore with the object of bringing together at a Conference, the UPASI and all the major trade unions in the three states and the representatives of the three State Governments. K.T.Achuthan, Labour Minister of Kerala and Vaikunda Baliga, Labour Minister of Mysore proved very helpful and an inter-state Tripartite Plantation Labour Conference, the first of its kind, was held in Thiruvananthapuram on August 30,1961. It was inaugurated by V.V.Giri, the then Governor of Kerala, who had always expressed himself as enemy No.1 of all adjudications and Wage Boards. Every single trade union in the Plantation Industry was represented by its office-bearers.

In his inaugural address V.V.Giri said: "*I consider Wage Boards in Industries where workers are well organized as redundant and superfluous, as the workers could directly bargain and obtain the maximum wages possible*". He exhorted everyone present there, to negotiate in a spirit of give

and take and he offered to sit with them the whole day and help them to arrive at a settlement. During the Conference Dr.P.H.Daniel representing the ESUSI, offered to strive for a Bipartite Settlement relating to staff. But such a move was not possible from the side of trade unions of workers, since they were affiliated to several Central Trade Unions. The INTUC representative said that they were prepared for a bipartite settlement outside the Wage Board. But the AITUC representative submitted that his organization was for a Wage Board and therefore they wanted a "scientific investigation" by the Wage Board about the capacity of the Industry to pay and the right of the workers for fair wages. Given these conflicting postures, the Tripartite Conference achieved nothing at the end. The believers in "scientific investigations" were to learn in the end that such an exercise by the Wage Boards was nothing but barefaced horse-trading with the Central Government acting as a middleman. However, the UPASI agreed to negotiate with ESUSI.

But the UPASI was a little hesitant to conclude an agreement outside the Wage Boards. Wage Boards meanwhile set out moving around the country effecting sittings, collecting records and wasting public money as their members never took the trouble of applying their minds. The unions of workers began to agitate for interim increase as the Wage Boards were taking more time. According to Dr.Daniel, "*through the influence of the INTUC, the Central Government Commerce Minister took a hand in the game and horse-trading in right earnest began....., it all ended like a fish market*". The Government indicated that the UPASI and ESUSI could go ahead with direct negotiations, which in the beginning had been prohibited by it. The ESUSI with the help of Thirumayilai and G.Ramanujam negotiated with the UPASI and secured an interim salary increase for the staff. The ESUSI also negotiated with the UPASI and reached a settlement on DA and terms of fitment. Meanwhile, the Wage Boards threatened to go on forever. The employers were also getting disgusted at the delay. The managers who were in daily contact with the staff became convinced that further delay in settlement would result in irreparable damage to industrial peace and began to exert pressure on their organisations. Finally, good sense prevailed and both the UPASI and ESUSI were able to reach an agreement on all points at issue. They agreed to jointly present this Agreement before the three Wage Boards for their acceptance. This Agreement was signed on May 4, 1965.

The news about this Agreement unnerved the Central trade unions. The General Secretary of the INTUC described the Agreement as anti-staff, dubious and shady, though at that time the ESUSI was affiliated to the INTUC. His grouse was that the ESUSI had not waited till the wages of workers had been settled. But the ESUSI had done its best to get a similar deal for the workers. The criticism of the ESUSI by the INTUC created opposition against the INTUC. The ESUSI decided to disaffiliate from the

INTUC. The ESUSI then took up the settlement separately with the three Wage Boards for their acceptance. Both B.K.Nair of the INTUC and P.Ramalingam of the AITUC in Kerala supported the stand taken by the ESUSI stating that it was the only representative Union of the entire estate staff.

10.4.27 ESUSI in Kerala

In 1947, the Estate Staff Association, the predecessor of ESUSI had about 500 members in Travancore mainly from Peerumade, Vandiperiyar, and Mundakkayam and from the estates in Central Travancore. Since the headquarters at Coonoor was far away, K.N.John was appointed as the Regional Organizer for Travancore on September 5, 1947. In the same year, a Branch Office was formed in Munnar and John was put in charge. By middle of 1948, the ESUSI grew in strength in Travancore.

Since the ESUSI was registered in Madras, the employers in Travancore moved the Government that a trade union registered outside Travancore should not be allowed to function in the State and the Government accepted the plea. Under these circumstances the ESUSI took steps to register a Union in Travancore and this was done on September 21, 1948 as the Estate Staff Union of South India (Travancore) with N.S.Varadachari as President, Dr.P.H.Daniel as Secretary and K.N.John as Assistant Secretary with its Registered Office in Maruthikunnu in Thiruvalla. It was after the formation of the Kerala State that the Registrar of Trade Unions informed the ESUSI that a separate registration for their Union in Travancore was no longer necessary.

Soon the earlier registration relating to the Union separately for Travancore was got cancelled and thereafter for the entire region of South India the ESUSI was the only union representing the staff. There was a demand for shifting the office of the ESUSI in Kerala from Thiruvalla to Kottayam against the wishes of K.N.John. He started creating trouble by filing a civil suit that the assets of the old union should not be transferred to the Kerala Branch of the ESUSI. But the vast majority of the members opposed this move forcing John to withdraw the civil suit. K.Bhanu as the Secretary replaced him. A rented building in Chetty Street at Kottayam was taken to run the office of the ESUSI. In 1960, the ESUSI purchased a plot at Muttambalam in Kottayam and an office-cum-residence was built there in 1962. Several Keralites like M.K.Nambiar, and V.I.Chacko had worked as Secretary of the ESUSI, but Dr.P.H.Daniel continued as the main guiding spirit behind the ESUSI.

An attempt to sponsor a rival union was made by the Kerala unit of the CPI during the period of the EMS Ministry and it was called the Estate Staff Union of Kerala (ESUK). Then the ESUSI represented their stand saying that it was the only industry-wide union of staff in all the estates spread over south India. Two lawyers from Kottayam were chosen by the CPI to lead the ESUK as its President and Secretary and the State Government extended full support to it. The Minister did not want to provide representation to the ESUSI in the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC). Some members of the ESUSI at Mundakkayam and Thenmala resigned and joined the new union, ESUK, because the then ruling Party, the CPI, sponsored it. However, the majority of the estate staff in Kerala remained with the ESUSI due to the devoted campaign done by A.M.George, Chairman of the Mundakkayam branch, T.S.Jacob, Secretary and K.G.Mathew, Chairman of the Thenmala Branch, and, A.O.Vincent, Branch Secretary and K.Bhanu, Secretary of the Kerala Unit of the ESUSI. With the dismissal of the EMS Ministry, its sponsored ESUK came to an end. Besides the AITUC, the INTUC had also tried to sponsor a rival union against the ESUSI both in Kerala and Tamil Nadu but they too could not mobilize a sizable membership. Mention must also be made of another attempt at starting a union based on local patriotism. The Travancore Estate Staff Union in the High Ranges set up in 1960 also died out and its members joined the ESUSI. Today the ESUSI in Kerala has virtual monopoly of representation of estate staff and it has been able to negotiate settlements with the Association of Planters of Kerala (APK).

Today the Kerala State Office of the ESUSI is located at Kochi and P.Govinda Menon handles its activities. The Branch Office of ESUSI is functioning from Mundakkayam under the direction of T.S.Jacob. Besides, there are two Regional Offices. They are the High Range Regional Office located at Munnar and the Vandiperiyar Regional Office at Vandiperiyar. A.T.Victor and G.S.Baul Rajan look them after.

10.4.28 ESUSI since the 1960s

Reference was made earlier about the ESUSI's decision to secure its affiliation and connection with the INTUC. There were suggestions that the ESUSI should affiliate with the HMS. However, Dr.Daniel's contacts with Tom S.Bavin, General Secretary of the International Federation of Plantations, Agricultural and Allied Workers (IFPAAW) provided an opportunity for the ESUSI to get affiliated to this Federation with concurrence of the General Body of the ESUSI in 1968 and this relation continued for a long time.

The ESUSI had cordial relations with the UPASI and succeeded in reaching Long Term Agreements one after another. This was made possible by both the organizations having grown into maturity. Today the ESUSI has two sections: the staff section and the skilled and supervisors section. The membership of the staff section is limited to the monthly salaried staff who consist of *staff working in the office* – the head clerks and the assistants; the *staff working in factories* – the head tea makers, the head rubber makers and their assistants; the *field staff* consisting of the head conductors and their assistants; the *welfare staff* who consist of the medical officers who are not covenanted, the nurses, the pharmacists, the school teachers, and, the mechanical and engineering staff. Then there are the *skilled workers* and *supervisor's sections*, the skilled workers were being made up of daily or weekly paid mechanics, electricians, car and lorry drivers and ward boys, while the supervisors are those who supervise the work of the labour and are not monthly rated.

In each planting area, the ESUSI has set up a Branch of the Union. In Kerala these branches are set up in the High Ranges, Vandiperiyar, Peerumade, Mundakkayam, North Wayanad, Malabar Wayanad, Plappilly and Nelliampathy. Circles of the ESUSI were opened at Eranadu and coastal areas. A Chairman, Vice Chairman and Secretary aided by a Committee of Members, manages the affairs of each Branch. These branches are formed only for administrative purposes, since the ESUSI was a single Union.

In 1969 all the staff of Malayalam Plantations Limited, went on a strike demanding overtime payment, which was conceded after three days. In 1971 the staff of Travancore Rubber and Tea Estates Company went on a strike demanding overtime payment, which was conceded after 45 days. In fact the ESUSI had used the strike only as a last resort. In most cases the strike was declared only after prolonged negotiations and conciliation conferences. In the vast majority of disputes with individual employers good sense and goodwill on both sides had prevailed. That was a credit of the ESUSI.

10.5 EARLY UNIONS OF WORKERS

In Kerala, according to Dr.P.H.Daniel the first union to be started for the plantation workers was by B.K.Nair under the auspices of the INTUC. Almost at the same time another union was started in the High Ranges also under the INTUC auspices. But after the Communist Party of India (CPI) came to power in 1957, the AITUC unions grew fast. Soon they became the dominant force among the estate labour. Later when the CPI split into CPI and CPI (M), the AITUC unions in the plantations found some of their members joining the newly formed CITU. The RSP had organized estate

workers in the Thenmala Valley under the initiative of Prakkulam Bhasi and N.Sreekantan Nair. The Socialist Party also took a hand in the game but their influence was limited to the small coffee estates in Wayanad and Malabar.

There were certain common features with regard to all early labour unions in the plantations. First, they were not organized on an industry-wide basis like the ESUSI. Indeed there was not even one union, which was at least Statewide in extent. All of them operated within districts while some of them operated within districts or confined to local levels. Second, unlike the ESUSI, political parties had started most of the early unions of workers. Even those started by individuals had been affiliated with political parties. In none of the cases, workers had not been found to take the initiative to organize themselves. So the trade union movement among the estate workers had been started by outsiders, some of them with laudable objectives and motives, others with the sole motive of making the trade union field the source of their livelihood. Some leaders were little qualified to become honest trade union leaders. However, there were a few distinguished leaders who devoted their life to the working class in the plantations. Dr.Daniel mentions B.K.Nair of the INTUC, P.Ramalingam of the AITUC, P.L.Perumal of the H M S etc., but they were a just handful.

Dr. Daniel had written about the corruption of some early trade union leaders in the plantation without naming them. Since the workers did not have any knowledge to organize and run trade unions, outsiders were required. These outsiders did well in organizing the workers in the plantations, but they also sought the patronage of employers to enrich themselves. The wily employers were only too willing to help these leaders. Dr.Daniel had found several union leaders regularly going to the planters of their choice and replenish their lean purses and several planters who regularly subsidized certain trade union leaders and bought peace in their estates. What service such leaders provide to the workers could be easily imagined. Dr.Daniel, using his uncanny observation, had classified early trade union leaders in the plantations thus. First, there was the honest type whose only aim was service to the workers but they were few. Second, there was this class who went to the Planter for help and they deserved sympathy. Third, there was the leader who took money from the Planter so that he could lead a fast life with attendant brandy bottles, but who all the while shouted at the employers at open meetings and conferences to impress their followers. Such men deserved contempt. Fourth, there was the category that was out to cheat the worker and the employer in an equal measure.

Here is a description given by Dr.Daniel about the mode of operation of some union leaders in the plantations.

"Under the greenwood tree he holds a meeting of the workers and denounces the Manager as one of the most reactionary and brutal ever seen in the plantations and he calls on the workers to be ready for any sacrifice to get rid of the monster. Two days later he approaches the monster either directly or through the butler or chokra and requests for a donation of rupees one hundred. If the planter gives the donation, thereafter the donation becomes a regular monthly subsidy; but there is peace in the estate. If the planter resists, the meetings become more frequent; the language becomes more violent, dark hints are thrown about certain favours being given to certain women pluckers; even incitement to violence is made; it is very rare that a planter will brave it out; most often he yields and gives the subsidy and charges it to weeding account or manuring account!"

Dr.Daniel adds:

"When once peace is brought, the tables are turned on the union leader; he becomes the victim; when the Planter wants to get rid of a rude fellow or someone in his black list, he simply tells the leader and dismisses the chap, and the exist of the chap is smoothly done! So that the leader might not lose his popularity, every now and then a dismissal is arranged and on the intervention of the leader the dismissed person is reinstated and height presto, the leader's popularity goes up! Such leaders fleece staff, especially field staff. I know estate staff who lost their jobs because they refused to be fleeced. Such sharks are not exceptions in the Plantations, nor are they to be seen only in the plantations, every industry in the country has its due share of them".

10.5.1 ESUSI and EWUSI

According to Dr. Daniel, some of the unions used to lie dormant till the season for payment of bonus approaches or the time for the negotiations of fresh wages comes and then they spring into hectic activity. Unions competed to put up higher demands than others and denounced the rest as traitors. When a settlement was reached, because of the intervention of the Government conciliation machinery, the unions started telling the workers that but for their firm fight, the workers might have lost every thing. Thus went on the story of fleecing the gullible workers. Dr.Daniel was of the view that the ESASI

could have provided these workers with efficient leadership. The REGE Committee (1946) had mentioned in its Report that workers in the Plantations were unorganised and the ESASI could provide the workers necessary leadership for organizing themselves. Leaders like Hariharnath Shastri, Kandubhai Desai and Kamaraj had advised the staff that they could organize the workers in the interests of everyone. After prolonged debates it was decided to organize a parallel Union called the Estate Workers' Union of South India (EWUSI) for the benefit of the estate workers and it was launched on an experimental basis in Anamallais in Tamil Nadu and High Ranges in Kerala.

But this attempt failed. First, the Planters were dead against ESUSI organizing the workers. They were frightened about the staff and workers joining hands and posing a threat against their security. Second, when ESUSI started organizing workers, the existing leaders of workers' unions took it as a threat against their livelihood. Third, the workers were not in favour of the EWUSI. They feared the wrath of field writers who were members of the ESUSI. The tea factory workers also felt in the same way towards the Tea Makers. The estate managers also took a hand in the game and adopted a nice attitude towards the workers throwing the blame for everything on the field writers. The labour leaders poured oil into the burning fire by lecturing the workers that the Managers were really nice men and that the field writers were the persons responsible for all their woes. The position of field writers and factory staff became so bad that they threatened to quit the ESUSI if it continued to run the EWUSI. Thus the EWUSI came to an inglorious end.

10.5.2 The Man behind the ESUSI

We now turn our attention to knowing a little more about the man behind ESUSI. When Dr.P.H.Daniel completed his fifty years of invaluable service to the ESUSI, the Union brought out a Souvenir in 1997. In a message to the Souvenir, R.Venkataraman, an old associate of Dr.Daniel and a former President of India had stated that he was greatly impressed with his friend's dedication to the cause of Estate Staff and his valiant efforts to safeguard and promote their rights. According to Venkataraman, Dr.Daniel had more bipartite settlements to his credit than perhaps any other labour leader in the country and he was an exemplary trade unionist.

Dr.P.H.Daniel was born on May 22, 1910, in Neyyoor in Kanyakumari district as the son of Dr.N.Paul Daniel who had started his career as an Assistant in the Travancore Medical Service in the General Hospital in Thiruvananthapuram. Neyyoor, though a small village then, was famous for the Hospital being run there by the English Medical Missionaries where the

famous surgeon Dr. Somerville (who successfully climbed Mt. Everest) had worked. Being in Government Service father Daniel used to get transferred frequently from one place to another. Thus P.H.Daniel, the son, had his school education in Eranial, Kottarakkara and S.M.V.School in Thiruvananthapuram. After passing School Final Examination he studied in the Science College in Thiruvananthapuram. Then he completed his MBBS Degree from the Madras Medical College. Some of his classmates like Dr.R.Kesavan Nair and Dr.S.Govindan became famous surgeons of Kerala. One of Dr.Daniel's professors was Dr. Lakshmanaswamy Mudaliar who after retirement had served as the Vice-Chancellor of the Madras University for several terms.

After finishing his house sergency, Dr.P.H.Daniel started private practice in Chalai, Thiruvananthapuram. It was a period when the public resentment against Sir C.P.Ramaswamy Iyer, the Advisor to the young Chithra Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore, had been very high. On one occasion following a police firing at a public meeting in Chalai, Dr. Daniel had no hesitation to treat the wounded at his clinic. When the local people formed a Committee to help the wounded and the families of the dead, Dr.Daniel became a member in it and thereafter he became a marked man. Just at that time a distant relative who was working in Anamallais as Head tea maker in a tea plantation informed him that the Group Medical Officer of Peria Karamalai Group was dead and that the place was vacant. Initially the young Dr.Daniel was not inclined to go when he knew that though the estate staff was not treated well doctors were well treated. He was also informed that C.R.T.Congreve, the General Manager of the Group was a very hard taskmaster and behaved roughly with his staff. In spite of this, finally Dr.P.H.Daniel decided to take up work in the estates. That was the beginning for Dr.Daniel to devote his life to the estate staff.

In his book *Plantation Panorama* published in 1975, Dr.Daniel had given an excellent survey of conditions of life and labour of staff and workers in the estates and also about the organizations of Estate Staff since 1930. We have quoted extensively from this book to give the reader an insight into the conditions in the estates. Dr.Daniel was a prolific writer and he had authored two other interesting works, namely, *Red Tea* and *Doctor's Tales* both in a lighter vein but based on his observations of the estate life.

In 1997 Dr.P.H.Daniel continued as President of the ESUSI even after attaining the age of 87, while his daughter Pamela Moses functioned as the Working President. She had written an excellent biographical note on her father in the ESUSI Souvenir, 1997 and that itself carried a chronological narration of the history of the Union.

The Souvenir carried many reminiscences of his contemporaries and close associates which throw light on the life and work of Dr.P.H.Daniel. Dr.Daniel was, until his retirement from service as a medical officer, a covenanted staff in the service of the Peria Karamalai Tea and Produce Company Limited which in the early days was managed by Pierce Leslie & Company Limited. He had to undergo many sacrifices when he decided to ventilate the grievances of the Estate staff for the redressal of the same. Instead of using his spare time for going to the clubs or taking part in other leisure activities, he was fully immersed in the trade union work, which was most dear to him and for which he dedicated himself. According to R.Krishnakumar, the Chairman of the Consultative Committee of Plantation Associations, not only the staff and workers of the plantations industry in south India, but the entire industry owed a great deal to Dr.Daniel and his missionary spirit, which has remained undiminished over the long period. The present writer had met Dr.Daniel at his Coimbatore office in the first half of 2000 soon after he celebrated his 90th birthday. At that time too his dynamism, devotion to the cause of the estate staff and his determination to be active in his work were resounding in his words.

Dr. Daniel's Trade Union principles always revolved round this dictum:

"Capital cannot do without Labour, nor Labour without Capital". (Pope Leo XIII)

According to E.B.Sethana of M/s. Matheson Bosanquet & Co. Limited, Nilgiris, Dr.Daniel was an excellent medical doctor, a committed trade union leader, a rocky administrator, and above all, a gentle human being. His rich, vast and almost unrivalled experience in the field of trade unionism and industrial relations, his scholarly approach, flair and reasonableness during the salary negotiations were very impressive. He was a living legend who tirelessly worked for the concept "one union, one industry" evolved by the late V.V.Giri.

Dr. Daniel retired in May 1965 from the service of the Karamalai Group of estates. Estate life was not very congenial for him because his health was never good in the climate of the hills, especially in the Anamallais with its heavy monsoons. Although he was glad to leave the hills after retirement, yet, he was sorry that he was leaving the place where he had lived 25 years, a life, which had been of some use to the estate staff. When he was free of official work, Dr.Daniel plunged into full-time work for the Union. An administrative office was opened in Coimbatore where he worked from 9 am to 12 Noon and 4 pm to 6 pm almost every day. To keep in touch with the medical field, he had a small clinic in the same building and treated patients.

Dr. Daniel in the early years had become a four *annas* (Rs.0.25) ordinary member of the Congress Party and had asked the members of the ESUSI and his ardent followers and friends to join the Congress. He had also campaigned for the Congress Party candidates in the elections to the legislature. His link with the Congress Party became close after he came into contact with leaders like Kamaraja Nadar and R. Venkataraman. He had even sought the support of the INTUC and got the ESUSI affiliated to it. But after many years, Dr. Daniel left politics because he thought that the Congress Party had done nothing much for the upliftment of the common man.

After retirement, Dr. Daniel organized adult education schools in the villages around Coimbatore but due to lack of financial support he withdrew from this programme. He, however, found time to combine Union work with several social activities like Sunday Schools, Sewing School for unemployed women, housing scheme for estate staff and holding medical camps in remote villages.

Pamela Moses, daughter of Dr. Daniel and present Working President of the Estate Staff Union of South India (ESUSI) in her short biographical sketch of her father, has made a mention about his approach to religion. Even before Dr. Daniel established medical practice in Chalai, Thiruvananthapuram, he had been attracted to Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam through his prolific reading of books on them. But at one point in his life he turned to the Rationalist Philosophy. Although he remained a nominal Christian and went to Church to please his wife, at heart Dr. Daniel was an atheist. When his wife took ill, he agreed to take her to healing meetings held by Dr. Dhinakaran, the famous Evangelist. Gradually this brought about a change in Dr. Daniel and he was converted to be a reborn Christian in 1978 at the age of 68. He continued to be a good Christian even today.

We conclude this by quoting a statement made by P.K. Kurian, Legal Advisor, UPASI. He said:⁹

"As a trade union leader he (Dr. P.H. Daniel) always led the members of the staff in a disciplined manner. The staff had implicit faith in his fairness and in his ability to get for them maximum benefits particularly, when the periodical revisions were taking place. He was a person who after listening to the staff about their demands and in consultation with his colleagues took a decision as to what should be the minimum that should be achieved at the time of settlement and the members accepted his decision without dissent. Dr. Daniel believes that no trade union and no employees can exist unless the industry itself exists. Therefore, he never put forward

demands, which will have a result of exterminating the industry.... This approach of Dr. Daniel coupled with his influence on the members he represents made it always possible to arrive at a reasonable settlement and I would say that this was his great achievement".

The trade union organization and activity as evolved and practiced by Dr.Daniel merit a deeper study as a role model for trade union movement to establish healthy and cordial relations with the employers based on mutual acceptance, respect and trust, rather than as adversaries out to win battles.

10.6 STRUGGLES IN MUNNAR AND PEERUMADE

By 1940 the All Travancore Estate Workers' Union had established its control over the plantations in the region from Kulasekharam in the South to Vandiperiyar in the North in Travancore. The trade union movement in the plantations in the High Ranges covered such centres like Munnar, Devicolam, Peerumade and Mundakkayam. In this movement the first to enter was the communists and later by the 1950s, the INTUC made its entry. For some years the movement was controlled entirely by the AITUC and the INTUC. In the AITUC, some of the prominent leaders in the movement were Rosamma Punnoose, M.Sankarankutty, P.A.Solomon, P.Ramalingam, Kottayam Bhasi and C.A.Kurian. B.K.Nair, K.Karunakaran, R.Kuppuswamy, N.Ganapathy and A.K.Moni led the INTUC. After 1957 the RSP linked UTUC also made its presence felt in the union movement in the High Ranges. Its main leaders were N.Sreekantan Nair, Prakkulam Bhasi, T.M.Prabha, K.Pachu Pillai, and C.A.Devassy Kutty. The other central trade unions like CITU, HMS and BMS also have now established strong presence in selected centres. We wish to make an attempt below to narrate some major episodes of struggles in the plantations in the High Ranges mainly drawing the information from the reminiscences of the leaders besides referring to published documents relating to them. The State Labour Commissioner's Office had prepared a compilation of settlements reached by the Plantation Labour Committee, which is also a rich source of information.

10.6.1 Entry of Communists

The Communists of the erstwhile State of Travancore had formulated a strategy to mobilize the working class spread over various geographical centres as well as diverse productive activities. Though the beginning was made in the coir manufacturing industry in the coastal region of Alappuzha and Cherthala, the union movement soon covered fishing workers, boat crew

and farm workers in the coastal region extending from Kollam up to Aroorkutty on the border of Travancore and Kochi. The Communist Party then decided to depute its prominent leaders to Kollam to organize tile, engineering and cashew workers. Some were deputed to Punalur, Pathanapuram, Adoor, Kunnathoor, Pathanamthitta, Mundakkayam and Peerumade to mobilize the workers in the plantation estates owned by European companies as well as native planters. Thus the union movement initiated by the Communists of Travancore extended to every centre of industrial activity.

10.6.2 Movement at Peerumade and Mundakkayam

R.Prakasam has made a reference to a leaflet issued by the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) in 1924 on the deplorable conditions of work and wages of workers in the plantations in the Travancore State ¹⁰. Quoting George Kakkanadan, he also mentioned the work of the *Sanmargodaya Cooli Vela Sanghom* at Mundakkayam in the year 1930.

In the 1920s itself attention of the Travancore Government had been drawn to the evils of the *Kangan System* prevailing in the plantations. Work under the *Kanganis* (labour contractors) was really slave labour. Working hours in many estates had no ceiling. Whenever the planters wanted, the workers had to provide their labour power. But some estates had fixed 12 – 13 hours of workload a day. The workers used to get exhausted with hard labour and they were often punished savagely so that a good number of workers lost their lives during the execution of their work. In such cases, the estate supervising staff would ask the other workers to dig a hole and dump the dead body in it. Anyone showing sympathy or remorse would be severely beaten up. Under these conditions, no one dared to register their protest. Since the supply of labour was unlimited, the workers could not protest. If one went away, the planter could replace him with several others, if he wished. No cases were registered against the inhuman atrocities of the planters because the government, revenue and police officials always extended total protection to them. In the Legislative Council of Travancore, T.C.Kesava Pillai was reported to have raised the issue on December 6, 1928 to draw the attention of the Government to the hardships of the plantation workers in the State ¹¹. Another member, Thariath Kunjithomman strongly supported the views of Kesava Pillai on the floor of the house. The Government promised necessary action to restrain the planters from indulging in the atrocities.

10.6.3 P.A. Solomon looks back

Born in 1917 at Kattoor, Alappuzha, P.A.Solomon is one of the few surviving leaders of the trade union movement in Travancore, particularly in plantations. He started his career as a coir factory worker at the age of 15 when R.Sugathan was guiding the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) as its Secretary. Solomon was a self-taught individual and became well versed in English and soon he was made a member of the working committee of the TLA. He was inspired by P.Krishna Pillai and his Congress Socialist Party (CSP) and attended study classes at Commady camp where K.Damodaran was assisting Krishna Pillai. It was from K.Damodaran that Solomon learnt the fundamentals of dialectical materialism.

Solomon worked for the Aroor Coir Factory Workers' Union and was deputed to Thrissur to organize the trade union in the Sitaram Mills there. C.L.Varkey worked closely with Solomon to develop the Union into a strong force. But estates in the plantation sector offered Solomon an exciting field for trade union work. From day one, he began to feel that estates provided a fertile ground for conducting revolutionary struggles of working class. Whenever Solomon showed his true enthusiasm, P.Krishna Pillai restrained him. Later Solomon was deputed to guide trade union work in the Punalur Paper Mills and there he worked with C.O.Mathew and Karunakaran.

In the Plantation Sector the trade union controlled by the Communists, according to Solomon, had eleven branches with a total number exceeding 20,000 as active members. The union leaders, as a part of their strategy to counter the rowdies of estate owners and managers, formed small cells with committed and militant group of workers in it. The Karumalis estate and Travancore Estate were under the management of the H & C Company. The Union there wanted to hold a meeting of workers. T.V.Thomas was the President and P.Ramalingam and P.A.Solomon were its Vice-President and Secretary respectively. Spencer was also an active member. The management had prepared to prevent the union meeting with *goondaism*. As scheduled the meeting commenced with Solomon saying that a registered trade union had every right to organize a meeting in the estate. When *goondas* of the management arrived on the scene to disturb the meeting, a few militant workers rose in anger and showing their readiness to counter the *goondas*. Sensing the mood of the workers, the management directed the *goondas* to withdraw.

The Sivalokam Estate was another field of action where the union leaders including Solomon tried to mobilize the general public also while mobilizing the estate workers there. The whole area was in the grip of Malaria and workers and their leaders worked in the community to fight the Malaria

too. K.V.Surendranath, Marthandom G.S.Moni, Thiruvattar Krishnan Teacher and Arumana Ramaswamy were the front line leaders there. Among them Ramaswamy was a Congress worker but very bold in his actions with great commitment to the estate workers.

P.A.Solomon in looking back at his life and career highlighted certain notable events. In 1939 when the activists put out the demands for Responsible Government as the birthright of the people, Solomon became a full time political worker. After some time he associated himself with the publication of *Thozhilali* (Worker) being brought out from Alappuzha. P.Kesavadev, the renowned literary figure and novelist with an ardent Marxist and progressive outlook were the main force behind the *Thozhilali*.

Following brutal police repression by the Dewan's Government, Kattoor Jospah was killed along with three other activists. Those killed had not been on the front line but were standing in the middle of the group of workers. Solomon remembers the day on which he had sent a telegram to P.Krishna Pillai on what had happened. When the coir factory workers commenced the General Strike, the factory owners employed black legs. The striking workers then picketed them. Strike committees had been constituted. K.K.Warrier, C.O.Mathew, P.A.Solomon and K.V.Pathrose were among the first of the batches that picketed the blacklegs. All of them were subjected to brutal repression. The police used to hit them with grinding stone all over their bodies.

Solomon had engaged himself in political and trade union work in Thrissur and Anthikkad also. While in Alappuzha the political workers subsisted on dry tapioca chips and plain water, the situation in Thrissur was a little different. There C.Janardhanan's family extended some help. This family used to get *Padachor* (rice offerings from temple), and as soon as it reached Janardhanan's home, his mother would send half of it directly to the Communist Party office.

In the early days, most of the Party and trade union leaders came from financially sound families. They became political workers due to their ideological commitment and vision of a progressive and just society and were willing to sacrifice their material comforts. The cadres voluntarily came and joined the movement. Their families could never expect them to come back alive as repressive measures of the government, police and capitalists were well known. Many of them who joined the political and trade union movement even forgot to get married. Solomon cites the cases of the Chinese leader Mao, P.Krishna Pilai and A.K.Gopalan who could marry while in the thick of popular struggles. Solomon actually thought of marriage only after the struggles were over.

Solomon was of the view that political and trade union leaders should be given a monthly allowance to meet their modest living and travelling expenses as in the old days. But the practice of keeping accurate statement of every rupee of expenditure and the purpose for which it was spent must be insisted. There had been reports about honest leaders who starved and collapsed even while carrying the Party's funds in their pockets. When moving from one centre to another these leaders used to carry only just minimum cash with them and in reaching a new centre they had to be supported by the local party workers. Those who sacrificed everything in their life lived and died in indigent conditions. Now those who entered the movement in post Independence period just aim at amassing wealth through exploitation of those whom they were expected to serve.

According to Solomon, the movement stood divided and fragmented. Common issues are lost sight of. False slogans are framed and shouted. Unity is totally evaded. Hence it is time that all rallies together and consolidate the movement, said P.A.Solomon.

10.6.4 Entry of B.K.Nair

According to B.K.Nair, the life of workers in the plantations was comparable to that of petty slaves. Till 1947 the estate managements used to refuse to discuss the problems of workers with political or trade union leaders. It was under great physical risk that the leaders from the plains trekked to the high ranges where Malaria would not spare any one. But once the Plantation Labour Act was passed, the estate managements lost some of their freedoms to exploit the workers without any limit.

B.K.Nair, born in Alalppuzha, had gone to New Delhi to hunt for a job. He had applied for one in the Office of the ILO there, which at that time was headed by a Malayali Dr.P.P.Pillai. B.K.Nair knew Dr. Pillai's nephew, K.Krishnan Nair, who later became well known as Krishna Chaitanya. Though B.K.Nair did not get a job in the ILO office, he was introduced to G.L.Nanda, the veteran Congress leader and INTUC stalwart. It was Nanda who instructed B.K.Nair to take up INTUC work. He was given some initial training in trade union work before he was sent to Kerala to organize the INTUC in the State.

B.K.Nair's first task was to organize the INTUC in the Communist fortress of Alalppuzha where the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union (TCFWU) was an unquestionable entity among coir factory workers. It was an enormous work that awaited B.K.Nair at Alappuzha. Bit by bit, he started trade union work. P.J.Joseph, Appachan, Varghese Thundiyl and others

assisted him in starting INTUC unions in coir factories, shops and commercial establishments and in the port. Thereafter B.K.Nair entrusted the organizing work with local activists and went to Kochi, where along with G.S.Dhara Singh he organized INTUC unions in Cochin Port. He later shifted to Kollam and brought up stalwarts like C.M.Stephen to the forefront of INTUC unions.

B.K.Nair had worked in mobilizing estate workers in Pathanamthitta and later Munnar. In the trade union work in Munnar, B.K.Nair was greatly assisted by K.Karunakaran. Both of them trekked to the high ranges with great difficulty and succeeded in getting the INTUC a strong foothold there. In the initial years they had to confront the communists who were also trying to mobilize the estate workers. However, there existed a high degree of understanding between the top leaders of the INTUC and AITUC when they struggled with mobilization of estate workers who were reluctant to join trade unions due to their fear of management and subsequent victimization. But both the INTUC and the AITUC made successful inroads into the plantations and established themselves as representatives of estate workers.

10.6.5 Entry of M Sankarankutty

In Mundakkayam, European companies owned most of the estates but their day-to-day management was in the hands of the T.R.D.Company of Sarmas. In these estates trade union work was extremely dangerous as the lives of leaders were frequently threatened. Simultaneously the union activists had to confront the police and government officials besides the management. The High Range Estate Workers' Union organized by the Communists was the first trade union in Mundakkayam. Sankarankutty was its General Secretary. He had jumped into political work and spent his apprenticeship in it at Calcutta. He had great admiration for the Calcutta environment where the relationship between intellectuals, students and working class was extremely close.

When the Communist Party deputed Sankarankutty, he had no idea about the plantations. P.P.George, P.T.Punnoose and C.S.Gopala Pillai gave him a good insight and guided his union work at Mundakkayam. At that time the estate workers were under full control of the INTUC. According to Sankarankutty, the estate workers were not comparable with industrial workers. They had the mental framework and behavioural pattern of agricultural workers. They were loyal and pure, but at the same time willing to be bonded into slave conditions without any protest. They wanted liberation and not a trade union, which fought for higher wages and bonus. They looked up to the trade union for liberating them from bondage and this

was the first task that the Communists took up in Mundakkayam and Peerumade.

In the early days the estates were closed to outsiders. Even the trade union leaders had to seek prior permission to enter the estates. Under these circumstances, the leaders had to jump the gates or enclosures during night time for meeting the workers and pleading with them to join the union for escape from bondage. It was during such contacts that the leaders began to realise the gravity of the poor conditions of work and wages in the estates. They learnt that male workers had a common barber employed by the planter to give them haircuts. Even for conducting marriages in workers' families, the permission of the planter was required. The Tamil workers were most subservient compared to the Malayali workers. On one occasion, when Sankarankutty and Rosamma Punnoose were not granted permission to enter an estate, they boldly broke the entry gate and the management initiated police action against them, which led to a spontaneous strike there. Rosamma Punnoose being a lady could easily establish a close rapport with the families of estate workers and they revered her as "*Amma*" (Mother). She could, therefore, even get marriages among workers solemnized at her trade union office. One day in an estate in Peerumade, police hunted a young boy who ran into Rossamma's house for safe shelter. Thobias, the Inspector was after him, but Rosamma intervened and got the bail for the poor boy. In those days the estate workers held the trade union leaders in high regard and considered them as their "saviours".

10.6.6.1 Rosamma Punnoose looks back

Rosamma Punnoose, a veteran in the trade union movement, was enjoying excellent legal practice when she entered the union movement. Her elder sister Accamma Cherian was a leading figure in the Travancore State Congress and created history when she led a huge demonstration of protest against the maharaja as well as the British Resident and the Dewan. In recognition of her illustrious role in the struggle for freedom and responsible government, the Government of Kerala installed a bronze statue of Accamma Cherian in front of the Raj Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram. With this family and political background, Rosamma cultivated, even in her early teens, a desire to plunge into popular movements and working class struggles. After her marriage with P.T.Punnoose, the veteran Communist Leader, her involvement in the Party and trade union movement became deep. She was particularly keen in taking up the cause of estate workers in cases filed by employers. Most of such cases were the ones deliberately framed by the employers to victimize innocent workers and union activists who questioned their misdeeds. She never accepted cases for employers or capitalists.

Rosamma Punnoose and M.Sankarankutty always worked together as a team. In those days trade union workers used to be given modest cash allowance to meet their day to day expenses. They were also given instructions not to accept any money from workers. As a matter of maintaining discipline the union activists were asked to campaign among workers to spread the message that they should never attempt to commit theft, and, if at all they were found doing so or caught, they would be removed from the union. The union was vigilant and saw to it that the workers never indulged in illegal activities and indiscipline against the planters and their staff. The union always weeded out the bad elements. It also used to take stringent action against the workers who did not execute their work properly. These activities of the union brought respectability and the planters and the managers treated the union leaders decently.

10.6.6.2 Rosamma's marriage with Punnoose

During political and trade union work, P.T.Punnoose and Rosamma were brought closer together and a bond of love and comradeship was built. In 1946 they decided to get married with the blessings of the Party. Rosamma's mother had differences since Punnoose was not a Catholic and so insisted that the marriage had to be solemnized in a church. At that time P.T.Punnoose had been prohibited by the government from entering the State of Travancore. So the marriage was held at Ernakulam in the Cochin State. They had invited Pattom Thanu Pillai to the marriage. But when Pattom proceeded from Thiruvananthapuram to reach Ernakulam, the news reached Alappuzha and the workers there decided to block his way because of his anti-working class posture and deeds. Pattom was not allowed to move from Alappuzha to the north and as such he could not attend the marriage function.

P.T.Punnoose at that time was functioning as the Secretary of the Communist Party. Besides his party work, he used to make fiery speeches, which often lasted two or three hours at a stretch. In those days, leaders held public meetings in late evenings and people used to carry palm mats to the venue to sit and eagerly lend their ears to the speeches. No one wanted to miss P.T.Punnoose's speeches. Such was the popularity and mass appeal to his oratory.

10.6.6.3 Cumbly Struggle

In Munnar, the estates used to supply two woollen *cumblies* (blankets) to the workers during the winter season. The rule was that the trade unions should certify to the quality of the *cumblies* before they are purchased by the

estates in bulk for distribution of the workers. In one year, the trade unions approved the *cumblies* of one company but they were found to be of a poor quality. Workers sated complaining to leaders Rosamma Punnoose and S.Kumaran. The leaders went to the European Manager, Soutar and registered a strong complaint. When the leaders were returning from the Manager's bungalow they visited some estates and informed the workers that a settlement was reached with the management and their complaint would be resolved. On their way back, agitated workers stopped their car. When the leaders stepped out of the car, they were shocked to find a woman worker throwing a ball of cow dung at the car to register her protest. Rosamma then approached the woman who started crying and addressed Rosamma as "Amma" (mother), and told her that Rosamma was always good, but all other union leaders were "*Thirudans*" (Thieves).

10.6.6.4 Meloram Estate Struggle

In 1951, the AITUC had established deep roots in Peerumade and had a strong presence among the estate workers. Here Rosamma was assisted by Kottayam Bhasi. One day they decided to hold a meeting in the Meloram estate. They found the gates of the estate locked. When the workers volunteered to break the lock, the leaders did not allow them to do so telling them that it would be a criminal act. Therefore, being the trade union leaders, they themselves would break the lock and enter the estate since they enjoyed some kind of legal immunity as they were prevented from seeing their members. The estate manager filed a legal complaint against the leaders in the police station. The sub inspector then intervened and he supported the views of the union leaders saying that they enjoyed every right to enter the estate as part of their union work.

10.6.6.5 Incident at Malayalam Plantations

On another day, as a part of her trade union work, Rosamma Punnoose went inside the Malayalam Plantations at Pampanad. The meeting with workers was over by 6 pm. When she was proceeding to the exit gates, the manager ordered the estate gates to be locked to prevent her from getting out. Rosamma was furious. She sent a letter to the Peerumade Police Station through an estate worker. The police arrived on the scene. She requested the police officer to take action against the European Manager for keeping her in unlawful confinement. A case was charged against the Manager. The police officer advised the Manager to go and apologize to Rosamma for his ill-advised action. Accordingly the European Manager went to Rosamma's house at Thiruvalla and tendered his apology.

10.6.6.6 Back to Munnar

Kuppuswamy was one of the top leaders of the INTUC in Munnar. But at one stage he had great differences with the INTUC and he left it. He offered his help to the AITUC. According to Rosamma Punnoose, Kuppuswamy knew all the estates and being a Tamilian, had a close rapport with the Tamil workers. It was a time when the AITUC was pursuing the twin objectives of improving living conditions of workers as well as getting an enhancement in the wages. One Chellayya was the Secretary of the AITUC union. The leaders found that the children of estate workers, mainly of Tamil origin, were not being sent to schools, though the estate management was running schools. The AITUC used the services of Kuppuswamy and Chellayya to launch a campaign among Tamil workers to send their children to estate schools. The AITUC also demanded the establishment of crèches. Usually after attaining the age of ten, most children go for work by reporting that they have crossed the age limit of 16 years. The AITUC in Munnar continued its campaign with vigour for the improvement of hygiene and sanitary conditions. At the spots where the tea leaf plucked by workers was weighed, the AITUC used to send its men to see that weighing was done correctly and workers were not cheated.

In 1957 Rosamma Punnoose was asked by her estate workers and comrades to stand for elections. According to her, the native estate owners were worse than European owners. During the period of 1957-59 there arose a case regarding unauthorized felling of trees in Kalluvelli. Some innocents were punished by registering false criminal cases against them. N.Sreekantan Nair of the RSP had a small union there and he requested the AITUC for help. September 2 was fixed for a joint meeting. The employer mobilized *goondas* and farm workers. Rosamma decided on a new strategy. She put men volunteers in front of a march she organized, instead of women as was usually done. When the *goondas* of the estate management charged on the marchers, the frontline male activists retaliated. The estate management never expected this. Finally, the meeting organized by the AITUC and the RSP went on smoothly. The police, however, registered a case against 52 union activists. The case was personally handled by Rosamma Punnoose herself as such cases were dear to her heart and she always wanted to fight for the workers' cause.

While Rosamma was active in Munnar there arose an issue relating to a piece of land located adjacent to the headquarters of the AITUC there. That land was a *poramboke* (state-owned) land. The KDHP Company had occupied this land, but later it had been assigned to a few houseless people. At one stage they encroached on nearby lands that belonged to the AITUC. Rosamma Punnoose was an MLA then. She filed a complaint with the

Collector and that led to a tense situation. But since Rosamma was a respected leader, the issue was soon peacefully resolved.

10.6.6.7 Soutar's views on Rosamma Punnoose

Rosamma Punnoose left Munnar in 1960. Just before that there was an interesting incident. J.B.Soutar, the European Manager of KDHP Company, was retiring from service. Several trade union leaders in Munnar went to his bungalow to collect whatever he was disposing of before his departure to England. Soutar invited Rosamma Punnoose for a farewell party at the European Club. It was reported that Soutar said on that occasion “*all the trade union fellows were his employees, but Rosamma was different. She was a terror but one who always stood for justice*”.

In his message to the ESUSI Souvenir 1997, sent from his residence in Edinburgh, J.B.Soutar had stated ¹²:

“I was privileged to be involved in the conduct of affairs in a difficult political situation, the development of Indian management, and the growth of trade unionism. In that development, I was supported by many trade union leaders, sometimes to my discomfiture as when I had, out of politeness, to accept Rosamma Punnoose’s cigarettes from her handbag tasting of violet face powder”.

10.6.7 C.A. Kurian looks back

April 26, 1956 was an unforgettable day for C.A.Kurian who had held the position of President of the State unit of the AITUC and had also served as Deputy Speaker in the Kerala Assembly during the period of the LDF Government led by E.K.Nayyar during 1996-2001. Kurian was originally an employee in the Kottayam Bank, which was later amalgamated with the Orient Central Bank and subsequently with the State Bank of Travancore. Kurian, born in Puthuppally near Kottayam, completed his studies and then got involved in political work among the communists. His transfer in the bank to Kanjirippally brought him closer to the plantation centre of Mundakkayam. One day he received information that M.Sankaran Kutty, the General Secretary of the High Range Estate Workers’ Union had been taken into custody by the police along with T.K.Jacob and C.K.Govindan. Immediately Kurian finished his work in the bank and rushed to the police station along with M.N.Ramakrishnan. Thobias, the Inspector did not like this. He took Kurian inside and started hitting him all over. Though Kurian resisted the

blows, he fell down and he was pushed into the cell, which already had a complement of 16 men. The union activists, on hearing this incident, commenced a strike. The Rubber tapping workers threw away the rubber milk they had tapped and marched to the police station with their sharp tapping knives and demonstrated their protest.

The police one day took Kurian and other colleagues in the lock-up for a bath. In the lock-up, it was congested and all inmates had to pass urine and store them in earthen pots, which they themselves should carry on their heads next day morning. They had to sleep on bare cement floor. This was the general pattern in almost every police lock-up in the State during the Dewan's Rule as well as in the early 1950s. After this incident the Manager of the Bank became unkind to C.A.Kurian on account of he being a communist. Zachariah, the Secretary of the District Committee of the CPI directed him to go to Munnar and relieve Rosamma Punnoose who had been working there for some years, so that she could go to Mundakkayam and work there. Kurian then gave up his job in the Bank and shifted to Munnar in 1957 to do full time trade union work.

10.6.8 Bonus Struggle

K.Karunakaran, B.K.Nair, N.Ganapathy and Kuppuswamy were the most important leaders of Munnar. M.Sankarankutty was a close colleague of Rosamma Punnoose. When there arose a major bonus dispute and as it could not be resolved through direct negotiations, T.V.Thomas, Labour Minister, decided to intervene. He called a conciliation conference and personally came down to Munnar for holding it. The Conference was held in the Government Guest house. T.V.Thomas personally summoned Soutar of KDHP Company. Stanley and few other activists belonging to the AITUC union, without informing Rosamma Punnoose, decided to block Soutar's car on his way to the Guest House with a view to create fear in his mind and force him to settle the bonus issue. When Soutar finally met T.V.Thomas, the former was unusually irritated unlike his usual sober approach. On enquiry, he told T.V.Thomas and Rosamma of what happened on his way to the Guest House. Though Rosamma profusely apologized for the misdeeds of her union activists, Soutar was stern and refused to settle the bonus issue. It was at this point that Rosamma announced her decision to go on a hunger strike. T.V.Thomas gave her full support. Soutar had no alternative and he immediately showed his readiness to settle the bonus issue. In those days M.N.Govindan Nair used to visit Munnar regularly to promote and guide the Party work. Very soon the AITUC union in Munnar became a major force. It could establish its own large building to house its office in Munnar and it became a landmark in the town.

10.6.9 Kuppuswamy looks back

R.Kuppuswamy, born in September 1924, is the top leader of the South Indian Plantation Workers Union (SIPWU) and A.K.Moni, MLA, assists him. The Union was set up by veterans like K.Karunakaran and B.K.Nair and is affiliated to the INTUC.

Kuppuswamy was born in Ambasamudram in Tirunelveli. He started his career as a worker in the Papanasam Mills and soon joined the Communist Party of India. While engaged in a struggle in the Mills, he was dismissed from service. In this struggle held in 1948, union activists like Arunachalam and Selvan were killed in police firing and several others injured. In 1948 Kuppuswamy attended the Party Congress at Calcutta. In that Congress P.C.Joshi was replaced by B.T.Ranadive and that brought about a major shift in the Party's policy in favour of holding violent militant struggle. Kuppuswamy could not digest it. According to him, one Natarajan was killed for opposing the new policy shift.

Kuppuswamy returned home a rather dejected man. It was at this time M.S.Ramachandran, INTUC leader of Madurai invited him to join and work for the INTUC which stood for non-violence, truth, and, democracy. Kuppuswamy did not hesitate even for a moment and decided to work for the INTUC. He made an extensive tour of Tamil Nadu and reached Munnar in Kerala where a large number of Tamil workers were engaged in the estates. He opened an INTUC branch there in the name, High Range Labour Union with the help of one Jayaraj. Soon 95 per cent of Tamil workers in Munnar, Peerumade and Udumpanchola came under the INTUC union. Soon the High Range Labour Union decided to merge with the South Indian Plantation Workers' Union (SIPWU).

In 1953 the INTUC unions held a peaceful strike when the KDHP Company refused to pay Bonus. The strike lasted 13 days. Panampally Govinda Menon and G.Ramanujam intervened. They told the company management that they should get the balance sheet of the company and if they were convinced that the company had incurred loss, they would not press for bonus. The matter of dispute was then referred to the Industrial Tribunal. The union demanded 4 per cent bonus. The company brought down renowned labour law experts from London to argue their case. But ultimately the dispute was settled. The Tribunal awarded 4.5 per cent bonus.

During the 1950s, veteran leader Jivanandam had come to Munnar. At this time P.Ramamoorthy wanted Kuppuswamy to return to the Communist Party but Kuppuswamy was determined to continue with the INTUC. During the debate on the issue of reorganization of States on linguistic basis, there

was a division among the leaders in Munnar. Some like Jayaraj told Dr. K.M.Panikkar, member of the State Reorganization Committee, that though there were nine Tamil dominated taluks in Kerala, they should not be merged with Tamil Nadu and so they should be retained in Kerala when the reorganization was done. At one stage other leaders argued that these regions should be handed over to Tamil Nadu. If the Commission had accepted this view, Kerala would have lost almost all the tea estates in the high ranges. V.Subbiah of the SIPWU wanted Munnar to be transferred to Tamil Nadu, but Kuppuswami who was the organizing Secretary of the SIPWU opposed it.

In 1958 Kuppuswamy resigned from the SIPWU to work for the campaign for the by-election. Rosamma Punnoose of the AITUC and B.K.Nair of the INTUC won the elections. After this the INTUC and the AITUC fought each other to establish supremacy in Munnar. According to Kuppuswamy, the AITUC always indulged in militancy and violence during strikes called by it. The company management always sought the help of the police. The AITUC activists used to physically attack company officers to deliberately create fear and terror in the region. Kuppuswami cited to this author the police firing at the Thalayar estate as one instance. The entry of the CITU into the plantations had further encouraged inter-union rivalry and disturbances in industrial relations in the high ranges.

Kuppuswamy had high praise for his colleague and compatriot, A.K.Monji whose parents were estate workers. But Monji could go for higher studies and became a science graduate even though he was involved in student and youth congress work. Later he joined as a typist in the office of an estate in Munnar. He thus rose to the position of the Joint Secretary of the SIPWU. Monji used to get advice and guidance from both Kuppuswami and late Muthuswami. According to Monji, the Tamil workers in the estates never practiced family planning and as a result their number had enormously increased. The estate managements promoted this because the larger number would always give the companies a reserve work force to draw on. The companies, however, adopted a policy that every able-bodied member of the family was provided with some job so that they would not leave the hills in search of work. According to A.K.Monji, one great historic event in Munnar was the decision of the Labour Minister Aryadan Mohammed to use the threat that he would revise the minimum wages of estate workers by resorting to the method of Notification when the estate managements refused to settle the issue. This brought about a "bumper settlement" to the workers. The INTUC activists still feel sad about the martyrs, Hassan Rawther and Pappammal who lost their lives during the Police firing in Munnar when Kerala was under the rule of the Communist Party led by E.M.S.Namboodiripad.

10.6.10 Ganapathy looks back

Hailing from Tirunelveli, N.Ganapathy was brought to Munnar by his grand father who worked as a *Kangany* for the KDHP Company. He used to recruit the workers from Tirunelveli and Maniyachi regions in Tamil Nadu. In the early years the KDHP Company used to burn the forest to clear the land for plantings. Ganapathy in his younger days was attracted to the Congress and the INTUC in 1950. B.K.Nair and K.Karunakaran were organizing the INTUC in Munnar. G.Ramanujam, Khandubhai Desai, Suppayya Nadar, B.K.Nair and K.Karunakaran had inspired Ganapathy. While Ganapathy was leading High Range Workers Union, Suppayya Nadar was in charge of the South Indian Plantation Workers' Union (SIPWU).

On August 4, 1953, the trade unions demanded a minimum bonus of 4 per cent and J.B.Soutar rejected it. About 40000 workers started a strike. Ganapathy, Padmanabhan and Suppayya Nadar went on one-day hunger strike. Later they met Panamppally Govinda Menon and he brought about a settlement, which gave a bonus at 6.5 per cent. Besides, the striking workers were given eleven days of back wages. The rest of the issues were referred to the Industrial Tribunal.

In 1958 both the INTUC and the AITUC jointly declared a strike. Rosamma Punnoose went on a hunger strike. At Thalayar Estate the police opened fire at striking workers and Hassan Rawther and Pappammal were killed. Ganapathy, though an MLA at that time was physically assaulted by the police. V.R.Krishna Iyer was the Home Minister in the EMS Ministry at that time.

According to Ganapathy, the British companies had got a big bonanza when the Raja of Poonjar allotted them 1.25 lakh acres of forestland in the high ranges on a long-term lease of 99 years at a cost of one rupee per acre. Anjanad Hills, Chinnar Hills, Chokkadammudy Hills etc., were included in this lease. The European planters reached the high ranges from Udumalpet by horseback. The workers were brought from Tirunelveli 300 miles away from Munnar. There was a great preference for workers from Chingalpet. The wages, according to Ganapathy, were paid at the rate of four *annas* (Rs.0.25) treated as "*Chelavu Kasu*" (payment for meeting expenditure). Workers were never given firewood by the estate managements. But the same managements tried their level best to please government officials working in the region by giving them a number of free goodies. The cost of this was adjusted by deducting 10 kg of output from every 100 kg of output tea leaf plucked by workers. This was an ongoing process of dirty exploitation done by the estate managements. The workers engaged in plucking tea were also subjected to severe exploitation by false weighing of output. Once the trade unions insisted

in posting their representatives at the weighing centres this kind of cheating was prevented.

Ganapathy felt sad that while head load workers earned Rs. 250-300 a day in the Munnar town, the poor estate workers who toiled from morning to evening were paid only Rs.60 to 66. The line quarters given to them were in bad shape with practically no security, or adequate sanitary and hygienic conditions. When authorities come for inspection of housing conditions of estate labour, the estate managements would take them to a few sites kept ready as good showpieces. But the majority of estate workers unfortunately are destined to live in horrid conditions. A change in this is yet to come. Unfortunately, the trade unions of today do not evince much interest in improving the living conditions of workers since most of them concentrate their attention on wages, DA and bonus. The conditions of housing of workers in Rajamalai, Thalayar, and Elapputty and Kallurutty estates were worse and shocking.

The town of Munnar had virtually come under the control of the Tata Tea Company. Individuals could not hope of purchasing a piece of land in Munnar. Almost all government officials including those of the police and labour departments had been made pro-management to serve the interests of the Company. According to N Ganapathy, the Company looked after the officials well. Tea packets used to be sent to them regularly, free firewood supplied to their kitchen, and free medical treatment given to them and their families in Estate Group hospitals, while the ordinary hard working estate labour were given only injustice. The company through offering attractive bribes to their leaders also silenced the trade unions. Some had been given good housing.

In 1986 N Ganapathy filed a complaint to the Pollution Board against the Tata Tea Company for polluting the water in the Munnar Lake. The Company had asked him why he went to court. The case even went up to the High Court. There were a few leaders like B.K.Nair who refused to take anything from the company. He would not even accept a cup of tea offered by the management when he went for meetings. He would politely refuse tea, but he was always happy to accept tea offered by a worker in his lines. Today the trade union movement in the high ranges stood divided but most of the unions provided back door support to the management.

10.6.11 R.S.P. led Struggles

In Peerumade the R.S.P had established a strong foothold in the plantations under the able leadership of Prakkulam Bhasi, N.Sreekantan Nair

and K.Pachu Pillai. In 1954 C.A.Devassykutty joined them in mobilizing estate workers. Devassykutty was working as a Secretary in the Elephant House Tea Factory Workers' Union in Sri Lanka led by Leslie Gunawardana. Gunawardana telephoned Sreekantan Nair to say that he was deputing Devassykutty to work among estate labour and Nair should accommodate him. In those days the RSP activists were militant and retaliated the management's anti-labour actions. It was in 1957 that the INTUC appeared in Peerumade. There were reports of clashes between estate management's *goondas* and union activists in Chinnar Estate and other estates lying in the range between Elappara and Kottamala. Peerumade police station was a notorious place where the police experimented with their brutal torture exercises on union activists. For the RSP activists Sreekantan Nair was a great inspiration since he was an exceptional leader who had felt the pains of workers.

In Peerumade, Pandalam P.R.Madhavan Pillai, leader of the CPI was a guiding spirit for all trade union and political workers. He was also deeply involved in the peasant struggles in middle Kerala. One day P.R. asked C.A.Kurian, the plantation labour leader, to accompany him to Peerumade via Kaniyanvazhy. They reached Karimpanal of Kanjirappally where some trees had been planted in a big farm. The owner of the farm had filed a criminal case against the CPI controlled Travancore-Cochin Karshaka Sanghom which P.R. was leading. In that criminal case, C.A.Kurian was also charged and taken into police custody.

10.6.12 Struggles in Kaliyar Estate

The Kaliyar Thottam Thozhilali Union had played a historical role in the struggle for Responsible Government during the heyday of Sir C.P.'s autocratic Rule. O.J.Joseph of the Communist Party had organized this Union. Jose Abraham who had worked among Estate workers in Wayanad joined O.J.Joseph in 1953. One of the notable struggles in the Kaliyar Estate was to protest against the dismissal of a few workers. The struggle lasted 27 days. During the struggle, farmers and farm workers voluntarily came forward to extend their solidarity and support to them. They supplied food grains and eatables to the striking workers and their families.

10.6.13 Other Struggles

Another important struggle in the high ranges was in the small estates there. In Kothamangalam at one stage Kuruvila Mathew, known better as

Ikkachan, was forced to conduct a 14-day hunger strike demanding settlement of various important issues facing estate labour and it was a big success.

The Kerala Plantation Labour Federation led by P.Balachandra Menon and K.I.Rajan engaged in a struggle against the decisions taken by the Central Wage Board for Rubber Plantations in 1966. It may be noted that earlier V.V.Giri had strongly opposed the Wage Board for bank employees in 1952-53, though as a consequence he had to leave the Central Cabinet. The struggle by Plantation Labour Federation lasted 67 days. As a part of it, a Raj Bhavan march was conducted to attract the Government's attention. At that time the AICC was holding its Conference in Kochi and the Central Minister Jagajeevan Ram was addressing it. The Federation activists decided to conduct a *gherao*, which was a unique form of direct action and had not been tried previously in the State of Kerala. The Federation got nearly a 1000 strong suicide squad. As soon as the news of this appeared in the Press, a conference was held and the decision to appoint the Wage Board was deferred.

Following the split of the CPI into the CPI and CPI (M), many leaders from estate unions crossed over to the CPI (M) and most of them got arrested. They were sent to Viyyur Central Jail for imprisonment that lasted 16 months. They included A.K.Gopalan, his wife Suseela Gopalan, T.K.Ramakrishnasn, M.M.Lawrence, V.Viswanatha Menon, C.A.Kurian, K.M.Abraham, M.K.George, E.M.George, M.G.Ramachandran, C.L.Varkey, M.A.Karthikeyan, Arayakandy Achuthan, M.T.Thomas, K.K.Joseph and Jose Abraham.

10.6.14 Struggle by Construction Workers

Among the above leaders, Jose Abraham and Vazhoor Viswam had been involved in the movement of construction workers in the dam sites. The Electricity Board had started to establish a number of large-scale hydroelectric projects in the high ranges. One such site was at the Idukki Project. The Hindusthan Construction Company undertook the construction work. In early 1964 this Company started discharging a large number of CLR workers. They were not unionised. But union leaders in the high ranges like Jose Abraham decided to take up the case of the unfortunate CLR workers. The CITU affiliated KSEB Workers' Association extended support. It was decided to question the Company's action in the High Court. Subramonian Potti, the veteran pro-communist lawyer offered to argue the workers' case. He quoted a judgement of the Allahabad High Court on a similar issue. If any worker had worked 240 days continuously during a calendar year, he could not be dismissed, without giving due notice and due reasons. The Kerala High

Court was fully convinced that the action by the Hindusthan Construction Company was illegal and therefore unjustified. During this struggle P.Balachandra Menon met the Kerala Governor to present the case of the CLR Workers. The Governor directed his Advisor who later reported that there was a strong case for making the CLR workers permanent. This decision was a phenomenal event and transformed the status of construction workers in Kerala. Following this, workers in State Agricultural Farms, Contract and Casual Workers in Public Sector units etc., secured permanency.

The real work on the mobilization of construction workers commenced from the Sabarigiri project. Whenever workers in the construction site agitated the Contractor Company requested for intervention by police. Project sites were declared as prohibited sites. In the early struggles M.N.Govindan Nair and K.T.Jacob of the CPI had been arrested for their involvement in the struggle of construction workers. In those days construction sites were like concentration camps and worse than in estates. Neither Government nor the police dared to question the Construction Company. This provoked the workers and at Kulamavu, police opened fire killing 2 construction workers and injuring 22 others. But the struggles succeeded and construction workers here secured minimum wages, bonus and other benefits through negotiated settlements. Retrenchment compensation, festival holidays, leave with wages and other similar benefits, which were exclusive preserve of organized industry workers, were now extended to construction workers too. This was not a mean achievement. It inspired the formation of working class struggles in the other parts of the country in the field of construction work. In the Idukki struggle Jose Abraham and Vazhoor Viswam and about 130 workers were arrested and confined to jail custody for about 36 days.

10.7 STRUGGLES IN PATHANAMTHITTA

Pathanamthitta district of Kerala today was the home of many well-known plantations. Skinnerpuram, Kumbazha, Pathanapuram, Nedumpara, Thenmala Valley, Rajagiri, Kodumon, Thenginad, Nellimukal, A.V.Thomas and Company, Harrison and Crossfield, Malayalam Plantations, Ottupara, Thamarappetty etc., are some of the estates where several historic working class struggles were held. It would be a Herculean task for anyone who attempted an exercise on comprehensive documentation of these struggles. Since written materials were not available on most of these struggles this author had to rely on whatever oral evidence collected from major trade union leaders in this area.

10.7.1.1 Ramalingam looks back

One of the oldest trade union leaders of this region who shared his reminiscences with this author was P.Ramalingam of Adoor. Born in an orthodox Brahmin family of Mavleikkara in February, 1916, Ramalingom used to read *Macaulay's Essays*, Edmund Burke's *Impeachment of Warren Hastings* and similar books and developed a great interest in History, English literature, poetry and Shakespeare. His father R.Parameswaran, a graduate, was a member of the Sreemoolam Assembly. With this background young Ramalingam moved closer to the Travancore State Congress as the leftist in that organization had a fascination for him. It was M.N.Govindan Nair, the Communist leader who first asked Ramalingam to preside over a public meeting to criticize Mannath Padmanabhan's movement against State Congress. K.T.Thomas who was present at the meeting jumped on the platform and announced that the meeting was going to be converted into a meeting of the State Congress. Ramalingam was one of the first Brahmins who joined and actively worked for the State Congress. Since that meeting, Ramalingam worked closely with M.N.Govindan Nair. His contacts with other leaders like K.C.George, C.S.Gopala Pillai, A.K.Thampi and P.T.Punnoose made him a true communist. Ramalingam had attended study classes conducted by P.Krishna Pillai and E.M.S.Namboodiripad. The first meeting of the Travancore State Communist Party was held at Ezhamkulam near Ramalingam's house. E.K.Nayanar and A.V.Kumhambu participated in it.

10.7.1.2 Union at Skinnerpuram Estate

The rich Christian family of Anthraper owned Skinnerpuram estate. P.P.Wilson, a Communist, was the first to attempt to form a trade union there but that attempt failed. Ramalingam was deputed to Alappuzha to seek the advice of the veteran leader T.V.Thomas. It took many more months before a union could be formed in the estate.

Meanwhile, the Second World War and anti-Japanese struggle had been started and confrontation between differing political ideologies and lines had become a subject for discussion. It was during this period many communists had been arrested along with their kingpin P.Krishna Pillai. He alone was taken to the Edalakudy jail near Suchindram in the Kanyakumari District. It was here that he came into contact with Thankamma who became his wife later. Ramalingam was also arrested and on his release he returned to Adoor and started mobilizing the workers in the Skinnerpuram estate. Many workers of this estate were retrenched as a part of the policy of victimization. The trade union took up the issue and it was referred to adjudication. The

Award was in favour of the trade union and all the retrenched workers were taken back with back wages.

10.7.1.3 Turbulent period of 1940-45

During this period unionisation was a Herculean task, as leaders were not allowed to enter the estates and speak to the workers. This restriction was the greatest in the Harrison and Corssfield estates in Konni and Laha. The position in Kumbazha, Nedumpara and Thenmala Valley were no better. Workers who were found talking with trade union leaders would be summarily dealt with by dismissing them. Under these circumstances, the leaders used to stealthily enter the estates after mid night to visit the *coolie lines* and speak to the workers. T.V.Thomas was elected as the President of the Union and Ramalingam as the General Secretary. One day both of them wanted to meet the manager of the Kumbazha estate but that was initially rejected. A.V.Thomas owned the Rajagiri estate. There also stiff resistance initially met unionisation. In this estate the father of the famous Malayalam literary writer Kakkanadan was reported to have made an attempt to organize a trade union but failed.

During the Punnappa-Vayalar revolt P.A.Solomon and P.Ramalingam worked together in Pathanamthitta. A friendly police constable warned them that the authorities had already issued arrest warrants against them and they should arrange for going to the underground. They made a pact between them so that Solomon would work in Laha and Ramalingam in Kumbazha. One day Solomon had to get a hair cut without much publicity. When they were slowly moving towards the barbershop, a police constable recognized them and began to follow them. Noticing this, the leaders rushed to the Achankovil River and just jumped into it and swam away. Later they reached the estate, organized meetings of workers and declared a strike and after that Ramalingam left for Adoor via Enathu. While reaching Kottarakkara, he entered a barbershop to get a shave and sent a person to buy a train ticket for his journey. On seeing a constable having a close watch on Ramalingam, the man was instructed not to buy the ticket and Ramalingam just escaped by walking all the way to Ezhukone. There he bought a railway ticket, and, boarded a train to reach Thiruvananthapuram.

The dispute in the estate had been referred to the Labour Court presided over by M.O.Varghese. He wanted the parties to settle the dispute and Solomon took the initiative and with a little mutual give and take the dispute was settled. During this period S. Kumaran and M.T.Chandrasenan paid a visit to Adoor to give instructions to the activists. Meanwhile, Ramalingam went to Madurai. At Punalur railway station, he found

M.N.Govindan Nair travelling in another compartment. MN was proceeding to Madurai, but he got down at a station prior to it. Mariarputham, the Police Officer was following him but MN could escape easily. Ramalingam requested MN to visit Adoor and guide the formation of trade unions in the estates.

10.7.1.4 Admbanad Estate Struggle

The Ambanad estate management was notorious for its ill treatment of workers. All the workers were under the iron grip of the *Kangany*. This man used to lock up his workers after they finished a day's work. Wages were not paid regularly on the argument that it was convenient for him to settle the wages at the end of the year. Majority of the workers were of Tamil origin. One day one family among them wanted to conduct a marriage within the premises of the estate. The Division Manager refused permission. At this time Ramalingam, V.I.Thomas and P.G.Padmanabhan, union leaders intervened. They asked the family to go ahead with their plan and conduct the marriage. One of the managers in the estate was T.K.Alexander. He was not only a kind-hearted person but also a pro-communist. He gave a warning to Ramalingam not to walk on the roads leading to the estate office because he feared that the cars of top managers might try to knock him down. In spite of the resistance the Tamil worker's family conducted the marriage and fortunately no untoward incidents occurred on that count.

10.7.1.5 Kumbazha Estate Struggle

By 1948-49, trade unions had taken deep roots in the plantations in the Pathanamthitta area. Spontaneous strikes occurred in many estates. They sent the right signals to the estate managers that any misbehaviour on their action would be questioned by collective action. In the Kamahi estate there was a strike lasting 12 days and spontaneous support came from workers in adjacent estates. The spirit of working class solidarity was demonstrated. The estate managements did not show any animosity towards leaders like Ram lingam because they always stood for justice and held no ulterior personal motive. They liked the approach of estate managements in agreeing to negotiate settlements on basic issues. Estate owners like Anthrapraper, who never yielded to trade unions, had a soft corner for Ramalingam who was found to make detailed analysis of all issues and showed willingness to accept reasonable settlements. But on certain fundamental issues concerning the workers Ramalingam was always uncompromising. In the working of the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC) he had played a central role along with K.Karunakaran and B.K.Nair of the INTUC.

This estate witnessed another unique and interesting struggle. The Writer, a staff in the estate, was in the habit of misbehaving to the women workers and occasionally this used to create tension. One day when Ramalingam and P.A.Solomon were returning from the estate after a routine union work, there were torrential rains. In the thick of it a worker ran up to them crying and told them that this notorious Writer had been harassing his wife. Ramalingam instantly reacted and asked the worker to go straight to the Writer's quarters and give him a bashing since that alone would create sense in him. He promised the worker that he and Solomon would meet the officer and ask him to apologize for his misdeeds. Accordingly, in the rains they went to the officer and sensing the mood of the union leaders, the issue was immediately resolved. The Writer gave in, apologized, and, promised the leaders that he would behave decently in future. It also enhanced the image of the trade union and its respectability among the estate workers.

Another incident in the Kumbazha estate was also interesting. One Superintendent there scolded and beat up a worker. His co-workers could not remain silent. Spontaneously they jumped into action and lifted the Superintendent and pushed him into a tank containing rubber latex. Following this, the *Kanganis*, Superiors and the white Managers unleashed a reign of terror on the workers with inhuman savagery. It was reported that on account of this several workers took to their heels to save their life.

10.7.1.6 Plantation Workers' Federation

There were a number of AITUC affiliated Plantation Workers' Unions all over Kerala spread over different regions. As decision was made to form a Federation of their unions, P.Balachandra Menon, the veteran trade union leader guided the Federation in the early years of its existence. P.Ramalingam had also functioned as its President for a number of years. When B.K.Nair, the Gandhian INTUC leader staged a hunger strike in Munnar, where the INTUC had a strong hold in the initial phase, the left unions led by the AITUC directed P.Ramalingam to commence a hunger strike in the Rajagiri estate. Both these hunger strikes were for the same issues but held in two different regions.

When the split came in the AITUC, the new CITU organization did not want Balachandra Menon to associate himself with the Plantation Workers' Federation though they were willing to allow Ramalingam, another AITUC leader to continue there. In fact the ideological war between the AITUC and CITU became strong and finally the CITU wing established a separate federation of their own.

10.7.1.7 Strike in Rajagiri Rubber Wood Factory

In the Rajagiri Rubber Wood Factory a unique issue came up causing some amount of tension. The management and the unions there had entered into a negotiated settlement. After that came the Government notification on minimum wages. It was discovered that the minimum wages so notified were higher than the negotiated wages. It raised a legal issue whether the negotiated wage could be lower than the minimum wages. AITUC, INTUC and CITU unions hotly contested the issue. Finally it was decided that workers should be paid the minimum wages and a mechanism of recouping the difference when minimum wages fell below what was agreed upon by settlement. It gave a lesson in the formulation of union policies that once the strike began, one should have a vision about what line it should take in order to reach a settlement beneficial to the workers.

10.7.1.8 Problems in Government Plantations

The Government of Kerala had started a fully State owned rubber Plantation Company at Kodumon at Adoor, Pathanamthitta and another at Kalady near Aluva. Both these plantations had several trade unions. On the side of the left unions P.Ramalingam and A.P.Kurian were the leaders. They had a committee, which decided to launch a strike, and A.P.Kurian who later shifted to the CITU and CPI (M) and became the Chairman of the Kerala State Bamboo Corporation took the initiative for it. He had also served as the Political Secretary to E.K.Nayanar when the latter became the Chief Minister. When the strike decision was taken, Ramalingam expressed his dissent and warned that the strike would fail. After the strike commenced, A.P.Kurian approached Ramalingam on the third day and sought his help. Both of them together went to Thiruvananthapuram and met Dr.M.S.Nair, Director of Agriculture, who was in-charge of the two State plantations. E.P.Gopalan MLA requested him to meet the Labour Minister and call a conciliation conference. The Secretary prepared a Note for discussion. However, the Labour Minister was not happy at the turn of events and he directed Dr.M.S.Nair to visit both Kodumon and Kalady immediately and bring a settlement of all issues. At last A.P.Kurian had to make a retreat and the strike failed as originally forecast by P.Ramalingam. Even to this day, Ramalingam believes that many strikes failed because they were unprincipled and unjustified from the beginning. Unfortunately in the present day only this type of struggles take place and with too much politicisation and last minute face-saving exercises and compromises they are made to appear like successful struggles. To make the working class loyal a social consciousness had to be

created in them and both employers and workers must understand that both have a social responsibility, Ramalingam added.

10.7.2 All Travancore Estate Workers' Union

One of the earliest trade unions in the plantation sector of Kollam district was the All Travancore Estates Workers' Union (ATEWU). P.Ramalingam was the venerable *guru* (respected master) of all the union activists. Another leading figure was M.T.Varghese who had escaped from lock-up, though being severely infected by small pox, and devoted his life to the cause of estate workers. M.N.Govindan Nair, the top CPI leader, was always ready to give his guidance to the union activists. During the 1950s several young students had left their schools and colleges and joined the Communist Party.

In 1953 the Pathanamthitta Plantation Labour Union was formed exclusively for Pathanamthitta. Vilangupara Sukumaran was its first Vice President and Thankappan worked as its Secretary. K.M.Mathew of Kozhencherry was also a leading figure in the movement. Generally the conditions of work and wages in estates managed by companies were better than those owned by individual planters. The *Kanganis* had to be paid a *Thalakkasu* (Head Money) at the rate of one Travancore *Chakram* (28 *chakrams* forming one rupee). The *Kanganis* handled all the money in the estate for paying the wages. These *Kanganis* became supervisors in later years, once the law abolished the system of *Kanganis*. Mention may be made about other leaders like Y.Thomas and Mundappally Thomas belonging to the Communist Party and the AITUC.

10.7.3 H & C (Harrison and Malayalam) Plantations

The Harrison and Crossfield Plantations was one of the oldest European companies in Pathanamthitta. Most of their top staff was European. But they too were dependent heavily on the *Kanganis* for recruitment of labour. While Tamil labour was recruited for tea estates, the companies used to prefer to employ workers from Mangalore for its rubber estates. The major estates were the Konni estate (tea and rubber), Kumbazha estate (tea and rubber) and Laha estate (rubber alone).

The workers were supplied rice from the Company itself and its price was deducted from the wages. Instead of settling wages then and there, the Company had introduced the system of *Chelavukasu* (wages to meet expenditure) under which three days' wages were paid for a week. The first

union in the company estates was affiliated to the AITUC and the veteran P.Ramalingam was leading it. When the Communist Party was banned, he had gone underground. It was in this context that the veteran B.K.Nair formed the INTUC union in 1947. B.P.Cleetus and Joseph of the INTUC stayed in the labour lines and worked for mobilizing the Tamil workers. The AITUC had little control over the Tamil workers. There used to be regular confrontations between the INTUC and the AITUC activists. In spite of this, their leaders often came to hold joint actions against the company management.

10.7.4 Unfriendly Native Planters

All over Kerala, the native planters always took an unfriendly approach to their workers. In Pathanamthitta, things were not different. The case of Perumala Estate could be cited as an excellent example. This estate owned by Zachariah and Sons never used to keep either register or rolls relating to the workers in their estate. Tamil workers were attacked in their lines by *goondas* hired by the planter and brought to the estate all the way from Alappuzha. Naturally the workers retaliated and several were injured on both sides. This led to a long struggle lasting three months. Finally the matter went for adjudication. Unfortunately, the Award went against the workers.

The Ottupara estate owned by the family of P.C.Thomas, MLA of Thiruvalla, and Thamarappally estate owned by a planter from Chengannur were some of the other estates, which used to witness several clashes and retaliatory actions by both sides. One of the reasons was the unilateral decision by the managements to raise the workload of workers, which directed them to tap more number of rubber trees per worker. The managements were looking at only their profit by getting, more trees tapped. In spite of the directives of the Plantation Labour Committee, this was going on and workers had to struggle against it.

10.7.5 Struggles in Punalur and Pathanapuram

O.Sreedharan was an active member of the Working Committee of the Plantation Labour Federation affiliated to the AITUC. He had also held important positions in the trade unions in the Kerala State Farming Corporation, Rehabilitation Rubber Plantations and estates in Thenmala Valley. According to Sreedharan, some of the leading figures in the trade union movement in the estates of Thenmala Valley were P.O.Spencer and Advocate K.C.Thankappan Pillai. In those early years they worked hard to organize both the Communist Party as well its trade union wing.

On May 25, 1954, A.P.Ninan, owner of Kulathupuzha estate deployed his *goondas* against union activists. In this incident one Muthuswamy was stabbed. Similar incidents of attack on trade union activists were reported from the Achankovil Estate also during the same period. P.O.George, K.A.George, C.O.Mathew, S.Kumaran, R.Rajagopalan Nair and P.A.Solomon were the leaders who were organizing workers in the estates as well as the Punalur Paper Mills. As stated elsewhere, the trade union organized by the communists in the Punalur Paper Mills was the main inspiration for forming trade unions in estates.

According to T.M.Prabha, a veteran trade union leader of Kollam, belonging to the UTUC (B) group, the Harrison and Crossfields Estate at Thenmala Valley was always a centre of working class struggles from early 1940s. It was P.P.Wilson who founded the Travancore Thottam Thozhilali Union in the Thenmala Valley and fought several struggles against the *Kangany* system in the estates. Later he left the Communist group and went over to the Congress Socialist Party and later to the Indian Socialist Party and became an MLA. Compared to the native planters, the Europeans were better behaved and willing to settle issues through negotiations if they found the demands of the unions genuine. They had respect for law and democracy. Indian managers were more exploitative, while the European Managers were more moderate.

In that first phase, the AITUC was dominant in the union movement. But very soon the INTUC and UTUC leaders entered the scene. There then emerged a number of confrontations based on inter-union rivalry besides joint struggles against the exploitation meted out by the *Kangany* system and the non-implementation of the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act. In those days estate workers were supplied with various goods at subsidized rates directly from the stores started and run by the Companies. When this facility was unilaterally stopped, the trade unions registered strong protest. Inter-union rivalry between the activists of the AITUC and the UTUC had created a number of unfortunate incidents at T Rambahadur Tea Company. The reason for this was mainly ideological clashes between the CPI and the RSP.

The split of the CPI and the AITUC as stated elsewhere had led to the formation of the CPI (M) and the CITU. In the years before mid 1960s, estate workers in Punalur and Pathanapuram were mostly under the control of AITUC unions. Under these circumstances attempts were made to establish rival CITU unions there particularly in the Rajagiri Estate, Ambanad Estate, Achankovil Estate and also the estates managed by the Malayalam Plantations under the H & C management. Managers of the Malayalam Plantations were mostly Europeans like Southerland and McClean. R.C.Unnithan, M.K.Bhaskaran and V.S.Chandrasekhara Pillai guided the organizational

work of the CITU in the estates. The younger cadres were led by Lalaji Babu, who subsequently rose to a top position in the CITU led All India Plantation Workers Federation with a membership of 2.5 lakh workers as members.

In the Malayalam Plantations, the management refused to talk to the leaders of the CITU led union saying that they did not recognize them. This provoked the CITU leaders and they asked their supporters to encircle the European Manager from 10 am to 5 pm until the police arrived. Following this, the management dismissed 9 workers. Similarly at Ambanad estate the CITU union members were victimized and they retaliated by throwing a bomb at the Manager's bungalow. In this the bungalow was damaged and the Alsatian dog of the manager was killed. Following this a few workers were dismissed and a criminal case was registered. The Manager of Ambanad Estate at that time was one Ansari who was related to the then I.G. of Police of Kerala and also the Nizam of Hyderabad. These connections had given Ansari over confidence in unleashing brutality against the workers and the CITU activists.

In handling the criminal cases charged against the CITU leaders and activists, Lalaji Babu approached pro-CPI (M) lawyers like P.K.Sadasivan and Vakkom Bharathan. But unfortunately, P.K.Sadasivan, though closer to the CPI (M), refused to argue the criminal case on the ground that he was not given his usual fees as advance. This prompted Lalaji Babu to undertake the Law Course and become a lawyer to help the poor workers.

When the LDF Government came to power, the CITU established a firm footing in this plantation area. By that time, the CITU decided to take up the case of the dismissed workers and explore the possibility of getting them reinstated. One Nambiar was then the Personnel Manager of the Estate. Malayalam Plantations were notorious for their anti-labour policies and once they took any decision, they rarely agreed to reverse it. But this Nambiar was different. T.K.Ramakrishnan of the CPI (M) and K.Padmanabhan of the CITU took up the issue of reinstatement of dismissed workers with him. Finally these efforts found result.

Lalaji Babu remembers an incident that happened in 1956 at an estate owned by A.P.Ninan at Achankovil in the centre of a thick forest. Ninan never allowed any trade union to be formed in his estate. He had successfully foiled all attempts at it through brutal tactics. In one such incident, Muthuswamy had become a great martyr. Ninan's henchmen killed him. In this estate, workers sought the help of the CITU and it decided to form a union. Lalaji Babu was instructed by the CITU leadership to take up this challenging work. When he plunged into action, Ninan threatened him by saying that he would kill him. The tussle between them went on for some

time. Finally Ninan was at the end of the road. He did not want to continue to maintain the estate and compromise by allowing a union there. So he decided to sell it. When it was sold Ninan expressed his feelings to Lalaji Babu saying that the estate had been very dear to him and he felt sorry that he was selling it. Since then, the ownership of the Achankovil estate changed many times and at one stage the A.V.T.Company controlled it. Since the estate was located in the centre of a thick forest, it was almost isolated from the other regions. In spite of this location and remoteness and difficulties of reaching the site, the CITU had established majority control of the workers in this estate under their banner.

10.7.6 Another Struggle in Skinnerpuram

During the Liberation Struggle against the EMS Ministry, this estate witnessed certain gruesome incidents. At Vattazhi Mukku several AITUC activists were attacked and seriously injured including the union leader Y.Thomas. Another major incident was the workers' spontaneous struggle against the management's decision not to provide the use of roads inside the estate. The struggle succeeded when the general public also joined it. The estate roads were declared public roads in later years.

The Skinnerpuram estate in the early years never paid minimum wages. When the struggle started against this, the management issued notices terminating the services of a large number of workers. P.K.Kunju was the then Labour Minister and he called several conciliation conferences but the management boycotted them. The unions took out solidarity marches. Finally, the dispute was referred to adjudication at the end of the struggle that lasted 125 days. The management challenged the Award in the High Court and the Supreme Court as it went against their interests. In spite of that the dispute went in favour of the workers. All those whose service was terminated were reinstated with back wages.

In 1974 the estate witnessed another major struggle. Anthraper, as mentioned earlier, owned the estate. The dispute was on the question of quantum of work and the number of workers required. The management held that there were surplus workers and they had to be dismissed. As soon as the management commenced terminating the services of workers one by one the union objected to it. The management declared a lockout. Union leader Mundappally Thomas commenced a hunger Satyagraha that lasted four days. The dispute was settled and the workers were reinstated.

In another incident, the Labour Officer became bold enough to send a show cause notice to Anthraper mainly under pressure from the trade unions.

The Planter just ignored it but took care to inform the Labour Officer to mind his business and warned him not to interfere in his estate. It was well known that anybody who dared to question Anthraper would be found dead in one of the innumerable wells inside the Estate. The attitude of Anthraper provoked the trade unions and a struggle started. After a few days on June 2, 1955 the dispute was referred to the Special Tribunal for adjudication. The main issues that were listed in the Show Cause Notice and in the reference for adjudication were Bonus for 1951-54, increment based on length of service, workload, gratuity, equal pay for equal work, pay during sick leave, night duty allowance, time for feeding children etc. Unfortunately the Government did not allow the Tribunal to function as a counter to the trade union struggle. Panampally Govinda Menon called a conciliation conference and requested the unions not to press the bonus for 1951 and 1952. On other issues the minister advised the unions to accept what the planter was willing to give. The AITUC union did not have any second thoughts on this and they straightforwardly rejected the plea. The High Range Estate Employees' Union decided to continue the struggle. The UTUC, INTUC and PSP unions extended their support to it.

10.7.7 Thenginad Estate Struggle

The Thenginad Estate owned by Thekkeveettil George also saw several struggles during 1968-70. George was an influential member of both the Association of Planters of Kerala (APK) as well as the UPASI. He used to turn down the demands of the trade unions. If the unions did not withdraw, he used to employ *goondas* to let loose physical attacks not only on union activists but also workers. Oppressed by these attacks some of them spontaneously joined the Naxalite movement. Thus union struggles gave way to Naxalite action.

The Nellimukal estate at Sasthamcottah, owned by Balakrishna Pillai, three migrant workers were dismissed. Tension mounted when unions launched a struggle demanding their reinstatement. Violence erupted. Public came out extending their support to the struggle. Finally considering the mood of workers, the estate owner agreed to settle the issue by paying full compensation to those migrants as required by the unions.

10.7.8 Conflict of Ideology

Following the split of the CPI and the AITUC, the left movement in the plantations got divided and clashes between the activists of the two groups used to occur. Within the AITUC itself there arose some ideological conflicts

and misunderstanding between leaders. Two leaders R.C.Unnithan and Mundappally Thomas were expelled from the organization without giving them any notice. The issue was triggered off by an article “Norms for political work” (in Malayalam), in *Rajahamsam* published by Mundappally Thomas. Later the union’s misunderstanding was cleared and in 1980 R.C.Unnithan assumed charge as the General Secretary of the Kunnathur Estate Workers’ Union. The action against Mundappally Thomas was also withdrawn as the misunderstandings got cleared. Thomas was the Secretary of the District Committee of the AITUC in Pathanamthitta during 1998-99.

10.7.9 Struggle in A.V. Thomas Company

In the 1990s many plantation companies in Pathanamthitta had started selling their estates either in full or in part. At the time of sale, though the companies gained, the workers lost their security of job as well as earnings. This was taken by the trade unions in the estates owned by A.V.Thomas Company. The issue was raised by the unions that the company should agree to share the profits from sale of estate land or trees with the workers. The A.V.Thomas Company was the first to make an agreement with the unions in this matter and it was successfully implemented there for some years. But by 1998 this practice was stopped and the main reason was the weak bargaining power of the unions.

The Company started insisting that they would pay gratuity to workers only if the estate worked 240 days continuously. But the ground reality was that this norm could not be achieved always. The union leaders commenced a fast at the gates of the Estate. The workers of the nearby estates and those in the Electricity Board came to express their solidarity. After 19 days of relay fast, a settlement was reached. The management accepted the qualifying period of 180 days, instead of 240 days, when the Kerala High Court issued a directive on this.

10.7.10 Some other leaders

Pathanamthitta plantation sector had been a major centre of trade union movement. Mention was made about a number of trade union leaders who had worked for the betterment of conditions of work and wages of estate workers. Here we attempt to mention about a few more such leaders.

One of them was K.M.Mathew of Kozhencherry. Mathew had joined the Trade Union School at Aluva and worked for the promotion of workers’ education. Wilson, another union leader, was an important figure who in a

later period of his career had joined the ISP and PSP. He had gone to Nedumangad, another plantation centre in Thiruvananthapuram district to organize struggles. He was appointed a Member of the Minimum Wages Committee of 1952 and had associated himself with the veteran leader K.Karunakaran in the fixation of minimum wages. Later the M.P.Menon Commission had looked into the conditions of work and wages of estate workers. N.T.Varghese, another estate union leader, had a weakness as he always jumped himself into action when workers' issues arose.

S.K.Gangadharan, though an employee of the State Transport, had found time to work, not only for transport workers, but also for the estate workers of Pathanamthitta. He got deeply involved in the struggles in Skinnerpuram estate in the Kunnamthur Taluk. He told this author that Anthraper, the estate owner would destroy anyone who agitated against him and his policies. Several activists had been killed inside the estate under the hands of his *goondas*. Anthraper would then see that the bodies of those killed in his estate were disposed of in wells dug inside the estate land. The digging of wells always gave a signal of his atrocities and many workers were forced to leave their unions out of sheer fear for their lives.

Top leaders like P.T.Punnoose, Kottayam Bhasi, T.V.Thomas, Varghese Vaidyan, R.Sugathan and K.C.Mathew were some who had guided the trade union movement in the plantation sector. Besides, Prakkulam Bhasi and N.Sreekantan Nair had also made their impact on the union movement in the estates in Kollam district.

Mention may also be made about K.Thankappan and Thalachara Sukumaran who worked for the Pathanamthitta Taluk Plantation Labour Union. Another leader was Nataraja Pillai who started his career with the Communist Party and the AITUC but subsequently due to ideological differences, shifted himself to the CPI (M) and ended up with the HMS. All the leaders mentioned in the present narratives had suffered many hardships during their work in the trade union movement.

10.8 STRUGGLES IN WAYANAD

Wayanad was originally part of British administered Malabar District. It was known as a vibrant centre of Tea and Coffee Plantations. In later years other plantation crops like cardamom had also made their presence in Wayanad. Being part of British Malabar, Wayanad had acquired a different socio-political and economic environment, which made significant influence on the character and behaviour of both employers as well as workers. Conditions of life and labour were neither better nor worse as compared to

those prevailing in Munnar, Peerumade and Pathanamthitta. The only exception was that some elements and vestiges of Mysore influence got reflected in Wayanad. Families of Gownders and Naickers owned some estates in Wayanad in the early years. As in other parts of Kerala, Wayanad was also drawn into the developments in the political movement, and, as a part of it, working class mobilization had also started. Political leaders of the freedom movement were the first to kindle the spirit of collective consciousness among the working class spread over farms and estates. Wayanad has even today very little of industrialization and as such the size of the industrial workers is insignificant.

10.8.1 Ban on Communist Party

When the Communist party was banned in 1948, the activities of the AITUC in Wayanad had also come to a standstill. At that time only the INTUC could operate openly and freely. The ban on the CPI and AITUC stimulated the growth of the INTUC affiliated Malabar District Estate Workers' Union. Its President was C.K.Govindan Nair, and T.M.Raghavan was the Vice President. K.Kumaran, K.M.Krishnan and Radha Gopi Menon functioned as the General Secretary, Assistant Secretary and the Treasurer respectively.

The AITUC had started to mobilize the estate workers in Wayanad as early as 1946. N.E.Balaram, C.H.Kanaran, A.K.Gopalan, T.Rama Warrier and Gandhi Gopalan reached the Thalappuzha Estate in Mananthavady to work among the estate labour through small meetings and campaigns. In 1946 themselves the estate labour was reported to have conducted a strike demanding an increase in wages. The strike spread from Thalappuzha estate to Arappatta Estate near Meppady. They succeeded in holding a conference with Hey, the European manager and a settlement was reached to increase the daily wage rate by one *anna* (1/16 of a Rupee). But the management did not like the settlement, which, they thought had been forced upon them by the resourceful leaders of workers. Hence they started repressive measures. With their influence with the authorities they got the leaders arrested and some of the leaders went underground to escape arrest.

10.8.2.1 V. N. Sivaraman looks back

It was during this period that V.N.Sivaraman, the present top leader of the AITUC affiliated Wayanad Estate Workers' Union reached the area. Sivaraman's original name was P.V.Ravindranathan, son of Plappally Madhathil Velappan Pillai. His native place was Kavumpady, near

Moovattupuzha in old Travancore. Born in December 1922, he was attracted to the State Congress at the young age of 14 and became a four-anna member at the age of 18 in 1940. Ravindranathan participated in the Quit India movement and demonstrations connected with it. Pappaly, the Police Chief ordered a brutal lathi charge at the demonstrators in the Rajendra Maidan in Kochi, and, Ravindranathan was injured in it. With the help of an uncle, Ravindranathan secured a job at the Minor Products Division of the Tata Oil Mills and Soap Factory. After two years, he left that job and shifted his residence to Moovattupuzha. There he came into contact with progressives and communists like C.S.George, P.T.Mary, Esthos, M.M.Lawrence, Mathai Kunju and Aliyar. This prompted him to establish a communist party cell there in 1946. There were already similar cells in Karumkara, Kacherithazham and Petta. New cells were formed in Maarady, Kathathy and Velloor Kunnu.

During the Punnapra-Vayalar struggle and its aftermath the Dewan had let loose repression of an unprecedented scale mainly targeting the communists. When the Dewan left Travancore and by integration of states Travancore and Cochin became a reality, many thought that the character of the state and the style of government would undergo a big change. But that did not happen as evidenced by later developments. The approach of the Government led by Parur T.K.Narayana Pillai was equally worse and anti-people as that of the Dewan. He also took a special interest in eliminating the communists.

Koothattukulam in the Kottayam district was an active centre of communists. C.K.Viswanathan, P.S.Srinivasan, K.T.Jacob, Jacob Philip, C.S.George, Narasimha Iyer, P.T.Mary, V.C.Mary, Alli, Mathai Master, Issac, V.P.Esthos, and others were in the frontline of popular struggles. Ambayya Nadar, the notorious police officer led a team of policemen to raid the *Chaultry* at Koothattukulam to brutally attack the communist leaders staying there. In the direct confrontation between the communist activists and the police, Oommen, a head constable was killed and several others on both the sides got injured. A march was held in June 1, 1948 at Koothattukulam to register protest against the attacks. Activists came from different cells of the Party and they faced the attack by the police. Four activists were killed in the fierce encounter. Police was searching for the activists with a view to take them into custody. Many including Ravindranathsan went underground. Finally he escaped from Travancore-Cochin and reached Kozhikode in Malabar. He established contacts with the communists there with the help of C.M.Kunhiraman Nambiar who was working in the Prabhat Book House. Since Ravindranathan was in the hit list of the Travancore-Cochin Police, and branded as a criminal involved in the attack on the Koottattukulam police station, Nambiar suggested a change of his name from P.V.Ravindranathan to

V.N.Sivaraman. Nambiar gave Sivaraman a letter addressed to K.M.Krishnan Master of Meppady at the fag end of 1949. It was thus, Sivaraman, at the age of 27, reached Meppady. Since then till date he was in the thick of trade union movement among plantation workers in Wayanad.

Reference had been made earlier that during the period of the ban on the CPI, the AITUC too had become non-functional and this had given stimulus to the INTUC in Wayanad. Krishnan Master introduced Sivaraman to estate workers who were friendly to the Communist Party. Master took him first to the Attamala and Chooralmala estates and made him an organizer on a monthly salary of Rs.60. In those days no union leader or organizer could do the campaigns in the open and so had to move about incognito and operate in secrecy. Damodaran Nambiar, Chathu Master and Mathai Master worked with Sivaraman. Occasionally they used to travel to Meppady to discuss various issues and seek guidance by meeting Krishnan Master.

10.8.2.2 Conditions of life and labour

The conditions of life and labour in the Wayanad estates were inhuman. The workers subsisted under slave conditions and enjoyed no rights of their own. The estate owners, planters and their officials had a field day to experiment with repressive measures and instruments of exploitation. In 1904 the Madras Government had promulgated a system of labour contract work under which the Kangaris through sub-kangaris or middlemen did recruitment of workers. Most of the people recruited for estate work were agricultural workers. The state, the police, planters and the *kanganis* always stood united and wanted the workers to be kept under slave conditions. The courts were also pro-employer. Workers had thus to face these forces on the one side, while putting in hard work at low wages and in unsanitary conditions of existence. Besides, the workers faced cruel onslaughts on them by the police and the *goondas* employed by the planters and also attack of wild animals from the forests. A lasting solution for these would be to take up a fight through a collective organization like the trade union.

10.8.2.3 Attempts at unionisation

The 700 workers employed in the Centennial Rock Tea Estate falling under the Attamala and Chooralmala divisions had been partly mobilized by the INTUC Union Estate Committee President Fakhir Mohamed and Secretary Kuttikrishna Marar. One day Krishnan Master asked Sivaraman to accompany Fakhir Mohammed and others to the Estate. In early 1950, Sivaraman thus reached Attamala. About 70 per cent of the workers there

were recruits of T.K.Kunhiraman *Kangany* who hailed from Thalassery. Though Boltbee was the European Manager, the *Kangany* was managing the whole show with the help of a dozen *goondas*. Below the *Kangany* there were many *Kolmaistries* (a kind of supervisors) who were responsible for directly dealing with the workers. When Sivaraman tried to establish personal contacts with individual estate workers, the ground realities of life in the estates came to graphic relief. According to Sivaraman, he was shocked to find the palatial bungalow where Kunhiraman *Kangany* was staying at Choormala. He was being served by dozens of female aides who were at his beck and call. Around his bungalow about 300 workers were put up in dirty and unsanitary coolie lines. No one could come nearer to the bungalow unless he secured advance permission.

There was Kanaran Maistry who hailed from Badagara. He was a sensible person and under him worked around 70 workers. Sivaraman decided to utilize these workers to build up contacts with those working under Kunhiraman *Kangany*. Within a period of six months, Sivaraman succeeded in mobilizing, the workers who were under the group and surveillance of Mahali Maistry, Chinnappan, Njanasundaram and Chellan Maistry. Gradually Sivaraman extended his reach and influence on the workers under Monappa, Subbiah Shetty, and Lingu Chetty who hailed from Karnataka. Most of the workers showed readiness to join the union of Sivaraman. He succeeded in organizing small public meetings in the evenings and not only the workers but also their families attended them.

10.8.2.4 A sad episode

The workers in Attamala and Choormala had some common roots. Most of them had come from the eastern regions of Palakkad and some were blood relations. Sivaraman appropriately exploited this to consolidate the union membership and build up unity among the ranks. In 1951 there occurred some tragic incidents during the 60th birthday celebrations of the *Kangany*. Kottakkat Damodaran and his wife Kalyani had been working in the estate for more than a decade that gave them only days of deprivation and utter destitution. They had an existence of semi starvation and had no extra cloth to change what they were wearing. Damodaran had been directed to go over to the bungalow and engage in some work on the day previous to the birthday celebration. Sumptuous food was being prepared and Damodaran had a dream that he and his wife Kalyani could at least have a full meal on that day. On the day of the birthday celebrations, Damodaran proceeded to the *Kangany's bungalow* and he told the master there that he would soon return and give his cloth to his wife so that she could also go there and take her meal. Kalyani waited till evening but did not find her husband returning.

According to information available with Sivaraman, this woman, Kalyani, committed suicide by jumping from a cliff at Soochippara above the Choormalmala River. This episode throws light into the pitiable conditions of life of estate workers in Wayanad. The body of Kalyani was recovered, taken in the bullock cart of the *Kangany* for conducting post-mortem at Vythiri. The body was cremated after three days.

Sivaraman and his colleagues took up the story of Kalyani and used it in their campaigns. Within one month 90 per cent of the workers had come forward to join the Union of Sivaraman. As a result nearly all the workers had become members of one union or other. Soon the communist activists succeeded in extending their influence on workers in the estates at Chemprapik, which were under the ownership of Pierce Leslie Company. This caused some heart burning among the Congress and INTUC leaders and they feared that their influence in the plantation sector would decline in due course because of the inroads being made by the Communists.

10.8.2.5 Formation of new communist unions

The Union's main demand was to end the *Kangany* system. The communists held a meeting at Panthadimattathu, near Choormalmala estate. The communists were isolated at the meeting since the INTUC activists dominated the union committee. In a meeting held later in 1951 at Meppady Committee Office, C.K.Govindan Nair, the Congress leader raised objections against V.N.Sivaraman and the Committee decided to remove him from the Union. Krishnan Master remained a sad onlooker. The communists were expecting this development and they decided to chart out a course of action. Within a month, a new union was to be organized for the workers employed in the Centennial Rock Estate. The general body of the workers was held and it decided to register the Malayalam Plantation Estate Workers' Union (MPEWU). C.H.Kanaran was made the President and V.N.Sivaraman, the General Secretary. K Kuttikrishna Marar and V.K.Kunhikannan were the Assistant Secretaries and the Treasurer was M.K.Ramankutty.

Soon another union led by the communists was registered in Chemprapik estate. In 1952 general elections were held in Malabar. The ban on the Communist Party was withdrawn. Vyloppilly Ramankutty Menon, K.A.Beerankunji, P.V.Varghese Vaidyan and V.N.Sivaraman took the initiative to form the General Estate Workers' Union with headquarters at Meenangady. At Pozhuthana another union named Kurichiylmala Plantation Workers' Union was formed in 1952 at the initiative of P.Koyamaster. The CPI deputed P.Sankar to guide the unionisation work. All the unions thus formed were got affiliated to the AITUC.

10.8.2.6 Consolidation of unions

In 1954 all the four unions called a joint meeting, which was inaugurated by P.Jeevanandam of Tamil Nadu. This meeting integrated the four unions into one with P.Sankar as President and V.N.Sivaraman as General Secretary and got it affiliated to the AITUC. Later P.Sankar took the initiative to form the North Wayanad Estate Workers' Union with headquarters at Mananthavady. Thus by 1954 there emerged the Wayanad Estate Workers' Union in Mananthavady in North Wayanad in Kannur district and both the unions were affiliated to the AITUC. These unions played an important role in the estate workers' struggle for ending the *Kangany System*, the prime item in their agenda. The demand for a single comprehensive law for plantation labour was also raised. The Government referred these issues to the Industrial Tribunal at Coimbatore. Skandanarasimha Chettiar was its presiding officer. He conducted meetings to collect evidence as well as any relevant information required by it. Following the Report of the Tribunal, V.V.Giri, the Union Labour Minister took the initiative to frame the Plantation Labour Act, 1957.

The United Planters' Association (UPASI) was the representative body of estate companies and planters. They expressed their opposition to the Plantation Labour Act but the Government stuck to its pro-labour position and implemented the Act. Under this Act, plantation workers began to get innumerable benefits which among other things included free medical aid, minimum wages, DA, gratuity, maternity benefit, pension and other retirement benefits, leave, housing, schooling etc. The government was compelled to enact this Law in the shortest time possible. Finding the mood of the Government and the unions of estate workers, the UPASI shed its initial opposition and expressed its willingness to cooperate with them and implement the Plantation Labour Act, which was considered as the *Magna Carta* of plantation labour.

10.8.3 Split in the CPI and AITUC

Reference had been made elsewhere about the factors leading to the split in the CPI. Though the CPI split into the CPI and CPI (M), the split in the AITUC was avoided for two or three years as many senior party leaders held the view that the AITUC was a class organization and must be independent of political parties. Contrary to this, a split emerged and the CITU was formed as an adjunct of the CPI (M). But this view did not receive all round support. Following the split, the CITU started capturing both unions as well as workers from others. Meanwhile new Central Trade Unions were

formed and they started forming trade unions for plantation labour. Today, as is every where, in Wayanad also the estate or plantation labour had come under the control of AITUC, CITU, INTUC, HMS, UTUC, STU and BMS and it has promoted inter-union rivalry to a certain extent. However, in Wayanad these unions have succeeded in establishing a strong bond of unity and always work together for the estate workers.

10.8.4 The CITU led struggles

Reference had been made earlier that P.Sankar had been elected as the President of the Communist led union of estate workers. Sankar had a chequered career in the Communist movement in Ceylon where he had gained lot of experience in organizing the estate workers there. It was he who instilled a sense of commitment and discipline among the activists who were trying to organize the estate workers in Wayanad. One of the activists who emerged into a top position in the plantation labour movement in Kerala was K.Padmanabhan. Though he worked in the CPI and the AITUC earlier, after the split in these organizations, he shifted to the CPI (M) and the CITU.

10.8.5 K. Padmanabhan looks back

Born in Chelakkara, Thrissur, K.Padmanabhan discontinued his school education on account of financial difficulties. He migrated to Wayanad in search of work and a livelihood. Initially without much difficulty, Padmanabhan secured work in the Coffee estates as a Writer, an office job. He soon had involved in political work and got elected to the Malabar District Board in 1954. In 1955 he was brought under the spell of leaders like P.Sankar, P.R.Warriar and C.Uthaman. According to him, the Malabar Plantation Workers' Union was registered in 1952. The ruling wage rate in the estates in 1956 was Re.1 as .5 (Rs.1.31). With great struggles it could be raised to Rs. 2 as .4 (Rs.2.25) as a result of the Award of the Industrial Tribunal presided over by Skandanarasimha Chettiar. The management questioned the Award in the Supreme Court and secured an interim stay. Finally the wage was fixed at Re. 1 as 11 ½. (Rs.1.71)

Since Malabar was under Madras Government, all decisions concerning labour depended on the moods of those who were in charge of governance there. Padmanabhan, however, pointed out certain specific gains secured by estate workers as a result of their struggles. For instance, the so-called Madras settlement secured 15 days gratuity to workers. G.Ramanujam, the INTUC leader, played a big role in it. The AITUC unions were not satisfied with this settlement and they launched struggles. In privately owned

estates, the struggles were met by *goonda* attacks and victimization of unionised workers. In one of the small estates owned by A.K.Kadarkunju Mohammed Haji of Mahe, two workers were dismissed and false criminal cases were registered against them. The struggle in that estate continued for about six months. Incidentally it was interesting to note that V.R.Krishna Iyer was the advocate of Kadarkunju and this Krishna Iyer later became the Minister of Law in the EMS Ministry in 1957 and was described as a great judge with a progressive mind. He was even elevated to the Supreme Court and served there till his retirement. Even today he is deeply involved in social activism and is a much sought after speaker on subjects of law and human rights and, of course, politics.

10.8.6.1 P. Kunhikannan looks back

P.Kunhikannan is one of the top ranking CITU leaders who works among the estate workers in Wayanad. Born in 1929 at Kannapuram, Edakkeppuram in the Chirackal taluk, his entry into the trade union movement in Malabar was through the activities of the *Balasanghom* (children's club) in 1938. T.V.Krishnan (who later became a renowned correspondent for the BLITZ weekly) and M.Anandan inspired him. Kunhikannan had occasion to work in the campaign committees constituted for the election of Communist candidates to the Malabar District Board. The exploits of A.V.Kunhambu, Subramonia Shenoy and Kanthalot Kunhambu made Kunhikannan aspire to become a communist and became an active member of the Communist movement going underground and moving from one shelter to another to escape capture by the police. He remembers how he and his colleagues prepared anti-British posters by hiding in cremation grounds during the thick of night and finishing their work in candlelight. It was indeed a very risky venture. In 1943 the ban on the Communist Party was lifted in Malabar. When the USSR was attacked by Germany the Party put forward its thesis on the People's War and supported Britain. This change in the Party's stand had to be given wide publicity among the public. This was the task assigned to the younger activists in the party.

Kunhikannan had witnessed a number of struggles by peasants in different parts of Malabar and particularly the brutal handling of the struggle by the Malabar Special Police (MSP). At Cheruthazham when the drama "*Anaadha*" written by T.V.Krishnan was being staged to mobilize funds for the Party, the MSP forces attacked those playing on the stage. Kunhikannan was then only 14 years old. In 1946 Kunhikannan joined the Hindusthan Mills as a textile worker since he had learnt that work also. P.C.Joshi, the Secretary of the CPI visited Chirackal taluk and Mohan Kumaramangalam came to the Town Hall at Kannur to speak on the Party line. In 1948 following the

Calcutta Thesis, repression against Party workers had been stepped up. During this period Kunhikannan started a small sawmill at his home.

Kunhikannan and Ambu Nair were relatives, but active communists. They were arrested and brutally attacked in the lock-up. The police wanted them to write a confession statement saying that they had planned to attack and loot the government treasury and that now they were willing to resign from the Party. When they refused to oblige, the police beat them till they fell unconscious. It was during this period that Moyarath Sankaran was killed in police lock-up in Kannur.

When Kunhikannan was released, he went to Bombay and secured work in a silk mill at its weaving and spinning department. There he got deeply involved in the activities of the Silk Mazdoor Union. For this he was dismissed and he moved on to the Paragon Textiles in Worli. There he started the Kerala Thozhilali Sanghom and mobilized Malayalee workers there. When he was distributing trade union literature among the workers, the matter was reported to the management. They transferred him from the Folding Section to the Weaving Section. When a Jobber physically beat a worker, Kunhikannan intervened and there was a scuffle and direct confrontation. The management could no longer tolerate Kunhikannan and he was dismissed. He then decided to return to Kerala. His father had also written to him about this.

In 1954 Kunhikannan took charge as the Secretary of the CPI Local Committee at Kannapuram. During this period he had worked very closely with K.Damodaran, V.Narayanan Nair, A.V.Kunhambu and Azhikodan Raghavan. At that time Azheekodan Raghavan was in charge of Party activities in Wayanad. It was this contact with Azheekodan Raghavan that brought Kunhikannan to the Wayanad sector. There he started working for the Wayanad Estate Labour Union as its Secretary. He participated in a hunger march in that year and saw the ground reality of the life and labour of estate workers. There were no motorable roads in certain areas in Wayanad. On certain days he had to walk 50-55 kms for moving from one centre to the other. Being a pure vegetarian he found subsistence difficult and the severe cold climate did not suit him in the beginning.

In 1956 Wayanad had a large number of small estates. The INTUC was concentrating more on the workers in the large estates run by big companies including foreign companies. The control of the *Kanganis* on the estate workers was strong. The workers had to pay a part of their wages to the *Kangany* in order to get regular work. They worked like slaves and had to bear the brutality and abuse meted out by the inhuman *Kangany*. Workers were housed in one-room sheds called lines. This room had to be used for living, cooking and sleeping. No latrines were provided. The Labour Officer

was stationed in Coonoor and was not easily accessible. The visits by Plantation Inspectors were rare. The *Kanganis* were mostly supporters of the Congress and due to this the INTUC unions could not take any issue with the management. The *Kanganis* were reported to have instructed their workers to join the INTUC union.

10.8.6.2 Edappetty Estate Struggle, 1956

In those days the native planters were more brutal than the European planters in their treatment of estate workers. The former used their *goondas* against workers who erred. Even if a struggle commenced, by evening the same would be withdrawn as the native planters liberally used to bribe the striking workers. On receiving the bribes the strikers would abandon the struggle and report for work. The struggle in the Edappetty Estate thus failed to reach a successful end.

10.8.6.3 Arimula Estate Struggle

Ranga Iyer owned this estate. The struggle was for early implementation of the Plantation Labour Act. The management started the termination of service of several workers and union activists. Kunhikannan was the convenor of the Action Council. When a march of workers was held, there were hardly seven workers in it. But in spite of the lack of enthusiasm and non-participation and non-involvement of the workers, Kunhikannan claimed that this struggle lasted 40 days. Finally the management agreed to reinstate all workers.

10.8.6.4 Strike in small estates

A reference was made earlier to the reference of a strike in small estates to the Industrial Tribunal in Coimbatore presided over by Skandanarasimha Chettiar in 1956. The planters contested the Award but the Court granted a small interim increase in wages. On April 5, 1957 after the EMS Ministry took over, efforts were made to settle the dispute. The unions had demanded 7 *annas* (Rs.0.43) for male workers and 5 *annas* (Rs.0.31) for the female workers, but the Tribunal had recommended only 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ *annas* (Rs.0.14) and 1 and 3/4 *annas* (Rs.0.10) respectively.

The Government called a conciliation conference and invited the UPASI and also the trade unions. The INTUC was represented by the veteran trade unionist G.Ramanujam. Captain Perumal, A.V.Radha Gopi Menon and

Raman Nair represented other unions. The AITUC Federation registered a protest and launched a one-day token strike on April 15, 1957 a day after the settlement was reached. According to the settlement, wages of workers were to be fixed at Re.1 as.11 ½ (Rs.1.71) for male workers, and, Re.1 as.7 (Rs.1.43) for female workers. The AITUC could not agree to this. For the first time, the CPI and AITUC activists held a Red Flag protest. They described the settlement as a great sabotage by other trade unions.

10.8.6.5 Tactics of Planters

Indeed, the Plantation Labour Act was considered as a *Magna Carta* for estate labour but its provisions were not satisfactorily implemented. To escape the commitments related to the Plantation Labour Act, the planters adopted ingenious tactics. The Planters in Kuzhuthunad started splitting their estates into small bits. In 1958 the management of the Vengakotta estate sold it to another. As per the agreement, the new owner could discharge anybody he wanted and employ anybody he liked. The Union protested. The INTUC sent black legs. Those who had worked in the estate for a long time decided to launch a struggle. Kunhikannan led a march and the black legs blocked their movement leading to mutual fights. Several workers were injured and hospitalised.

Kunhikannan had functioned as the General Secretary of the AITUC affiliated Estate Workers' Union, which was having V.N.Sivaraman as its President during the late 1950s. During this period in one of the estates in Wayanad the police registered cases against Varghese and 12 other workers and AITUC activists. Initially Govindan Nambiar, the Circle Inspector of Police sent Raghavan Nair, the Head Constable to ask these workers to come over to the police station. When they refused, they were taken into custody and put up in the lock-up. Agitated mob of workers encircled the police lock-up. Some of them went to Paraman, the Magistrate and secured a bale. But the Circle Inspector refused to implement the Magistrate's orders. When this was conveyed to the Magistrate, he became furious and rushed to the police lock-up and told the police officer that he might be forced to take disciplinary action against him for defying his orders. The police officer had to bend his knees and those arrested were immediately released.

The Vengakotta uprising was a notable popular uprising, which did not last long as all the issues had been settled quickly. But during the anti-communist liberation struggle directed against the Government led by E.M.S.Namboodiripad, the anti-communist front brought out a charge sheet against the government accusing it for the release of those involved in that uprising. The incident got undue media coverage.

10.8.5.6 Unity call fails

It was in 1968 that an attempt was made to bring about some amount of unity among trade unions operating among plantation labour. This led to the formation of a United Front called the Plantation Labour Federation. It launched a one-day token strike in all estates through out the State. A joint action council was also duly formed. Unfortunately the anti-communist trade unions did not join this body. When a march was organized in Meppady by the AITUC, Kunhikannan issued instructions that those who participated in the march should not hold any flags including the Red Flag. This was aimed at bringing all workers under one banner. But the INTUC unions boycotted it and they held a parallel march thereby defeating the plan for building unity among the unions.

10.8.7 Struggle by Coffee Estate workers

In Wayanad, the plantation sector had estates growing Coffee, Tea, Rubber and various spices. From the early days the workers in the Coffee estates were paid wages that were lower than that paid for tea estate workers. This anomaly was an irritant among the plantation workers, though the nature of work in the estates had only marginal differences.

The AITUC union took up this issue and demanded that the Coffee estates should also pay wages on par with the tea estates. It was during this struggle that pro-communist workers decided to carry the Red Flag in their hands during their marches and demonstrations. Mathai Manjooran, the State Labour Minister, called a conciliation conference in his chamber. In this conference the Association of Planters of Kerala (APK) and the United Planters Association of South India (UPASI) represented the planters. They made some sarcastic remarks describing the trade union leaders as wild animals. The minister became furious and directed them to withdraw their remarks and tender an apology. This was a turning point and the Minister brought about a settlement very quickly.

10.8.8 Few more struggles

Several times the plantation labour in Wayanad had been forced to conduct struggles for the implementation of the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act. They had raised their protest against lack of efficient inspection of the estates by the officers. The attempt by the APK and the UPASI had to be countered and resisted. For instance, the APK had once refused to allow the grant of Festival Holidays and when unions registered their protest they

went to the High Court and secured a stay. The Unions decided to hold noisy demonstrations before the High Court at Ernakulam. After long delay, the workers got back their festival holidays.

The dependents of male workers alone had the privilege of getting free medical aid. The unions found this as unjust and wanted to be suitably changed. Workers were mobilized to hold demonstrations against the injustice. During the period of Emergency as was it elsewhere, the plantation sector in Wayanad was also peaceful as no one dared to flout the black laws and ordinances. In 1976 K.Padmanabhan was elected the General Secretary of the Plantation Labour Federation. During that period Padmanabhan was actually operating from underground and guiding the organization. P.Kunhikannan was functioning as the Acting Secretary. On one occasion Kunhikannan got a notice printed and wanted it to be circulated among the workers. The police was sent to search for him. Kunhikannan went underground and hid himself safely in the house of a Congressman where the police used to call on regularly to put their signatures on a register, which used to be inspected by Superior officers to ensure vigilance by the subordinates.

10.8.9 Lockout in E.N.S.T. Company

In 1968 there was a lockout in the estates owned by ENST Company. This was a Scottish Company. E.M.S.Namboodiripad was the Chief Minister and Mathai Manjooran, a veteran trade unionist was the Labour Minister at that time. Their intervention did not help resolve the dispute. T.P.G.Namboodiri, the union leader suggested that workers should act and take over the estates. Morarji Desai, the Deputy Prime Minister of India at that time had come to Coonoor to address a meeting organized by the UPASI. There he was informed about the lockout of estates and the alleged threat of workers on taking over the estates. Morarji was firm and declared that such lawlessness on the part of the workers and their unions would not be allowed and assured the members of the UPASI all his support. He even cited the experience of Indonesia when workers forced out the British companies from that country and at that point the British Government boldly intervened and gave a fitting reply to the law-breakers. Mathai Majooran, the State Labour Minister in Kerala was tactful. He called a conciliation conference and in that the issue was amicably settled.

Among other notable struggles in the Wayanad plantations, mention has to be made to the regular demand for the payment of annual bonus. In the early years the estates paid bonus to its workers at different rates and few estates used to express their inability to pay any bonus. This led to struggles

here and there. But when some kind of centralized bargaining started, workers began to get a uniform rate of bonus irrespective of the estates where they worked. The formation of the APK and UPASI on the side of the planters and the federations of trade unions like the Plantation Labour Federation on the side of workers helped to sustain centralized bargaining. Once the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC) was formed as a tripartite forum, almost all issues concerning the plantations were discussed and settled amicably.

10.8.10 P.K. Gopalan looks back

In the Wayanad plantation sector the names of V.N.Sivaraman of the AITUC, P.Kunhikannan of the CITU and P.K.Gopalan of the INTUC were the most loved and respected by the estate workers. As mentioned earlier, when the Communist Party was banned, the Congress activists could gain entry into the trade union movement in the plantations. When the ban was lifted, the AITUC started building up the lost ground. But this did not adversely hit the fortunes of the INTUC thanks to the pioneering work done by C.K.Govindan Nair, A.V.Radha Gopi Menon (brother of A.V.Kuttimalu Amma), Narayana Kurup, Devan, T.M.Raghavan and K.Kumaran.

Born in 1932 at Edathanattukara in Palakkad, P.K.Gopalan had spent his childhood at Wayanad where his father was working in an estate. According to him, workers began to join trade unions enthusiastically as early as 1946. During that year there occurred an incident. Devar and T.M.Raghavan, union activists, had physically stopped Anthraper, the Estate Manager on the middle of a road and secured his signature on a paper containing terms of settlement on certain urgent issues. This incident, though a kind of violation of law, got all-round support from the estate workers. Trade unions were formed in estates located in Aripetta, Thalappuzha and Mananthavady.

10.8.10.1 Madras Agreement

The 19-day fast conducted by K.Kumaran was a great event in the trade union movement in Wayanad. C.K.Govindan Nair was the President of the Union. C.Rajagopalachari known as Rajaji was the Chief Minister of Madras and K.P.Kutty Krishnan Nair, another prominent leader of the Congress, was a Minister in his cabinet. Kutty Krishnan Nair himself was a trade unionist and he was particular that a colleague like Kumaran's life should be saved. But Rajaji was furious but later he agreed to take initiative to resolve the dispute. He arranged to send a telegram to request Kumaran to go over to Madras to have a discussion with him. Meanwhile, the managements

informed Rajaji that they were not willing to yield to the demands made by the unions. At this, Rajaji directed the Labour Commissioner to draw up a settlement and get the signatures of the two parties and then make a report to him without delay. Thus the Madras Agreement was reached. Under this, estate workers secured an increase in wages as well as gratuity. It was after this that the Gratuity Act was enacted.

Compared to the Tea estates, the workers in the Coffee estates in Wayanad were not well unionised. During the early period they were reluctant to join trade unions. Their wages were also lower. Jinachandran was the Chairperson of the Wayanad Coffee Estate Owners' Association and that was a strong body, which resisted successfully the timid struggles organized by the unions. It was during this period, according to P.K.Gopalan, that a few communists attempted to penetrate into the INTUC, pleading that they wanted to work with the INTUC. But the INTUC leaders, particularly C.K.Govindan Nair, who asked these people to go away, recognized their ulterior motive.

10.8.11 Post 1968 scene

After 1968 Wayanad saw the emergence of working class solidarity cutting across political ideologies and the credit goes to the leaders like V.N.Sivasraman (AITUC), P.Kunhikannan (CITU) and P.K.Gopalan (INTUC). New unions had been formed by the STU and BMS. They too agreed to join a single Trade Union Action Council comprising leaders of all trade unions in the Wayanad Plantations Sector. This came to be called the Wayanad Model. When P.K.Gopalan (INTUC) held the Chairmanship of this Action Council, an important decision was to resolve all disputes in Wayanad Plantations through direct negotiation. Conferences were held and amicable settlements were reached on several issues. One outstanding settlement needs to be highlighted. The Action Council agreed that estates could pay reduced wages when product prices of tea, coffee and rubber registered a decline. Similarly when these prices increased, workers would have a legitimate right to receive proportionate increase in wages.

Today the plantations in the Wayanad region are on the decline due to exogenous factors like adverse trends in product prices, liberal cheap imports, decline in India's share in global markets, high incidence of taxes, unplanned expansion and poor management of estates, failure in replanting in time and shortage of working capital and high cost of funds. But the planters would also highlight low productivity of labour and comparatively higher wage rates as causes for the decline. It is very difficult to say that trade union movement had been the singular factor causing the decline of the plantations in Wayanad.

10.9 STRUGGLES IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Thiruvananthapuram district comprises of some areas in the southeastern side of the Kerala where a large number of small and medium estates had been set up mostly under private initiative. Ponmudi, Vithura, Brymore and Bonakkad estates were the most important ones in this area. Conditions of life and labour in these estates were not better or worse than those in other regions. Here also a large proportion of workforce in the estates in the higher altitudes are of Tamil origin, since in the initial formative years workers from the plains showed little interest to trek to the hills in search of work. With such composition of the work force, and the extremely unfavourable conditions of topography and climate, unionisation of workers by outside labour took some time. Thiruvananthapuram, however, had one advantage in promoting unionisation since it was the seat of Travancore Government and as such had been witnessing popular movements and struggles, particularly with the advent of the State Congress. As such in the early years, the leaders of the State Congress promoted the union movement in the plantations in Thiruvananthapuram. But in later years, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) leaders made an inroad in to the plantation industry in the district. This led to some inter-party and inter-union rivalry in the estate centres. We attempt below to narrate some struggles in the estates. Already in an earlier chapter on the Union Movement in Thiruvananthapuram some struggles in the plantations in that district have been documented. Every effort has been made to avoid repetition of narration. Here we confine to those struggles that have not been mentioned there. We do not claim that this is comprehensive account. Strict chronology of events has not been followed.

10.9.1 Struggle in Mary Gold Estate

In the plantation sector of Thiruvananthapuram district the activists of the State Congress formed the early trade unions and some of them later had come out to organize the PSP. But as mentioned elsewhere, the entry of the RSP and left activists brought some amount of inter-union rivalry. Such rivalry created issues in the Mary Gold Estate where some workers decided to leave the PSP led union to join the UTUC. This led to some clashes. In them the PSP activists attacked some workers who had crossed over to the UTUC union. One worker belonging to the UTUC union was wounded and another was tied to a pole. The PSP activists were having a field day. They even destroyed crops and cut down banana and plantain trees.

When K.C.Vamadevan and a few union activists of the UTUC, visited the lines to make an on the spot study of the situation, stones were hurled at them¹³. They were also greeted with abusive slogans. The leaders and the activists of the UTUC were forced to run away for shelter. The news spread like wild fire. Pro-UTUC workers from nearby estates ran towards the Mary Gold estate and directly confronted the activists of the rival PSP union. Everybody was searching for the whereabouts of Vamadevan and his colleagues who ran away earlier. At last they were tracked down. Even though Vamadevan expressed a desire for getting hospital treatment for his injuries, the local activists and workers belonging to the UTUC kept him under their constant vigil and the leader was forced to undergo traditional Ayurvedic treatment. Next day a mass rally was held at Palode to register the protests of workers in the estates. On that day the workers deserted the Mary Gold Estate in order to attend the meeting at Palode. Some of them were prevented from going to Palode by the authorities of the Brymore estate. When this was resisted clashes occurred. After these episodes the UTUC union established its control over the workers of the Mary Gold estate.

10.9.2 The Hundred Acre Estate Struggle, 1953

Vithura was a predominantly plantation area located northeast of Thiruvananthapuram. The major crop here was Rubber and there were a number of small rubber plantations or estates. The workforce mainly consisted of rubber tree tappers who were recruited by *kanganis*. In 1953 in one of the small rubber estates, the owner terminated the services of two tapping workers. Negotiations to settle the dispute failed. Even the attempts made by the Labour Department to settle it through conciliation failed. M.Aboobacker Kunju led the trade union in this estate. When there was no response from the estate owner, the union leader started an indefinite hunger strike. When there was no end to the dispute even after four days, the union requested K.C.Vamadevan to reach the spot. When Vamadevan reached the spot he found a large gathering of agitated workers from nearby small rubber estates. They held a torch light procession and shouted slogans demanding the reinstatement of the dismissed workers. Both the estate owner and the workers stood their ground. Soon students boycotted classes and demonstrated their support to the striking workers. The public of Vithura threatened to observe a *hartal*.

On the seventh day of the struggle T.Ananthasankara Iyer, the Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) announced that he would come all the way from Thiruvananthapuram to the site. Meanwhile Raghavan Pillai, the Sub Inspector of Kazhakkottam arrived near the estate known as Noorekker Estate (Hundred Acre estate) with a posse of police constables. To

reach the estate, one had to cross a shaking hanging bridge. It would sway to the left and right dangerously when anyone stepped on to it. Raghavan Pillai did not dare to walk over the bridge due to fear of falling down. But when the ASP came, he himself crossed the bridge and asked every body to do so. Since Raghavan Pillai, the Sub Inspector was shaking with fear, he had to be carried by his subordinates. The trade union leaders requested the ASP to intervene and put pressure on the estate owner to take back the two workers. Though the ASP did so, the estate owner was adamant. The struggle continued. On the tenth day Vithura saw a *harthal*.

Meanwhile the Labour Commissioner had invited the parties to a conference. Informal discussions took place and various formulae were examined to resolve the dispute. Finally a formula was put forward which got general acceptance. According to it, the estate owner would reinstate the workers with back wages. After one week these workers would resign and written letters regarding it would be submitted to the estate owner at the time of signing the settlement itself. Those who resigned should be paid all benefits as per the law. During the period from the date of the agreement and the date of resignation, the workers would have the right to work but they would not do the work. But the estate owner would give them due attendance and pay them wages for these days. These terms were agreeable to both sides and this unique agreement was signed. Labour Commissioner was happy at the turn of events. The estate owner who was adamant from day one became flexible and agreed to reach a settlement. The union also did not continue its pressure tactics and agreed to be a little flexible since they knew that the only point that the estate owner was insisting was that he would not reinstate the workers whom he had dismissed earlier. The above settlement brought into graphic relief the necessity of appropriate "give and take" by all parties to the dispute as a way to resolve complex disputes.

10.9.3 Brymore and Bonakkad struggles

The Brymore Tea Estate was originally under the ownership of the Ponmudi Tea and Rubber Company Ltd with its headquarters in Coonoor. This European Company employed about 700 workers in its tea estate in Brymore in Thiruvananthapuram district. In the beginning these workers were unionised with the hard work rendered by the PSP activists under the leadership of Felix Fernandez, A. Subbayya and two unique women, Alamelu and Saraswathy. These sisters used to enter the estate and make enquiries about the life and labour of workers there, circumventing the opposition of the company. Initially work on unionisation was done both in the Ponmudi and Bonakkad areas. The union was named the Travancore-Cochin Estate Workers' Union.

According to Karippur Srikumar, an old trade union and social activist, when the trade union was organized in the Merchiston Estate, the company management brought *goondas* from Tamil Nadu to attack the union activists and create terror among the poor estate workers. Provoked by the *goonda* attacks the workers marched to the Managers' quarters and threw stones at it. Subbayya and Srikumar were identified as persons who instigated the workers and a case was registered against them. This case went up to the High Court. Later the Merchiston Estate was taken over by Birlas.

In the Bonakkad Estate another notable struggle was staged on the issue of second woollen blanket to workers. As per the convention and law, the workers in the estate were entitled to a second woollen blanket but the management did not grant it as it argued that the estate was located at an elevation below 2500 ft from sea level. During this struggle, Karippur Srikumar held a hunger Satyagraha that lasted 17 days. He was arrested and forcibly admitted to hospital. The case was referred to the Industrial Tribunal, due to the timely intervention of Ponnara Sridhar. He also pressurized the Chief Inspector of Plantations into filing a case in the High Court against the management. The High Court issued a judgement in favour of the workers. However, the management was not willing to accept it and decided to go on appeal to the Supreme Court. At this point, at the instance of the Union, workers *gheraoed* the managers and soon they agreed to grant the second woollen blanket.

Karippur Srikumar remembers the hardships the early trade union leaders had to undergo when they attempted to unionise the estate workers. In the early days no one from outside dared to walk into the thick forest areas inhabited by the tribal *Kanikkars* and wild animals. There were no roads leading to the estate. Subbayya, K.P.Neelakanta Pillai, Srikumar and others ventured into this unchartered territory. They boldly walked into the interiors of the forest and put up a high-rise shed from grass and sticks to stay safe from blood sucking leeches and wild boars. The estate workers were also initially hesitant to listen to the leaders but through hard work they could be convinced about the advantages of having a union for collective action.

By 1954, there appeared RSP and UTUC controlled unions and the era of inter-union rivalry commenced in Ponmudi, Brymore and Bonakkad estates. Prakkulam Bhasy, K.Pankajakshan, Titanium Bhasi, Baker, K.C.Vamadevan and M.Aboobacker Kunju gave the lead for this. The UTUC union in Brymore estate conducted several agitations for implementation of labour laws. The leaders used to visit the "lines" where the workers were housed and staying there they went about organizing the workers. In those days transport buses operated from Thiruvananthapuram only up to Peringamala.

During one of the struggles, the unionised workers shouted slogans when they assembled for mustering. This happened when the Estate Superintendent, White, was coming that way. On seeing him, workers including women, shouted slogans against him. White shouted some abuse and spontaneously workers rushed and surrounded him. Out of fear, he took his pistol and fired in the air provoking the agitated workers further. However, White was saved by the timely intervention of Samuel, the Tea Maker and Chellappan, the office superintendent. White ran away and got into the tea factory near by to save himself from the workers. The Secretary of the union directed the workers to calm down and go for work and after finishing the work assemble for a protest meeting.

At noon, after the work for the day was finished, the workers gathered together and held a march to White's office. They surrounded the office. The company alerted the Palode Police outpost and soon three truckloads of policemen arrived on the scene led by ASP Chelladoraraj. Those inside the office had not been able to go out for their lunch. On getting information about the agitation, K.C.Vamadevan had come all the way from Thiruvananthapuram to reach the spot by 5.30 p.m.

Those inside the office had closed all the glass windows to shut out the noise of slogan shouting. Vamadevan told the workers that their shouts were not reaching the people inside the office as windows had been closed. He requested them to stop shouting slogans. On hearing this, Devaki, a woman worker, used her fist to break the glass panes throwing its splinters into the office room. Vamadevan called the conveners of the union and planned a strategy to resolve the crisis and avoid a bloody repression by the police. He took the initiative to hold talks with the ASP. The police officer requested the union leaders to save him from initiating any action against the workers. From his words the union leaders gauged the mental weakness of the police officer.

The leaders informed the ASP that if the management agreed to ask the Labour Officer for holding a conference the very next day morning and apologized for firing the pistol by White, they would direct the workers to go back to their lines peacefully. The ASP conveyed these demands to White, which was refused. The police stood in attention with loaded rifles. Vamadevan had gone on record of what happened thereafter¹⁴. He stood in front of the office door and told White that the workers were not going to let him free and the police would fire at the workers and there would be dead bodies all around him and he, alone, would be held responsible for the massacre of a large number of workers. Vamadevan took a union letterhead and wrote in it the terms of settlement and requested the ASP to take that to the manager inside the office. Time was running out and the sun was setting. Assessing the mood of workers and the stand taken by the workers, White, the

manager agreed to all the terms of settlement proposed by the Union. He even gave a written apology for using his pistol. When this was announced, the workers peacefully went back to their lines.

10.9.4 Hunger strike at Brymore

The UTUC led Brymore Estate Workers' Union was one of the strongest trade unions in the plantations in the Thiruvananthapuram district. K.C.Vamadevan was its President. The Brymore Estate was a European company till M.K.Thomas, a planter, bought it. His son-in-law, N.K.Thomas was its manager. A few years later the Estate was sold to Sarma Brothers. This change of ownership brought about a fundamental change in labour-management relations. While Thomas was friendly to labour, Sarma Brothers were anti-labour and always loved to indulge in repressive measures. They used to treat trade union activists and leaders as criminals. They tried to create divisions in the ranks of the union members by using unholy practices. To some extent they succeeded in creating a sense of aversion in the minds of workers towards trade unions.

The union leaders continued their campaigns to mobilize the workers and keep them ruder their control. The management started repressive measures like issuing orders of suspension and dismissal. The company had two major divisions, the Rubber Division employing mostly Malayali workers and the Tea Division employing Tamil workers. The workers of the Rubber Division stood behind the union. The management deployed their Tamilian supervisors and staff to force the Tamil workers from associating with the union. This posed a threat of survival for the union. It had to devise a strategy and an action plan to keep the union alive. The union decided that Vamadevan, its President, should commence a hunger strike. The decision was conveyed to the top hierarchy of the UTUC as well as to the Labour Commissioner.

On the first day of the hunger strike, the management sent its staff to note down the names of workers who visited the Satyagraha. This action put a constraint on even active union members from expressing their support and solidarity to the struggle by the leader. The Tamil workers watched the Satyagrahi from a distance but did not dare to come closer. The other union leaders conducted meetings and made speeches, which did not make any impression on the workers.

Vamadevan was offering the Satyagraha in the open. On the third day dark monsoon clouds gathered on the horizon and rains were expected at any time. Some union activists wanted to put up a small canopy over the place

where Vamadevan was sitting, but he refused any protection. When the rains actually came, Vamadevan was fully drenched. The Malayali workers of the Rubber division could not bear the situation and they wanted to protect their leader. They took a torch light march and called on every line where Tamil workers were living. This march aroused great feelings of sympathy towards their union leader. They came out in large numbers and started shouting provocative slogans against the management. Devaki and Valli, two women activists, led the Tamil women workers and they assembled near the site of the Satyagraha. This was a signal heralding the unity of all Malayali and Tamil workers in the Estate and all of them became deeply involved in the struggle.

On the fifth day of the hunger strike, the union decided to call for an indefinite strike. At this point, the Government decided to refer all the issues to adjudication and then Vamadevan ended his fast.

10.9.5 Struggles during the 1990s

During the 1990s the size of the work force in the plantation sector in general and the estates in Thiruvananthapuram in particular were rapidly declining due to increasing incidence of closures and lockouts by companies as well as individual planters. Literally the owners were simply abandoning the estates. They were not able to offer adequate work as the market for their products was declining. Most estates, which had not decided to close down, initiated very little maintenance work or replanting. In the last two years of the 1990s, starvation deaths were reported among the estate workers. For months together, even though the estates offered some days of work, they did not pay wages for these days. The unions agitated asking why the workers should work when no wages were paid. But no unions moved towards calling a strike because they knew that they would not be interested in it.

The composition of the workers and their character had also changed compared to older times. The second and third generation among the Tamil workers were now not much different from the Malayali workers. Both types of workers were reluctant to join in struggles. If at all any workers' struggle occurred, no one gave serious attention to it. Solidarity among the workers was not strong as in the old days. When starvation deaths were reported a few ministers and MLAs visited the Bonakkad Estate and the television media gave a good coverage. Promises were made but they were not fulfilled. The workers of the Bonakkad Estate held a hunger march on August 19, 2000 and reached the Government Secretariat to hold a big demonstration. The Government agreed to offer all benefits to workers including free ration and free medical aid. However, the Government made it clear that it was unable to

provide any alternative employment. It expressed its inability to take over the estates.

One major problem facing the plantation/estate workers was their inability to own land even if they mobilized adequate funds for it. The estates owned almost the entire land in the estates and surrounding areas. For example, in Munnar, almost all the land in the area were under the ownership of the Tata Tea Company. The Tata Company thus controlled the development of Munnar. Even the State Government, which had leased out the land to the estate companies, had very little say in the matter. Though the estate workers had been provided with quarters called lines, the conditions of housing were below standards prescribed by the Plantation Labour Act. If the workers wished to move out of the quarters, it was not allowed, mainly because of the nature of work involved. In short, the estate quarters, often called *coolie* lines were virtually a captive shelter from where the inmates could never hope to escape. As workers' families expanded, the total number of people the estates should sustain also went up. Almost all estates had accepted the rule that all members of the estate workers' family would be given some employment in the estates itself. Critics used to say that this policy always ensured a steady stream of workers to the estate management at low wages.

In 1994-95 all the trade unions in the Merchiston Estate held a joint struggle followed by hunger Satyagraha in front of the estate office. The matter was brought before the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC). Aryadan Mohammed was the Labour Minister. When the management refused to settle the dispute in the PLC, the Labour Minister used his discretionary powers and directed the Labour Secretary to issue a Notification on the terms of settlement and made them binding on the management.

The issue in Bonakkad Estate could not be resolved easily since the local managers always told the union leaders that they did not have powers to take decisions. The head office of the company was in Kochi. The INTUC union initially led the struggle in Bonakkad estate and R.M.Parameswaran Pillai, Charuppara Ravi and Vithura Sasi guided this union. The struggle lasted 42 days. It was settled with the intervention of the Labour Minister.

In the Ponmudi Estate, the owner K.T.Thomas declared a lock out on the ground that it was not economical and profitable to run the estates. Tea prices were falling, but wage cost was rising. Quality of tea was also declining. There was no incentive for doing even maintenance work. The INTUC union was the first to launch a strike against the management decision to lockout the estate. The workers held a march from the estate to the Government Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram. The matter was taken up in

the form of a lawsuit in the High Court and later it was sent to the Supreme Court. Finally the issue were settled.

10.10 SOME OTHER NOTABLE EVENTS

In this attempt at documenting the history of trade union movement in the Plantations, we might have missed to list a number of working class struggles. But this was not deliberate, since whatever published material and oral reminiscences of leaders we could gather, we have tried to present here. This might have made this documentation somewhat loosely knit. In the following sections we try to draw the readers' attention to some struggles in the plantations, which we were forced to set aside in the narration done so far.

10.10.1 In Palakkad

N.P.Saidalavi of CITU in Palakkad was born in Mannarghat, a plantation centre. According to him, there was a plantation labour union there led by one Kangassery Krishnan. He was a victim of estate employer's brutality. When the employer raised his rifle to fire at the agitating workers, the latter caught hold of him and the rifle was produced before the police station. At that time Attappady was a real "black Africa" in every sense. Here the migrant settlers from Travancore grabbed land from the native locals and exploited their labour, which virtually amounted to a kind of bonded labour. The Mooppil Nair family was in the forefront in this exercise. The landlords used to come on horseback and ill-treated the workers, mainly the tribal people. In the Champana Estate struggle the police made a brutal lathi charge on workers. Criminal cases were registered against several workers on false charges. The early trade union leaders had to fight against this. There were struggles in the Valluvanadan area also. In all cases, in the old days, the trade union leaders themselves argued the cases of workers in courts. Besides Kongassery Krishnasn, mention must be made about other leaders like P.Balachandra Menon, Sankaran, Gopalan, P.P.Krishnan, V.Krishnadas, Unni and P.M.Aboobacker who had worked for the mobilization of workers in this region.

K.Appu of the INTUC in Palakkad had mentioned about a struggle in the Nelliampathy Estate where workers' union was formed in the early 1940s. Most of the workers were drawn from neighbouring areas in Tamil Nadu and mobilizing them was not an easy task. But the presence of a strong movement of peasants and farm workers in Palakkad had given a fillip to the union movement among estate workers in the region.

10.10.2 Notable Settlements

On December 12, 1952 a tripartite conciliation conference was held in Thiruvananthapuram to settle some issues relating to the plantation labour. It was held at the VJT Hall and presided over by Panampally Govinda Menon. K.Karukaran, Prakkulam Bhasi, T.K.Divakaran, T.P.Seetharaman and Dr.T.T.Chacko, K.P.Neelakanta Pillai (Speaker of the legislative assembly), and, Kochukuttan, attended it.

On February 28, 1956 another tripartite conference was held at the Government Secretariat. J.B.Soutar, M.M.Varghese, U.Padmanabha Kukkiliya and K.V.Thomas represented the employers. B.K.Nair, Prakkulam Bhasi, A.Subbiah and Rosamma Punnoose represented the workers. Out of the several issues, it was decided to discuss the issue of bonus and leave the rest of the issues to a Standing Committee. Though conciliation efforts did not result in a settlement, the Chief Minister intervened and declared awarding a bonus at the rates of 6.25 per cent and 8.33 per cent respectively for 1953 and 1954. The bonus for 1955-56 was to be treated as a separate issue for negotiations. The Standing Committee consisted of J.B.Soutar, M.M.Varghese, K.V.Kuriakose, B.K.Nair, K.Karunakaran, Prakkulam Bhasi and Rosamma Punnoose.

The bonus for plantation labour for the year 1955-56 was decided at another conciliation conference held on May 20, 1957. In the light of this settlement, the general strike scheduled for May 22 was called off. T.V.Thomas, the Labour Minister with his timely intervention could settle the issue quickly to the satisfaction of both sides.

10.10.3 Agitations and Violence

Some violence was reported from the estates in Wayanad and it was alleged that the communists were behind it. At Kodanad, estate workers *gheraoed* the Assistant Superintendent and this strained the relations further.

In the first half of May 1957 the trade unions in plantation gave a strike notice to the employers and this was led by the INTUC. A meeting presided over by Karunakaran demanded PF, Gratuity and a higher bonus. An Action Committee was also formed with B.K.Nair as the Convener.

The month of April 1958 saw the commencement of a series of agitations against the evictions of settlers from the high ranges initiated by the Communist Government. It finally became a part of the anti-communist Liberation Struggle called *Vimochana Samaram*. An action committee led by

B.K.Nair of the INTUC was formulating its strategies for mobilizing the high range settlers as well as the estate workers there. The committee had O.V.Lukose, M.C.Chacko, P.C.Cherian, K.M.Mani, Jolly Jacob Daniel, P.M.Joseph, Gregory Kandamkary and Joseph Podippara as active members. Political analysts found that the Christian wing with entrenched interests in the prosperity of the highlands and plantation estates was planning to form a separate group within the Congress. It was this group that finally got separated from the parent Congress Party to form the Kerala Congress. Since then this new Party grew by continued division within it with each faction being led by one or the other prominent leaders in it. The struggle of the evicted settlers gathered strength and it created hectic mobilization in the high ranges.

On June 21, 1959 a meeting of all the anti-communist trade unions was held in Ernakulam attended by about 200 delegates representing 153 organizations. The meeting was presided over by M.K.Raghavan and B.K.Nair, C.G.Janardhanan and T.K.Divakaran guided its proceedings. An Action committee was constituted with prominent trade union leaders like R.S.Unni, K.Pankajakshan, B.K.Nair, K.Karunakaran, A.Subbaiah, P.K.Sankarankutty, M.K.Raghavan and P.E.Thomas with A.A.Kochunny as its Convener. It decided to submit a Memorandum of Demands to the EMS Ministry. Among other things, it included the demand for 12.5 per cent bonus, implementation of minimum wages, supply of subsidized rice, withdrawal of police intervention in labour disputes and settlement of the ongoing plantation labour dispute in the State. Elsewhere we have discussed the anti-communist struggles in Munnar and other plantation areas during 1957-59 and the police firing and finally the dismissal of the EMS Ministry by the President of India. It was indeed a turbulent period in the history of Kerala.

10.10.4 Struggles during the 1960s

The INTUC led plantation workers were planning to launch an indefinite strike during May 1963. B.K.Nair announced it after a meeting at Mundakkayam. P.C.George, V.J.Zachariah, P.M.Mohammed, P.K.Koshy and M.T.Cheriyan Vaidyan addressed the meeting.

An indefinite strike started in the plantation sector from August 12, 1966 as decided by a meeting held under the presidentship of P.Balachandra Menon of the AITUC. The UTUC and HMS also extended support to it. One major issue was relating to the Rubber estate workers. But the strike was extended to Tea estates. G.Ramanujam, the INTUC leader who said that the left unions were agitating to nullify the recommendations of the Wage Board, questioned this. He argued that out of the total number of tea estate workers,

60 per cent were members of the INTUC. As long as the estate management paid the DA to workers, that DA could be linked only to the all-India Consumer Price Index. It was pointed out by left unions that this all-India index was not valid as long as prices in Kerala were higher. According to Ramanujam, the left unions should first ask for reducing the differential prices rather than focusing on certain silly issues.

However, the INTUC later announced that they were planning to conduct another strike from August 17, 1966 as decided by its Plantation Sub Committee attended by K.Karunakaran, B.K.Nair, G.S.Dhara Singh, A.Gomez, and, S.Varadarajan Nair. Meanwhile a joint action council consisting of Kerala State Trade Union Council (KSTUC), HMS and UTUC decided to call for a strike. Panamppally Govinda Menon, the then Deputy Minister of Civil Supplies in the Central Government promised the Plantation labour leaders that he would strive his best to resolve the rubber estate workers' issues. If the strike really commenced, the Government of India would be forced to intervene. Jagajivan Ram gave such a guarantee and assurance to a delegation consisting of A.K.Gopalan also.

The INTUC sponsored strike in the Rubber Plantations commenced involving 30000 workers. It was actually led by the Kerala Plantation Workers' Federation Action Committee with K.V.K.Panicker as Convener. The Government of India announced its acceptance of the Wage Board recommendations. Under this a male worker would get Rs.2.45, a female worker Rs.2.16 and an adolescent Rs.1.24 and promised its early implementation. Meanwhile the AITUC led strike was deferred.

In June 1967 the rubber growers launched a *dharna* before the Raj Bhavan in Thiruvananthapuram to demand an increase in the price of natural rubber, stoppage of rubber imports and financial support to small holders. K.M.Chandy, K.M.George, Baby John, T.A.Majeed and T.P.Ulahannan had taken the initiative for this.

10.10.5 Strike at Munnar, 1968

This strike held in 1968 was aimed at making political capital. The split in the Communist Party had led to a division in the trade union movement. There arose a leadership struggle in the Estate Workers' Union between the pro-CPI and the pro-CPI (M) groups. Recognition granted to this Union had been withdrawn by the KDHP Company management following a strike during the days of the Indo-Pakistan War in 1965. Top leaders of this Union, who were at that time CPI (M) members, were in jail. But the leaders who remained behind called the strike against the wishes of trade union

leaders like P.Balachandra Menon. According to C.Achutha Menon, the strike was an utter fiasco and had to be withdrawn with not a single demand having been conceded¹⁵. After the release of the leaders from jail they tried to revive the union activities. During this process a few activists resigned from the CPI (M) and joined the CPI to rebuild the Union. Soon they got the Union recognized by the KDHP Company.

The CPI (M) could not brook all this and sought vengeance on those who deserted them. In the negotiations between the CPI Union and the Management, the bonus for the 1968 was settled at the rate of 7.5 per cent. The pro-CPI (M) workers did not accept it and demanded half a percent more, though they did not have a registered union. The leadership of the CPI (M) called for a strike against the bonus settlement and the INTUC union led by N.Ganapathy supported it. The official union, which had signed the bonus settlement, issued to a call to its members to abide by the settlement and go for work. This was not liked by the CPI (M) and they resorted to unholy and unethical tactics. They were reported to have brought non-estate workers and *goondas* from the plains who came wielding dangerous arms and weapons like crow bars, knives, choppers, crackers and country made bombs and began a blitzkrieg attack on the workers who were going for work in the estates. Police did nothing to protect the loyal workers. Even the Labour Minister was alleged to have encouraged the attacks saying that it was a part of arranged guerrilla struggle. The CPI supported AITUC affiliated Union could not take these blatant activities lying down. Ultimately the CPI (M) sponsored strike fizzled out. It may be noted that in the General Elections held in 1965, no party or group in Kerala secured a working majority and so the President's Rule was imposed in the State till March 6, 1967. In the elections conducted subsequently in 1967, a seven Party coalition government led by E.M.S.Namboodiripad of the CPI (M) came to power, but it lasted only till October 1969. Thereafter, there again occurred a new realignment of political parties, which resulted in the appointment of C.Achutha Menon of the CPI as the Chief Minister. Though he was forced to resign on August 1, 1970, he came back soon to head a CPI-Congress coalition ministry that lasted for nearly six years. This period included the days of the National Emergency of 1975. During the period of Achutha Menon's Government, inter-union rivalry between the CPI and CPI (M) supported groups had reached its heights. As a part of this, there were a number of small and big confrontations between these groups in many industries including plantations in the State. We could not do a complete chronicling of these in the present study for want of reliable sources of information.

10.10.6 Struggles during the 1970s

On October 3, 1972 leaders of CITU, INTUC, AITUC, UTUC and STU met at Kozhikode to discuss the major issues facing plantation labour including those working in Cardamom estates. K.Padmanabhan, the CITU leader, announced this. He demanded that cardamom estate workers should be paid at least Rs.4 for males and Rs.3 for females. On March 21, 1972 out of 2.5 lakh plantation workers 75000 observed a token strike in Devicolam, Peerumade, Vandiperiyar and Mundakkayam. This was for demanding a 12.5 per cent bonus for tea estate workers. But the Management had indicated their willingness to settle for 10 per cent. The Plantation industry went through another massive strike on August 1, 1974 demanding the implementation of new DA rates and minimum wages recommended by the State Government. Workers in Coffee, Tea and Cardamom estates participated in this strike.

The month of October 1977 saw Kerala in the grip of another notable struggle by workers of the Rubber estates. Rubber production sector has a large segment of small holders and a few large estates. Obviously the capacity of employers in these segments for paying a uniform rate of wages and other benefits differed. This often led to minor and major confrontations with the unions of workers. While large estate employers agreed to give an increase of 65 paise in the daily wages, the unions demanded that it should be enforced in smaller estates too. But the representatives of small estates did not sign the settlement. This created tension in some areas in the rubber growing areas. On October 10, 1977 the rubber estate workers commenced an indefinite strike. The unions demanded that wages should increase at least by one rupee. The strike affected large rubber estates in Mundakkayam and Erumely. According to newspaper reports, about 182,000 workers participated in this strike as stated by K.V.K.Panicker, the General Secretary of the Plantation Workers led by the National Labour Organization (NLO). The strike was jointly sponsored by the INTUC, CITU, AITUC and the NLO. B.K.Nair of the INTUC was the Chairman of the Joint Action Council and R.Ravindran was the Convener.

In 1977 Kerala had a ministry headed by K. Karunakaran of the Congress. But following the Rajan murder case and enquiries on alleged police atrocities during the National Emergency under his rule, Karunakaran was forced to resign and in his place A.K.Antony of the Congress became the Chief Minister. But he too could not continue for long due to the intricacies of Kerala Party Politics. Then came a Ministry headed by P.K.Vasudevan Nair, the suave soft spoken leader of the CPI. However, this Ministry was also short lived. Oommen Chandy of the Congress was the Labour Minister in the Antony Cabinet. Speaking at the Seventh State Conference of the INTUC led

Plantation Corporation Staff Union, Oommen Chandy said that his government was fully committed to implement the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act in letter and spirit.

In August 1983 there was another massive strike in the Plantations totally paralysing the activities in that sector. The main demands were an increase of three rupees in wages of workers, increase in the salary of Supervisors by Rs.100, and making temporary acting workers permanent. The strike was jointly called by CITU, INTUC, INTUC (I), AITUC, NLO, HMS, UTUC and STU. It may be noted that a division had appeared in the Indian National Congress in Kerala due to a personality clash between K.Karunakaran and A.K.Antony. This resulted in Congress (I) led by the former and Congress (A) led by the latter. Following this division in the party, a similar division started appearing in the Congress supported INTUC also. In later years the State Unit of the INTUC got divided and fragmented with several INTUC unions each linked to individual party leaders. Sometimes this resulted in more than one INTUC union in the same establishment. The estates were, of course, no exception to this.

10.11 CONCLUSION

Before we conclude this long chapter, we would be failing in our duty if we did not say anything about the growth of tripartite relations in the plantations industry initiated and nurtured by the State Government since the early 1950s with active cooperation of trade unions and employers and their associations. This tripartism has come to stay in the plantations industry in the form of the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC). In this context, we trace only some of the early developments in the PLC, as we have no time to attempt at a full documentation and assessment of the record of the PLC since its beginnings to this day.

10.11.1 The PLC

What is most outstanding in the field of industrial relations in the Plantations in Kerala is undoubtedly the functioning of the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC) constituted on a tri-partite basis. The plantations industry was a most vulnerable centre of industrial conflict. The first tripartite conference was held as a sequel to the successful settlement of the dispute in the Lahai Estate. The chief issues involved in this dispute were the recognition of trade unions and the evils of the estate *Kangany* System. The dispute was settled through joint consultations among the parties and this

inspired the Labour Commissioner of the State to call a statewide tripartite conference that finally led to the formation of the PLC in 1953-54.

10.11.2 First meeting

In the first meeting, the Labour Commissioner appealed to the employers to extend all kinds of cooperation and encouragements to the trade unions in their estates and factories. This was to include, among other things, the permission to outside union leaders and organizers to enter the estates and canvass workers. The representations of employers at the conference made strong objection to this suggestion, for they found irresponsible behaviour among union organizers somewhat universal. They also alleged the existence of union rivalry, which they considered as the main source of trouble. Calderwood, one of the employers, voiced his concern thus:¹⁶

"The management could not close their eyes to unauthorized entry into estates by outsiders, holding meetings without permission and shouting of slogans near factories during working hours. The compulsion from union leaders on non-union labour to take part in their union activities was also a source of trouble".

On the question of union rivalry, the tripartite conference could not reach any unanimity among the representatives of labour. The INTUC leader B.K.Nair was clearly in favour of rival unions, for, he believed in the fundamental right of workers to join whichever trade union they liked.

10.11.3 Agreement on Union Recognition

The tripartite conference, however, agreed that the success of industry-wide joint consultations largely depended on strong organizations and bold leadership on both sides. The conference then resolved to adopt an Agreement on the Recognition of Trade Unions, which could be considered as the *Magna Carta* of the trade union movement in Kerala. The Agreement was as follows¹⁷:

- (i) *"It is mutually agreed that the management would place no obstacle in the way of organization of registered trade unions in the estates. The trade union organizers could visit the estate lands for organizational purposes without permission of managements. Meetings and processions during*

working hours should be avoided as far as possible. The management is to be informed before holding meetings and conducting processions inside the premises of estates.

- (ii) *With regard to rival unionism, the representatives of trade unions agree that members of one trade union will not obstruct meetings or processions held or conducted by the members of other unions. The representatives of unions further undertake that rival union activities shall not occasion any cessation of work or embarrassment to the management.*
- (iii) *The formal recognition of trade unions by employers will await the enforcement of any suitable law regarding recognition of trade unions. In the meanwhile the employers agree that they will be prepared to receive representatives from registered trade unions and grant interviews to their representatives".*

This Agreement could also be considered as a Code of Conduct and a Code of Inter-Union Harmony.

10.11.4 Second Conference

Very soon the tripartite conference became an annual affair in the plantation industry. The Second Conference was held in 1951. It discussed the evils of the *Kangany* System of recruitment of labour in the estates and it reached a decision to abolish it ultimately. The replacement of *Kanganis* by a new cadre of labour supervisors was tried at a later date, when there was a greater accord between the managements and trade unions in the plantations.

One great achievement of the conference was the industry-wide bonus settlement. The practice of bonus payments in the plantations in Kerala was there even before 1950. In 1950 the estates paid a 4 per cent bonus and paid it as a lump amount. The Second Conference agreed that "*the 4 per cent lump payment paid to estate workers shall be converted to bonus calculated on the same basis as before to 8.33 per cent in the case of tea estates and 6.25 per cent in the case of other estates for the year 1950*".

Another important resolution passed by the Conference related to the reinstatement of workers who had left after receiving their annual emoluments. In such cases the employers agreed to give them the benefit of lien in their former jobs if they returned and were available for work within two days after the period notified at the time of their departure.

10.11.5 Resolution on Trade Union Procedure

The Second Conference was marked by the passing of a historic Resolution on Trade Union Procedure, which brought the unions the right to represent the grievances of their members into bold relief. It stated:

"Whenever there is a grievance concerning a worker, it should be taken up with his immediate superior for its settlement. If this is not settled at that level, it has to be brought up for discussion and decision in the Works Committee. If the dispute is not settled in the Works Committee, the Union could take it up with the management and try to settle it by mutual negotiations. If by such mutual negotiations between the management and the union, the dispute is not settled, attempts should be made to settle it through the mediation of the conciliation staff of the Department of Labour. The unions should not resort to direct action before exhausting the procedure laid down above".

In its essentials, this was nothing other than a statement of a Model Grievance Procedure, which has now become an integral part of collective bargaining contracts the entire world over.

10.11.6 Third Conference

The Third Tripartite Conference discussed such questions as equal wage for men and women, wage differentials and transfers of workers from factory to field and vice versa. This conference held that an Industrial Relations Committee whose decisions should be binding on both managements and workers should decide all differences of opinion of an industry-wide nature affecting labour-management relations. It also decided to refer the question arising in individual estates to the consideration of this Committee on mutual agreement. Based on this view the State Government constituted the Tripartite Plantation Labour Committee (PLC). This produced a healthy climate of industrial relations in the plantation industry where great lawlessness and uncertainty prevailed in earlier years.

The PLC started holding regular meetings and successfully settled several complex issues in the plantations. The members of the PLC used to participate in the deliberations with an honest objective of reaching an amicable settlement. When V.V.Giri was the Governor of Kerala, he used to take a personal interest in the working of the PLC. It was at his intervention that the PLC decided to refer all unresolved issues to arbitration. However, during 1958-59 the trade union representatives dissociated themselves from the PLC, complaining about delay in deciding the bonus issue. The issue was defying solution for some time causing labour flare-ups in the Munnar Sector of plantation industry. In 1958-59 about 83 work stoppages were reported from the plantations, involving 0.7 million Mondays in all. It had been one of the most difficult years in the industry.

10.11.7 Union's rejection of Sliding Scale

Since the appointment of a National Wage Board for plantation labour, the question of wage revision began to agitate the minds of trade unions in the industry in Kerala. Here the Minimum Wages Committee for Plantations set up as early as 1952 had recommended a wage structure and rates and the Government had implemented it. Another Minimum Wage Committee appointed in 1961-62 also had revised the wages. The State Minimum Wages Advisory Board had marginally raised the minimum wages to Rs.3.50 and it also adopted a sliding scale for effecting automatic adjustments in wage rates to changes in cost of living. But the trade union representatives in the PLC rejected the sliding scale in favour of a flat increase in basis wage rates, which was reached through negotiations with employers. In 1967 if the sliding scale were in operation, the plantation labour would have got a daily emolument of Rs.4.97. The bartering away of the sliding scale by the trade unions in favour of a negotiated flat increase in wage rates did indeed result in a loss to workers. The cost of living continued to rise putting labour to great hardships, for, that increase was not properly neutralized.

In April 1966 the Wage Board for Tea Plantations recommended a minimum wage of Rs.2.25 per day for a male worker in tea estates and a DA linked to the cost of living index. But evidently this was lower than that recommended by the State Minimum Wage Advisory Board. The employers pleaded that they must accept the wage board decision. This led to a united action by plantation labour led by INTUC, AITUC, UTUC, HMS and various other independent unions. The work in the plantations came to a standstill. P.Balachandra Menon of the AITUC and B.K.Nair of the INTUC guided this struggle that lasted 12 weeks. The unions finally pleaded for the reintroduction of higher rates of minimum wages and the sliding scale as recommended by the State Minimum Wages Advisory Committee. The strike

was finally withdrawn at the intervention of the Labour Minister in the Central Government.

10.11.8 Gratuity Scheme

The PLC has to its credit the evolution of a gratuity scheme on a voluntary basis. This was adopted in its meetings in 1962. This Agreement superseded the scheme of Gratuity, which was in force earlier in Travancore-Cochin. Under the PLC Agreement, gratuity would be payable to all employees in the plantation who have completed ten years or more of continuous service at the rate of fifteen days of wages based on the last drawn wage rates immediately preceding the date on which gratuity becomes payable, for every year of service, subject to a maximum of twelve month's wages. Gratuity would be payable to the worker at the above rate at the time of his voluntary retirement after the qualifying period of superannuation or on attaining the age of 58 years or on his retirement after one year of service on account of permanent total disablement due to accident or disease.

A quick look at the text of the Gratuity Scheme would demonstrate its comprehensive nature ¹⁸. However, it did not apply to the workers in the Malabar area excepting those who had completed 24 years of service on the date of the Agreement. The Gratuity Scheme had also prescribed that gratuity would also be payable to the nominee of the worker, or in the absence of the nominee, to the legal heirs of the workers who have completed one year of service on his death while in service. For avoiding the likelihood of a large number of workers simultaneously seeking payment of gratuity, payment of gratuity would be limited to five per cent of the total number of employees in the estate in any calendar year, the order of priority being for people with larger service. The Gratuity Scheme did not apply to estates, which were outside the purview of the Plantation Labour Act.

10.11.9 Agreement on abolition of Kanganis

The PLC also reached an Agreement on the Abolition of the *Kangany* system. The *Kanganis* were to be replaced by a new cadre of labour supervisors and whether proper compensation should be paid to the displaced *Kanganis* and what kind of training and absorption of the new cadre of labour supervisors should be adopted became irritant issues between trade unions and employers. However, in February 1962 an amicable settlement was reached in the PLC. It was agreed that all registered *Kanganis* who did Supervisory work would be employed with continuity of service as supervisors on terms currently applicable to supervisors on a total wage equal

to the minimum time rate plus a differential of fifty paise. The retirement age for supervisors was fixed as 58 years. Head *Kanganis* or *Kanganis* who used to receive “head money” direct from the Management who wished to leave employment were to be paid compensation.

10.11.10 Abolition of Special Tribunal

It may be noted that following the litigation on the Thattil Estate strike, the Labour Appellate Tribunal had decreed that Plantations would come within the purview of the definition of ‘Industry’ as laid down in the Industrial Disputes Act. The credit for this has been attributed to the struggle led by K.Karunakaran, the veteran political and trade union leader of Kerala. Since then a Special Tribunal for the plantations was set up for the purpose of adjudication of disputes in that industry. However, soon after the establishment of the PLC, the State Government abolished this Special Tribunal.

10.11.11 Unions fail in documentation

In this Chapter, we have somewhat exhaustively dealt with the course of events in the history of the trade union movement in the Plantations industry of Kerala. As explained on an earlier occasion, we do not claim that we have done justice to this historical narration. However, we have attempted to bring together, in a systematic manner, whatever primary and secondary sources of information we collected and that anyone who is looking for a basic understanding of the conditions or life and labour and working class struggles in the plantations industry would not be feeling totally let down by this author. Many struggles had not been properly documented. A major culprit in this was, no doubt, the trade unions and their leaders themselves who even to this day continue to be ignorant about the importance of documenting of events and persons in the working class movements and struggles. Ultimately, it turns out to be a big loss to the society.

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CHAPTER XI

POLITICS AND INDEPENDENCE OF TRADE UNIONS

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The trade union movement in Kerala has recently witnessed an interesting debate on the independence status of trade unions vis-à-vis the political parties. It is generally believed that the political parties in India as well as in Kerala usually nurse “their” trade unions. In other words, the public are made to believe that the trade unions are mere appendages of political parties and the parties always treat them as feeder and supporting organizations. Thus, the INTUC is believed to be linked to the Congress, AITUC to the CPI, CITU to the CPI (M), BMS to the BJP/RSS, UTUC to the RSP, AICTU to the CMP, STU to the Muslim League and so on. As the political parties started splitting, causing the emergence of factions, the public got a confused picture about the trade unions and their link to political parties. Whether the link between the trade union and the political party was organic or not was also an issue in debate. However, the debate became very electrified with the emergence of the open confrontation between the CPI (M) and the CITU in Kerala during November 2000.

11.2 ACTION AGAINST LEADERS

The CPI (M) created sensation when it took disciplinary action against some prominent leaders who held high positions in the Party as well as in the CITU. But as the Party decided to keep the CITU under its control, some of its actions clashed with the independence of mass organization and trade union democracy. Leaders like O.Bharathan, V.B.Cherian, and P.C.Joseph were singled out for disciplinary action by the CPI (M).

11.2.1 Action against O. Bharathan

Kannur Thalaap Olacherry Bharathan, namely, O.Bharathan, the veteran trade unionist of Kannur, Mabalar is no more. He passed away in the afternoon of Sunday, March 3, 2001 in a private hospital at Kannur after serious illness from kidney failure. He created history by contesting the election to the post of the KSRTC Employees’ Association and defeating the CPI (M)’s official candidate K.Chandran Pillai, another CITU leader. This

happened at a time when the rift between the CITU and the CPI (M) leaderships was in the formative stage. The top leadership of the CITU, C.Kannan, the President, and K.N.Ravindranath, the General Secretary were maintaining the independent status of the CITU as a working class organization and a popular mass organization. They did not approve the initiatives taken by the CPI (M) leadership to bring the CITU under the party control.

O.Bharathan was expelled from the CPI (M) once he fell out of favour with the party leadership for writing a controversial article in the *CITU Sandesham* vehemently criticizing CPI (M) politburo member V.S.Achuthanandan. What triggered off the expulsion of Bharathan from the CPI (M) was, of course, his rebel stature in the contest for the presidency of the KSRTC Employees' Association. Following his expulsion from the CPI (M), O.Bharathan announced his decision to quit active politics in protest against the hostile attitude of the party leadership. After having been a member of the State Committee of the CPI (M) from 1974 to 1998, and devoting a major part of forty-five years of his political life to CPI (M) and trade union activities, he had the severest shock when the Party isolated him from the mainstream party activities in the Kannur district. He was demoted from the State Committee to the Kakkara Branch committee after the Palakkad Conference of the CPI (M). After expulsion from the Party, on April 18, 1999, O.Bharathan had been resting at his residence at Thottada, Kannur and devoting his time to literary pursuits. He had thus written a kind of autobiographical work in the form of articles in Malayalam serialized in the *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*¹.

Born on December 17, 1931 as the son of Karuva and Paru, O.Bharathan completed his Intermediate course at Malabar Christian College, Kozhikode. He was a student leader during his college days and also a good player of football. He started his trade union activities when K.P.Stanley, the District Secretary of the CPI, Kannur, asked him to leave the football field and join politics and trade union work in 1954. He worked in the CPI and the AITUC, and after the split in the Party, he joined the CPI (M) and became the State Secretary of the CITU in 1970. During the National Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi, he was arrested and detained for 16 months in the Kannur Central Jail.

C Kannan, the veteran trade unionist and revered by the working class of Kerala was a great inspiration for O.Bharathan. Bharathan always claimed that Kannan had moulded his character and style of trade union work. Kannan was all in all of the Kannur Tobacco Workers' Union, one of the oldest trade unions of Malabar. This Union also provided Bharathan, the practical classroom to learn trade union work.

O.Bharathan was elected MLA three times and became a Member of Parliament once. In the election of 1987 he defeated K.Sudhakaran of the Congress by a margin of 349 votes. Sudhakaran challenged this and the Court set aside Bharathan's election verdict. On going on appeal, the Supreme Court set aside the decision of the High Court. Unfortunately by the time the Supreme Court verdict came, the term of Assembly was over. In 1996 O.Bharathan won the Parliament election from Badagara with a thumping majority.

K.P.Stanley, A.V.Kunhambu, Punnalath Narayanan and C.Kannan were the leaders who had inspired O.Bharathan the most. The year 1967 was a bad year for Bharathan because he had to bear two major shocks in his life in that year. In 1967 the Party expelled A.V.Kunhambu, Punnalath Narayanan and himself from the District Committee, when M.V.Raghavan captured the committee. Bharathan's mother died in 1967 and on the 90th day of that his father also passed away. Azheekodan Raghavan and Stanley had arranged Bharathan's marriage. When the Communist Party split in 1967 Bharathan was heart broken. Since the Government was hunting out the Marxist activists during the Emergency in 1962, 1964 and 1967, Bharathan was also a target. In December 1964, A.V.Kunhambu, Puthalathu Narayanan, V.Kannan Nair, M.V.Raghavan and Bharathan were arrested. In the Kannur Jail, Bharathan was put up with other leaders like E.K.Nayanar, K.P.R.Gopalan, Chathunny Master, Keluvettan, M.P.Kunhiraman Master, Sadhu P. Ahmed Kutty, Kunjali, C.Kannan, P.V.Kutty, P.V.Kunhikannan, Kundacherry Kunhiraman Master, Patyam Gopalan and others. They spent nearly 18 months in Block No. 8 of the Kannur Central Jail.

During the Indo-Pakistan War of 1964 the Communist detainees in the Poojappura Central Jail were in the thick of a debate. One group led by V.S.Achuthanandan argued that the detainees should forgo one day's food and contribute the value of it to the War Fund, besides donating blood for the Indian soldiers who get wounded in the conflict. The other group led by O.J.Joseph held the view that this was detesting and could not be accepted as it would be treated as a sign of fear and weakness on their parts, particularly so when this got linked up with the possibility of securing parole. Bharathan felt sad about the conflict between the two top leaders of the Party who were expected to play a unifying role in the organization while the rank and file were looking at these leaders of the Party Secretariat for inspiration and guidance. Bharathan's article on this issue was published in the CITU organ *CITU Sandesham*. It indirectly criticized the stand taken by V.S.Achuthanandan and it created a strong rift between them.

The State Committee members P.G.Velayudhan Nair, Avanamkuzhy Sadasivan, Fakhir Khan, K.Anirudhan, Mytheen Kunju, Dr.P.K.Sukumaran,

C.P.Karunakaran Pillai, Damodaran Unnithan, C.A.Peter, S.Damodaran and P.K.Kunjachan were also in jail as political detainees. On December 24, 1966 E.M.S.Namboodiripad held a Press Conference in Thalassery to announce the Party's decision to keep both V.S.Achuthanandan and O.J.Joseph out of the State Party Secretariat and at the same time censure the State Committee members mentioned above. All this happened just after the CPI split and CPI (M) emerged as a separate entity.

The CPI IM) was looking for developments related to O.Bharathan so as to take disciplinary action against him. When Bharathan conducted the marriage of his only daughter at Kannur, K.Sudhakarshan, the Congress MLA of Kannur and number one enemy of the CPI (M) Kannur unit, attended the marriage reception as an uninvited guest. The CPI (M) took this incident seriously and started accusing Bharathan that while he did not invite his party friends and colleagues, he had invited the enemy of the Party to the reception. This, according to the CPI (M) was more than sufficient cause for taking action against him.

Earlier in 1998, the Palakkad Convention of the CPI (M) had initiated action against O.Bharathan on the ground that he had defied the Party, contested the election to the Presidentship of the KSRTC Employees' Association against the Party's official candidate K.Chandran Pillai and defeated him. This had tarnished the image of the CPI (M) as well as that of the CITU. But Bharathan's explanation was that he had only obeyed the majority of the members of the Association when they had rallied behind him and demanded that he should contest the Presidentship. Once he got elected, the CPI (M) directed Bharathan not to take charge as the President of the Association. Bharathan went on appeal to the high power committee of the Party and secured a decision in his favour. But being a true Marxist he did not want to continue a confrontational path with his party.

In April 1999 O.Bharathan told the media that he had enough from the CPI (M) and felt happy with his firm decision to retire from active public life. In 1999 he underwent a bypass heart surgery and doctors had told him that he could easily expect to live for another ten years. He was also highly diabetic. Perhaps the CPI (M) leadership took these health factors into account and decided to "rest" him. Accordingly, the CPI (M) did not consider him when their list of candidates for contesting the general elections was finalized. The Party had found out a good excuse to keep Bharathan out as he was declared as a horse that got exhausted after running for long. As was usually done in the case of old horses, the CPI (M) removed Bharathan from the State Committee and demoted him further to the local committee at Thottada.

Though O.Bharathan decided to retire from active public life pleading that he did not want to embarrass the CPI (M), the Party with which his life and career had an organic link, he wanted to live as a true Marxist but feeling sad about the internal feuds in the organization. However, he decided to write his autobiographical reminiscences in the form of articles serialized in the Malayalam *Mathrubhoomi Weekly* (September 1999 to February-March 2000). The last in the series of 26 articles was titled “*Bharatha Vakyam*” which literally implied the Final word. A year later on March 3, 2001, Bharathan passed away leaving memories of a veteran humanist Marxist and devoted trade union leader to the Malayalees.

11.2.2 Action against V. B. Cherian

Born on July 27, 1945, at Niranam, V.B.Cherian spent his childhood with his parents in Aluva. His father was an employee in the FACT Ltd., Udyogamandal. Cherian witnessed several struggles by workers in Aluva factories. Parur Sivan Pillai and E.Balanadan had close association with Cherian. When he was completing his SSLC, Kerala was witnessing the Liberation Struggle against the Communist Ministry led by E.M.S.Namboodiripad. Cherian was active in the Students' Federation. In the Union Christian College, Aluva, the day scholars were alleged to be followers and sympathizers of Students' Federation and hostelliers as pro-Congress. After completing his B.Sc. Course in the Maharajas College, Ernakulam, Cherian joined the first batch of students in the Thrissur Engineering College. There he became very active in the left movement and soon he got branded as a communist in the campus.

In 1962 he was staying with his parents at the quarters in the FACT Township. There Cherian met R.Gopinath, a chemist in the R & D Division. Gopinath, according to Cherian, was a genius, though the former was nicknamed as *Vattu Gopi* of Ezhikkara (“*Vattu*” meant “crack”). It was from Gopinath, that Cherian secured Marxist-Leninist literature and with him he had open debates on subjects like dialectical materialism. When the CPI split and CPI (M) was formed, Cherian was with the CPI (M) and it was he who formed a unit of the pro CPI (M) Kerala Students' Federation in professional colleges. At that time V.M.Sudheeran, who later became the controversial Speaker of the Kerala Assembly, was the leader of pro-Congress students' organization called the Kerala Students' Union (KSU) in the St.Thomas College, Thrissur.

After securing the Engineering Degree, V.B.Cherian joined the FACT as an Apprentice and worked in the Techno-Economic Development Project Team in the FEDO, a unit of the FACT. In the late 1960s, as a part of the

Project Work, Cherian visited North Malabar. During this period he met Patyam Gopalan, Subba Rao, Ramayya Shenoy and other leaders of that region. North Kasaragode was a region where communists could not penetrate even in the days of P.Krishna Pillai, largely due to strong resistance as well as the language barrier. Later Cherian moved on to Mananthavady, and there he functioned as a link between the CPI (M) activists of Kannur and Kasaragod. When naxalite ideology was penetrating the communist movement, Cherian made a move to counter it. But the youth cadres like Philip M. Prasad, Ajitha, T.P.Ravindran and Phalgunan could not be convinced about the dangers. In 1972 Cherian worked in the Democratic Youth Federation (DYF) the youth wing of the CPI (M). When Cherian was promoted to the managerial cadre in the FEDO, his father told him that he should not keep both the FEDO and the DYF. Cherian consulted E.Balanandan and on his advice resigned from the FEDO. Since he had earlier taken an examination with the State Public Service Commission for a post of Junior Engineer in the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), Cherian did have no regrets. When he got the appointment in the KSEB, he was ready to play an important role in the CITU affiliated union led by E.Balalandan. Peerumade K.I.Rajan was its General Secretary. T.K.Krishnan of Nattika was the Vice President. Other office bearers included K.Anirudhan and C.K.Balakrishnan. This Union represented employees at the level of Junior Engineers to Sweepers. Soon several category unions emerged in the KSEB. But in 1978 the CITU became the largest union in the Board. Stalwarts like K.P.Kosalaramadas, J.Chitharanjan, K.A.Rajan, A.C.Jose and Thampanoor Ravi led the other unions in the Board.

During the National Emergency V.B.Cherian was taken into custody while he was working in the Edappally Transmission Centre. In 1978 following a breakdown of talks with the then Chief Minister P.K.Vasudevan Nair, the CITU union in the KSEB led a strike. There were cases of sabotage in several transmission lines and V.B.Cherian was arrested. In 1982 Cherian resigned from the KSEB when he was elected the Secretary of the District Committee of CPI (M) in Ernakulam. In Ernakulam, Cherian led several unions in the Cochin Shipyard, Cochin Port, HMT, Premier Tyres, Indian Rare Earths, Velloor Hindusthan News Prints and others. In 1983 he was elected to the National Working Committee of the CITU. Though he contested the general elections to the State Assembly from Kunnathunadu, he was defeated. In 1990 he was elected the National Secretary of the CITU. Cherian is a strong spokesman for trade union democracy and also independence from political party.

The above stand by V.B.Cherian led to disciplinary action by the CPI (M) leadership. Though he was removed from the CITU under pressure from the CPI (M), Cherian continued as the Vice President of the all-India CITU. Dr.M.K.Pandhe referred his case to an enquiry and the Report was submitted.

However, the Kerala State Committee of the CITU and the CPI (M) are yet to take a final decision on the Cherian issue. Though O.Bharathan decided to retire from public life pleading that he did not want to embarrass the CPI (M), the Party with which his life and career had an organic link, being a true Marxist he kept mum. With his death on March 3, 2001, the Bharathan episode came to an end. But unlike O.Bharathan, V.B.Cherian continues with his activities as a trade unionist willing to fight for trade union democracy and the independence of the CITU from the control of the CPI (M). The CPI (M) forced the State CITU to put up official candidates to contest elections in the CITU affiliated unions in Cochin Refineries, Cochin Shipyard and several other undertakings in Kochi but the workers defeated the official candidates and the panel. They supported V.B.Cherian and his panel. Those defeated included Suresh Kurup and K.Chandran Pillai. This demonstrated the workers' trust in V.B.Cherian though he had been blacklisted by the CPI (M) and CITU. This has further irked the CPI (M) top leadership, which started crying for Cherian's blood.

But unlike Bharathan, V.B.Cherian did not take rest. He continues to be active in the trade union field. Though he had been removed from the CITU, workers' trust in Cherian had in no way been affected. This has irked the CPI (M) leadership in the State and it has started crying for his blood.

11.2.3 Action against Vijayachandran

Following O.Bharathan and V.B.Cherian, the CPI (M) was trying to axe several others who did not obey its dictates. One among them was K.Vijayachandran, a technocrat who had worked as Special Secretary to Suseela Gopalan when she was the Minister for Industries in the LDF Ministry led by E.K.Nayanar during 1987-91. Later he had worked as the Chairman of the Kerala State Industrial Development Corporation (KSIDC) for some time at the instance of the CPI (M). But soon he fell out with the top leaders of the CPI (M) and he was relieved of all responsibilities and official positions. Vijayachandran, being a technocrat, openly defied CPI (M) party discipline and criticized some of its policies. According to the CPI (M) leadership, Vijayachandran's words and deeds were anti-Party and he had been alleged to having been involved in the activities of the *EMS Samskarika Academy*, which was encouraging anti-CPI (M) propaganda. Vijayachandran, however, even in 2001 continued to be a lone fighter against the "misdeeds" of the CPI (M).

11.2.4 Action against P. C. Joseph

In May 2000 newspapers reported the removal of an old Marxist comrade, P.C.Joseph of Thrissur from the CPI (M). The CPI (M) charge against P.C.Joseph was that he had attended and spoken at a memorial meeting held in honour of K.K.Raman whom the CPI (M) had removed from the party ². In 2000, P.C.Joseph had just completed 50 years of his membership in the Communist Party. For becoming a communist he had been ostracized earlier by the Church. Joseph had served as a member of the District Committee of the undivided CPI and later served as Area Secretary of the CPI (M) for Chavakkad and Manalur, besides having been the President of the Elavally Panchayat for 33 years. When the CPI (M) order on his removal from the Party reached him, he was confined to bed with rheumatic paralysis. P.C.Joseph was one of the first among Catholic Christians in Kerala who dared to defy the Church to join the Communist Party. He was the kingpin in the historic struggle of coconut tree climbers in Pavaratty in Thrissur. This struggle was listed by the Congress (Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee – KPCC) as one of its first major charges against the EMS ministry of 1957 when it submitted its memorandum to Indira Gandhi who was deputed to Kerala by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The KPCC after launching the Liberation Struggle was demanding the dismissal of that Ministry and it accused it for causing the breakdown of law and order. The Pavaratty struggle of coconut tree climbers led by P.C.Joseph was cited as one example of this breakdown of law and order.

In 1959 the Communist Party had to counter the Liberation Struggle. In Thrissur, Father George Vadakkan was spitting fire and venom with his anti-communist speeches. The Party found that only P.C.Joseph alone could counter the speeches of Father Vadakkan and he was deputed for it. Wherever Father Vadakkan spoke attacking the communists, P.C.Joseph used to emerge from nowhere and start countering every point made by Father Vadakkan. In 1980 P.C.Joseph was specially asked to contest against V.M.Sudheeran of the Congress from the Manalur constituency.

11.2.5 Action against N. K. Madhavan

One of the oldest living heroes of the Communist Party in Kerala, N.K.Madhavan was also forced to face disciplinary action by the CPI (M). When the Party split, Madhavan had no hesitation to join the CPI (M) on the belief that it was the true working class revolutionary party. But soon he started feeling that the CPI (M) was really deviating from its original path.

Now in 2001, at the age of 91 he was resting at his home in Wadakkekara near North Parur in Ernakulam District.

N.K.Madhavan's father hailed from Ezhupunna and mother from Kumbalangi. He started his career as a coir factory worker and was active in the revolutionary struggles in Alappuzha, Cherthala and Muhamma. As directed by the Party he had also gone to Punalur to mobilize workers there. While the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle was in full swing, Madhavan was engaged in mobilizing tile and bidi workers in Aluva. However, he remembers his close association with P.A.Solomon, C.O.Mathew, Simon Asan, K.K.Kunjan, C.K.Velayudhan and R.Sugathan. He felt sad that the Party did not even attempt to take a census of the number of workers who lost their lives by participating in the Punnappa-Vayalar struggle. He is all praise and respect for P.Krishna Pillai, the Comrade who networked the struggles in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Madhavan strongly believed that if Krishna Pillai were alive, the inner feuds and policy and ideological bankruptcy of the CPI (M) would not have happened. Madhavan was a strong critique of V.S.Achuthanandan and the former had tried to expose the latter in his articles contributed to the *Kerala Kaumudi* daily.

N.K.Madhavan played a big role in establishing a Communist Party unit in Aluva and Edappally. One day the police took him into custody and put him up in the lock up at Edappally Station. Some young revolutionaries like K.C.Mathew, M.M.Lawrence and V.Viswanatha Menon then decided to break open the Edappally Station lock up and secure the escape of their leader N.K.Madhavan. (This episode has been documented in detail in the chapter on the Union Movement in Cochin.) Though the station was attacked, the plan was a fiasco. This had happened after the independence of Travancore. Madhavan had expressed high appreciation about T.K.Ramakrishnan, M.M.Lawrence, K.N.Ravindranath, V.Viswanatha Menon and A.P.Kurian, but according to him, the CPI (M) leadership was trying to snuff them out, while letting loose a bunch of inexperienced youth. This would definitely ruin the CPI (M) in the long run, he added.

N.K.Madhavan was a senior member of the State Committee of the CPI (M) for a long time. But his unreserved criticism about the CPI (M) line, policies and leadership, forced him to face disciplinary action against him. In 1987 he was demoted to the District committee and later to the Local Committee at North Parur. He suspected that V.S.Achuthanandan was mainly responsible for this decision and at the same time he was sure that S.Sarma whom Madhavan had brought up in the Party hierarchy was instrumental in expediting his demotion to the Local Committee. But N.K.Madhavan said that he had no regrets.

The CPI (M) leadership took serious note when those leaders who were involved in the Edappally Police Station attack decided to attend an anniversary meeting on the episode. M.M.Lawrence and V.Viswanatha Menon were served with notices why disciplinary action was not to be taken against them. M.M.Lawrence, one of the senior most leaders in the top hierarchy of the CPI (M) had also served as the Convener of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) Liaison Committee. He was removed from that position without any explanations. Viswanatha Menon had served as the Finance Minister in the CPI (M) led LDF Ministry. He had also held the Presidentship of the KSRTC Employees' Association. The CPI (M) top leadership also sidelined him and in 2001 Viswanatha Menon was leading a quiet retired life at his house in Moovattupuzha and rarely appears on Party forums and meetings. He had also been silenced by the CPI (M). According to the critics, the CPI (M) had perfected the art of axing old time leaders however prominent they are, if they dared to question the top leadership. Unfortunately the CPI (M), according to the media reports, had started witnessing faction fights between different groups. The most prominent among them is the fight between the Pinarayi group from Malabar and V.S.Achuthanandan group from Travancore. The fight keeps the cadres on the razor's edge of suspense and drama.

11.3 ACTION AGAINST KANNAN AND RAVINDRANATH

After E.K.Nayanar and C.Kannan, Kannur had contributed O.Bharathan to the State Committee of the CPI (M). Since the Party could easily throw away a stalwart like O.Bharathan, people were not very much surprised when the CPI (M) decided to throw away C.Kannan, the President of the State unit of the CITU since its inception and bring under its control a person like K.N.Ravindranath, the General Secretary of the CITU. On November 25, 2001 the CPI (M) State Committee decided to remove K.N.Ravindranath, from the position of the General Secretary. The Party State Committee arrived at this decision through a division after the strident opposition to the move from one section of the Committee members. The Party then decided to make the Party Central Committee member P.K.Gurudasan, a close confidant of V.S.Achuthanandan, the new General Secretary of the CITU in the place of Ravindranath who had been holding that position for a long time³. The State Committee's proposal was to make Ravindranath the State President of the CITU in the place of the veteran trade union leader C.Kannan who had been functioning as the President since the formation of the CITU in 1974.

Although the CITU, as defined in its Constitution, is an organization independent of the CPI (M), CPI (M) members dominate it at all levels. It was

expected that the decision of the State Committee would have a definite impact on the CITU office bearer's election at the organization's Eighth State Conference held in Alappuzha on November 29, 2000. The CITU sources dubbed the Party move uncalled for, since in their reckoning, it would lower the standing of both the organization as well as K.N.Ravindranath. However, the Party was assertive that the only way to bring the CITU back into the Party fold and Party control was to go in for a leadership change. In the Party leadership's perception, some of the CITU leaders were indulging in actions aimed at creating fissures in the Party and trade union ranks.

Ravindranath, the suave trade union leader known for his intellectual scholarship analytical skills and deep grasp of Marxist-Leninist theory and practice had been removed as a member of the CPI (M) Central Committee in the wake of the faction feud in the Party. Repeated moves for his rehabilitation had met with failure and he had been concentrating on trade union activities since then.

11.3.1 Crucial Alappuzha Conference of CITU

The Alappuzha Conference of the CITU was held during November 29 to December 1, 2000. The media described this as a crucial meeting as it was expected to openly reflect the factional equations in the State CPI (M) and also the much-debated issue of trade union autonomy. This issue of trade union autonomy or independence from Party Control had a direct bearing on the recent moves by the CPI (M) leadership to introduce a code of conduct for trade union leadership. At a more important and larger level, there was also the question of protecting the rights of workers in the changing economic scenario in the country consequent on the adoption of the policies of liberalization, privatisation and globalisation. The CPI (M) therefore argued that the emerging situation called for new strategies and new initiatives and wanted the CITU to take up the new challenges and for this a change of leadership was thought to be inevitable.

The Alappuzha Conference, as media reports showed, saw scenes of suspense and drama with a show down at the end when new office bearers of the CITU were chosen. Both optimists and pessimists believed that a show down would cost the organization dearly. What the organization was recently witnessing was a realignment of forces spread over the CITU and the CPI (M). For some time one was hearing about the honeymoon between the CITU loyalists and those who swear by the CPI (M) politburo member V.S.Achuthanandan. But the situation became serious with the veteran leader opposing any attempt to extend whatever bridge building he had done so far to the election of the CITU office-bearers. Initially at the State Secretariat

meeting of the CPI (M) the majority view was in favour of replacing Ravindranath with the Party Central Committee member, P.K.Gurudas and to retain the present State President C.Kannan. However, when the issue was placed before the State Committee there were many who felt that any such move would prove counter productive, particularly at a time when the State Assembly elections were scheduled to be held sometimes in the first half of 2001. The CITU loyalists were, however, pained about the decision of the CPI (M) to dispense with the services of the veteran C.Kannan, who was lovingly called simply as "C" in the party as well as in CITU.

11.3.2 The Critical Report

At the Conference K.N.Ravindranath, the General Secretary made a critical self-evaluation of the CITU's activities in the State. In his Report he said that the ordinary worker was in the grip of inertia and the maximum that the organization could now lay claim to was "namesake democracy". According to him, the CITU had failed to see greater internal democracy as an important component of trade union activity. He also made a reference to the economic situation but was totally silent on the controversy over the attempts to impose a code of conduct on the CITU from outside hinting at the CPI (M). To strengthen the CITU as an organization of workers, Ravindranath suggested several measures such as fostering active cadres from the working population, holding conferences in tune with the Constitution and Rules of the CITU and encouraging cadres to speak out their mind at both committee and departmental meetings.

The General Secretary also emphasized the need to pass on to the new cadres some of the burdens of leaders now carrying a heavy load on their shoulders. The Report also insisted that revenue and expenditure accounts of all unions affiliated to the CITU should be audited and presented before the committees concerned. It also stressed the need to secure the concurrence of workers at the appropriate forum before entering into wage agreements and to constitute co-ordination committees for specific sectors at the State level. An area, which found special emphasis in the Report, was the need to bring forward more women cadres into the CITU and for this lower level leaders were to identify sectors and industries employing a large number of women and encourage the growth of women leadership. An office-bearer at the State level should be assigned the responsibility of co-ordinating the activities in this direction.

The Report regretted the failure of the State Excise Minister T.Sivadasa Menon, a leading member of the State Committee of the CITU and also the CPI (M) to hold discussions with the trade unions on ways to

check the spread of spurious liquor after the arrack ban imposed by the previous UDF government led by A.K.Antony of the Congress. The trade unions had placed such a demand before the Excise Minister when authorized sales of good quality liquor began to be affected by the sale of spurious stuff. Though the Minister did agree to discuss the issues with the trade unions, he did not do so. However, the Report made no attempt to place the blame for the liquor tragedies in the State during 2000 on the State Government. The Report took note of the attempt made by the AITUC led unions in the liquor industry to criticize the CITU on different issues.

According to the Report, the CITU had registered over 20 per cent growth in the State during the last five years, the strength of membership in the organization having gone up from 743,174 in 1995 to 917,772 in 1999.

11.3.3 The Speech of M. K. Pandhe

Dr.M.K.Pandhe, the CITU national General Secretary, inaugurated the Eighth State Conference of the CITU in Alappuzha. Pandhe was known to have opposed the removal of V.B.Cherian from the CITU as it was against the letter and spirit of the Constitution of the CITU approved by the Eighth National Conference of the organization held in Patna during March 3-7, 1994. In his inaugural address delivered at Alappuzha, he told the delegates that the progress of the trade union movement in the country would be determined by its democratic content and the ability of trade unions to emerge as independent organs of the working class. Trade unions, he said, must have the freedom to decide how to organize union work, pass their accounts and organize the working class. *“Our advancement will be determined by how free and democratic we are”*, he said.

The CITU General Secretary regretted what he termed the tendency of many trade unions to toe the line of the political parties to which they are linked and said the CITU had appealed to all trade unions regardless of their political ideology and affiliation to come together to fight against the ill-effects of globalisation and liberalization. The trade union movement was being marginalized and in such a context *“if we do not come together, the very existence of the trade union movement will be at risk”*. It is clear from both the Report presented by K.N.Ravindranath and the inaugural address of Dr.M.K.Pandhe that both of them wanted to secure internal democracy and independence of trade unions coupled with utmost transparency and accountability.

11.3.4 Some Undercurrents

The Alalppuzha Conference, according to media reports, witnessed a well-orchestrated discussion aimed at pulverizing the loyalist camp and the CPI (M) diehards emerging determined to scotch any remaining sign of resistance to the Party decision to take over the reins of the State unit of the CITU. The message to the CITU wing was loud and clear. The CPI (M) was determined to prove that the CITU was not a few leaders at the top and it decided to accommodate a few leaders from the rival persuasion in the list of new office bearers. For this the number of office-bearers was to be increased from the present 19 to 29. The original proposal was to increase the strength by six, but three more positions were to be created to accommodate those who have been knocking at the door for long.

The CITU camp was divided on whether or not to force a show down with the CPI (M) while one section was all for it, others were counselling caution and arguing for a strategic retreat. There was general agreement that the one person who would decide which way things would go was C.Kannan. The media, therefore, put Kannan as the centre of focus. It was clear to all that if a contest occurred, it would be one-sided. But those who argued for the contest felt that a contest was necessary to defend the principle of trade union democracy. Those who wanted a contest also felt that the criticism of the current leadership from a relatively inexperienced section of the delegates would actually prompt many in the old guard to sympathize with Kannan-Ravindranth duo, particularly so if there was a secret ballot as laid down in the CITU Constitution.

11.3.5 New Theories to justify change of guard

The Alappuzha Conference witnessed the circulation of some new theories to justify the need for a change of guard. According to one just theory mooted by the CPI (M) loyalists, the State CITU Secretary should be a member of the Party Central Committee and given that condition, P.K.Gurudasen who was chosen by the CPI (M) State Committee to head the State CITU was fully justified. But this theory was opposed by the CITU wing, which pointed out that besides a violation of the principle of trade union democracy, it raised serious questions about why this theory was floated only just now. K.N.Ravindranath, the present General Secretary, was not even a member of the CPI (M) State Secretariat when he was elected State CITU General Secretary. The same was the case with T.K.Rangarajan, the Tamil Nadu CITU State General Secretary and Chittabroto Majumdar in West Bengal.

K.N.Ravindranath was tight-lipped when media persons asked him whether he would accept the Party decision that he replaced Kannan as the State CITU President. Some others at the Conference were forthright in demanding that he should not accept the Party formula, which, in their reckoning, would amount to dumping the venerable veteran, Kannan, unceremoniously, and breaching the principle of trade union democracy he had been vehemently arguing for a long time.

According to the media reports, the criticisms against C.Kannan and K.N.Ravindranath during the deliberations in the Conference, were spearheaded by a relatively younger crowd comprising Thiruvallam Sivarajan of Thiruvananthapuram, P.Rajiv of Ernakulam and Madathakode Murali of Kollam, all new faces in the CITU. They accused the CITU leadership of having failed to organize effective campaigns against globalisation. While replaying to the discussions, Ravindranath was reported to have strongly rebutted the charges and explained that the CITU, being a union with hundreds of affiliates, could not possibly hope to deal directly with every agitational programme of the affiliates or involve itself directly with the ideological education of the cadres. He also listed, for the benefit of the delegates, the various campaigns launched by the CITU against the ill effects of globalisation and liberalization.

11.3.6 CPI (M) gains control of CITU

On December 1, 2000 the Alappuzha Conference of the State CITU was expected to produce a big show down between CPI (M) and CITU leadership. But though no such showdown occurred, the Conference witnessed some dramatic scenes. The CITU die-hards took a last minute decision not to force a showdown and this paved the way for the CPI (M) Central Committee Member P.K.Gurudasan to be unanimously elected the new General Secretary of the State CITU. The outgoing general secretary K.N.Ravindranath was accommodated as the State CITU President. C.Kannan created dramatic moments when he rejected the Vice-President post offered to him and slammed the whole election exercise “undemocratic” and “imposition of the will of the Party on the CITU”.

C.Kannan had refused to buy the argument that a contest was essential to defend the principle of trade union democracy. Though the CITU loyalists were forcing a showdown, Kannan had cautioned them that going to such extremes would result in their being wiped out by the numerically stronger pro-Party delegates. Though demoralized with the developments, the CITU wing expressed happiness that the pro-Party section did not succeed in getting rid of K.N.Ravindranath and hoped that Kannan’s refusal to become the State

Vice-President would have left its mark in the minds of the cadres. The original decision of the CPI (M) leadership was to oust Ravindranath from the helm of the CITU. However, at the end, to avoid a big showdown, it had to relent following strong opposition from its own ranks and decide to make Ravindranath the President. But that had only resulted in Kannan feeling slighted and opting out of the top rungs of the CITU.

According to media reports, C.Kannan's name was, in fact, proposed for the post of General Secretary, by one K.V.S.Iyer, a delegate from Ernakulam. M.Rajan from Kollam supported this proposal. The atmosphere in the conference venue became tense with this unexpected development and many started feeling that a contest was in the offing. However, C.Kannan, who, as the President of the CITU, was conducting the proceedings dramatically declared that he did not wish to contest for the post. That virtually eased the tension. Subsequently when his name came up as part of the official panel, Kannan once again rose to decline the post.

11.3.7 C. Kannan blasts CPI (M)

The outgoing or "ousted" President of the CITU, C.Kannan termed the election of the office bearers of the CITU as "undemocratic". Addressing media persons in Alappuzha soon after the CITU conference ended, the veteran leader said that the CPI (M) had decided "every thing" and all that the Conference did was to endorse that. He was not told why he was being removed as President. Instead of asking him to vacate, the Party had unilaterally decided to "remove" him.

Kannan who had served as the State President of the CITU ever since its formation said that the decision as to who all should be the office bearers and how many of them should be there was decided by the Party which also adopted "every means" to carry it out. He said: "*I have been told to go, but I have not been told why I am being removed. It is not wrong to remove a person, but he should be told why he is being removed*", the veteran trade union leader told reporters shortly after the conclusion of the conference. He alleged that the election of the office-bearers was neither free nor fair. But it was no use offering resistance because everything had already been decided. Pressure was brought upon the CITU cadres at the level of the State Committee and through Party district leadership to fall in line with the Party decision, he said.

C.Kannan also told the media that the CITU national leadership had not placed any proposal before the Alappuzha Conference as any proposal was certain to be rejected by the delegates. What had transpired at the

Conference, according to Kannan, was undemocratic and the Central leadership probably decided not to interfere because it knew well that no change could be effected in one Conference. *"It was no use claiming that the CITU was an independent organization because the events at Alappuzha had clearly shown that it was not independent. The organization's character would change only when the cadres begin to believe that theirs was an independent organization"*, Kannan added.

Asked whether he felt that fellow leaders ditched him, C.Kannan replied in the negative. To the question whether K.N.Ravindranath was used to ease him out of the CITU leadership, Kannan said that such things were open to interpretation. Ravindranath, he pointed out, was also not told that he was being removed as the General Secretary. The original decision was to oust Ravindranath from all posts. It was only when opposition to the move gathered strength that the CPI (M) leadership changed its decision. Kannan submitted that he was not pained by his removal and added that he would remain active in the trade union movement as a member of the CITU State Committee and as active as he was in the past.

11.3.8 Kannan's removal evokes mixed response

The meticulously planned removal of the veteran trade union leader and widely respected Communist, C.Kannan from the post of the CITU State Presidentship had evoked mixed response in Kannur where he is virtually synonymous with the trade union movement. Kannan had been involved in the movement since the early 1930s and had worked with leaders like A.K.Gopalan. According to media reports, the coup that marked the easing out of this tall trade unionist, known for his integrity and Spartan life style, appeared to have a strong sense of *deja vu* about it. Expectedly there was neither outrage nor elation among party cadres in the Kannur district over the removal of the 86 year old Kannan. They had experienced a similar situation before when O.Bharathan, another trade unionist and CPI (M) leader was eased out of the CITU and subsequently expelled from the Party following his contest against the Party nominee, K.Chandran Pillai, in the election to the post of the President of the KSRTC Employees' Association held in 1998.

The question that was being speculated by the political circles in Kannur was whether Kannan who had been in the vortex of political and trade union movement for over five decades would go the Bharathan way by withdrawing from public life. Those who think that the going would be tough for Kannan in the CPI (M), recall the experience of O.Bharathan who was initially demoted from the Party State Committee membership to that of a local branch and isolated from the mainstream Party activities following the

CPI (M) Palakkad State Conference in 1998 before he decided to quit politics leading to his expulsion from the Party. However, it was widely rumoured that unlike Bharathan, Kannan was unlikely to beat a retreat without putting up a fight. It may be recalled that Kannan was the only leader who called Bharathan's decision to quit politics an act of cowardice while responding to reporters at that time suggesting that the latter should not have surrendered so easily before the diktats of the CPI (M). Kannan had then said openly that Bharathan could continue in the CITU leadership regardless of his expulsion from the CPI (M).

11.3.9 O. Bharathan's response

Responding to the removal of Kannan from the helm of the CITU, Bharathan wrote an article in the *Mathrubhoomi*⁴. It carried the title "The Sad Departure" ("Dhukhakaramaya Irangippokku", in Malayalam). According to him, C.Kannan had no substitute in the trade union movement as he had sacrificed his entire life to build up the movement and his summary removal from the CITU was tragic as well as shocking. The CITU was a mass organization of the working class overriding differences in language, caste, religion and politics and it had maintained true independence and respected democratic traditions and practices till now. The CITU was never considered as a mass organization owing total allegiance to CPI (M) and this had been emphasized in the speeches and writings of none of other than B.T.Ranadive. In fact it was he who for the first time raised the slogan of a single confederation of all trade unions in India. E.M.S.Namboodiripad himself had gone on record warning the CPI (M) that it should not force any mass popular organizations to come under Party tutelage as it would be better for these organizations to work independently to achieve their goals. However, the members of these organizations would be forced to have their own political views.

According to Bharathan, the CPI (M) did not attach any importance to the views of Fraction Committees. For instance, in September 1998, 20 out of 21 members of the Fraction Committee of the KSRTC Employees' Association decided to put up Bharathan for the Presidentship of the Association, but CPI (M) ignored this view and put up its candidate K.Chandran Pillai. It then directed the members of the Association to vote for him. The CPI (M) even then had stated that the President of the KSRTC Employees' Association should be a member of the State Committee of the Party. But in the Alappuzha Conference what the CPI (M) had done was to throw the above principle into the dustbin and installed K.N.Ravindranath, who was not a member of the State Committee of the Party, in the post of the President of the CITU. This was an unprincipled strategy used by the CPI (M)

to control the CITU. E.M.S.Namboodiripad had elaborated on the procedure to be followed by the CPI (M) if there arose differences between the Party and mass organizations. According to it, there should be detailed discussions between them to resolve the differences and if needed both should be fully prepared to execute necessary corrections in their views and approaches. But in 2000 the CPI (M) had totally ignored the views of both late B.T.Ranadive and E.M.S.Namboodiripad on the delicate relationship between the mass organizations and the Party. According to Bharathan, this stand of the CPI (M) only devalued its reputation as a political party of revolutionary working class organizations. Bharathan vehemently criticized the policy of the Party in amassing huge wealth and assets through collecting funds from the rich and bourgeoisie class and at the same time ignoring the poor workers who could contribute only small amounts to the Party fund. The CPI (M) was also building up a close link with the abkari-contractor lobby and this would only malign the good name of the Party, which had in the past reflected itself as a bastion of revolutionary proletariat, Bharathan added.

O.Bharathan had told *The Hindu* on December 2, 2000, soon after the Alappuzha Conference ended, that the CPI (M)'s tendency to sideline the trade unions and trade union leaders who strengthened the Party would be detrimental to the Party as well as the trade union movement. According to him, the CITU workers could not imagine a CITU state leadership without C.Kannan who was one among those very few leaders who had founded it and given it flesh and blood. It was Kannan who was in the forefront of forming a breakaway group out of the AITUC in 1965 following the split in the Communist Party of India (CPI) and was censured by the CPI (M) for breaking the AITUC against the decision of the Party leadership. The Party then took five years to accept the line of trade union leaders like Kansan in founding the CITU. While the AITUC had an array of stalwarts like T.V.Thomas, R.Sugathan and Kallat Krishnan, the CITU could become the largest trade union thanks to the dedication of the leaders like Kannan and E.Balanandan.

C.Kannan, according to Bharathan, was among the very few surviving communist leaders who had attended the underground meeting at Parapram in Pinarayi, Kannur in 1939 that led to the formation of the Communist Party of Kerala. Kannan was also in the forefront of organizing bidi and handloom workers of Malabar. He had also undergone several years of imprisonment for mobilizing workers and leading working class struggles. One sympathizer of the Party in Kannur told *The Hindu* that the CPI (M) would soon become a party of the working class sans workers as its cadres.

11.3.10 Behind the Scenes at Alappuzha

As stated elsewhere, the CPI (M) leadership had brought its entire weight to bear on the CITU camp to avert a contest in the election of office-bearers on the concluding day of the CITU Conference at Alappuzha. The outgoing president Kannan's stand became crucial to the game plan of both sides. Till the day of election of office bearers, Kannan was all for the contest. However, sensing his importance in the whole scheme of things, the CPI (M) leadership got in touch with persons close to him and told them, in no uncertain terms, that if Kannan opted to contest, they would be held responsible for it. The leadership did this knowing fully well that the outspoken and veteran leader, Kannan, would not accede to any direct request from them.

The Party leadership's attempt met with success when the CITU Kannur District Secretary K.P.Sahadevan, and a fair number of the 41 strong delegates' team from Kannan's home district pleaded with him not to force a showdown. Subsequent events, including Kannan's refusal to contest the post of the General Secretary suggested that he saw wisdom in not forcing the issue. It was clear from day one that the CITU loyalists, despite being virulent in their professed views on trade union democracy, were not working to a game plan. The rival side, on the contrary, had been working with a target for over a year now and moved in for the kill exploiting the confusion in the CITU ranks. It could, therefore, be said that the better team had won.

But the comments made by the CITU national President, E.Balanandan, the General Secretary, Dr.M.K.Pandhe, and, also Kannan on the conclusion of the Conference, on the issue of trade union democracy might also have little to say on why things happened the way they did in Alappuzha. Both Balanandan and Phadke were firm on their assertion that the CITU would not barter away its independence. They, as well as Kannan, were, however, at pains to tell the media reporters that things could not be changed overnight as trade union democracy was a long haul away. Balanandan, who was a picture of neutrality at the Alappuzha Conference, also reminded one and all that "*those who have the power to elect also have the power to remove*".

11.3.11 The new Office-Bearers of CITU

The Alappuzha Conference of the CITU had decided to increase the number of office bearers and also the size of the State Committee. The new office bearers were K.N.Ravindranath (President), P.K.Gurudasam (General Secretary) and K.Moosakutty, M.M.Lawrence, T.Sivadasa Menon,

P.Sarasappan, Nazimunnisa, K.Anirudhan, A.K.Balan, P.Nandakumar, J.Mercy Kutty Amma, K.K.Jayachandran and V.S.Mani (Vice-Presidents). The last five among them were new entrants. The Secretaries of the CITU were K.Padmanabhan, N.Padmalochanan, Peroorkada Sadasivan, K.K.Chelappan, K.O.Habib, K.K.Divakaran, Elamarom Karim, V.V.Saseendran, M.Chandran, K.Chandran Pillai, K.P.Sahadevan and T.P.Ramakrishnan. Among them the last four were new faces. K.M.Sudhakaran was re-elected Treasurer.

The Eighth State Conference of the CITU drew to a close with a massive rally attended by thousands of CITU and CPI (M) activists and cadres drawn from different parts of Alappuzha district. In the public meeting that followed, the outgoing CITU State President C.Kannan presided as if nothing had happened to him. E.Balanandan inaugurated the meeting. Dr.M.K.Pandhe, K.N.Ravindranath, P.K.Gurudasan, T.Sivadasa Menon and V.Kesavan addressed the meeting.

11.3.12 New Chapter Begins

It was believed that with the CPI (M) wresting control of the State CITU, a new chapter was expected to begin in the relations between the two bodies⁵. The period 1996-2000 had seen the CITU leadership trying to assert its identity but that has became a thing of the past. From now on, the CITU would not be a disturbing presence, but a trustworthy member of the extended CPI (M) family. Neither those who were at logger heads with the State CPI (M) leadership or those who were willing to carry out all its bidding would admit it, but the fact of the matter was that the CITU had never been an independent organization with a mind of its own. It could not but be so when the two shared the same ideology and a vast majority of the CITU members were CPI (M) members or sympathizers. It was very much like the INTUC (I) claiming to be independent of the Congress (I) or the BMS not being a member of the BJP or Sangh Parivar.

One could thus see the change of guard in the CITU as the sign of a malady spreading from one part of the body to another. If one could forget the individuals and look at the whole affair with a little bit of detachment, one could see that things had happened the way they did in Alappuzha owing to the CPI (M) leadership's deft handling of the anti-establishment sentiment among a large section of delegates. That it had used every trick in the book to achieve its end was what had made the development so sensational.

According to C.Gowridasan Nair of *The Hindu*, it was no different in Palakkad at the beginning of the summer of 1998 when, in one stroke, a

whole power edifice was brought down by a dominantly young bunch of delegates who found in the CPI (M) politburo member, V.S.Achuthanandan, a rallying point. At that time, the so-called CITU loyalists in the Party were hauled over coals for having tried to enlist the support of the Indian National League (INL) in violation of the Party resolve not to have any truck with communal outfits. That the power elite who had assumed charge in Palakkad later had no qualms in wooing the Muslim League and even striking local level tie up with the Party showed why the change of guard was no change of guard at all. All that one could say charitably about those who had voted to humble the then establishment was that they might have been inspired by dreams of a new dawn in CPI (M) politics. The fact of the matter was that there were many within and outside the CPI (M) who felt sad about the developments of the last several years. On every side of the three-way divide in the Party there were many who were capable of taking the CPI (M) and the class and mass organizations linked to it out of the trodden path, but they were caught in a power struggle gone out of control.

The question that was of immediate relevance in the context of the developments in Alappuzha was how these were going to affect the fortunes of the CITU. One could safely assume that the organization would remain largely untouched by it all. The attempts of sections in the CITU to assert trade union democracy and the right of individual trade unions to decide who should lead them and how they should organize their union activities may well become few and far between. The less said the better about the possibility of non-CPI (M) sections joining unions affiliated to the CITU. If that were the case, it would be a serious blow to the trade union movement of Kerala.

11.3.13 Pinarayi's Thesis

After the developments in the Alappuzha CITU Conference, Pinarayi Vijayan, the CPI (M) State Secretary, hailing from Kannur, published an Edit Page article in the Party organ *Desabhimani* entitled "CITU Conference and the Media Campaign". In it he said that a member of the CPI (M) would be subject to the decisions, policies and discipline of the Party regardless of the class or mass organizations in which he or she works. According to him, though each class and organization has its independent existence and programmes and function in accordance with its Constitution, Party members in such organizations would have to abide by Party decision and discipline. The Party did not, however, consider any such organization as its adjunct or feeder organization, he added.

Pinarayi's thesis was as follows: Members of the CPI (M) would ordinarily function in some class or mass organization. It is the Party unit concerned that decides on what front a member should function. If a person is deputed to organize farmers, that individual would naturally concentrate on the activities of the Karshaka Sanghom and rise up the ranks as part of such activities. Which means it is the Party unit of which the person is a member that decides on what front the individual should function and that regardless of the class or mass organization, a Party member's functioning will be subject to party decision, policies and discipline.

Pinarayi Vijayan said that only the conferences of the CITU held under its Constitution have the right to decide who should lead the CITU and what its programmes should be and that nobody could dilute such rights. In case anybody has any difference of opinion about the positions taken by the Party, it will be reflected within the Party organization. It will have no effect on the class or mass organization concerned.

Describing reports of a rift between the CPI (M) and the CITU as the product of the media's imagination, Pinarayi Vijayan said "*the attempt of the media was to transpose the factionalism that had manifested in the Party since years ago to the present and picture it as a clash between the Party and the class-mass organization*". The Party had taken action against some and expelled a few for having set up a "parallel centre" and engaged in internal sabotage. Some of them were CITU activists and office bearers of some unions. They and some anti-CPI (M) elements were now working against the Party through an Ernakulam based forum. The implicit reference obviously was to K. Vijayachandran and V.B.Cherian.

The attempt of the media was to describe this "gang" as the CITU and to depict their activities as being reflective of the CITU's hostility towards the CPI (M). The message of the Alappuzha Conference, according to Pinarayi's thesis, was clear. It was that neither the CPI (M) nor the CITU could have anything to do with these " betrayers of the working class and propagandists of anti-people politics". It was as a result that some such persons were excluded from the new CITU State Committee, said Pinarayi Vijayan.

11.3.4 The Impact on the Elections, 2001

In May 2001 Kerala went to General Elections to the State Assembly, the Congress led UDF and CPI (M) led LDF being the two major contesting groups. The UDF secured an absolute majority and the LDF had a shocking defeat after LDF Government led by E.K.Nayanar had completed a full term in office. In the post election period the LDF started an in-house debate about

factors that led to their defeat. Some of the Ministers in the LDF Government were defeated in the elections. The LDF Convenor and Politburo member V.S.Achuthanandan had shifted from Mararikkulam constituency, where he had met with defeat in the previous election, to a safer seat at Malampuzha and even though he won the seat, the margin was much lower than what his predecessor T.Sivadasa Menon had earlier. It was then rumoured that some disgruntled elements in the CPI (M) and CITU had rallied against the LDF candidates in several constituencies. For instance, K.Chandran Pillai who contested from Trippunithura was defeated by a big margin by the UDF candidate. All this led to a soul-searching discussion in the State Committee of the CPI (M) as well as in the LDF. In the LDF committee, the CPI, in particular, argued that one reason for the defeat of the LDF was the poor performance of the Nayanar Government. Other parties pointed out the alliance with the INL as a major reason. But the general view was that the religious, caste and communal forces, the BJP and RSS had joined hands in supporting the UDF to bring about a shocking defeat to the LDF.

The CPI (M) State leadership's stand that the LDF's defeat in the Assembly elections was mostly on account of an anti-left consolidation of communal and caste interests and fall in the prices of agricultural commodities had come in for severe criticism at the two day State Committee meeting held in the last week of May 2001. Several members questioned the correctness of the State Leadership's assessment of the poll results and contended that a host of other reasons, mainly the failure of the Nayanar Government on diverse fronts and the alienation of a large number of cadres belonging to class and mass organizations, also contributed to the dismal performance of the Party and LDF in the election. Several State Committee members insisted that these reasons should also be reported to the Party units below and cautioned that unless corrective actions were taken, the Party would face even greater set backs.

According to media reports, the factional divide in the Party was also manifest in very strong terms in the deliberations, with those owing allegiance to V.S.Achuthanandan and the hardcore CITU loyalists raising serious doubts about the Party leadership's assumptions about the election outcome. The role of the CITU in ensuring the defeat of some of the Party candidates came in for particular mention in this context. The counter-argument, though not by way of defence, was that when the Party insisted on alienating the working class, there was bound to be a backlash.

The special correspondent of *The Hindu* daily, a reputed political analyst, had stated thus:⁶

"The CPI (M) election review report has identified arrogance, partisanship and luxurious life style of persons holding responsible positions at various levels of the party and the general lethargy among a large number of party workers as major organizational factors that contributed to the alienation of the masses from the CPI (M) and its defeat in the Assembly polls. The review report is notable for the scathing comments it makes about the party cadres and sections of the party leadership and the grim signals it seeks to send to the rank and file. The report, without being specific, says that while some of the leaders are guilty of arrogance, others have contributed to the alienation of the masses from the party with their partisan handling of issues. The report calls for a self-critical introspection by party cadres and leaders on whether the CPI (M) has been functioning like a working class party....."

"In a line reminiscent of the portion dealing with party cadres in the political organizational report adopted by the 16th Party Congress in Calcutta in 1998, the present report points out that a large section of the CPI (M) members are not playing any part in party work Significantly, the report is all praise for the contribution made by the CITU in the election campaigns. While the work by the class and mass organization was noteworthy, that put in by the trade union movement is most significant and praiseworthy".

11.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter concentrated exclusively on the politics and independence of trade unions with special reference to the CITU-CPI (M) interface in Kerala. Similar, but small and unpublicised events have been taking place in other political parties and trade unions supporting them. But since we did not make a detailed study about these, a discussion on them is avoided. We may also add that CPI (M), in recent times, has been openly demonstrating its resentment against any one in the Party whoever he be, be at high or low in the hierarchy, criticizing the Party's line in public forums. The Party used to take disciplinary action at appropriate time against members by initiating action against such "erring" members through removal or suspension or by demotion in the hierarchy. Among those who had been dealt with in such a fashion included top CITU leader M.M.Lawrence, who once had held the post of the Convener of the Liaison Committee of the LDF Government. Some like V.Viswanatha Menon, former MP, State Finance Minsiter, and, President of the KSRTC Employee's Association had voluntarily withdrawn from

active party work when the top leadership of the CPI (M) expressed doubts about Menon's health conditions. Appukkuttan Vallikkunnu who was a source of strength for CPI (M) newspaper *Desabhimani* found himself one day thrown out from that newspaper as well as from the CPI (M). Even to this day Appukkuttan continues to fight against the Party's policy of denying natural justice to him. Indeed he was removed from his position without serving him a prior notice or any explanation. He even dared to take the issue to the law court and demand legal compensation for unjustified removal from the newspaper. He has also questioned the deliberate and open violation of the CPI (M) Constitution by top leadership of the Party.

Meanwhile, in the latest election of members to the State Committee of the CPI (M), a clear division between two groups led by V.S.Achuthanandan and Pinarayi Vijayan emerged and at the time of writing this, the rift between these two leaders has been interpreted as reflection of North-South divide or conflict with both leaders respectively belonging to the South and North regions of the State. To put it simply, it has boiled down to a tussle between the two leaders to bring both the Party as well as the CITU under their control. The on-going drama in the CPI (M) and the CITU has of course created a bit of confusion among the trusted followers and activists at the middle and lower hierarchy in both the organizations. Whether it will strengthen or weaken the CITU as a working class organization is indeed a big question.

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See *Malayala Manorama*, 24-04-2000.

3. See the reports in *The Hindu*, dated 27, 28, 29 of November 2000 and 1, 2, 3, 5 of December 2000.
See *Mathrubhoomi*, 07-12-2000.
4. O. BHARATHAN : “ Dukhakaramaya Irangippokku” (The Sad Departure), *Mathrubhoomi*, 07-12-2000.
5. See Reports by C. Gowridasan Nair in *The Hindu*, 03-22-2000.
6. *The Hindu*, 05-06-2001.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

Our documentation of the history of trade union movement in Kerala spread over several regions and sectors must have clearly demonstrated the close relationship between the union movement and the political movement in this State since the early 1920s. The trade unions had played a vanguard role in the political movement for freedom and responsible government. Attempts had been successfully made to bring together various segments of the State's working class by instilling in them some kind of political ideology and beliefs. Political mobilization, in the strict sense of the term, was the work of the left ideologues and the socialists and radical elements among them. They called the coir and fishing workers in Punnappa and Vayalar to rise and fight against feudal lords, European and native petty capitalists and the royalty and its armed forces all in the name of freedom and emancipation of the working class. Similar episodes were enacted in Cochin and Malabar. But it was in Malabar, that the revolutionary communist movement took up the challenge of political and working class mobilization and consolidation with greater vigour. Its father figure P.Krishna Pillai, though born in Vaikom in old Travancore, took up the role of providing a connecting link between the movements in Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Thus from its formative years politics became an integral part of the trade union movement. And today when looking back, one is forced to say that the trade union movement in Kerala had more than enough of politics in it, which created a serious threat to basic working class interests.

12.1 Everybody turns pro-labour

The governments of the day from time to time had imposed bans and restrictions on trade union as well as political work. During such periods the leaders and frontline activists went underground and ceaselessly continued their work. Resumption of normal union and political work was restarted only after 1948. But thereafter, the political parties began to be conscious about creating separate identities and searching for followers and supporters from various segments of the society including the working class. No political party could risk by abandoning the politically conscious working class in the State and as such they began to enter a rat race of competition to get them. This made every political party in the State demonstrably pro-labour. Consequently, the governments they set up also naturally became pro-labour. Today, the State of Kerala ranks high in the implementation of Good

Practices in the field of labour as defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO). According to some critics, these Good Practices had put a heavy burden on the sagging economy of the State with stagnation spreading rapidly through its commodity producing sectors.

12.2 Divisions and New Leadership

In the early 1950s itself, the trade union movement in Kerala started getting divided on political as well as petty political and ideological lines. Each political party tried to create a trade union wing of its own and treat it as a supporting force rather than allowing the union to function as an independent class/mass organization with the chief objective of serving the interests of the members of that organization. This often led to serious confrontation at times between those who were at the top of decision-making bodies of the political party and the trade union. The problem got complicated when there arose ego clash between the two sets of leaders. In the old days either political leaders or social activists formed the trade unions. In later years this changed when new cadres of trade union leaders arose from the ranks of the working class. Besides, there were a few well-known political leaders of yester years who decided to quit political party work and concentrate exclusively on trade union work. At the same time, there were a considerable number who grew up with the trade union work and later choosing the path of political work. In such cases, their long run aim was to use the trade union work and popularity as a stepping-stone to political leadership and then to important political office. For achieving these objectives, some caused vertical as well as horizontal splits in the parent organization be it the political party or the trade union.

We have mentioned elsewhere about the split of the Communist Party of India into CPI and CPI (M) and, the Indian National Congress into the Congress (I), Congress (A) and Congress (S). The other political parties like the Kerala Congress, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Muslim League have also split in recent years. For instance, the Kerala Congress has at least three or four groups led by K.M.Mani, R.Balakrishna Pillai, P.J.Joseph and T.M.Jacob. Baby John and K.Pankajakshan lead the RSP groups. The Muslim League split created the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). Following this split in the political parties the trade union centres supporting them also began to split to create the AITUC, CITU, INTUC (I), INTUC (A), INTUC (S), UTUC (B), UTUC (official) and so on. In some trade union centres like the Swathantha Thozhilali Union (STU), though an open split had not emerged yet, factional groups have started operation. Besides, Kerala has also witnessed the proliferation of craft/category unions that caused further sub-division and fragmentation in the union movement.

With the emergence of accommodative and compromising strategy of coalition politics becoming the order of the day, two major groups, namely the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) have captured the centre of attraction. The Congress both (I) and (A) factions currently lead the UDF together while the CPI (M) calls the tune in the LDF. The inter-party and intra-party politics of the two groups and their constituent allies has made its impact on the trade unions under them, those supporting them and those friendly to them. In the course of the last five decades the number of trade unions has increased very rapidly. The number of registered trade unions in Travancore-Cochin in 1951-52 was 555. After the formation of the Kerala State, the number increased to 1213 in 1957-58. In 1991 the number of unions went up to reach 9264 and by 2000 it crossed the 11140 mark.

12.3 Spread of Unionisation

Unionisation has been spreading to areas hitherto remaining neglected. There are trade unions in shops and commercial establishments, motor transport and light motor vehicles, construction work, fisheries, liquor trading and liquor vending, food processing, petrol pumps, cooking gas (LPG) agencies, private hospitals, dispensaries, pharmacies, clinical laboratories, scanning centres, private educational institutions, security services, production of motion pictures and tele films, and hotels to mention a few. There are trade unions even for mahouts engaged in handling and care of elephants, those who work as frog catchers, and, those engaged in the collection of river sands. Indeed, the expansion of the tertiary/service sector in the State's economy stimulated the growth of trade unions among employees in several informal and unorganised sector employments and most of such unions acquired the highest degree of aggressiveness and militancy. The traditional industries like Coir, Cashew, Textiles, Bidi and Plantations, which had pioneered the union movement in the State and had functioned as active centres of trade union activity remained stagnant, while new centres emerged in the union movement. One of such strong centres has been the white-collar Government employees' unions.

12.4 Affiliations

The bulk of trade unions in the State are affiliated to the Central Trade Unions like the INTUC, CITU, AITUC, HMS and the BMS. There are also several trade unions under various political parties and it is in their midst that a few Independent trade unions like the ones led by the veteran S.C.S. Menon try to survive. But most of them are seen in the industrial belt of

Kochi where many insiders had come forward to form trade unions. In such unions, outsiders are fully kept out. After the dismissal of the Communist Ministry headed by E.M.S.Namboodiripad in 1959, the political scene underwent a drastic transformation. Initially the CPI and CPI (M) were at each other's throat in the domain of labour, particularly because both decided to enhance their control over the working class in the State. Soon most other political parties joined the race. The net result was that major labour relations issues were sidelined and the working class was asked to see everything from a political angle. This was bad for industrial peace. New forms of trade union action also emerged on the scene. Workers resorted to *Gherao*, which became very controversial as a trade union weapon. *Harthals* and *Bundhs* became so frequent that the High Court was forced to intervene in them.

12.5 Changing Character

Contemporary unionism is far different from what it was in the thirties or forties. There has emerged now a growing gap between leadership and the rank and file. The spirit of evangelism, sacrifice and service that the older generation of leadership had shown has now been replaced by a measure of irresponsibility, disloyalty and petty graft of the younger generation. The political misadventures of a few leaders have further harmed the interests of steady union growth. There is also moral degradation on the part of the working class. Respect for authority and conscious need for discipline are fast losing in importance. Class-consciousness is not strong as it was in the earlier years. While union leadership is engaged in direct negotiations with the employer, the so-called irresponsible elements among the workers launch direct action in defiance of the leadership. These are cases when workers join one union and later leave it in order to join another. There are also workers who pay the membership fee to more than one union and as a result the data on membership become unreliable. There is no unanimity on the issue of adopting secret ballot or verification for ascertaining member support for unions. There is opposition to the proposal for conducting referendum based on secret ballot due to fear of losing representative character of the union.

The union members are reluctant to attend union meetings and participate in its deliberations. They are more concerned about maximizing their economic gains. This has encouraged multiplicity of unions, aggravating inter-union rivalry and conflicts thereby bringing a bad name to labour relations in the state. There was a demand for a legislation to deal with the problem of union recognition either through secret ballot or membership verification. The Trade Union Act is found to be out of date in dealing with the new issues. But so far no attempt has been made by the Central Government to look into this matter, though it has already received the Report

of the Second National Commission on Labour headed by Ravindra Varma. It is reported that this Report is not unanimous and the BMS representative in the Commission has written a Dissenting Note to the Report. When the Terms of Reference for the Commission were finalized, the Central Government did not consult the Central Trade Unions and most of them had boycotted the sittings of the Commission. The Central Trade Unions including the INTUC, AITUC, CITU, HMS, BMS and others had expressed their fears about the possible fallouts of Liberalisation, Privatisation and Globalisation on the Indian working class. They are deeply concerned about retrenchment, cuts in wages and benefits enjoyed by the working class for a long time and also restrictions on legitimate trade union rights. Hence they have planned to form joint action councils and launch agitations against the Government's New Economic Policy. The situation is not different in Kerala too. The very recent passage of a Bill in the second half of 2002 by the UDF Government on head load labour has created lot of debate and opposition even from the trade unions belonging to the ruling Parties in the State.

12.6 Positive aspects

In spite of the political divisions, rivalries and other structural weaknesses, there existed a positive feature in the trade union movement in the State and it was considered somewhat unique when compared to the rest of India. On major issues in industrial relations, the trade unions, irrespective of their political affiliations, had come forward to form joint action councils and programmes. This was reflected even in the process of collective bargaining at the enterprise level. Here all the unions at the enterprise might sometimes file a joint Demand Notice, sit together and form joint bargaining committee to wrest a deal from the employer/management. In such cases it was difficult for the employers to drive one union against another when issues of common concern arise. There had been cases when enlightened managements had taken bold initiative to sign Long Term Agreements and Settlements with all the major and minor unions of workers in their enterprises. In some cases some of the managements had even signed agreements with unregistered unions. But lately such cases are not reported from anywhere in the State.

12.7 Economic Reforms and After

Since 1991, the economic scenario in India has been witnessing fundamental changes. The structure of the economy as well as commodity production, product mix, market behaviour, attitudes of employers, trade unions and the State towards industrial relations and governance in industry are changing rapidly. Van Dusen Kennedy, the American expert in industrial

relations studies once made an assessment of the role of the three principal actors, namely, the employer, trade union and the state, in the tripartite system in India thus: "*The trade unions are militant, employers are legalistic and state tender minded*". But now it seems that after economic reforms were initiated, the unions are becoming more legalistic, employers more aggressive and militant, while the State continues to be soft and tender minded while at the same time to express its helplessness to protect labour. There are indications that the State is being compelled to abandon its old position and adopt a new one projecting itself as a *facilitator* rather than a *provider* of social protection.

The post1991 scenario has indeed generated a number of opportunities and challenges to the three partners in industrial relations. The employers are compelled to formulate new strategies to become more competitive. The trade unions have been compelled to accept the reality of reforms and change and are advised to make appropriate adjustments to their attitudes and policies and also to make little sacrifices to make production efficient and keep industries running instead of forcing them to close down. The State is becoming more capital friendly and reversing its earlier labour friendly approach.

One important result of economic reforms is the decline of trade unions. Jobs in the organized/formal sector are being lost all around. The unions fear that under ruthless competitive pressures, employers may take such steps to effect further thinning/slimming of the organized/formal sector and enlarge the unorganized/informal sector, which does not enjoy any effective social protection. So workers are now more concerned with keeping their jobs than demanding further improvement in their conditions of work and wages. Due to serious fiscal crisis, even the State Government employees are now threatened with staff reduction, postponement of salary payments and withdrawal, reduction and even denial of service benefits enjoyed by them for a long time.

Many trade unions are witnessing declining membership and lack of interest even in paying their membership fees. Some top leaders of unions have stated that the rank and file members are losing faith in the leadership. Unions are deliberately kept out of joint consultations and decision-making process. To some employers, unions have become a nuisance. To workers, union seen to have become unnecessary since they believed that labour laws will continue to provide them protection. The workers have failed to understand the underlying threat that these labour laws are in the process of modifications in favour of Capital. Now union leadership is trying to use all the means at their disposal to send the message to the workers that the time has come for them to stand united, find their common enemy and its strategies and collectively fight to regain the lost ground.

12.8 Stock taking

Unfortunately, the trade union movement today stands divided and fragmented. In some cases, the political parties treat the unions as appendages to boost their vote bank and support political decisions, even if such decisions go against the fundamental interests of the working class. Inter-union and intra-union rivalry is widespread, though Kerala is a unique situation where it is minimal. Use of muscle power in the unorganized/informal sector employments is increasing due to the absence of adequate social protection to its workers.

In Kerala, a new generation of workers is emerging. Sacrifice of class/societal/public interest as well as ideology in preference to short-term economic gains and political power has worsened the industrial relations situation in the State. Among the working class there is little concern for larger issues like growing unemployment, declining industries, loss of investor confidence and worsening wage relativities and even re-emergence of contract system and pre-capitalist modes of production. At one end, in the past the workers were asked by their leaders to resist any attempt at technological upgradation of work processes and reorganization and restructuring of industries. At the other end, the distance between leadership and rank and file in the union movement began to widen, the latter taking law into their hands even in defiance of orders from the former.

There is little democracy at the work place as well as in the day-to-day functioning of trade unions. In some unions there is no internal democracy. Office bearers are often nominated, not elected. The members do not take General Body meetings seriously and as a result the members do not participate in decision-making. Basic issues concerning the working class in general and specific groups of workers in particular are not discussed and debated openly. Groups of vested interests take decisions and force them on the leadership. If the leadership resists it, they search for new leadership who would obey. Many top union leaders have confided that many among them are forced to dance to the tune called by powerful groups merely for survival. Many young activists have entered the trade union field to make a living. They are exposed to charges of corruption and some have amassed a fortune through their trade union work. They become easy victims to tempting offers from employers who seek their support. However, there are a few leaders who still maintain commitment to the working class, and, honesty and integrity in their trade union work. But their number is on the decline and very soon they will be a part of a fast vanishing rare tribe in the trade union movement in Kerala.

In Kerala all will agree that labour in this so-called “problem State” should abandon its present attitudes to work and productivity and accept a new work culture in tune with the fast-changing economic scenario. Several hypotheses have been advanced by reputed scholars for explaining the low level of industrialization in this State where all the necessary potential exists for accelerating industrial growth. Perhaps a shift from traditional industries to more skill/knowledge based industries, professional management and adoption of fairer practices by both management and labour are a few recent prescriptions for stimulating industrial growth in the State. Some have pointed out that the high psychic cost which entrepreneurs and managements are forced to bear stands as the biggest constraint on industrialization. According to some, the Malayali worker works well and is the most productive when he is outside the State. What has gone wrong with him while he works in Kerala? A hard search would give us a long list of explanatory factors like unionisation with sole focus on economic gains, character of leadership, style of functioning, politics and ideology, failure to understand larger societal interests, misplaced ego and unwillingness or resistance to submit himself to any universally acceptable norms of discipline, involvement in petty quarrels over piffles, and, the in-built desire to stand like the proverbial coconut palm showing no respect to others who are assumed to be less taller.

12.9 Inevitability of Change

It is in this context that many argue for a new work culture. When one agrees with this, one should also say there are a few pre-conditions for creating such a work culture. We should start from the beginning, from the school. We should incorporate in our educational system and in the children who get groomed there, such things as respect for authority, discipline, dignity of labour, high quality of performance, a willingness to listen to others' views and a feeling that one need to work not only for one self and family but also for the society in which we live.

With the recent changes in economic policy, workers in Kerala too have started feeling that there are serious threats to their jobs, emoluments and other benefits. Employers too are not better off. Consequently attitudinal changes are taking place. Fortunately a large number of trade unions have started to tell their members that their first duty is to protect and save their establishments and only afterwards they should start fighting for their rights and privileges. In many establishments the unions have agreed to raise workload and accept productivity norms. In one or two cases at least the unions and their members have agreed to accept cuts in wages and help the industry to reduce cost of production. Can we not treat this as a positive change?

In Kerala the trade union movement today is trying to establish a common platform for launching a “Save Industry” campaign and build trade union unity cutting across political differences. Some distinguished leaders in the union movement have openly canvassed for creating an environment of mutual trust in the place of traditional confrontational posture. They know that the employer is also threatened. So unless both the partners join together, survival becomes difficult. The politics of trade unions is being given a new interpretation. It is argued that the trade union is a class organization and not an appendage of political parties. This is very evident from the recent stand taken by the State unit of the CITU.

Employers often complain that the present work culture is not conducive to increasing productivity and therefore a new work culture must be evolved based on teamwork and networking. The focus must be on larger organizational goals rather than personal or individual gains. The existing mindset of workers treating their employers as blood-sucking exploiters must change. They should realise that only by achieving the organizational goals and protecting their establishments that the workers would be able to achieve higher wages and quality of life.

In running an industry till now one spoke about three partners, namely, employers, employees and the State and hence tripartism was given great importance. Now the role of the State is changing. It is going to become a *facilitator*, not a *provider* and in addition we have a new partner, the customer on the scene. In this changed context, the worker has to be multi-skilled, flexible, proactive, self-directed/empowered to work without rigid external control, result-oriented and responsible.

12.10 Trade Unions to lead

One must say that willingness to work longer hours at lower wages and under slave conditions is not the kind of work culture that we must ask for. What we need is a work culture based on mutual trust, good work quickly supported by due rewards and financial incentives, recognition of the human face of the worker and an enabling environment of cordial relations. Work culture is something that cannot be created; it must be evolved and nurtured. For this one cannot rely entirely on the workers and the management. The State, a **Strong State**, have an important role to play in this. However, the enlightened workers and their trade unions can take the lead in this and help try to create such a **Strong State**. That is the challenge before the trade union movement in Kerala in the coming years.

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 Centenary Celebrations Committee,
 Kollam, 1997

ANNEXURES

1. SOUVENIRS and PERIODICALS

AITUC, Trade Union

CITU Sandesam

CITU Samsthana Sammelanam 1995 Decemebr, Souvenir

Dr.Velukkutty Arayan Smaranika, Smaranika Committee, Karunagappally, 1994

ESUSI, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir, 1929-1989

Karshaka Thozhilali Maasika, Rajatha Jubilee Pathippu, 1998

Kerala Dinesh Bidi Souvenir, 1979

Plantation Staff Felicitates Dr.P.H.Daniel on Completion of 50 years of service, 1997

Praja Mandala Smaranakal, Praja Mandala Charithra Rachana Samithy, Cochin, 1985

Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union (TCFWU), Kanaka Jubilee Souvenir, 1972

2. LIST OF TRADE UNION LEADERS WHO ALLOWED AUDIO RECORDING OF THEIR REMINISCENCES

Aboo, T.M., Kochi
Achuthanandan, V.S., Alappuzha
Anandan, K.S., Kollam
Anirudhan, K., Thiruvananthapuram
Aravindan, N., Thiruvananthapuram
Aryan, A.V., Thrissur
Babu Divakaran, Kollam
Balagangadhara Menon, P., Kochi
Balakrishnan Nair, G., Vembayam
Balan, I.V., Chirackal
Balanandan, E., Kochi
Bharathan, O., Kannur
Binoy Viswam, Kozhikode
Bhaskaran Nair, K., Kozhikode
Chandrasenan, M.T., Alappuzha
Chellappan, K., Kollam
Chitharanjan,J,Thiruvananthapuram
Daniel, P.H. Dr., Coimbatore
Dhara Singh, G.S., Kochi
Divakaran, K.K., Palakkad

Abraham, K.M., Kottayam
Ahmedkutty Unnikulam, Kozhikode
Anathalavattom Anandan, Thiruvananthapuram
Appu, K. Palakkad
Aryadan Mohammed, Nilambur
Azeez, A.A., Kollam
Baby John, Chavakkad
Balakrishnan, K., Azhikode
Balakrishna Pillai,R. Kottarakkara
Balan, V., Kannur
Bhaskaran, P., Valathungal, Kollam
Bhat, K.S., Kochi
Ben, K.S., Punnappa
Chandran Pillai, K., Kochi
Chekkootty, P.K., Kondotty
Cherian, V.B., Kochi
Damodaran, S., Alappuzha
Devassykkutty, C.A., Elappara
Divakaran, C., Thiruvananthapuram
Eapen, K.C., Alappuzha

Eliyas, P., Kollam
 Francis, P.R., Thrissur
 Gangadharan, K., Kozhikode
 Gangadharan, S.K., Adoor
 George, N.T., Thiruvalla
 Gopalan, P.K., Meppady
 Gurudasan, P.K., Kollam
 Haridas, K.P., Kochi
 Jubba Ramakrishna Pillai, Thiruvananthapuram
 Jose, A.C., Kochi
 Joseph, V.J., Thiruvananthapuram
 Kannan, C., Kannur
 Kannan Menon, Kochi
 Karthikeyan, M.A., Thrissur
 Karunakaran, K., Thrissur
 Kesavan, C.K., Alappuzha
 Kesavan, K., Cherthala
 Kochunny, A.A., Kochi
 Krishnan, C., Taliparamba
 Krishnan, P.K., Thrissur
 Kumar, D., Munnar
 Kunju Panicker, V.K., Alappuzha
 Kuttikrishnan, K.M., Kozhikode
 Lalaji Babu, P., Bharathipuram, Kollam
 Madhavan, N., Kollam
 Madhavan, N.K., Wadakkkekara
 Mathew, K.C., Kochi
 Menon, E.K., Thrissur
 Menon, S.C.S., Kochi
 Mettuthara Narayanan, Pathiyoor
 Muhammed Basheer, E.T., Kozhikode
 Nair, B.K., Kochi
 Narayanan, E.K., Eda Kochi
 Nataraja Pillai, N., Ranni-Perunad
 Oommen Chandy, Puthuppally
 Padmalochanan, N., Kollam
 Padmanabhan Nair, P.D., Aluva
 Pandi, S.K., Munnar
 Pankajakshan, K., Thiruvananthapuram
 Paulose, C.O., Thrissur
 Perrorkada Sadasivan, Thiruvananthapuram
 Potti, S.S., Thiruvananthapuram
 Prabhakaran, K.C., North Parur
 Prathapachandran, V., Thiruvananthapuram
 Raghavan, P.K., Bharanikkavu
 Rajan, K.A., Kochi
 Rajendran, K.P., Thrissur
 Fakhir Khan, Balaramapuram
 Ganapathy, N., Munnar
 Gangadharan, P.S., Kochi
 George, K.A., Punalur
 George Chadyannmury Mrs., Chengannur
 Gopala Pillai, K.N., Kochi
 Habib, K.O., Thiruvananthapuram
 Hochimin Velayudhan, P., Kozhikode
 John, C.P., Thiruvananthapuram
 Jose Abraham, Thodupuzha
 Kakku, M.A., Thrissur
 Kannan, M.K., Thrissur
 Karippur, M. Sri Kumar, Nedumangad
 Karunakaran, G., Kollam
 Karunakaran Pillai, C.P., Kollam
 Kattakkada Balakrishna Pillai, Aryanad
 Kesavan Nair, P., Kollam
 Kosalaramadas, K.P., Thiruvananthapuram
 Krishnan, I.P., Kozhikode
 Krishnadas, V., Palakkad
 Kunhikannan, P., Vythiri
 Kuppuswamy, R., Munnar
 Kurian, C.A., Munnar
 Lawrence, M.M., Kochi
 Madhavan, P.K., Alappuzha
 Madhavan Paruvathotti, Chavara
 Malayil Velayudhan, Feroke
 Menon, K.P.S., Kochi
 Moni, A.K., Munnar
 Moosakutty, K. Kozhikode
 Mundappally Thomas, Adoor
 Nandakumar, P., Thirur
 Narayanan, P., Kalliaserry
 Neelakantan, U., Kadakkavoor
 Ouseph, P.A., Thrissur
 Padmanabhan, K., Chelakkara
 Palode RAVI, Thiruvananthapuram
 Panikkar, K.V.K., Thrissur
 Paraman, A.M., Thrissur
 Payyappilly Balan, Kochi
 Pokker, U., Kozhikode
 Prabha, T.M., Kollam
 Prabhakaran, K.P., Anthikkad
 Puthuppally Raghavan, Kayamkulam
 Rajan, A.N., Thrissur
 Rajasekharan Thamby, Chengannur
 Raman Pillai, N., Kollam

Ramachandran, N., Thiruvananthapuram	Ramalingam, P., Adoor
Ramakrishna Pillai, V.P., Kollam	Ramaswami, T.S., Nagercoil
Rao, P.T., Aluva	Ravindran, C., Azhikode
Ravindranath, K.N., Kochi	Rawther, M.S., Thiruvananthapuram
Rosamma Punnoose, Kunnamthanam	Sadirikoya, Haji., Kozhikode
Saji Narayanan, Thrissur	Sankaradhas, K.P., Thiruvananthapuram
Saithalikutty,K., Manjeri	Sankaranarayanan, T.V., Kochi
Saidalavi, N.P., Palakkad	Sankarankutty, M., Thiruvananthapuram
Saithalikutty, K., Manjeri	Sankarankutty, P.K., Kozhikode
Saseendran,V.V., Karunagappally	Sarasappan, P., Thiruvananthapuram
Sivaraman, V.N., Meppady	Sivanandan, K.N., Thiruvananthapuram
Sreedharan, O., Punalur	Solomon, P.A., Kottarakkara
Sreedharan, T.K., Kollam	Sreekantan Nair, N.,Mrs., Ambalappuzha
Sudhakaran, K.M., Kochi	Subramonia Shenoy, Payyannur
Subramanian NAIR, P., Kozhikode	Sukumaran, K.N., Thiruvananthapuram
Sukumaran, N.M., Kochi	Surendran, N.K., Kannur
Suresh Babu, K., Kollam	Surendranath, K.V., Thiruvananthapuram
Thampan Thomas, Kochi	Thankappan Unnithan, Adoor
Thennilapuram Radhakrishnan, Palakkad,	Thomas, Y.,Adoor
Thomas Kocherry, Fr., Thiruvananthapuram	Thyagarajan, S., Kollam
Vamaidevan, K.C., Thiruvananthapuram	Varghese, P.C., Alappuzha
Varghese Thundiyil, Alappuzha	Varkey, C.L., Thrissur
Varkala Kahar, Thiruvananthapuram	Vasu, A., (GRO), Kozhikode
Vasu, C.K., Alappuzha	Vasu, M., Kozhikode
Vazhithala Bhaskaran, Thodupuzha	Velayudhan, K.K., Arimbur
Velayudhan, P.P., Kozhikode	Venkatachalm, A., Thiruvananthapuram
Venugopal, R., Coimbatore	Vijayan Kunissery, Palakkad
Vijayan, P., Thalasserry	Vijayakumar, K.K., Kochi
Viswanathan, C.K., Kochi	Vilangupara Sukumaran, Pathanmthitta
Viswanatha Menon, V., Moovattupuzha	Vithura Sasi, Thiruvananthapuram
Yusuf, A.N., Palakkad	