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THE EMERGENCE OF RADICAL WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT IN ALLEPPY (1922 - 1938)

THOMAS ISAAC

Centre for Development Studies Ulloor, Trivandrum 695 011 Kerala

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Introduction .

The radical working class movement which emerged in Alleppy by the end of the 1930s has played an important role in the development of trade union and communist movements in southern Kerala. In 1922, the Travancore Labour Association (TLA) was formed in Alleppy. It was then more a labour welfare organisation rathern than a trade union for collective bargaining. Sixteen years later, Alleppy was embroiled in almost a month long general strike in the coir industry, led by the TA. This strike was the culmination of the twin processes of deteriorating industrial relations and growing political involvement of the workers. The workers held out heroically in the struggle, despite the informal compromise reached by the bourgeois national leadership with the Travancore government. This event, in 1938, marked a new phase in the development of the national movement in Travancore as it heralded the entry of the working class as an independent political force in the struggle against imperialism and feudal autocracy. The present paper attempts to analyse the making of this radical working class movement.

Though the growth of the trade union militancy and class conciousness was linked closely to the deterioration of the labour conditions and the consequent upsurge of economic struggles, the emergence of working class radicalism cannot be explained by economic conditions alone. It is important to understand the totality of social relations within which the working class develops. In particular we emphasise the radical streams in the Ezhava Social Reform Movement (ESRM).

The interaction of caste and class in the social development of Kerala has received widespread attention. As far back in 1947, E.M.I Namboodiripad drew the attention of scholars to the contribution of ESM in preparing the ground for the spread of the communist movement in scuthern Kerala. Our effort in the present paper is to develop this theme of inter-relationship between caste and class through a detailed examination of the early history of the Alleppy working class movement.

We begin with a discussion of the objective formation of the coir working class. We briefly describe the development of the coir weaving industry in Alleppy. The coir weaving had no indigenous tradition on the Malabar Coast and was introduced by the Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century. The social origin of coir workers from the Ezhava caste and the acute labour scarcity experienced by the industry 'till the end of the 'twenties are important factors to be borne in mis while analysing the systems of labour regulation within the coir manufacturies. They also explain the support extended to the TLA by the India coir firms at the time of it's formation. The Indian employers in the TLA possible instrument to instill a sense of discipline amongst the workforce. The workers, on the other hand, exhibited little interest in organising against their employers.

They were, however, deeply involved in the social reform ferment within their own caste. The emerging bourgeois elite in the Ezhava out

power, brought the Ezhava masses into the agitational path against the savarna domination in social and political life of Travancore. The coir workers were actively involved in the anti-savarna movements and were strengly influenced by them. Our discussion mainly revolves around the process through which the coir workers came to class conciousness i.e. the process through which the coir workers came to consider themselves primarily as members of a class rather than as members of a particular caste or community and how the anti-savarna struggle became but one aspect of the general working class struggle.

We discuss the deterioration of the labour conditions in the industry due to intense inter-capitalist rivalry and unregulated expansion of industrial capacity. The spontaneous struggles of the workers forced the TLA to choose a path of active resistance and a new militant union leadership emerged. Working class solidarity grew and the conciousness of semmon economic interests developed among the workers.

The economic struggle of the workers began to intermingle with
the general political movements in Travancore. We describe the course
of evolution of the class conciousness from the stage of 'economism' to
radical political conciousness i.e. the awareness of common political,
interests among the workers as opposed to/different from those of
the capitalists and their political movements and the conviction for
the mode to overthrow the capitalist system itself if the workers interests
were to be permanently safeguarded. The general strike of 1938 proved
to be the school of mass political education. We emphasise the leading
rele played by the Congress Cocialist Party (CSP) in this latter transition.

The process of class polarisation was accelerated by the emergence of a class of coir capitalists from the Ezhava caste itself and the ascendancy of conservative trends in the Ezhava caste movement. The vacillating and ambivalent attitude of the caste leadership to the economic and political struggles of the working class, forced the workers to move away from the communal leadership and ideology. It was the working class movement that carried forward the radical legacy of the ESRM.

The Coir Weaving Industry

The history of coir weaving industry at Alleppy begins with the establishment of a coir manufactory at Alleppy beach by James Darragh, an Irish born American in 1859. It was the first of its kind on the Malabar coast. In England, the industry had been established a quarter of centure earlier and subsequently spread even to America. In fact, prior to setting out to India in 1855, James Darragh was an assistant in his father manufactory in America.

Since the weaving of coir mat and matting had no indigenous tradition in the Malabar Coast, a new labour force had to be trained up in the new art. In Darragh's manufactory, a number of Bengali weavers (probably the remanants of Mr.Darragh's unsuccessful attempt to start the industry in Calcutta) under the supervision of a master weaver from England, trains the local workers. The art was known only to the newcomers and they had confined to themselves all the secrets of the art as well as trade in the manufactured goods. Perhaps, it was the need for close supervisio and the desire to have a closer control over the skill of the workers, in

large scale of operations of the early manufactories. The pioneering firm of James Darragh employed 1170 workers in 1900. The handloom technology employed in the coir manufactories hid not necessitate this scale of concentration of production and wage labourers. The large scale of operation of the early manufactories was more an expression of their isolated character.

Information regarding the developments in the coir weaving industry during its first half a century of existence is very much limited. Coir manufactories came up in other coastal towns such as Colachel, Quilon, techin and Calicut. In Alleppy, Darragh's enterprise rapidly prospered and took over the manufactory of his chief rival Josiah Dowe & Sons, a new entrant into the industry in the 1870s, 10/ The firm under the style manufacturer of the style wir products in the world, with the combined production of it's Alleppy and Brooklyn establishments. 11/

the exports of coir fabrics, on which the industry in Malabar test was dependent for its survival, on the whole, fluctuated at a low level. It was only in the early decades of the present century that the exports began to increase steadily. In 1908-09, the total exports of ear fabrics from Travancore was around 12,930 qtls. By 1911-12, it had increased to 68,481 qtls. During the First World War years, the exports ranged around 30,000 qtls. Thereafter, the exports rapidly increased and ranged around 1,60,000 qtls. during 1921-22 to 1925-26 period. 12/

This period of rapid expansion was also marked by increasing profits. The rise in prices of raw materials and wage labour was relatively lower than that of the unit value of exports. 13/ The increase in demand for coir fabrics as well as the "large profits ... made in the manufacture" 14/ attracted the leading European west coast mercantile houses into the industry. They either set up new manufactories or took over the existing ones at Alleppy. A number of Indian enterprises also came up in the industry helped by the buoyant market conditions. These entrepreneurs came from diverse social backgrounds such as the Gujarati and Muslim merchants in Alleppy, the prosperous Ezhava and Syrian Christian farmers who had taken to trade in coconut products and the former employees of the European firms who had acquired the necessary market contacts and mercantile skills while in the European service.

These upcoming Indian manufacturer-shippers in Elleppy
were handicapped in many ways in their competition with the European
manufacturer-shippers of coir fabrics. 15/ The Europeans had greater
access to and control over the markets, better credit and discount
facilities and superior technology in dyeing and packing of coir fabrics.
Further, the Indian firms were severely discriminated by the shipping
lines which were European controlled. The main competitive asset of
the Indians was the relative cheapness of their products mainly arising
from the savings in establishment charges and lower profit margins.
The established European firms also had an adequate reservoir of skilled
workers.

Not before long, these two divergent interests in the industry began to crystallise into two separate organised factions, each pursuing

its special interests and trading allegations against the other. 16/ The Indians took up the issue of exports of coir yarn, the raw materials for weaving coir fabrics, to foreign countries. The coir yarn export was entirely controlled by the European companies because of their monopoly over the baling facilities. The Indians held/the European industry, protected by high tariffs against the imports from Travancore, was steadily undermining the home industry. 17/ The European coir wasving industry enjoyed considerable competitive advantage from cantly higher freight charges for shipping the bulky coir fabrics from Alleppy over the baleable coir yarn. 18/ Further, powerloom weaving had become common in Europe while in Alleppy coir fabrics continued to be woven on traditional handlooms. The Travancorean industry was able to hold the ground because of the lower cost of production. 19/ tection of coir weaving inclustry in Alleppy through restricting the exports of coir yarn and the ending the discriminations against the Indian Manufacturer-shippers became a subject of memorandums to the government and inconclusive debates within the Travancore Legislature and Economic Development Board. 20/

One of the features of this period of expansion of the industry in the first two decades of the century was the localisation of the industry in and around the town of Alleppy. Many factors such as the mercantile and administrative facilities available in Alleppy, the chief wert town of Travancore, as well as the plentiful and cheap supply of region waving yarns over which the Travancore/had a monopoly was responsible in making Alleppy the centre of coir weaving industry. 21/

The industrial expansion of this period was mainly through the expansion of the large-scale manufactories. In 1921, of the 36 manufactories, 12 employing more than hundred workers, accounted for 80 per cent of the total employment. 22/ In 1931, there were at least 16 such large-scale manufactories accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the 7132 workers employed in the industry. 31/2 The continued expansion of the large-scale manufactories is partly explained by the use of mechanical power in the dyeing and finishing processes which increased the optimum size of coir manufactories. 24/

In the larger manufactories there was detailed division of labour both according to the wares produced and the processes employed. The products of the industry consisted of various types of pile and non-pile mats, mattings, carpets, mourzouks and rugs weven on handlooms similar to the textile looms (but very much more sturdier to handle the coarser yarn) or on wooden frames or boards from coir yarn. The workforce was predominantly adult and male. Women were mostly employed in the processing of yarn and children in the preparatory processes for weaving though mechanical power came to be used to a limited extent in the finitiand packing processes, the rest of the production processes continued to entirely based on manual labour. Thus, the coir weaving was a labour intensive industry. Further, it also required a large reserve of workers to continue the production smoothly given the wide fluctuati in the export demand from month to month. 27/

The Workers in the Industry

Labour scarcity seems to have been a problem faced by the industry from its inception. When James Darragh started his manufactory, he had to seek workers from the rural areas since he could not get sufficient 'hands' in the town. Accustomed to working in the open fields and not exposed to the rigours of factory discipline, most of the rural workers were hesitant to accept work in the "fenced compound" (as going to work in Darragh's manufactory used to be then called). 28/ Caste restrictions also probably played an important role in restricting the supply of wage labourers. 29/ The inadequate supply of wage labourers which seems to have been a general feature of Alleppy town in the early years of the century $\frac{30}{}$ was further aggravated by the rapid expansion of the industry after the First World War. While the exports of coir fabrics nearly doubled from 91,826 gtls. in 1921-22 to 1,67,358 gtls. in 1931-32, the employment in the industry, according to the Census of 1931, had increased, only by around 40 per cent from 5101 in 1921 to 7132 in $1931 \frac{31}{}$

A significant proportion of the workers, especially in the preparatory and finishing activities, were employed through contractors.

The management paid the contractor on a lumpsum basis. For all practical purposes the contractor was the employer of the workers. He was respensible for recruitment, fixing of wage rates, supervision of work, we payment of wages and ensuring the security of tenure of the workers under him.

directly employed by the company managements. Their wages and service conditions were directly fixed by the managements. The supervisory tole as well as the tasks of recruiting and supervising workers according to the demands of the trade were combined in the institution of moopan.

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The majority of the workers according to the moopans were according to the moopans whose earnings to the majority of the majority of the moopans whose earnings consisted of a commission (Moopan Kasu) deducted from the wages of the workers.

Under conditions of labour scarcity such systems of labour recruitment ensured supply and control of the labour. The piece rate system of wage payment universally prevelent in the industry also imposed a self-discipline on the worker as his earnings depended on the out-turn. A time wage, for instance, would have involved such questions as a guaranteed minimum out-turn, regular employment and regular attendance. Enforcement of such discipline would have been extremely difficult given the production conditions in the industry.

Therefore, monetary incentives and disincentives formed an important element of the system of labour regulations. The work in the second compound" started every day at 6 in the morning and continued to 7 the evening. Every one who arrived at the factory gate before 6 in the ming was given a cup of coffee free. 33/ And for these who came:

end of the month. 34/ In Darragh Small & Co., there was a tradition of paying a commission of 20 per cent on out-turn till the mid 'thirties.

It was not a part of the wages and not all the workers were entitled to it. 35/ It was a discretionary payment given to workers based on the quality and regularity of work. Some of the European firms used to even previde payment to the workmen who had been in their regular employment. 35/ It is interesting to note that, when the Factories Bill (Regulation V ef 1908) was circulated for eliciting public opinion, the coir firms was in it "mothing objectionable ... from a manufacturer's point of view" went from the need for reducing the eligibility age of the children. 37/

had to be offered to attract sufficient hands into the industry. According to the 1931 Census, only 'motor repairers' received higher wages than the seir workers. 38/ The upcoming indian manufacturer-shippers who were more severely handicapped by the scarcity of skilled workers had to lure them from the established firms by offering advances. 39/ But there were severely employers willing to pay still higher advances and the workers would move away, at times without repaying the advances taken. 40/ In a situation of labour scarcity the task of maintaining labour discipline must have been very difficult.

The Indian manufacturers saw in the TLA, the first union to be fewed in the industry, a possible instrument to decrease the labour turnever and instill a sense of discipline amongst the workforce. In this, the megpans who took initiative in forming the union also had a stake.

P.K.Bava, the yard superintendent in a leading Gujarati firm, with the help of a number of his friends who were moopans in the other companies.

N.Krishnan and K.M.Cherian managers of two important Travanccrean coir firms, and Khatau Kimji, proprietor of the Empire Coir Works, actively co-operated in the venture. Still, when the intention of the formation of the union was announced, there was a furore. According to P.K.Bava, it was only after long discussions and explanations, in which he and moof his fellow moopans also participated, that the employers agreed to the formation of the union. Bava was successful in convincing them the formation of a Labour Union would also promote their interests.

However, the European managements continued to be hostile to the TLA. They were never friendly towards the union and watched its activities with suspicion. 42/

the of TLA and some among them regularly contributed to the union funds. N.Krishnan, the manager of Travancore Products and Industrials, even served as the President of the TLA for a brief period. The secretary of the TLA in 1937, writing the official history of the union, consider the contribution made by the management of Empire Coir Works in the development of TLA, a matter that deserved formal acknowledgement. Not only did it's proprietor contribute to the union funds and give facilities for union activities within the factory premises, but exceeded that he will not give job for a worker who did not join the union. According to a trade union activities of the period, through measures in active support of the union, the management of the Empiremeasures.

works was able to win deep loyalty of it's workers. As a consequence, "the workers began to consider the jobs in that factory as their own and execute them very sincerely. All the merchants were in agreement that no product could compete in quality to those of that factory".

This close cordial relationship which the management of the

Depire Coir Works and some other companies had with the union was a

source of bickerings within the union, instigated by rival managements.

In 1924, M.L.Janardhana Pillai of General Supplies Agency even sponsored

a short-lived rival 'Thozhilali Sangham'.46/

that limited the use of extra economic and coercive methods for labour recruitment and management during the early periods of the industry when the labour was scarce. Unlike in Quilon, which developed into another mjor industrial centre in Travancore, the supply of agricultural labourers of Pulaya and Paraya castes for the factory work was very much limited in Alleppy. 47/ Therefore the coir workers had to be recruited from the ranks of the inferior tenants and hutment dwellers of the Ezhava caste.

According to the Industrial Census of 1921, 65 per cent of the workers in the coir weaving industry were from the Ezhava caste. About 19 per cent of the workers were Christians and 12 per cent Muslims.

The Mairs, who constituted around 20 per cent of the population were rirtually absent in the work force, constituting a bare 0.3 per cent.

Ther, it must be remembered that most of the Christian workers clonged to the Latin Rite. Latin Christians were largely converts from the backward castes such as the Ezhava. During the following decades, the

end of the 'thirties it was estimated to be around 80 per cent. 49/ The social origin of the coir workers from the Ezhava caste and their relations homogeneity had important implications. As a worker himself noted in 1926, "Unlike the workers in other parts of Travancore, the workers in Alleppy, who are more urban, progressive and educated, have some sense of rights and urge to develop. Therefore the masters do not deal with them harshly. "50/ To understand these aspects of working class development in Alleppy we have to shift our discussion from coir industry to the Travancore society at large.

The Coir Workers and the Anti-Savarna Caste Movements

The formation of the new social class of wage labourers in Alleppy was taking place in an atmosphere surcharged with great social and intellectual ferment, unprecedenced in the annals of Travancore. The traditional social structures and values were being challenged by the new social forces unleashed by the nascent capitalism. Trapped in the old world, the Nair aristocracy could not take advantage of the new possibilities of bourgeois enrichment that the mid-nineteenth center opened. The economic base of their social dominance was steadily undermined by the new social classes of commercial farmers, traders, petty capitalists and industrialists emerging in Travancore. The origin of these forces from the non-dominant castes and communities of Enhancement Christians and Muslims gave rise to a new social contradiction.

The traditional inferior social status, that the emerging beurgeeis was assigned to by the conventional caste hierarchy no more accorded with their new economic power. The traditional caste and social structures — became barriers to the advancement of the emerging beurgeeis elite. This was the background of the social reform movements in the Enhava, Christian and Muslim communities in Travancore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The ESRM constituted the most radical aspect of this social amakening that accompanied the rise of capitalism. In the traditional caste hirearchy, the Ezhavas occupied an intermediate position between the ex-slave Palayas and the Mavarna Nairs. Because of the diversified traditional occupational roles of the Ezhavas, they were able to exploit the new epportunities that were emerging with the modernisation of the company. With the rise in the demand for coconut products and liquor (the precessing and trading of which were the most important traditional compations of the Exhavas) many of them moved into the roles of small-sele capitalists and traders. A small segment of the Exhavas were able to acquire superior tenancy rights and landed property. A western wincated elits - who spearheaded the reforms - also emerged.

Mumerous associations advocating reforms sprang up within the whave caste. The movement received a new impetus with the ascendancy of free Marayana Guru, a saintly ascetic, into prominence among the Ezhavas. Free Marayana initiated a mass campaign to sankritise the social customs, risuals and ceremonies of the Ezhavas. This apparently conservative programme was a radical challenge to the caste hierarchy and it's

traditions that had denied ritual purity to the Ezhavas. And therefore, it fully accorded with the aspirations of his fellow men. The success of his programme gave the Ezhavas a new sense of pride and self respect.

'The Society for the Protection of Sree Narayana Dharma' (Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam hereafter SNDP Yogam), under his patronage, developed into the most important and the common organisation of the Ezhava easte. 53/

The Alleppy-Shertallai region was one of the most important centres of the ESRM. Besides the SNDP Yogam, there were numerous other caste associations active in the region. 54/ P.K.Bava, the guiding spirit behind the formation of the TLA, was a person who had been deeply influing by the reform movement. By his own narration, his initiative in forming the TLA was a reaction to the social insults he had to bear while he was worker. 55/ The last straw seems to have been the humiliation he had to suffer in a legal court. On the insistence of Bava, a worker filed a case against some rowdies who had brutall, assaulted him. The judge dismissed the case ignoring the evidence produced by the worker who was from the low caste. Whatever be the truth about this particular incident it is certain that Bava was motivated by a deep sense of social justice in organising the workers.

Numerous early trade union leaders like C.K.Velayudhan, V.K.Velayudhan, P.K.Madhavan and R.Suguthan were important activists of the SNDP Yogam. The first three even served in the Board of Directors of SNDP Yogam. The importance given to the temperance movement in the activities of the TLA may be directly traced to the influence of the

refers movement.—66 Siece Narayana advocated that the Ezhavas should leave their traditional occupation of tody drawing. It was a part of his campaign to raise the ritual status of the Ezhavas.

Another important dimension of the ESRM, apart from the campaign for referms within the Ezhava caste, was the struggle against savarna desination in social and political spheres. The coir workers entered the socio-political arena of Travancore through these struggles for civil liberties. Such were the deep anti-upper caste emotions that, at times, even in the economic struggles anti-Nair slogans were raised. 57/
The union emetings usually opened with resolutions proclaiming loyalty to the Ming. The golden jubille of the British emperar was celeberated with great fan fare. It should be remembered that there existed a strong section in the ESRM who advocated a compromise with the Eritish as well as the Travancore monarchy to get the caste grievances redressed. National freedom without the destruction of the caste system held no meaning for them. 58/

Nowever, it was the nationalist streams within the ESRM that had greater influence among the coir workers. Not only did the coir workers present a purse to the Salt Satyagraha Jatha from Travancors to Calicut, but they also volunteered to participate in the struggle. 59/
Haay union activists participated in the foreign cloth boysott agitation at Alleppy. The TLA gave an official reception to Jawaharlal Nearu when he visited Alleppy. 60/

Caste leaders like T.K.Madhavan attempted to link the antisaparna struggle of the Ezhavas with the broader national movement. Under his influence, the Indian National Congress began to actively take up the grievances of the lower castes in Travancore. The satyagral struggle at Vaikom temple in 1931, to end the pollution practices in the temple and its premises, was the culmination of this co-operation. 61/
The Satyagraha which lasted for one year and eight months aroused wider enthusiasm among the Ezhavas as also among the coir workers in the adjacent industrial belt. The TLA strongly protested against the reput at Vaikom and sent a batch of 51 volunteers, selected at the Union Among Conference, to participate in the struggle. 62/

In Shertallai, the Temple Entry Movement was transformed into a movement to boycott the temples that observed pollution practices. 63/
P.K.Bava was once dismissed from a coir factory because of a provocative leaflet he published in connection with the 'Temple Boycott Movement'. The temperance movement was also reactivated with the co-operation of Congress nationalists, who perceived in it yet another opportunity for government agitation. The coir workers in and around Shertallai were active in this new phase of the temperance movement in the Alleppy-Shertallai region. The agitation drew severe government repression was suppressed. 65/

In spite of the widespread enthusiasm it created, the Vaikom Temple Satyagraha had to be withdrawn with a face saving compromise. The discriminations against the Ezhavas and the non-Hindus in public employment as well as legislative representation continued. 66/ All these made the avarnas suspicious of the sincerity of the savarna can and the savarna national leaders. The absence of a powerful secular

democratic movement reflecting the just demands of the avarnas prepared the way for the entry of their communal political organisations.

P.K.Madhavan, the president of the TLA during the 1926-28 period, and N.S.Anirudhan, another important activist of the TLA, were the secretaries of the "All Travancore Ezhava Political League" formed in 1932.— Similar communal political organisations also came up in the other aggrieved communities such as the Christians and the Muslims. In 1932, these organisations joined together to launch the "Joint Political Congress" demanding communal reservation in electoral representation and sublic service.

The agitation came to be known as the "Abstention Movement" due to it's main agitational platform of abstaining from elections to the legislative Assembly. The agitation scon enveloped the masses in the above communities and drew them, for the first time, into a state wide asses agitation. The Alleppy coir workers constituted one of the important contingents of the struggle. It was in Alleppy, that C.Kesavan, the leader of the movement, chose to court arrest when he was charged with sedition. When he was arrested the workers all over Alleppy struck work in protest. An employer later complained: "No notice was given to the employers. They had either to close the factories or be prepared to subject themselves to all ridicule that might be thrown upon them." 69/

The government was forced to concede most of the demands of the tentionists. Once the interests of the minorities had been safe ded, the Joint Political Congress sought to join a wider alliance

with the savarna nationalist to fight for a constitutional monarchy responsible to the people. These efforts culminated in the formation of the Travancore State Congress in 1938.

Thus, the ESRM brought into action the whole Ezhava people and was the most sweeping mass movement that Travancore had known. The bourgeois class was able to mobilise the masses in this manner because their challenge to the established order reflected also the sentiments of their less fortunate caste men. Their demands were in that sense the demands of the whole Ezhava caste, eventhough it was the elite we stood to gain most from the success of the movement. Unlike the Muslis and Syrian Christians, the avarna Ezhava bourgeoisie felt the injustim of the caste hierarchy more keenly and were not weighted down by religious structures which relegated them to the bottom of the social ladder. This implied an ide logical position that had strong elements of bourgeois radicalism. The Radical rehetoric was necessary to mobil the masses.

For example, in the heat of the Vaikom Satyagraha campaign, carried away by his own rhetoric K.Aiyyarpan exhorted the coir worker at their annual conference: "Just as the Russians managed to obtain to by putting an end to their royal family, the Ezhavas also must fight; the very end without caring for the guns of the Sepoys, batons of poli or even the Maharaja". Aiyyappan was banned from addressing public meetings in Travancore for this speech. And a disturbed Dewan noted that most of the agitators were "imbued with some form of communism.

They...talk(ed) of the equal rights of men'. 72/ Aiyyappan, the founder of the Brotherhood Movement that preached inter-caste marriage and inter-cining, was very much inspired by the revolution in Russia. He organised one of the earliest trade unions in Cochin and published a journal Velaboran (Worker) from Alleppy for brief period. 73/ It was through his poems that the news of the Soviet Revolution first reached the Alleppy workers. 74/

Reformers who preached the renunciation of the caste ridden

Mindu religion had wide popularity among the coir workers. There were

strong advocates for conversion to Islam and Christianity. P.K.Bava

had embraced Islam for a brief period as a young man. 75/ R.Sugathan,

another important labour activist, entered public life as a worker of the

Budhist mission at Alleppy. 76/ The militant members of the Sikh

enmunity at Alleppy founded by K.C.Kuttan, alias Sardar Jai Singh, were

very active in the labour movement. 77/

The enthusiasm of Muslims and Christians for prosyeletisation created considerable tension in Alleppey and resulted in a violent element rict in 1936. Perhaps, the riots only strengthened the belief in the irrationality of all religions amongst the coir workers. There is no involvement of coir workers in the riots. It was reported that the employers were nervous in moving about in the town and attending to work "because they feared that generally workers (would) have some grudge against factory owners" and might try to settle their scores in the general turnoil. 78/

The rationalist and atheidic; hile sophies advocated by K. Aiyyamm and E.Madhavan spread rapidly among coir workers. Sree Narayana Guru's call for "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man" was transformed in a novel slogan by them: "No Caste, No Religion, No God for Man". E.Madhavan rejected all religions as irrational. He argued that Exhavia should renounce all religions and declare themselves to be a 'free society' outside the fold of all religions and castes. There was nothing to be lost by the rejection of the anti-scientific, irrational and unethical religious beliefs. Wasn't Soviet Russia's success a great victory of the irreligious movement? This was how Soviet Union and it leader Lenin entered his book 'Free Society' (Swatantra Samudayam). This book became the bible of a whole generation of Ezhava young men organised under Akhila Kerala Thiyya Yuva Jana Sangham which was very active in the Alleppy-Shertallai area. 79/ these influences in the making of the Alleppy coir working class if a wants to explain the suprising . pace with which Marxist ideology sprew among the workers at the end of the 'thirties.

It should be noted that the TLA was never a caste organisation. The union membership was always open to workers of all castes and from it's inception many of the office bearers had been non-Ezhavas.

P.S.Mohammed, who presided over the first gathering of the TLA, was the editor of the 'Muslim', a journal that took strong nationalist polynomial than the khilaphat agitation.

M.K.Antony, a local medical practioner, was the first president of the Union.

Though most of the Union activists were involved in communal expanisations, the Union had carefully avoided any formal communal effiliation. The Union, in 1926, had appealed to the communal organisations in the state to hold separate labour meetings along with their annual conferences. Only SNDP Yogam conducted such a labour conference along with its annual conference at Quilon. The participation of the TLA is the above meeting was misrepresented and criticised by some sections of the press. Thereupon the Union decided not to participate officially is such conferences.

The open sympathy of the TLA with the anti-savarna movements as well as the affiliation of its' office bearers with the communal organisations must have been a source of many unsettled arguments within the TLA.

There was always a small section of "pure" nationalists who held all communal organisations as anti-national and disruptive. A perusal of the proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference of the TLA in 1937, gives very interesting insights into the nature of these conflicts.

The following resolution was moved by some of the fraternal delegates from Quilon in the Conference: "This great conference of the wage workers declares that the real interests of all workers in different communities of this country are the same and that the different communal and religious organisations that we see in this country are only for the purpose of concealing this real unity of interests from the public.

The sonference appeals to the wage labourers to resign from all such erganisations and work for their economic and political interests in class lines. 82/ The resolution created a furore in the conference.

The defense of the organisations of the lower castes and their important met with wide approval at the conference. It was alleged that the resolution was a clever move of the higher castes to deflect the labouring masses from the anti-caste struggle. It was the following resolution, moved by R.Sugathan, that was finally unanimously adopted: "This conference resolves that since the economic interdsts of all the labour organisations comprising of people from different communities and religions are the same, within the labour organisations there is no relevance for religious or communal interests". 83/

The latter resolution did not bar individuals in the union to work in caste organisations. However, the resolution perceived only deconomic interests of the working class. This line of compromise was nothing new but a restatement of the broad policy that the TLA had been following.

Significantly, neither resolution reflected the platform of the whose influence was steadily increasing amongst the coir workers. The Congress Socialist Party had emerged in Malabar in 1934 as the formal organisation of radical sections within the national movement. 84/ Unl the Congress leadership CSP stood for strengthening the national movement in the native states and the development of independent class organish of workers and peasants.

It appears that CSP sympathisers in Alleppey did not have either sufficient mass strength or well articulated arguments to make a deturint intervention in the debate on workers and communal organisations. The first resolution was evidently far removed from/CSP's attitude towards

the anti-imperialist struggle and struggle against savarna domination, and therefore, had supported the Abstention movement despite its communal evertenes. At the same time, CSP stood for the development of independent class organisations of workers and peasants, which were to rise to the leadership of the national and anti-savarna struggles. The unanimously adopted compromise resolution, as we have already noted, set me political task for the working class.

The mass of workers were won over to the political platform of the enly during the tumultous general strike of 1938. This meant a decisive end to ideological hegemony of the communally inclined moderates were the workers. This general strike was the culmination of a long process of deterioration of industrial relations. It is to these issues that we shall turn in the following sections.

The Deterioration of Labour Conditions and the Accentuation of Capital-Labour Conflicts

Though one may trace isolated instances of disturbances?

**Merally speaking, the relationship between the employers and employees

Me cordial during the early periods of the industry.

**End Annual Conference of the TLA in 1926: "It must be admitted that

**Itherto there has not been any serious difference of opinion between the

**Werkers and the industrialists. Likewise, it cannot be said that the

**Players have caused any great hardship to my labour bretheren....

**Wen in the matter of working hours and wage rates there have not been

**End Annual Conference of the TLA in 1926: "It must be admitted that

**Itherto there has not been any serious difference of opinion between the

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**Itherto there has not been any serious difference of opinion between the said that the

is something that both deserve to be congratulated."87/

As we have already noted, the Indian employers actively co-operated in the formation of the TLA. The name of the union was changed from 'Labour Union' to the less agressive sounding 'Travancore Labour Association' within a few months of it's formation. The TLA, it was advised, should concern itself to improve the social status of the workers than their economic conditions. Social welfare activities such as the formation of a reading room and library, an evening education centre, a death benefit fund scheme, an ayurvedic hospital and co-operative social for the workers constituted the main burden of the TLA's functioning in the early years. Speeches of the union leaders at labour meetings on such themes as the virtues of thrift and education and the vices of drinking and indiscipline.

employers were not seen as antagonists but as friends. The early appear made by the TLA contained no reference to any capital-labour conflict the industry or the grievances of the workers. The misery, illiteracy and poverty of the workers were all legacies of their uncivilised past and the Association was setting out to eradicate them with the help of benevolent capitalists: "Know ye workers that the Labour Union is form to offer you the necessary comforts, to educate you and your children to raise you from the agonies of pverty and save you from your danged we assure you that the union will be with you as benevolent lord in poverty, as a teacher in ignorance, like daughters and sons in miser. Therefore each one of you, dear friends, must join the Union..."

Thus read one of the sarliest printed appeals circulated by the TLA in 1922.

wrkers were not very enthusiastic about their union in the early years. 91/ In the words of K.C.Govindan: "It was very rare that the workers joined the union by themselves. Therefore in many companies means had to be taken into the executive committee. It was their influence and compulsion that connected the workers to the Association initially. P.K.Bava admitted: "Apprently the workers were under the impression that organising/labour union was a subversive activity squast the capitalists. However much I tried to change this understanding I did not succeed. They expressed the stand that they had mething against the employers. "93/

This attitude is not surprising if one remembers that the workers did not yet form a 'class-in-itself'. The production of coir mat and matting during the War years must have been only around 1/3." of the level of production in 1922-23. Hardly 30 per cent of the work force, therefore, must have had more than 5 years of industrial experience. This is a conservative estimate given the fact that most of the coir workers came from the poorer strata of the peasantry rather than the landless agricultural workers and therefore had strong links with land. In such a situation one should expect a high labour turnover.

An equally important factor in this connection is the probability of an improvement in the material conditions of the workers shifting from agricultural activities into the industry. R.Sugathan, describes

times, earning as much as Rs.17.50 a week. Hurther, we have already seen that the systems of labour recruitment and regulation were not harm or oppressive. In a situation of acute labour scarcity, the moopans and contractors had to develop patron-client type of relations with the workers in order to ensure an adequate labour supply. On it we success depended their position in the company and prospects for prosperity. These conditions changed rapidly from the end of the 'twenties.

In the 'thirties, labour availability far from being scarce any more, exceeded the requirements of the industry. This was partly due to demographic causes but mainly due to the impact of the economic depression. With the sharp decline in the prices of agricultural products there was a significant reduction in the employment of labour in plantations and coconut farms. The redundant labour flocked to Alleppy in search of jobs. This resulted in the creation of a "floating population of which considerable portion (was) unable to find regular full time employment" and hung about the factory gates hoping to be "taken in as substitutes or part time workers". 97/ With such surplus population knocking at the factory gates the employers could successfully reduce the wages. The labour conditions rapidly deteriorated.

Paradoxically, it was also a period of rapid expansion of the industry. Because of the decline in the purchasing power of the common people due to the economic depression, the demand for cheap floor coveral like coir fabrics rapidly increased in the West. The exports of coir

febrics from Travancore which was around 91,826 qtls. in 1921-22, steadily increased to around 2,65,150 qtls. in the peak year of 1936-37.

At the same time, the export prices of coir fabrics which had been to stagnate from around the mid-'twenties, began to rapidly decline from 1927-28 onwards. The export prices slumped to the lowest level in 1933-34, the mat prices being 64 per cent and matting prices 50 per cent selw the 1925-26 level. From then onwards, the prices began to slowly recover. However, till the Second World War they continued to be around 10 to 50 per cent below the prices in the mid-twenties. 100/

The European manufacturer-shippers agreed with TLA, that "although it [ecommic depression] may have had some bearing on the decline of errent prices, it was primarily due to the unintelligent, unrescricted and unnecessary competition along the shippers". 101/

There were around 100 registered shippers of ccir products in
133. The four leading European manufacturer-shippers controlled 50 per cent
of the emports. The other important urban manufacturer-shippers, numbering
round 15, controlled another 30 - 35 per cent of the exports. This
seat that the rest of the shippers had an insignificant share of the
**rests. In fact, around 30 of them made no shipments at all in 1938.
**est of the smaller shippers made only occassional shipments and they
case into and dropped out of business year after year.

102/

 representatives in foreign countries. The only way in which they could capture the markets was by cutting down the prices. The foreign imported exploited the situation — by circulating orders for ceir products and the shippers and encouraging them to underquote each other. Though the exports of each of these individual shippers was very small, their offers of low prices depressed the prices of the goods of all other shippers. Often their agents in Europe failed to honour the contracts made and consequently the goods had to be dumped in the market for whatever price they might fetch.

of the 69 shippers active in 1938, only 23 transacted any business in 1929. Thus, the majority of the shippers that existed in 1938 had of entered the trade in the 'thirties. The emergence of a large number/small scale rural manufactories in the 'thirties was the background of this proliferation of shippers in coir export business.

Spurred on by the rapid increase in demand, the industrial capacity had increased several fold in the 'thirties. In 1938, there were 290 coir manufactories with 4335 matting looms and 7350 mat looms employing acround 25000 -30000 workers in the industry. Though the large-scale manufacturies continued to expand and the Alleppy town remained the major centre of the industry, the most important feature of the industrial expansion was the growth a small-scale manufactory sector in the country side between Alleppy and Shertallai. 45 per cent of the matting looms and 70 per cent of the mat looms were in the manufactories outside the town of Alleppy. While the average number of looms in Alleppy coir manufactories was 111, the average number of looms in the rural manufactories was only 30.103/

The lower cost of production in the countryside was the main attraction for this locational spread of the industry. Lower cost of land, building and other establishment charges, and "the many small economies that could be effected in the villages" all contributed to the cheaper production in the rural areas. The most important factor, however, was the 'comparative cheapness of labour'. According to the factory returns data, the rural wages were around 50 per cent below the urban wages. 104/

The rural manufacturers mostly came from the richer stratum of the Ezhava caste. In the beginning, the relationship between these rural manufacturers and the urban manufacturer-shippers who owned the large-scale manufactories was complementary, the former subsisting on the overflow orders of the latter. There existed, in fact, a kind of division of labour between the two sectors in terms of products manufactured and the work processes carried on. The rural manufactories were merely feeder establishments supplying coarser varieties of coir products in a semi-finished condition to the shippers who finished,

The subcontracting system enabled the urban manufacturer-shippers

to operate at an optimum level of production capacity, delegating the

excess orders to rural manufacturers, who bore the brunt of seasonal

variations in demand. It also enabled them to reduce the cost of

production and maintain the profit margins, which was already under

pressure due to the rivalry amongst the Indian and European manufacturer
shippers. There was considerable excess capacity in the rural manufactories

so that the manufacturers competed amongst themselves to secure orders, at times, even "execut(ing) orders below the cost prices". 105/

In course of time, some of the rural manufacturers, who were endowed with better financial resources, developed into direct shippers of coir products. Because of their lower cost of production, these rural manufacturer-shippers were able to market their products at lower prices than the established shippers. The competitive price reductions began to erode the profits. 106/ The crisis was aggravated by the operations of the 'factors' or merchant-shippers, who owned no coir manufactories but purchased their requirements from the small-scale sector in the countryside. Most of the factors had developed from the ranks of coir depot owners who acted as middlemen between the urban manufacturer-shippers and rural manufacturers. With practically no establishment charges, the factors could afford to work on very low profit margins and pass the burdens of competitive price reductions to the unorganised small-scale manufactories.

Because of the rivalry and lack of co-operation between the Indian and European firms, the urban manufacturer-shippers could not pred a common front against the new entrants into coir trade. They failed to agree upon a common scheme to regulate the industry and arrest the decline in profits. \frac{107}{} Experience had already shown that in Alleppy the powerlooms were "unable to compete with the country looms". \frac{108}{} The increase in the productivity consequent upon the application of the them available modern technology was not high enough to out compete the rural cheap labour based handloom production.



The options before the urban manufacturers were therefore either

to increase the subcontracts to rural manufactories or/reduce the wages

in their urban manufactories. Thus, the urban coir workers experienced

a steady erosion of their earnings, in a period of rapid expansion of the

for
industry/no fault of their own. Their keen awareness of the underlying

process - the reckless inter-capitalist rivalry - increased their resent
ment.

The workers alleged that wage rates for certain items were reduced by as much as 70 per cent in some of the urban manufactories between 1925 and 1938. We have summarised the data regarding the trend in the wage rates for certain typical items of work in the four leading Alleppy manufactories in the Table 1.

that there was any decline in real wage rates. However, a different picture emerges when one examines the earnings of the workers. There was a very significant reduction in the work available per worker during this seriod. While the number of workers employed in the industry had increased searly four fold during the 'thirties, the exports of coir fabrics had increased only by around 70 per cent even in the peak year of 1936-37 since the beginning of the decade. Thus, according to the working class saily budget survey of 1938, the weekly wage earnings of Alleppy urban water was only Rs.2.01 (see Table 2). For the rural workers it was even lower. At the same time it was estimated by the Board of Trade 1: sputes that a coir worker would have earned minimum of Rs.3 and a maximum of Rs.10 a week, even at the rates existing in 1938, if he had full time

Table 1

Average Wage Rates in Four Leading Alleppy Manufactories between 1925 and 1937

(Real wages at 1925 prices given in the brackets)

Items	1925 Rs.	1930 Rs.	1937 Rs.	% Change	Two rural manufactories (1937)	e di ince ween 4 E
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1. 2 shaft 4/4 size Anjengo Matting	6.19 (6.19)	4.63 (7.19)	3.06 (6.60)	-50.6 (+ 6.6)	2.06	32.7
2. 2 shaft 6/4 size Anjengo Matting	12.06 (12.06)	8.69 (13.49)	4.75 (10.25)	-60.6 (-15.0)	3.56	25.0
3. 2 shaft 8/4 size Diamond Matting	16.31 (16.31)	1P.94 (16.99)	7.56 (16.32)	~53.6 (+0.1)	4.06	56.3
4. 4 shaft 4/4 size Anjengo Matting	7.38 (7.39)	5.56 (8.63)	3.44 (7.43)	-53.4 (+1.5)	2.56	25.9
5. No.1 to 5 mats binding rate per 100	3.56 (3,56)	2.63 (4.08)	1.88 (4.06)	-45.9 (+14.0)	1.25	35.1
6. No.1 Mat weaving charges for 24/14 size	0.11 (0.11)	0.08 (0.12)	0.06	-42.8 (+18.2)	0.04	37.5

Source: Memorandum of the TLA submitted to Dewan of Travancore dt. 31/11/112

of food prim

Note: The money wages have been deflated with an appropriate price index/
The prices of the commodities have been taken from relevant issues of
the Statistics of Travancore and the weights from the family budget
survey conducted by the Board of Trade Disputes in 1938.

Monthly Earnings by Source and Indebtedness of Coir
Workers' Families (in Rs.)

Make of the	Famil Ccir manu- factories	occu-	from All other sources like assets etc.	Total family income	Average income per wor- ker from manufacto-	in debt	Average Debt per indebted family
Đ	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	rie s (6)	(7)	(8)
Alleppy	13.5 8	2.01	0.70	16.29	3.04	90.4	39.2 0
*mapra	10.31	2.95	1.18	14.44	7.36	98.61	32.15
L ajikuzhi	8.16	2.29	1.49	11.94	5.91	81.1	63.11
-homes	8.57	2.43	1.5 0	12.50	6.12	92.2	49.27
*prtallai	7.99	2.34	0.81	11.14	5.96	94.6	12.35
t Limiathode	10.40	2.39	1.69	14.48	6.5 8	77.6	25.91
Paravoor	10.44	4.31	3.5 8	18.33	7.10	80.0	35.3 6
M1 Centres	10.73	2.48	1.42	14.63	7.11	88.9	39.35

Source: Report, BCTDMMI, pp.206, 207, and 217.

werk. 109/ 88.9 per cent of the working class families surveyed were found to be in debt. The average debt per family was nearly three times the average monthly income of the family from all sources.

According to the Board of Trade Disputes, "the average standard of living of the workers in the industry is not satisfactory. They live in small huts, entirely made of coconut leaves with a single living room in which an average family of 5.6 members huddle together, and considering the exhausting character of their work, particularly of those who labour at the looms, the quality and quantity of their food cannot be regarded as sufficiently nourishing. We do not say that their standard of living is worse than that of those working in other industries and agriculture. But we have no doubt their conditions call for improvement". 110/

The moopan and contract systems of labour regulation became a source of widespread abuse and arbitariness. In fact, it was stated that the rationale for the continuation of the contract system in the labour surplus situation was that "the contractors could bring down the wages to the lowest possible limit at which the labourer would work". 111/
Illegal deductions from the wages, bribery, nepotism and heavy fines bear common in the industry. All the fringe benefits like pensions, special bonuses etc. disappeared.

perhaps, one should not exaggerate the role of the decline in the standard of living in arousing protest and promoting class conciousness among the masses. As we have seen, the whole inter-war period was a period of rapid expansion of the industry and therefore a significant segment of the labour force must have been new entrants into the industry. What was important was that a core section of the working class with service tenure dating to the 'twenties did exist in the urban areas.

It was they who actually experienced the full impact of the growing crisis in the industry. Their radical response to the situation struck sympathetic notes among the masses of workers given the ferment created by the BSRM discussed earlier.

playment and the increasing high handed behaviour of the contractors and mappans were sporadic and unorganised. In some instances, the supervisors were physically assaulted or warned through terrorising letters. 112/These were followed by protest meetings sponsored by capitalists against terrorism and equally strong disclaimers by the TLA of any involvement. The employers suspected that the coir workers were tending "to borrow a leaf from the terrorist activities of Dengal and Chicago. 113/

The first recorded strike against wage reduction took place in 1928 at the Williams Goodacra a Co. The Union severely reprimanded the striking workers. However, it was forced to come out against the management as no see could justify the disciplinary dismissal of the entire work force in the factory. This inauguarated a period of spontaneous strikes in a sumber of manufactories. It became a normal practice for the workers to seclare the strike first and then seek the support of the union leadership. The leadership had a difficult time trying to settle "the numerous strikes that broke cut one after another without damaging the interests and prestige of the capitalists as well as the workers". Need for self discipline and restraint was a constant theme of speeches of the president of the That "... It is most necessary that you should have respect and affection towards your employers. You should keep in mind that the prosperity of an affection to the content of the content of the president of the content of the content of the president of the content of the

the employers is also your prosperity. ... It is because this understand is lacking mutually that the peace and calmness in the country is declining... "116/

The picture that emerges from a close perusal of the strike movement of this period is of a union leadership whose thinking lagged behind the consciousness of the masses. According to President of the TLA, "To work for the friendly interaction between workers and capitalists [was] holding the principal attention of the union." 117/ It was always the ordinary workers who took initiative for the struggles forcing the conservative leadership into action. Consequent tensions and pressures were largely responsible for the frequent changes in the leadership. 118/

In 1928, K.C.Govindan became the Secretary ousting P.K.Bava who had sided with the management of Empire Coir Works in a labour dispute.

"... a fluent Malayalam sper'er... on several occassions advocating strikes 119/2 he symbolised the new growing militancy of the union. He led the three month long strike at Bombay Company in 1931 which was one of the first well organised strikes called by TLA. In 1934, P.S.Mohami was removed from the Presidentship and P.Kesavadev, a firey progressive writer, was elected as the Secretary. The Alleppy workers had been captivated by his radical speech at the Annual Conference in 1933 and sought him out to be their Secretary.

The short period in which Dev was actively associated with the TA may be correctly characterised as a nodal point in it's history. It may the end of the collaborationist trends as the mainstream in the TLA.

Towards a New Conciousness

The struggles in the individual factories began to get interlinked with each other and solidarity strikes became common. The TLA was successful in bringing a settlement in the first strike at the suburban branch of the William Goodare Co. in 1928, by threatnening to draw in the workers at the main manufactory also into the struggle. The three-month-long struggle at the Bombay Co. in 1931 needs special menties in this regard. The TLA was able, through generous contributions from the rest of the workers as well as public sympathisers, to provide mid-day meal to the striking workers throughout the strike period. Though the struggle was only a partial success, it gathered all the workers in class solidarity and brought forth new leaders like V.K.Achuthan and C.K. Velayudhan from the ranks. 122/ Under Kesava Dev's initiative, the The wan deliberated about the possibility of organising a general strike In the whole industry to protest against the wage reductions. The workers began to become conscious of their common economic interests as epposed to those of the capitalists.

The workers found that the labour conditions of the rural manufactories of the Ezhava capitalists were the worst even though the latter belonged to the same caste as the majority of the workers. The excess labour supply situation tended to depress the wage rates that were being fixed in the new rural manufactories. Further, given the close connections between the workers in the rural industry and the agricultural sector, the wages in the country manufactories tended to conform more to the low

wages prevelant in the other rural occupations than the traditional urban wage rates prevelant in the industry. 123/ It should also be noted that the rural workers derived a significant portion of the reproduction costs of their labour power from outside the industry. As can be seen from Table 2, they derived 43 to 26 per cent of their monthly family income from other rural occupations and assets. This also tended to keep the rural wages low.

The workers employed by the rural capitalists were mostly hutment dwellers living on the lands of the rural Ezhava capitalists and farmers and therefore "more accommodating and easy of control than the workmen in the urban areas. 124/ The caste affinity, the control over the dwelling place and the traditional customs enabled the rural capitalist to increase the exploitation through various subtle ways. A good portion of the wajes of the workers were expropriated by the management various reasons such as moopan's commissions, tickets for dramas, cine and other entertainments, festival collections and charity donations. The Board of Trade Disputes fully concurred with the TIA on the miseral conditions of the rural workers. "... even [\$ne low wages] are not paid at regular intervals or in full at any time. They maintain rice and provision shops, tea shops and, in some instances, even barber shops. A running account is kept with the labourers who receive, on account, 'chits' to these shops. Only a small portion of the wages is given in cash. In other words, the labourer is given enough to keep him alive and his account is seldom completely settled, and very often the poor labourer does not know what is due to him. "126/

The trade union movement in Alleppy realised that the existence of an unorganised sector in the rural countryside was a major threat to their bargaining power. The European manufactuter-shippers held that as long as the rural manufacturers were permitted to continue their reckless competition, the deterioration of the labour conditions in the urban areas could not be arrested. The fault lay with the TLA which had "meglected to endeavour to improve the conditions outside Alleppy where there was more wage cutting...". 127/

The TLA began to actively organise the rural workers by establishing rural branches of the trade union organisation at Shertallai and Whamma. It brought the TLA into a head on collision with the Ezhava capitalists. 128/ The Ezhava employers also began to act in a concerted fashion to prevent the spread of the trade union movement. They argued that the lower wages were justified by the lower cost of living in the rural industry because it would upset the general rural wage structure and create social unrest. 129/

The caste organisations like SNDP Yogam could do little to stem (**, the growing class conflict within the Ezhava caste itself.

The suffix of Muthalali (the owner of capital) after the names of the Thava employer became a common expression. The class rivalries were replacing the earlier caste affinities.

The growing class conciousness found rich expression in the cultural life of the workers. The Alleppy workers had been deeply influenced by the literary renaissance that accompanied the ESRM.

Coir workers had a surprisingly high level of literacy. In 1938, 65.6 per cent of the coir workers were literate. The poems of Kumaran Asan and K. Aiyyappan enjoyed wide popularity among the masses. These influences continued to flourish in the poetry recitals at labour meeting and the marching songs at demonstrations. The literary ferment was very widespread among the masses and deserves a more detailed study. Poets and short-story writers emerged from the ranks of the workers. Many of these new writers published their poems and stories in small booklets and sang their poems at workers' gatherings and factory gates. The sale proceeds often went to fund some cause of the Union. 131/ A perusal of this vast and scattered literature may not impress one with its literary qualities, but they should be seen as the first stirrings of a class realising its identity. The advertisement of a Malayalam prose drama, 'Raveendran or the Workers' Leader, produced by the coir workers emphasis "This story is about the poor. And the actors of this drama are those who have through their life *xperience known the real side of poverty repression. "132/

Thezhilali, a labour weekly published by the TLA from 1924 (with some brief period of inturreption—until it was banned by the government 1938) became a mirror of the emerging new conciousness and culture.

Under the impact of the growing struggles the journal began to slowly move away from its' early moderate positions. Under the editorship of Kesava Dev, the journal was transformed into a radical cultural weapon challenging every established order and galvanising the workers into tempestous moods. The circulation of the weekly, which was around 500

1000 between 1924 and 1933 more than doubled to 2000 in 1934. 133/
Poems and short stories dealing with the life and struggles of the workers of the workers were published. Thozhilali claimed that the new literature to be a reflection of the growing social struggles and the social awarness generated thereby. 134/

The new poetry was keenly aware of the 'nakedness of the weavers who clothed the world, the hunger of the peasant who fed the sountry, the tottering huts of the builders of palaces... and the chains on those who gave freedom to the world'. 135/ But it was not weighed down by by any sense of tragic bewilderment or helplessness. On the contrary, it reflected the robust optimism of the growing working class movement:

"Time calls on us to stand firm hand in hand,
The path for forward march is all clear new.

There goes the grand train of revolution

Come on Comrades! Enough have we suffered The cruelty and hunger of this wicked world..."

white Kedamangalam Pappukutty in Thozhilali. Pappukkutty, though not himself a coir worker, was closely associated with the cultural life of the coir workers. A regular contributor to the journal, he was the finest product of the new literary traditions that Thozhilali upheld. The workers claimed him to be the poet of their class and honoured him with a gold medal at the 7th Annual Conference of the TLA. 137/

The emotional temps unleashed by these cultural movements was an important factor that made the workers receptive to the radical ideology. Though P.S.Mohamed, the president of the TLA, frequently

assured the employers that the Alleppy workers were "loyal to their King and Country" and had no intention whatsoever "to imitate the works movement in foreign countries "this was precisely the course upon which the Alleppy working class was set. \frac{138}{} A significant space of Thoshibi was set aside to explain the international developments, especially the in the Soviet Union. The basic principles of Marxism and socialism we explained in a popular style. Even parts of 'Capital' were serialised, The Union conferences, attended by prominent radical leaders and thinks were another important source of disemination of the radical ideas. In example, at the 9th Annual Conference of the TLA, E.V.Ramaswamy Naicked who had just returned from a trip to the Soviet Union, spoke at length appreciatively of the new social system there. \frac{140}{}

the workers, that the TLA decided to launch an agitation to draw the tion of the government to wage reductions. It was decided that a jatu of 50 workers should march to Trivandrum to wait in deputation to the Maharaja, the 'Dear Lord and Bread Giver'. It generated great enthus among the workers. The jatha anthem written by R.Suguthan, exhibiting workers "destined to achieve the equal world, to start the march", but a very popular song among the workers. 141/ All these generated approximately among the capitalists and tensions in the industrial belt. Both the march the Indian Chambers of Commerces at Alleppy joined together to all the TLA of dabbling in politics. They alleged that the jatha program was intended to further the Abstention Movement which was in full substituted. 142/

The government banned the jatha and arrested the jatha leaders. It was convinced that "if the jatha or the worker's demonstration was allowed to proceed to Trivandrum on foot, it would create ensity and distrust between the employers and the employers in the state." 143/ In an unpremedented exhibition of class solidarity the workers all over the industrial belt struck work in protest. They amassed in front of the police station and refused to disposse till the arrested leaders on the request of the frustic police, appealed to the workers to disperse peacefully.

The worker's struggle came into direct conflict with the state power. Anti-government sentiments began to mount and the workers began to less faith in constitutional agitations. Attacks on the king were raised from the public platforms of the Union. When a lawyer, who happened to preside over one such meeting, reprimanded the speaker for criticising the fiverign and prevented his from speaking, the agitated crowd hooted the loyalist president and resolved that they should not have gentleman lawyers' to preside over the meetings. 144/ In fact, K.P.Panicker, the President of the TLA, who had disassociated with the Union on the eve of the government ban of the jatha, proved to be the last of the gentleman presidents of the Union. The masses were searching for a new leadership. Iven Kesava Dev, despite his radical convictions was unable to bear the union movement. It was at this juncture that the CSP made it's entry late the coir industrial belt.

The Congress Socialist Party and the General Strike of 1938

The historical importance of the CSP lies in the role it played in giving an organised expression to the radical and socialist trends among the Alleppy workers. The CSP led the discontent of the workers imprevolutionary channels. From 1935, when the TLA participated in the First All Kerala Workers Conference organised by the CSF at Calicut, there was active interaction between the two. 145/ The CSP leaders began to regularly contribute articles on socialist theory and international developments in Thozhilai. 'The Workers' Dramatic and Arts Society, at Alleppy developed into a centre of ideological training, where the CSP leaders like K.Damodaran conducted political classes for the coir workers. It was from this study circle that the cadres of the CSP at Alleppy and the future leaders of trade union movement emerged. 146/

by the government or by the farcical enquiry conducted by the District Magistrate into the grievances of the workers. The indignation of the workers reached its zenith when the government nominated P.S.Mohamed, who had by then been totally discredited because of his reformist and communities, as the worker's representative in the Legislative Assembly, despit the strong protests of the TLA. Further, the government denied legal registration to the Union. With a vengance it continued the prosecution against the jatha leaders and had them convicted. All these strength ened those who were arguing for a general strike in the industry. The CSF group began pushing the Union to take a bold stand in favour of open agitation and strike action to end the wage reductions. 148/

The rising tempo of the working class protest coincided with the agitation for the "responsible government" started by the Travancore State Congress. The brutal repression unleashed by the government only helped to win greater sympathy for the movement. Since all the basic civil rights were denied in Travancore, the State Congress decided to start a civil disobedience movement from August 26th. Thereupon the government banned the State Congress and the Youth Leage. 149/ There was a popular upsurge of protest and for the next two months. The whole of Travancore was thrown into a violent turmoil. Though the town of Alleppy was one of the relatively more peaceful centres of the struggle, in the adjacent countryside the agitation often took a violent turn. The police had to be instructed not to pursue the crowds to the country-side without adequate armed strength. 150/

In March 1938, then the TTA Ceneral Body formally declared its intention to organise a general strike in the industry, the government had the union leaders arrested under Section 90 Cr. P.C. The workers struck work and collected in front of the police station demanding the release of the leaders. Police lathicharged to disperse the crowds and one of the workers were killed. 151/

The State Congress leaders rushed to Alleppy and strongly condemned the repression against the trade union movement. They introduced a censure motion in the Legislative Assembly on this issue, the debate of which was prominently reported in the Thozhilali. 152/
The above expression of solidarity with the working class by the State

Congress was an important factor that won widespread sympathy among the workers for the cause of the State Congress agitation. Besides, many of the important leaders of the TLA were also prominent State Congress activists. The CSP also strongly advocated the workers should join the State Congress in mass. 153/ To crown it all, the Chambers of Commerces and the employers in Alleppy, held the State Congress responsition the growing labour unrest in Alleppy. This left little choice for even those workers who were not political in attitude. Political demand of the State Congress began to be raised openly in connection with the general strike.

broad phases. The first phase starts with the preparations of the stril up to the end of the end of the first week of the struggle. Though the decision for the general strike was taken in March, the leadership of the struck of the characteristic State Congress style, had not made any seriest attempt to prepare the workers for the struggle. By October, most of them were in jail having courted arrest in the State Congress Satyagraha or were away from Alleppy on political campaigns. Thus it was in the CSP cadres at Alleppy, who were assisted by a group of cadres in Malabar under the leadership of P.Krishna Pillai, the main architect of the Communist Party in Kerala, to prepare the workers for the strik. The union was reorganised in factory level committees and a disciplinal volunteer force was raised. The most important element of the prepartions was intense political campaign through factory and regional level meetings of the workers.

Such was the politically surcharged atmosphere created by this campaign that when in a massive gathering of workers on October 19th the strike declaration was read, the loudest applause was for the political demands for establishment of a responsible government, repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, release of political prisoners and withdrawal of ban on the State Congress and the Youth League. 156/
The main economic demands were — minimum wages of Rs.30 a month, 48-hour work week, unemployment allowance, maternity benefits and ending of the truck system, contract labour and unjust fines in the industry.

The strike began as 21st October, two days before the royal birth-day when the State Congress was planning a march of volunteers from all ever Travancore in the capital city. Perhaps, the CSP leadership wanted to prevent any compremise that might emerge between the State Congress and the government following the customary release of the prisoners on the birthday of the King. The strike was a complete success and peaceful, except for the police assault on some of the rickshaw pullers who had also struck work in sympathy.

However, the tension in the town was mounting. The boatmen all ever Travancore were already on an indefinite strike. Water transport being the chief means of transport /im Travancore, this strike had virtually paralysed the port town of Alleppy. 158/ Oil mill workers had also declared their intention of joining the strike movement. 25 red shirt uniformed workers from Alleppy paralicipated in the huge State Congress demonstration in Trivandrum on the strike movement at the head of the demonstration to the

beat of a song that declared the determination and the resolution of the striking workers:

"Slaves no more we are, bow down no more we shall	L,
Standing firm the battles we will fight,	
	
	_
Oh tyrant rule! we have seen your true colours	
In death we shall no more be frightened. 159/	

as a prelude to a general crackdown on the working class movement. At the same time, it tried to pacify the State Congress leadership by releasing the political prisoners. Though none of the other demands of the agitation were conceded, the vacillatory leadership of the State Congress allowed the tempo of the agitation to wane. The campaign was virtually reduced to reception meetings for the released political prisoners in various parts of the country. 160/ The major demands of the boatmen were conceded as a part of a concerted effort to have their strike withdrawn. 161/

The military and the police began the offensive against the coir workers from the night of 23rd itself. 162/ The provocation was the attempt of some of the workers returning from the worker's rally on the beach to obstruct the transport of stocks of coir goods from the factories. The violence by the police infuriated the crowd and a coir factory was set fire in the night. The next day, the police let

lesse a reign of terror in the town ransacking the union office,
besting up the picketeers, raiding the working class quanters and
besturing the arrested workers. Five workers were killed in the police
firings and more than 260 workers injured in the lathicharges. The
workers put up sporadic resistance by felling trees to set up road
blacks and resisting the rowlles with arms. However, the odds were
against them. The terror made the open functioning of the Union
impossible and broke up the old organisation. When the Strike Committee
met to take stock of the situation, there was no quorum for the Committee
to met. 163/

The second phase of the general strike started with the recognisation of the Strike Committee. In the place of the former factory committees, the town and substitute were divided into a number of wards, each under a ward committee of militants. By the end of the second week of the strike, the recordation and starvation had begun to make their impact felt on the morale of the workers. Workers began to trickle back to work into the factories. 164/ The Strike Committee chalked out a programme of picketing. To mip in the bud the rumours when by the interested quarters that the 'Malabar leaders' had withdown to safety after instigating the trouble, it was decided that leading the cadres were to lead the volunteers to the factory gates defying the military. The picketeers were publicly ascaulted and tortured and rumoure's speak amongst the workers that K.K.Warmier, a much respected CSP cade from Malabar, had died in the police lock-up. The indignation rullied the lagging spirits and the tide turned. 165/ Thus, in this

the

phase a set of young militant cadres began to assume Aeadership of the movement at all levels. The picketing programme and the resolute leadership of the given by the CSP increased it's prestige among, and hold over, the many

The third phase of the strike consisted of the last one week the struggle, when the differences between the Strike Committee led by CSP militants and the Managing Committee, led by the State Congress led came into the open. The older trade union leaders like R. Suguthan, L. Kunju, C.K. Velayudhan, and V.K. Velayudhan, who had been jailed but reled along with the other political prisoners, were unhappy at the turn of events at Alleppy. They were partly motivated by a lurking fear of losing the leadership of the union to the young militants. 166/ having lost the contact with the masses who had been rapidly politicial in the preceeding weeks; they underestimated the mass militancy and sp of self-sacrifice. Their efforts were, therefore, directed to bring about a face-saving compromise. They found the attitude of the Still Committee militants a hinderance to this course and an affront to the authority. In the name of the Managing Committee they began to arbit interefere with the strike programmes and curb the initiative of the masses.

massive demonstration that strike Committee had planned as 'unauthor' and postponed it. They feared that the secret negotiations they were carrying on with the employers would be jeoparadised by the demonstration that the negotiations failed and P.N.Krishna Pillai, who was left the discussions, was arrested. Evidently, the negotiations were only

a clever scheme by the authorities to create a rift among the workers.

The Managing Committee had to admit its mistake in calling off the

demonstration and make a public appeal to the workers to resolutely

sontinue the struggle. This temporarily ceased the tensions. 167/

However, the secret negotiations continued behind the scene, between the employers, Managing Committee leaders and the District Magistrate. On November / the Managing Committee withdrew the strike and appealed to the workers to resume their work. The only tangible gain was an immediate increase of 61 per cent rise in wages. The managements gave an assurance not to victimise the strikers and the government reitrated the decision to appoint a committee with employer-employee representatives to enquire into the disputes in the industry. 168/

even attempted to attack the house of V.K.Velayudhan where R.Suguthan lived. 169/ The Strike Committee members discovered the appeal and held that only it was authorised to take decisions regarding the strike.

The Managing Committee retaliated by dissolving the Strike Committee. 170/

It took a whole night discussion and persuasion by CSF leaders, like P.Krishna Pillai and A.K.Gopalan, to make the Strike Committee to agree to withdraw the struggle. It was resolved that the action of the Managing Committee was improper and inopportune. It had isolated and weakened the position of the rural workers who were not covered by the agreement. There was also no assurance for the withdrawal of cases registered against the workers. However, it would have been suicidal to continue the struggle with disunity in the ranks in a

situation when the State Congress agitation had virtually subsided.

Though the workers returned to work in the factories, and the Managing Committee leaders had their way, they became thoroughly discrediff before the class conscious workers. Even within the Managing Committee itself the moderates began to lose support. It was P.N.Krishna Pillai and V.K.Achuthan, who were still in jail, that the union nominated/workers representatives in the Board of Trade Disputes. P.N.Krishna Pillai after his release from the jail gravitated to a moderate position. He was willing to disassociate the Union from all political organisations in order to get the arrested workers released. It made his position as the President of the Union shaky and he dared not to call a general body meeting to pass such a resolution. 171/ Workers often expressed their displeasure of the moderate leaders by hooting at them publicly and refusing to allow them to speak. 172/

the workers unity. 173/ The refusal to undertake any witch hunting enable the genuine and devoted sections of the moderates to continue in the Unit Thus, while P.N.Krishna Pillai and V.K.Velayudhan drifted a way from trade union activities, leaders like R.Suguthan and C.K.Velayudhan grew into socialists and community party leaders. The experience of the 193 strike radically transformed R. Suguthan. It forced him to discard him moderate positions. He was arrested and sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment for a militant poem he wrote for the May day of 1939. 174/

The Emergence of Radical Hegemony

The strike decisively isolated the moderates in the Union leadership. The workers began to perceive their interests as distinct from the bourgeois national movement that had virtually ignored the strike efter their compromise of October 23rd. The participation of the State compress in the struggle was limited to a resolution of the Working Committee and a formal visit of an enquiry committee, whose report never saw the light of the day. 177/

The determination of the Alleppy workers to continue their

*truggle against all odds won the admiration of the Youth Leaguers and

the radical elements within the State Congress who were distillusioned by

campaign started by these radical elements brought them into close contuments that the working class movement. This collaboration led to the formation of the 'Radical Group' in May 1939, with M.N.Govindan Nair as it secretary. The Radical Group was to function as an organised social fraction within the State Congress on the lines of the CSP in Malabar. The authorities watched this political development with deep concern. Their [labour activists'] coalition with the Radical Section of the State Congress as exemplified by 12 members of Labour Managing Committee joining the Radical Section is ominous reported the police to the District Magistrate. 183/ The fears were well founded. The members of make Radical Group, except for a small faction led by N.Sreekantan Nair, became the leading core of the Communist Party in Travancore. From this stream came T.V.Thomas, who replaced P.N.Krishna Pillai as the president the Union in 1940.

The rapid politicisation of the masses and the emergence of the socialist leadership undermined the communal hegemony over the workers. The slow transformation that was taking place in the Ezhava caste leadership and movement was very evidence to the workers. The victory of the Absententian movement and the Temple Entry Proclamation had removed the immediate grievances of the Ezhava elite. Weak as they were, when control to the well entrenched Christian capitalists, they wanted now to within from all anti-government agitations. Given the new industrial policy of active state intervention to promote rapid industrialisation, an attitude of compromise rather than confrontation suited the interests of the Ezhava-bourgeoisis. 181/

assendancy in the ESRM actively demanded a change in the tactics of
the MADP Yogam. In 1933, 100 eminent Ezhavas of North Travancore demanded
that C.Kesavan be removed from the secretaryship of the SNDP Yogam as he
was an "atheist and rationalist". They threatened non-cooperation if
the SNDP Yogam continued to participate in the agitations against the
swerment "since most of the grievances of the community [had] been met."

They are another important pressure group demanding a change in the
swlicy of the SNDP Yogam.

183/ Finally, in 1939, the SNDP Yogam withdrew
of
all it's support to the State Congress and all forms/anti-government

The Ezhava coir capitalists fully endorsed the decision to withdraw from the national movement. In the annual conference of the SNDP regam of Shertallai, in 1939, the report of the Secretary was allowed to measure only after the deletion of the passages that could have been interpreted as veiled criticism against the government. 184/

This pro-government tilt in the policy of the SNDP Yogam severely underwined its hold over the workers. Unlike in 1937, when any attack spainst caste organisations led to emotional protests even in labour enferences, we now find severe indictment of the SNDP Yogam by labour sealers being warmly received even in caste gatherings. K.Aiyyappan, ens-time here of the Alleppy workers, but who now became the chief srchitect of the new strategy of the SNDP Yogam, was often singled out for criticism. 1857 C.K.Velayudhan, who had been in the SNDP Yogam Board,

he declared in a local meeting of SNDP Yogam at Alleppy: "I do not this that there is anying to be proud about the present situation in SNDP... Sree Narayana Guru held that all religious and castes must unite. But I am not aware of the SNDP doing anything to remove caste conciousness and religious hatred... I who know the inner secrets of the organisation of the that in the near future the SNDP and its branches are going to fall into the hands of the reactionaries."

en masse. They continued formally to be its members and some of them continued to be activists at the lower level. Because of the uneven development of the mass movement, the CSP also could not give a call for out right rejection of the SNDP Yogam. However, in Alleppy, the class organisation of the verkers had decisively replaced the caste organisation as the primary claiment of the workers allegiance. From a person who primarily considered himself as a member of the Ezhava caste, the Allegs worker came to consider himself as a member of the working class. The anti-savarna struggle became a part of the general class struggle to transform the society.

Thus, by the end of the thirties, the Alleppy workers developed into a class concious of it s aims and future. The change that had came about between 1922 and 1938 is best exemplified in the following experience of K.C.George, the Provincial secretary of the CPI in Travancore in the 'forties. In 1926, the young George, fresh from the college and

class centre in Kerala. Being a 'pure' nationalist who could stand in seminal organisation, he had to return deeply disenchanted with the workers. "It was a time when even the workers could not rise above seminal feelings," he recollects 187/ In 1938, disappointed with the ladership of the State Congress, he went once again to Alleppy where the workers were heroically upholding the flag of the struggle. The working class continuing the struggle for the independence of the country, fighting most cruel repression, without the support of the State Congress and relying on their own strength showed me a new field for work and new style of work."

It is this transformation of the Allempy workers that we have attempted to chromicle in this paper.

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40.4

13/	The	Indices	of	Unit	Value	of	Export	of	Coir	Products	from	the	Alleppy	Į,

Year	Coir fibr	e Coir yan	m Mat	Matting	
1913-14	100	100	100	100	
1914-15/1918-19	86	72	116	100	
1918-19/1921-22	108	117	172	151	
1921-22/1926-27	135	160	186	197	
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	Rural	Urban	Average
Male	93.7	85.8	89.9
Female	6.3	14.2	11.1
Adult	٤1. 8	85.4	83.8
Child .	18.2	14.6	16.2

Source: Statistics of Travancore 1113ME/1938-39.

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- Despite the rapid growth of the SNDP Yogam into a comprehensive and well initorganisation, the strength and resilence of the local Ezhava organisations in Shertallai Alleppy area is evident from the fact that even in 1930, there still existed 6 Ezhava caste organisations in that region prominent enough to be listed in the 'List of Political and Quasi Political Societies and Sabhas in Travancore', see C.S.No.D.Dis.746/30, ERC, Trivandrum.
- */ K.K. Marayanan, op.cit., pp., 6-9.
- MCG, Charitra Sangraham, pp.6-7.

- Proceedings, SMA, Vol.VII, Part 1, Trivandrum, 1936, p.35.
- 58/ E.M.S.Namboodiripad, ...cit., pp.261-2. See also
 E.M.S.Namboodiripad, ...anum Malayala Sahityavum, (Mal.) Trivandrum,
 1981
- 59/ KCG, Charitram, p.192.
- K.C.Govindan, 'Thiruvithancore Labour Association', (Mal.), Punnap <u>Vavalar Silver Jubillee Sourvenior</u>, Alleppy, 1971, p.113. see all the report on TLA, C.S.No.D.Dis.746/30, ERC, Trivandrum
- For a detailed discussion of the Vaikom Satyagraha struggle and if subdued end, see T.K.Raveendran, Vaikom Satyagraha and Gandhi, Trivandrum, 1975 and T.K.Raveendran Eight Furlong to Freedom, New Delhi, 1980. See also P.K.Madhavan, T.K.Madhavante Jeeva Charitram, Rantam Pusthakam, (Mal.), Quilon, 1947, pp.130-212.
- 62/ KCG, Charitram, p.183.
- K.K.Kusuman, Kerala Charitra Padanangal, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1976, p.85.
- K...Govindan, 'Vadappuram P.K.Bava', (Mal.), Thozhilali Mitram, Book 1, No.7, June 1981, Trivandrum, p.17.
- K.K.Kusuman, op.cit., pp.78-108. Also see the discussion on the adjournment motion on the repression of Temperance Movement in Shertallai, Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Vol.xVIII, 1931 ppp.171-212.

The Population, Public Employment and Electoral Representation of Various Communities in Travancore (percentage distribution given in brackets)

	Population (in lakhs) 1931	Public employment	Elected :	represente lative Ass 1925		1931
Total	50.95(100.0)	24,728(100.0)	23(100.0)	23(100.0)	23(100.0)	23(100.0)
Nair Nehavas Other de- pressed Castes	8.70 (17.08)	13,435(54.33) 913(3.69) 422(1.71)	•	0(0.00)	•	15(65.22) 0 (0.00) 1(4.35)
Other non depressed castes		5,257(21.26)	4 (17.39)	3(13.04)	2(8.70)	3(13. 04)
Maristian Muslims Others	3.53(6.93) 0.004(0.00)	4,042(16.35) 613(2.48) 46(0.19)	7(30.43) 0(0.00) 0(0.00)	7(30.43) 0(0.00) -(0.00)	6(26.09) 1(4.35) -(0.00)	4(17.39) 0(0.00) ~(0.00)

Source: P.S. Velayudhan, SNDP Yoga Charithram, Quilon, 1928.

P.K.Madhavan, op.cit., p.11.

For a detailed description of the course of the Abstention movement, see K.K.Kusuman, The Abstention Movement, Trivandrum, 1976; C.Kesavan, Jesvitha Samaram Moonnam Bagam, (Mal.), Kottayam, 1971; and P.K.K.Menon, Wistory of the Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol.II, Trivandrum, 1972, pp.333-76.

Proceedings, SMA, Vol.WII, Part 1, p.306.

C.Rajendran, The Ezhava Community and Kerala Politics, Trivandrum, 1974, p.54 and P.K.K.Menon, op.cit., pp.374-5.

The //mspector of Police to District Superintendent of Police.dt. 4.9.1899

Valkon Bundle, No.7, ERC, quoted in Robin Jeffrey, Travancore:

Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics in Robin Jeffrey (ed.)

People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the

Indian Princely States, Delhi, 1978., p.156.

1. Viraraghava Aiyengar, Memorandum, 24 April 1924, Vaikom Bundle, No.1, ERC, quoted in Ibid.

- M.K.Sanoo, Sahodaran Alyyappan (Mal.), Kottayam, 1980, p. 362.

- See K.Aiyyappan, Sahodarnte Padhiyakrithikal, Kottayam, 1981, pp./
 Is far backim. 1919, Aiyyappan welcomed the Soviet Revolution and held the revolutionary youth of Russia as the model for the Ezhava youngmen.
- See C.S.No.D.Dis.975/34,Ré: Particulars about the Managing Propriets of Travancore Coir Mills, ERC, Trivandrum.
- Puthupally Raghavan, Sakhavu Sugathante Jeeva Charitram, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979, p.28.
- See C.S.No.D.Dis.298/40, Re: Sikh converts in Alleppy, Vaikom etc.;
 C.S.No.D.Dis.248/38 Re: Speeches of Sirdar Thejo Singh; C.S.No.
 D.Dis.298/42 Re: Sirdar Tejo Singh of Shertallai; and C.S.No.D.Dis.
 1638/37 Re: Speech delivered by Mr.Jay Singh in the meeting of
 Veliyil Labour Union, ERC, Trivandrum.
- Letter from K.C.Karunakaran to the Dewan dt.26.5.1936, C.S.No.D.Dis. 1538/36, ERC, Trivandrum. See also M.H., Vol.XXXII, No.29, Septim 12, 1936, p.6; C.S.No.D.Dis.1085/36 and C.S.No.D.Dis.1247/36, ERC, Trivandrum.
- See E.Madhavan, Swatantra Samudayam (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979.

 This book was a revised version of the Presidential address deliver by E.Madhavan at the 3rd Annual Conference of the Ezhava youth organisation at Pattanac ud, near Shertallai in 1936. The publication book was advertised in Thozhilali. See Thozhilali, Sept.20,1930
- See Leg.Dept. No.R.Dis.100/30 Re: Return of the newspaper 'Muslim' and also, C.S.No.D.Dis.584/24 Re: The objectionable verses printed in the 'Muslim'.
- 81/ KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p.12.
- See the report on the 12th Annual Conference of the TLA, Kerala Kaumudi, Trivandrum, 1937 May 30, p.16.
- 83/ Ibid., p.17.
- N.E.Balaram, Keralathile Communist Prasthanam Adiya Nalukaliloode (Mal.), Quiton, 1973, pp.90-105 and E.M.S.Namboodiripad, Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi, Trivandrum, 1981, pp.306-37.

- the First World War was over the working hours in the Darragh Smail's. The management had to concede to change the opening time in the merning from six to seven o'clock. R.Prakasam, Keralathile Trade Taion Prasthanathinte Charitram, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979, pp.34-5.

 P.K.Bava narrates 3 incidents of work stoppages before the formation of the TLA; see K.K.Narayan, pp.5-6.
- Report, BCTDMMI, p.81.
- 2.6ovinda Panibker, op.cit., p.4-5.
- See the speech by N.Krishnan at the Union's General Body meeting in April 1922. KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p.7.
- 19/ MCG, Charitram, p. 182-3.
- TA, Vigiapanam, (Mal.), flysheet, PKCG, Quilon.
- In the first one month 116 workers were enrolled (TLA, Vigiapanam, (Mal.), fly sheet, date moth-eaten, PKCG, Quilon) By the end of the year, the number of members had increased to nearly 600. (TLA, Metice (Mal.), fly sheet, dt.20.1.1923, FKCG, Quilon). At the end of 1923 it stood at 800 (P.K.Padmanabhan Asan, Thozhilalikalude Dayaneeyavasthayum Nivaranar yangalum, (Mal), lileppy, 1924, p.3). Though the membership increased rapidly in 1925 with the reduction in membership fee, thereafter it declined and was only 251 in 1928 (KCG Charitza Sangrahu p.11 and P.S.Mohamed, Ezhamathu Varshika Sammelanathil Chaitha Amountha Prasangam, (Mal.), Alleppy, 1931, p.1). But since then the membership steadily increased. In 1930, it was 1098 and in 1931 it grew to 2145 (P.S.Mohamed, op.cit., p.2 and Secretariyude Report, (Hal.), Alleppy, 1931, PKCG, Quilon). In 1938 the union membership was around 14,000 (P.Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhayile Pothu Panimudakkam', (Mal.) in Antallat (ed) Shakhakkale Munnottu, Vol. II, Trivendrum, 1978, p.59).
- mc, Charitra Sangraham, [p.7.
- N.K. Marayanan, op.cite/p. 14.
- 1. Reguthan, Thiran jedgtha Lekhanangal, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979,p.73.
- The decenial rate of growth of population of Travancore was 16.2 in the first the discades of the century. During 1921/31, the population indicated by 27.2 per cent. See P.G.K.Panikar, T.N.Krishnan and H.Krishnaji, Population Growth and Agricultural Development & A Case study of Kerala. Pro, Rome, 1978, c.1.

- Government of Travancore, Report of the Economic Depression Enquiry Committee, Trivandrum, 1931, pp.20-2.
- 97/ Report, BCTDMMI, p.82.
- According to the Magistrate "this kind of treatment of the labourers [was] due to the fact that there [were] more labourers than necessary and consequently labourers can be got for at very cheap rates, and also due to the disorganised conding of the labourers and keen competition among them". See the letter of the Division First Class Magistrate to District Magistrate dt.15.2.113, Ind.Dept.No.R.Dis.2787/38, ERC, Trivandrum.
- 99/ Report, BCTDMMI, p.72.
- Unit value of Exports of Coir Mat and Matting from Alleppy Post
 (in Rs.per qtl .)

	1925-26	1931-32	1933-34	1936-37	1938-39
Mat	61.77	41.18	22.13	29.85	37.49
Matting	68.64	490	34.32	43.18	39.39

Source: Coir Board, Hand Dook of Coir Statistics, Kalavoa

- See the comments of Ms William Goodacre & Co. on the TLA Memorial submitted to the Enquiry Officer, Ind.Dept.No.R.Dis.2787/38, English Trivendrum.
- 102/ Report, BCTDMMI, pp.77-8 and 121-31.
- 103/ The Regional Distribution and the Lverage Size of Coir Establishin 1938.

in 1938.	No.of esta-	NO.OL MA-	NO.OI	Total	AVC
	blishments	tting looms	mat looms	no.of	of L
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Alleppy	41	2374	2180	4554	111.
Punnapra	54	11	723	734	13,
Kalavoor	19	43	598	641	31.
S.L.Puram	15	316	557	873	50,
Shertallai	7 3	811	1272	2083	28.
Kuthiathode	7	394	179	573	81.
Vaikom	5	103	40	143	28.
Muhamma	6 7	108	17 80	1888	28.
Quilon	9	172	24	193	21.
Total	29 0	4335	735 0	11685	46.

Scurce: Report DCTDMMI, p.73.

In 1930, the average daily wages of the urban workers was Rs.0.61 while in the rural worker received only Rs.0.30. Calculated from Statistics of Travancore 1113ME, 1938-39, Trivandrum, 1939, pp.

Report, BCTDMMI, p.130

Ibid., p.111.

Ibid., pp.131-44 and 169-80.

K.C. Karunakaran, 'Coco-Fibre Industry in Travancore', MH, 30th Year Annual, 1935, p.30. See also, D.M. Amalsad, The Development of Coir Industry on the East Coast of Madras Presidency, Madras, 1925, p.2.

Report, BCTDMMI, pp.111.

Ibid., p.110.

See the evidence given by the workers of Aspinwall & Co., Ibid.,p.22.

P.G.Padmanabhan, 'Coir Factory Thozhilalikalum Communist Partiyum', (Mal.), Souvenir, p.20.

See the statement issued by Alleppy Chamber of Commerce in MH, Vol.XXIX, No.43, January 27, 1934, p.3.

"It is not intelligent behaviour to strike out of momentary anger...
The present practice of striking first in most/companies without
the knowledge of the Union cannot be tolerated". "P.S.Mohammed
TLA Ettamathu Varshika Sammelanathil Sthiram President Mr.P.S.
Hohammed M.L.C.Chaitha Swagatha Prasamgam, (Mal.) Alleppey, 1932, p.5.

KCG, Charitram, p. 185.

P.S.Mohammed, op.cit.

Ibid., p.2.

118/ Presidents and Secretaries of the TLA

Date of Occasion	President	Secretary
1922 Foundation Conference	M.K.Antony	P.K.Bava
1922 Special General Body meeting	T.C.Kesavan Vaidyiar	**
1924 1st Annual Conference	N.Krishnan	***
1924 Special General Body meeting	15	K.Velayudhan
1925 2nd Annual Conference	19	st .
1926 3rd Annual conference	P.K.Madhavan	S. Vasudevan
1928 Special General Body meeting	19	P.K.Dava
1928 4th Annual conference	P.S.Mohammed	••
1928 Special General Body meeting	11	K.C.Govindan
1929 5th Annual Conference	10	H
1930 6th Annual Conference	11	**
1931 7th Annual Conference	38	Siva Prasad
1932 Special General Body meeting	19	V.C. Vasu Vai
1932 8th Annual Conference	98	10
1933 Special General Body meeting	89	M.C.Narayanam
1933 Special General Body meeting	**	V.K.Achuthan
1934 9th Annual Conference	A.Calakrishna Pillai	P.Kesavadev
1934 Special General Body meeting	V.K.Velayudhan	#1
1934 Special General Body meeting	**	Pandavathu Spi
		Pil
1934 10th Annual Conference	N.Krishna Menon	0)
1935 Special General Dody meeting	м	K.C.Govindam
1935 Special General Body meeting	K.P.Fanicker	44
1935 Special General Body meeting	P.K.Kunju	11
1936 11th Annual Confers be	**	11
1937 12th Annual Conference	**	R.Sugathan
·		

KCG, Charitram, pp.179-200.

- See the police report on K.C.Govindan, C.S.No.D.Dis.1004/35, EKC, Trivandrum.
- At the 8th Annual Conference he had won the admiration of the workers when he ridiculed the didatic speeches of the other guests and leaders and gave a new slogan to Alleppy workers: "Let us now become rowdy rebels". Interestingly, the prominent among the workers who approached him the next year to request him to contest for the secretaryship reemerge at the end of the 'thirties as the CSP cadres. See P.Kesava Dev, Ethurppu, (Mal.), Kottayam, 1979, pp.3106."
- 121/ P.Kesava Dev, 'Adiyte Oru Panimudakku', (Mal.), Souvenir, pp. 15-6.
- 122/ KCG, Charitram, pp.193.
- For a description of the linkages between the agricultural sector and the rural coir weaving industry, see H.Smith, op.cit., Ernakula, 1952, p.9.

- Report, BCTDMMI, p.80. According to a survey of coir workers at Shertallai, in 1941, only 12 per cent of the workers owned any land, 19 per cent were tenants and the rest were all hutment dwellers. See Robin Jeffrey, 'Indian Working Class Revolt: Punnapra Vayalar and Communist Conspiracy of 1946', The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol.XVIII, No.2, April-June, 1981, p.103.
- R.Suguthan, Thiruvithamcore Labour Associationte Managing Committee
 Samarppikkenna Memorandum, (Mal.), Alleppy, 1938, p.3.
- Report, BCTDMMI, pp.130-1.
- See the comments by M/s William Goodacre & Sons on the TLA Memorial submitted to the Enquiry Officer, Ind.Dept. No.R.Dis.2787/38, ERC, Trivandrum.
- See for instance the speeches of union leaders labour meetings at Parur dt.19.12.116 and 25.2.115 in <u>C.S.No.D.Dis.4014/44</u> and <u>C.S.No.D.Dis.3809/44</u>, ERC, Trivandrum. See also report on the Annual Conference of MCFWU, C.S.No.D.Dis.3689/44, EEC, Trivandrum.
- See the resolution No.2, the proceedings of the Committee of ACISU dt. 3.10.117, Minute Book (Managing Committee), RACISU, Shertallai.
- Report, BCTDMMI, p.201. Fee concession for the children of coir workers had been one of the earliest demands raised by the TLA. See the report on the 2nd annual Conference of the TLA, MH, Vol.XXI, No.16, June 13, 1925, p.5.
- Thejo Singh's 'Daridra Deepam', [Light of Doverty], depicting the travails of a couple dedicated to the cause of the toiling masses "was sold everywhere with a view to raise funds for the expenses in connection with a labour meeting" to be presided by K.P.Thayyil—the advocate of Ezhava conversion to Islam. See C.S.No.D.Dis.
 4187/44, ERC, Trivandrum. The proceeds from the sale of 'Thozhilali Ganam' i Song of a Worker] went to fund a reading room for the workers. See M.K.Padmanabhan, Thozhilali Ganam, (Mal.), 1930, Shettallai.
- Thozhilali, (Mal.), Vol.9, No.33, Number 7, 1935, Alleppey, p. 7.
- See the returns of the news paper Thozkilali in Leg.Dept.No.

 D.Dis.50/25, Leg.Dept.No.R.Dis.9/31 and Leg.Dept. No.R.Dis.112/34,

 ERC, Trivandrum.
- Thozhilali, (Mal.), December 20, 1934, Alleppy, p.8.

- 135/ Kedamangalam Pappukkutty, Kadathu Vanchi, (Mal.), 1953, pp.126-7.
- 136/ Ibid., p.128. See also his poem 'Velakkarude Pattu' (Song of the * Thozhilali, Thulam 28, 111, Alleppy, p.1.
- Ibid., p.76; and KCG, Charitram, p.193. The Union activists public accilection of his poems titled Aswasa Niswasam [Sigh of Relief]. The advertisement of the book in Thozhilali carried the caption: "Real Literature must be the reflection of ordinary peoples' daily life". Thozhilali Viseshalprathi, Alleppy, 1937, p.51.
- 138/ P.S.Mohammed, op.cit., p.5.
- 139/ N.E.Balaram, op.cit., pp.87-8.
- 140/ KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p.19.
- 141/ Puthupally Raghavan, op.cit., pp.50-1.
- 142/ KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p.22. See also the article 'Factory Billie Nere' (Mal.), Thozhilali, Vol.9, No.36, November 28, 1935, p.8.
- N.E.Balaram, op.cit., p.90.
- M.T.Chandrasenan, 'Alappuzhayile Communist Partiyude Ulbhavam', Mel. Navayuqam, Dook 31, No.33, Trichur, February 13, 1982, p.2.
- The proceedings of the Labour Conference at Calicut were explained at workers meetings. See the report of the Jatha Propaganda meeting in Thozhilali, December 25, 1935, Alleppy.
- 146/ M.T.Chandrasenan, op.cit.
- 147/ KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p.25-7.
- In September 1937, a meeting of the CSP cadres was called in Cochin by P.Krishna Pillai to discuss the possibilities of a general strike. See M.T.Chandra Senan, op.cit. P.Krishna Pillai describing the labour situation in Alleppy, in an article published in Mathrubhumi in 1935, argued that the only solution a general strike in the industry. P.Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhay Thozhil Vazhakku', (Mal.) in Antallat, op.cit., p.51.

- For a detailed description of the struggle of the State Congress see C.Narayana Pillai, Tiruvithamcore Swatantriya Samara Charitram, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1972. The Youth League was a loose group of young radicals who actively participated in the Congress activities but claimed themselves to be a separate organisation. Though they had no clear ideological perspective, they opposed the accillations of the State Congress leadership and stood for uncompromising struggle against the Dewan. For a brief description of contemporary CSP perspective on the struggle see K.Damodaran, 'Thiruvithamcorile Swatantri Prakshobam', Thozhilali, 1938, August 25, p.2-3.
- 150/ See C.S.No.D.Dis.195/49, Re: Shertallai Disturbances, ERC, Trivandrum.
- See the statement of the TLA Managing Committee dt.3.4.1938, in Antallat, op.cit., p.75.
- The Proceedings of the Sree Mulam Assembly, Vol.XII, 1939, Trivandrum, pp.297 and Thozhilali, Vol.11, No.38, July 21, 1938, Alleppy, p.1.
- See the speech of K.Damodaran at the labour meeting at Muhamma, C.Marayana Pillai, op.cit., p.328.
- "Till the party cadres reached Alleppy, because of the lack of experience, pretty little had been done by way of preparation except the passing of the resolution for a general strike. Even among the workers there was lack of confidence that the strike will materialise". P.Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhayile Pothu Panimudakkam', Antallatt, op.cit., p.62.
- K.K.Warrier, 'Marakanavatha Sambavam', (Mal.) Souvenir, pp.241-2.
 Also see the articles by K.K.Warrier and K.Kunjan in Antallat op.cit.,
 pp.496 and 475.
- P.Krishna Pillai, op.cit., in Antallat, op.cit., p.61.
- dated
 Interview with K.K.Kunjan/5.6.81, Alleppy, See also P.Krishna Pillai, op.cit., in Antallat, op.cit., p.60.
- M.K.Raman, 'Navika Thozhilali Samghathinte Ulbhavavum Valarechayum', (Mal.), Souvenir, pp.83-4.
- T.V.Haridas, 'Thiruvinanthapurathu Chuvappu Sena' (Mal.), Souvenir, p.104.
- See C.Narayana Pillai, op.cit., pp.678-94, K.C.George, 'Ente Jeevitha Yatra (Mal.), MMA, Book 26, No.27, September 12, 1981,p.13 and 41 and K.C.George, op.cit., (Mal.), MMA, Book 26, No.27, September 5, 1981,

- see the report of Mr.Haydon's interview with the Dewan dt.20.10.1938, Ind.Dept.No.R.Dis.2787/38, ERC, Trivandrum and M.K.Raman, Ente Jeevill Katha, (Mal.), Edappallykotta, 1977, pp.22-5.
- For an account of the police terror on 23rd and 24th of October, see F.Krishna Pillai, 'Pothujanangalodum State Congressionodum' (Mal.), in Antalatt, op.cit., pp.55-7 and also P.Krishna Pillai 'Alappuzhile Thozhilalikalode, (Mal.) in Antallat, op.cit., p.83.
- See the remeniscences of P.A.Soloman of the strike in Antallat, op.d p.471.
- See the letter to the Dewan dt.3.11.1938 from Mr. Haydon, the manager of William Goodacres & Sons. "Factories are still idle but this morning ten men have been to me and announced whether the leaders allow them to do or not, they intend to return on Mondey... The poor fellows are literally starving. I have never seen such a change in the appearances of men in such a short time." Ind.Dept. No.R.Dis.2787/38, ERC, Trivandrum.
- 165/ K.K.Warrier, op.cit., p.241.
- P.Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhayile Pothu Panimudakkam', (Mal.), in Antallat, op.cit., p.66.
- 167/ Ibid., p.68-9.
- See the letter of the District Magistrate to the Chief Secretary dt.30.3.114 and the letter of/Chairman of Travancore Chamber of Commerce to/Chief Secretary dt.15.11.1938, Ind.Dept.No.R.Dis.2787/3, ERC, Trivandrum.
- N.Sreekantan Nair, 'Kashinjakala Chitrangal (Mal.), Kottayam, 1976, p.26.
- "Yesterday we succeeded in getting a manifesto published by the labour union office bearers... to call off the strike. Knowing this, the other fellows approached the extremists (the strike committee members) and persuaded them to disown the manifesto published by the union as that the strike need be called off only after P.N.Krishna Pillai, Achuthan and others who are in custody are released. We knew about this only in the night and we persuaded the union to meet at once and dissolve the strike committee so as to avoid its functioning any longer. Anyhow a split has been created in their camp." Letter of the District Magistrate to the Dewan dt.30.3.114, C.S.No.R.Dis.2787/38, ERC, Trivandrum.

- 500 letter from K.C. Karunakaran to positional secretary to Dewan Dt.19.1.1939, C.S.D.Dis.No.46/39, ERC, Trivandrum.
- 172/
 See the report of the State Congress meeting at Alleppy dt.11.12.1938.

 "Mr.C.K.Velayudhan a member of the Managing Committee of TCFWU who along with R.Suguthan, the former general secretary.... was largely responsible for the termination of the labour general strike.... was hooted down several times and even after the request of the president, the gathering that consisted mainly of the workers did not allow Velayudhan to proceed. "C.S.No.D.Dis.213/38, ERC, Trivandrum.
- See P.Krishna Pillai, Alappurhayile Thozhilalikalodu, (Mal.) in Antallat, op.cit., pp.77-05. The emphasis of this appeal was on the need to preserve the unity: "What is immediately needed is that we should forget the unpleasent incidents among us for many reasons... Our future lies in a strong organisation".
- Puthupally Raghavan, op.cit., p.110-1.
- P.Krishna Pillai, 'Alapputhayile Pothu Panimudakkam,' in Antallat, op.cit., p.66.
- 500 the letter of Inspector of Police to the District Magistrate dt. 11.10.114, C.S.No.D.Dis.295/39, ERC, Trivandrum. See also the reports of the speeches of R.Suguithan and V.K.Purushothaman, C.S.No.D.Dis.239/39 LBC, Trivandrum.
- LAC, Trivandrum.

 K.K.Kumjan, Whiruvithamcome Coir Factory Workers Union Ettamathu

 Warshika Report, Alleppy, 1954, pp.10 1.
- K.C.George, or.cit., EMA, Vol.31, No.26, Kottayam, September 1981, pp.4 and 13.
- Puthupally Raghavan, op.cit., pp.111-26; N.Sreekantan Nair, op.cit., pp.70-2 and K.C.George, op.cit., MMA, February 20, 1982, p.4 and 15.
- Letter of the Inspector of Police to the District Magistrate dt.11.10.114, C.S.No.D.Dis.295/39, EEC, Trivandrum.
- For a discussion of the Industrial Policy of Travancore Government see P.K.Michael Tharakan and T.M.Thomas Isaac, State and Industrialisation in Travancore, CDS Working paper, (forthcoming), Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum.
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- 187/ K.C.George, op.cit., MMA, Book 26, No.1, February 21, 1981, p.4.
- 188/ K.C.George, op.cit., MMA, Boom 26, No.32, September 19,1981, p.4.

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C.S. Confidential Section.

C.F. Cover File.

Dev.Dept. Development Department.

Excise Department.

Industries Department.
Leg.Dept. Legislative Department.

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