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KERALA 1947-57

A STUDY OF SOME SIGNIFICANT FACTORS LEADING

TO THE COMMUNIST VICTORY IN 1957

by

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INTRODUCTION

In 1957, the State of Kerala, the southernmost of the Indian States in the Indian Union, made world history by becoming the first State to vote a Communist Government into power by democratic means and constitutional procedure. The success of the Communist Party in Kerala raised several interesting and significant possibilities and questions. The progress of Communism in India and indeed anywhere in Asia, assumes a special significance in a complex situation that affects international as well as national affairs. In emotive terms, in the stubborn tendency to see all things in black and white, in terms of 'democracy' vs 'totalitarianism', the success or failure of Communists and Communist Governments, is viewed with extreme concern. This concern becomes all the more urgent when it is focused on India, the largest democracy in the world, and to many the hope of democracy in Asia. More important however, is the question of how and why this State, which boasts the highest literacy rate in India, and is one of the most enlightened of Indian States in terms of standards of education, voted in a Communist Government. This action by an electorate that is unusually politically conscious in terms of awareness of issues, and by a people noted for their individuality, is significant.

Since the inception of India as a sovereign nation in 1947, the party in power has been the Indian National Congress. So overwhelming

(1) Nehru once referred to the Malayalis (i.e. people of Kerala) as 'a nation of intellectual anarchists';

(2) Referred to either as the I.N.C., the Congress, or the Congress Party.
has been the support given to this Party, and so lengthy its term of office, that India has been practically governed by one-party rule. A viable opposition, particularly at the State level, was almost non-existent, Congress being almost like a vast monolith on the political scene. If Acton's dictum on the corrupting effects of power is valid, then one can perhaps apply it to the Congress Governments which have tended, especially at the local level, towards corruption, inefficiency, disunity and factionalism. Fortunately for India's party system, and for Congress itself, the beginnings of an effective opposition were starting to make themselves felt by 1957, and at the State level even presenting a challenge to the monopoly of Congress rule, in many cases the challenge coming from the Communists. Thus the enquiry into how the Communists won is necessarily also an enquiry into how Congress behaviour had weakened its hold over Kerala.

This study is therefore not a comprehensive account of the Communist movement in Kerala. Severe limitations in the nature of source material would exclude such an examination. While aspects of its early history and strategy are considered, and where significant, elaborated upon, this thesis emerges as an analysis of Kerala after 1947, leading up to the events of 1957, the emphasis being laid on why the Communists were able to win, and why Congress lost. It is concerned less with Communism

(3) In the 1967 general election, Congress lost control in 8 of the 17 States and had to form coalitions or go into opposition.
per se in Kerala, and more with the long term conditions in the area, from 1947 onwards. 1957 is the focus of interest, but it attempts to study it as part of what is seen as a continuing process in Kerala's political development. The State of Kerala officially came into existence only on 1st November 1956, as a result of the re-organisation of States, when the former princely States of Travancore-Cochin (or T-C), \((4)\) were joined with the Malayalam-speaking taluks of Malabar, formerly part of Madras, to form a linguistic unit of Malayalam-speaking peoples. Travancore and Cochin were princely States which, though rules by hereditary maharajahs, were in the fore-front among the Indian States in terms of progressive administration. As early as 1925, Cochin had a Legislative Council with an elected majority, and became the first of the Indian States to send elected representatives to the newly formed Constituent Assembly in 1946. Soon afterwards, its Maharajah granted full responsible government. Travancore too had a Legislature but with limited powers. In July 1947, the Maharajah of Travancore introduced full responsible government and a popular ministry was installed. In July 1949, as part of the process of integrating the princely states with the Union, in preparation for the coming of Independence, Travancore and Cochin were joined together. In this new

\((4)\) Municipal districts.

\((5)\) Kerala is thus a distinctly 'Malayali' entity since its boundaries are based on linguistic considerations.

\((6)\) See V.P. Menon: The Integration of the Indian States (London 1956) p.275. Menon was the brilliant architect of the States' Re-organisation.

\((7)\) By the Interim Constitution Act, the first Constitution for the State of T-C was introduced on 24th March 1948, and for the first time a constitutional monarchy in the real sense was established in Travancore. Executive authority theoretically rested in the Maharajah, but was to be exercised on the advice of the Council of Ministers, responsible not to the Maharajah but to the Legislature. - R. Nair: Constitutional Experiments in Kerala (Kerala Academy of Pol. Sc., Trivandrum) pp. 26-27.
State of Travancore-Cochin, the Maharajah of Travancore became the titular head with the title of Raj Pramukh, which was not to be a hereditary position, but one appointed by the Governor-General of India. At the inauguration of the new State, the Raj Pramukh and council of Ministers, composed of members drawn from the outgoing ministries of Travancore and Cochin and headed by the Chief Minister of Travancore, assumed office. The Legislative Assembly met for the first time on 11th July 1949. By the States' Re-organisation Act of 1956, and the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act of 1956, Malabar was added to T-C to form Kerala State. It should be noted that although Kerala did not officially become a single political unit till 1956, the region is a distinct, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic unit, with common traditions and customs, and therefore the term has been employed in this study to denote a whole region i.e. Malabar, Travancore and Cochin prior to 1956.

Kerala has been regarded as a 'problem' State since 1947. There are several reasons for this. It has a land area of approximately 15,000 square miles, and on this small area it supports a population of nearly 16 million (1960 figure). It has the highest density of population in India, and the large majority of this dependent on agriculture for a livelihood, either directly or indirectly. Thus the pressure on land

(8) Ibid p.34.
(9) Malabar consists of the districts of Cannanore, Kozhikode, Palghat; Cochin of Trichur and Ernakulam districts; Travancore of Kottayam, Alleppey, Trivandrum, and Quilon districts.
(10) V.P. Menon pointed out this danger in 1949, when Kerala had 1,015 per sq. mile as against the Indian average of 281 - The Integration of the Indian States p.291.
is a major problem. In addition the high rate of literacy leads to a large educated section, unable to find adequate employment. Thus overpopulation and land scarcity were already present as major factors of discontent. The political instability that has characterised the region is in no small measure largely derived from this background. The results of the 1957 elections were purely political only in its ultimate expression, in the sense that it led to the voting in of a government that affected the political fortunes of the State. The situation was influenced by and functioned within a complex inter-relationship of social, religious, economic and political factors, and hence must be understood against such a background. The argument presented is that the ingredients leading to 1957 were present from 1947 onwards, if not earlier, and were not only present but intensified throughout the period under review, so that the ultimate result was not so much a surprise but one might almost be tempted to say, inevitable. While the particular condition of Kerala in 1956-57, especially in an atmosphere of Presidential rule, imposed in the absence of a strong government, no doubt helped create a feeling favourable to an anti-Congress vote, it was more the result of a process begun long before.

In seeking to understand how anti-Congress feeling developed in Kerala, and how the Communist Party was able to avail itself of this opportunity for victory, four main themes are studied. These do not of course provide all the answers, but they are centrally significant to any attempt to find an explanation for the events of 1957.

Chapter One entitled 'Political Instability' is concerned with the political background from 1947 onwards. Kerala witnessed a succession
of ministries and short-lived governments, and a proliferation of political parties between 1947 and 1957. Although Congress dominated the period, except for a brief time in 1954 when a Praja Socialist Party Ministry was formed, there was a lack of strong leadership. Congress itself was plagued by disunity and factionalism. It maintained its dominance only so long as there was no strong party to oppose it, and when this dominance was threatened it collapsed. An important point in favour of the Communists was disillusionment with Congress.

Political affairs were deeply influenced by the communal structure. (11) Four groups, the Nayars, Christians, Ezhavas and Moslems form the major communal groupings. The rivalries and differences within these communities have had an important effect on the political fortunes of the State, and party lines are often influenced by communal lines. Without stating baldly that the communal vote helped polarise the 1957 elections in Kerala into Communist and non-Communist, there was certainly a relationship between the voting of the major communities, and its effect on the election results. Chapter Two is therefore concerned with 'Casteism and Communalism' and its effect on the stability of the region. It attempts to show has communal considerations were significant in the anti-Congress tone of the 1957 elections, for the politics of casteism and communalism cannot be separated from the politics of Kerala. It is argued that it is in the strength of caste and communal feelings that a significant part of the answer to the events of 1957 lies. The tradition of caste has been very strong and rigid in this area, and the chapter analyses this tradition and the extent to

(11) Also spelt 'Nairs'.
which it has affected the modern situation. It also examines the nature and role of the major communities, which as substantial minority groups have affected the political fortunes of the State. Communalism has had an important effect on the success and failure of the major political parties. The extent of its operation was such as to put the parties, up to 1957, in danger of becoming communal rallying points. An attempt is made to assess the extent to which the more important parties were affected by casteism-communalism. When the Communists won in 1957, it was to the nature of communal voting and sympathies that they partly owed their success.

If the Communist Party was able to exploit the political and communal unrest, their strongest ally was economic, particularly agrarian discontent. The agrarian problem is perhaps the most important factor in any consideration as to why Kerala was and is an area of radical protest. If a 'floating margin' of votes, engendered by political and social discontent, gave the Communists the anti-Congress vote, their most reliable and consistent source of support came from the lower economic groups especially the agricultural labourers and small tenants. Chapter Three is termed 'The Agrarian Problem'. A fundamental basis of this problem is scarcity of land in an area of very dense population that is primarily dependent on the land for its livelihood. With this population constantly on the increase, a fermenting mass of unrest has been a familiar quality in Kerala since 1947. A considerable part of this chapter is devoted to the nature of the land tenure system, one of the most complex in India. Since a large percentage of the population is attached to agriculture, an understanding of the
settlement of land, and the landlord-tenant-cultivator relationship is vital. The resentment of the landlords by small tenants, and the complications of the land tenure system in which the bulk of work is done by landless labour has been heightened by the failure of Congress to deal adequately with the situation. This was an important source of advantage to the Communists. The landless labourers, a resentful and insecure group, were in fact the mass base for Communist strength, while unemployed or displaced members of the middle-class were also an increasingly anti-Congress and potential Leftist supporters. The first three chapters are mainly concerned with the failure of Congress to deal with the conditions causing discontent, a failure that has caused disillusionment for those who had any faith in the I.N.C. The point that all three make is that the vote for the Left was a protest against Congress ineptitude. The legacy left by the various right-wing parties in terms of their achievements since 1947, was only one that hastened their own defeat. It was fortunate for the Communists that by 1957, discontent with the status-quo enabled them to present themselves as the party of opposition. This was possible because they were able to offer themselves as an attractive alternative to Congress rule. Thus another area of enquiry in understanding how the Communists won, must be the Communists themselves. Chapter Four is therefore entitled 'Communist Tactics'. It traces the development of a Communist policy in Kerala from the advocacy of revolution and violence to a moderate approach. The latter expressed itself in the Party's willingness to accommodate

(12) i.e. displaced from the land.
itself within the Parliamentary framework, and with any Party opposed to Congress. It was indicative of the Party's recognition of the importance of adjusting itself to the local environment, and enabled the Party to fully exploit the mood of 1957, and attract those uncommitted voters willing to give a strong opposition a chance. The study of Communist tactics is a difficult task to undertake research in due to the inaccessibility of Party documents and matters relating to Party proceedings. However since the development of a strategy that enabled the Communist Party to present itself as a viable alternative is a crucial factor in understanding why Congress was defeated by the Communists, it has been necessary to work from the material available. Fortunately the studies used extensively in this chapter contain much useful documentation from official sources, not otherwise available, and it has been possible to make much use of these. It would be convenient here to comment on the use made of documents pertaining to the C.P.I. (Communist Party of India), published by the Democratic Research Service. Since this is an anti-Communist information service, the selections of, and comments on the documents, must be treated with care. Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller in their excellent comprehensive survey of the Indian Communist movement, point out with regard to these documents, that their close correspondence to documents published in the C.P.I. press, and the private admissions of C.P.I. leaders, make a strong case for accepting them as genuine. It has

(13) Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller: Communism in India (Univ. of California, 1959) p.311, footnotes.
been attempted, where possible, to give confirmation of documents cited from other sources as well, and to relate them not to the context imposed by the Democratic Research Service, but in the light of developments within the Party as borne out by more scholarly studies.

It is hoped that the major themes examined above will show that 1957 cannot be studied in isolation, and that the results of that election were not purely political, nor startling. It is important to see the election results as the climax of the frustration and discontent experienced by a large section of the electorate, at a time when Communist policies had adjusted themselves in Kerala in such a way as to enable the Communist Party to appeal to many of the voters. This study is concerned with the long term situation created by political, social and economic factors, and the role that the Communist Party of Kerala has been able to play in it.
CHAPTER I

POLITICAL INSTABILITY

The area of Travancore-Cochin has had a varied history in terms of political rule. Till the coming of full independence, its Maharajahs had run the affairs of what was till 1949, Travancore and Cochin, with little or no interference. The two States had autocratic 'native' rulers till 1948 when the first constitution was introduced into the State of Travancore and for the first time constitutional monarchy was established in India. With this the area of Travancore and Cochin was introduced into the arena of Parliamentary Government and Party politics, and since then has experienced endemic political instability. In the new State of Travancore-Cochin or T-C (later Kerala), the Maharajah of Travancore assumed the position of Rajpramukh or titular head. This was not to be a hereditary position as the previous Maharajahas had been, but was to be appointed by the Governor-General of India. At the inauguration of the new State, the Legislature consisting of the Rajpramukh and the Legislative Assembly or Council of Ministers, composed of members drawn from the outgoing Ministries of Travancore and Cochin, and headed by the Chief Minister of Travancore, veteran Congressman Pattom Thanu Pillai, assumed office. The Legislative

(1) Provided the Maharajahs were content to run the affairs of their kingdoms within the precepts of British practice, they were given a large measure of autonomy and independence. See Ramakrishnan Nair: Constitutional Experiments in Kerala Chap. I.

(2) By the Interim Constitutional Act of Travancore.
Assembly of T-C led by a Congress Ministry, met for the first time on 11th July 1949 and consisted of 178 members. The Government was to face its first challenge in democratic elections in the first General Elections of 1951-52. However it had already started with instability within the Government, and in the years to follow this instability was to recur with embarrassing frequency.

This chapter, as briefly outlined in the introduction, is principally concerned with setting one aspect to the background to Kerala from 1947-57, and that is political instability. While the Kerala region enjoyed some measure of stability under princely rule, since 1948 it has been the victim of chronic unrest. This unrest has significantly contributed to the success of the Communists in 1957. The discussion in this chapter is simply to establish the degree of party-political instability, while subsequent chapters are concerned with analyses of Kerala society, discontent and Communist activities against this background. The major parties (excluding the Communists) and especially Congress were preparing the way for their own downfall in 1957, a fundamental reason being their inability to maintain strong governments, and also their inability to maintain stability or unity within their own organisations.

To see this one has only to look at the political history of the ten years prior to 1957. The first government formed in the Kerala area

(3) Ramakrishnan Nair: *Constitutional Experiments in Kerala* p.34.
was in the then princely State of Travancore, in February 1948, after the first general elections under universal adult suffrage in the whole of India. The Chief Minister, Pattom Thanu Pillai, was a member of one of the major communal groups in Kerala, the Nayars, and President of the State Congress. Congress was at this time at the height of its popularity, and riding on the wave of its contribution to the nationalist movement. It was too, undivided by the factionalism that was to later draw many of its younger members, and frustrated socialists into the various opposition parties. Congress had won 97 out of the 120 seats, and the Tamil Nad Congress formed from Tamil members of the Congress gained 14 seats. The Communists contested the Travancore election under a united front with the small recently formed Kerala Socialist Party, and although they received a popular vote of 10%, none of their candidates were successful. The Communists at this time were banned in Malabar for their attempts to stir up small peasant revolts in that area and had also been weakened by the Punnapara-Vyalar incidents, not only in terms of members, but prestige.

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(4) This group advocated a separate linguistic unit of the Tamil speaking areas of Travancore and Cochin.

(5) The incident arose out of intense Communist activity among the low-caste workers of the Alleppey area in Travancore. On 24 Sept. 1946, the Communist dominated unions of Alleppey declared a general strike over the issue of responsible government and the removal of the Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. The Communists supported action to remove Ramaswamy Aiyar from a position of authority in any new constitution for the State. Party followers from Alleppey led a march to the large village of Punnapara, armed with sticks and stones. A few policemen were killed, Ramaswamy Aiyar declared martial law, and the army was called in. In the fighting that ensued between the soldiers and the peasants and workers of Punnapara and the neighbouring village of Vayalar, three hundred people were killed, although most of the Communist leaders escaped with their lives. See George Woodcock: Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast pp.246-48.
majority, it was expected that the Congress Ministry would ensure strong
government till the next elections, but factionalism broke out within the
Ministry itself, and on 17th October 1948, the Government was defeated by a
non-confidence motion initiated by members of its own party. Pattom Thanu
Pillai was followed by a fellow Nayar, T.K. Narayana Pillai who was in office
at the time of the integration of Travancore-Cochin. The new Cabinet for
T-C included most of the former ministers from Travancore and Cochin,
including Panampilly Govirda Menon, leader of the Congress in Cochin. In
less than a year bitter feuding broke out between the Travancore and
Cochin factions and in 1950 T.K. Narayana Pillai stepped down and a new
Cabinet was formed under C. Kesavan, an Ezhava and leader of this community, the
most numerous in the Kerala area, and one that is socially and economically
(depressed as a caste group. Kesavan continued in office till the general
elections of 1951-52.

The elections for the State Government in 1951-52 showed the extent
to which Congress had lost its standing in T-C, and Malabar. No Party
gained an absolute majority, but the opposition was stronger than it had
been previously. There were now four major opposition groups, headed by the
Democratic Socialist Party under the leadership of Patton Thanu Pillai who
had not only resigned from the Government in 1948, but also from the Congress
Party. Many liberal Nayars followed him into opposition, and seriously
weakened the Congress strength. Another Party to appear was the

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Kesavan had been one of the three Ministers of the Travancore Cabinet
of 1948 under Patton Thanu Pillai. His choice as Chief Minister was
designed as a compromise between the powerful Nayar and Christian
interests in the Congress Party.

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Revolutionary Socialist Party, an off-shoot of the Kerala Socialist Party, and which had gained considerable support in Quilon, Travancore, among the Trade Unions. The Communists fought the elections under a left United Front with the Kerala Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Socialist Party. The Congress Party as the largest single group in the (7) Legislative Assembly was invited to form a Government with the support of eight members of the Travancore Tamil Nad Congress (T.T.N.C.) and four (8) (Catholic) Independents. In Malabar, Congress defeat was even more dramatic - it gained four seats out of 30, and the majority went to a Communist-Socialist electoral coalition. The new Ministry in T-C was (9) sworn in on 14th March 1952 under a Christian, A.J. John. This Government did not last long and in less than two years it was defeated by its refusal to support the Tamil Nad Congress' demand for the secession of the four Tamil speaking taluks of Travancore to Madras. Following a motion of no confidence by the T.T.N.C., the Ministry fell. The John Government however continued as a care-taker government till the new elections were held in February 1954. The 1954 elections were noteworthy for two things, the appearance of the Praja Socialist Party (P.S.P.) formed out of Patton Thanu Pillai's Democratic Socialist Party and part of the

(7) 44 seats out of a total 108, with its popular vote reduced.

(8) The T.T.N.C. advocated the formation of a linguistically organised Tamil Nad that would include the Tamil speaking areas of Travancore and Cochin. As the Tamil Nad Congress it had won 10 seats in S. Travancore in 1948.

(9) The Christians were the dominant group in Congress in 1952, particularly due to the 'defection' of Patton Thanu Pillai with a substantial Nayar following.
nationally organised Praja Socialist Party led by Acharya Kripalani and Jayaprakash Narayan, and secondly the combination of all the left wing parties into a united front to oppose Congress. No Party gained an absolute majority. The proportion of seats gained by Congress was lower than before, 45 out of 118. The Communists won 23 seats, and the Socialists between them 31. It would have been possible for the leftist front and Independents to form a coalition government, but Congress prevented this. The leader of the Cochin Congress Party, Panampilly Govinda Menon, was elected to the leadership of the Party in T-C, but although Congress was the largest single Party after the elections, he was unable to muster a majority. Failing this Congress succeeded in breaking up the left-wing alliance. It offered its support to the P.S.P. which had only gained 19 seats. Pattom Thanu Pillai accepted the offer, and leaving his left-wing supporters from the united front, formed a Government, wholly dependent on the support of Congress. The Ministry was therefore already obviously bound to be unstable. This P.S.P. Government remained in office for eleven months, before collapsing after much internal factionalism and manoeuvring. Factionalism was primarily due to the suspicion of the P.S.P. by conservative Congress interests, especially Christian landowning interests. This section was particularly opposed to proposed legislation by the P.S.P. for projecting radical legislation for land reform and protection of labour. The P.S.P.

(10) The front thus included the P.S.P., the Communists, the Revolutionary Socialists (R.S.P.) and the K.S.P.

(11) This involved imposing a ceiling on landholdings, and supporting working class and Trade Union demands.
Ministry fell in February 1955, after a no confidence motion passed by the Congress Party and supported by the T.T.N.C. was passed. In March 1955, Panampilly Govinda Menon was sworn in as Chief Minister of a new Congress-headed Ministry. The support of the T.T.N.C. gave him a slim majority. The Government however only remained in office for a year, and in March 1956, Menon was forced to resign in the face of an open revolt by Travancore Congressmen. These Congressmen accused Panampilly of corruption and favouritism towards Cochin members. In the absence of a strong alternative government, Presidential rule was imposed from the Centre. It was in the atmosphere of Presidential rule that the elections for March 1957 for the newly formed State of Kerala were held. From this background of political instability, the Communists emerged as the strongest Party and formed the first Communist Ministry to be elected by 'democratic means and constitutional processes' in April 1957.

This then was the kind of political merry-go-round in terms of frequent ministry changes, that the Kerala area had experienced since 1948. Before proceeding to a more detailed discussion of these changes, it would be useful to look at some of the principal Parties involved in the struggle for political power, a little more closely.

In the first general elections to be held in independent India, between 1951-52, the major national parties in T-C were the Congress Party, the Democratic Socialist or Socialist Party, the Communist Party...

(12) The events leading up to this will be elaborated later in this chapter.
(13) George Woodcock comments on this: 'The charges of corruption were never proved, but those of favouritism were certainly true' - Kerala p.261.
(C.P.I.), and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (R.S.P.). Regional parties included the Kerala Socialist Party (K.S.P., - it gave birth to the R.S.P.), the Travancore Tamil Nad Congress (T.T.N.C.). The Congress Party had been till 1957, the dominant single group in the Kerala area. From its beginnings as a national movement in the fight for independence it became a political party, and at the same time the government of independent India. The first experiment in popular government in Travancore was Congress dominated, and in T-C a Congress Ministry ruled till 1952. While its role as the focus of national aspirations gave it enormous prestige nationally, its very diversity of appeal proved its disadvantage especially at the State level. Prior to Independence the internal energies of Congress were concerned with the 'reconciliation of special interests and different points of view'. When it became a political party, reconciliation was no longer easy, and this inevitably meant that it could no longer command the support of all its followers. Thus for example internal division and factionalism has been the characteristic of the Kerala Pradesh (State) Congress. Many members and groups had left, been expelled or forced out by changes in Congress policy. The departure of many

(14) Minor local parties were the Tamil Nad Congress, the Tamil Nad Peoples Front, the T-C Republican Praja Party and the Cochin Party - See S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park: Reports on the Indian General Elections 1951-52 (Popular Book Depot, Bombay 1956) pp.244-46. (Henceforth referred to as Kogekar and Park).

(15) This was never as strong in T-C, as elsewhere in India.


(17) Norman Palmer: The Indian Political System (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1961) p.188.
Socialists under the leadership of Pattom Thanu Pillai, and the factionalism within the Panampilly Govinda Menon Government in 1956, are two examples of the kind of disillusionment in its own strength, that Congress was creating in Kerala. This affected Congress prestige and efficiency as witnessed in the succession of ministries mentioned previously. In its official attitudes, the State Party reflects those of its national body, the I.N.C. (18) This has tended to be, as Norman Palmer points out 'nebulous and comprehensive', a quality which has had several effects. It has been able to encompass within its objectives much of the programmes of the other Parties, but has also left itself wide open for the attack that its objectives are vague or unrelated to a particular situation, as in Kerala. Economically, the I.N.C. has in theory committed itself to a socialistic stand. This socialism has been derived from several sources ranging from Gandhian ideals to Marxist principles, and accommodates big business capitalism as well as socialist ideas of State ownership and control of production. The Congress re-affirmation in its Avadi Resolution of 1955, of its commitment to the Socialist pattern of society, did not significantly clarify the nature of this socialism. At the State level in Kerala there was considerable justification for doubting the sincerity of the Congress stand with regard to socialism. Here Congress was increasingly associated with landed interests and conservatism. It was felt that Congress had little credibility as far as Socialism was concerned:

(18) Norman Palmer: The Indian Political System p.191.
In Kerala more and more people believed that if socialism was to be the goal prescribed even by Nehru, then the Communist Party with its better organisation, solidarity, discipline and devotion would be more competent for the task than the Congress with its record of group rivalry, corruption, and ministerial instability. (19)

One report on the 1952 elections in Kerala says of the Congress role there:

> It had the strong support of the landlords, capitalists, and the majority of the educated class who had not much affection for the leftist parties. The rich people supported the Congress Party even though they disapproved of the more progressive aspects of its programme because they feared the ascendancy of the leftist parties. (20)

Initially, the inability of the smaller parties to cement themselves as strong opposition to the Congress, meant that in claiming socialism as its stated objectives, it took much of the impact of the other parties calling themselves Socialist, especially parties like the P.S.P. or R.S.P. This was maintained only when the opposition was weak, and when the Communist Party emerged as a strong and relatively cohesive party, it posed a very real threat to the Congress claim to represent the only effective way to Socialism.

> The chief opposition groups in 1952 were the Socialist Party or Democratic Socialist Party, the R.S.P. and the Kerala Communist Party (K.C.P.). (21)


(21) i.e. Kerala branch of the C.P.I. Thus used interchangeably in this study.
The Socialist Party, a new arrival on the political scene was the creation of dissident Congressmen, and in Kerala this Party, also called the Democratic Socialist Party, was part of the National Socialist Party. In Kerala it was headed by Pattom Thanu Pillai. The break between the Congress and the Socialists can be treated here only in the briefest possible manner. It was founded in 1934 as the Congress Socialist Party (C.S.P.) by younger leftist members of the Congress Party.

The issue of contention centred principally round the feeling of many young Congress members that the Party should pursue a more revolutionary leftist policy. Congress Socialists subscribed to Marxism, and the aim to unite the nationalist struggle for independence with the workers' struggle for a better life. Their efforts were mainly directed towards a more revolutionary movement to get Britain out of India and to injecting socialist economic ideas into Congress resolutions. In an effort to unite socialist parties, a cause supported by the C.S.P. leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, 1936-40 saw a period of co-operation between Socialists and Communits. In Kerala this enabled the Communists to take control of many of the C.S.P. organisations, till the Communists were finally expelled.

(22) See Myron Weiner: Party Politics in India for more detailed discussion of the I.N.C.-C.S.P. split.

(23) E.M.S. Namboodiripad, leader of the 1957 Communist Government and of the K.C.P., was at this time a member of both the Congress Party and C.S.P.


(26) Chapter IV will deal with this in more detail.
In 1948 the C.S.P. severed relations with the Congress Party and in T-C, Pattom Thanu Pillai resigned from the first Congress Ministry to head the new Socialist Party, under the name the Democratic Socialist Party. It functioned as an independent party in opposition to the Congress, and was concerned mainly with rallying together other opposition parties subscribing to basic socialist principles. Thus in the 1952 elections in Kerala it joined with the R.S.P. and K.C.P. in a United Front of Leftists (U.F.L.). In Malabar it attempted to work closely with the K.M.P.P. This latter alliance however had little success in the election.

Another important opposition group the R.S.P., was among the largest non-Communist, Marxist Parties. Nationally it arose out of the revolutionary group the Anushila Samiti, in Kerala it was an off-shoot of the Kerala Socialist Party, an extreme, Marxist Party advocating an independent, sovereign republic of Kerala. As a national party the R.S.P.'s strength was mainly confined to Bengal and T-C. Strongly based on Marxist-Leninism, in T-C it had a considerable following among factory workers and students. It also campaigned for a united Kerala i.e. a union of the Malayalam speaking areas of Malabar with T-C. An extremely doctrinaire party, during

(27) Kisan Mazdoor Praja Party or Peasants, Workers and Peoples Party, formed of socialist Gandhian dissidents.

(28) This was in Bengal - see Myron Weiner: Party Politics in India pp.119-122.

(29) e.g. it had gained control of the Trade Unions in Alleppey, Travancore. The R.S.P. leader in T-C, Sreekantan Nair, was also General Secretary of the National Party.
the 1952 elections it was violently opposed to Congress, accusing it of alliance with Anglo-American capitalists and landlords. The Socialists also came in for attack from the R.S.P. for similar charges.

The C.P.I. contested the 1951-52 elections in Kerala as a banned Party, but contested seats as Independents or Candidates of the U.F.L. The Communist Party in Kerala was formed in the 1930's out of the C.S.P., and based itself on Marxist principles of the socialist society, in opposition to the Congress. In Kerala it fought the elections as an organised political group, and as an alternative to Congress. It too campaigned strongly for a United Kerala and the separation of Tamil speaking districts from Kerala.

Minor parties apart from the K.S.P. was the T.T.N.C. (Travancore Tamil Nad Congress). This Party's raison d'être was for the Tamil-speaking areas of Kerala to be constituted as a linguistic unit within the political framework of T-C, with ultimate re-organisation of these areas into a wholly Tamil entity, Tamil Nadu. Thus after the re-organization of States was completed in 1956, and Kerala State officially formed, the Party ceased to function in Kerala. However it remained an important factor in Kerala politics up to and after the 1954 elections. In 1952 it returned eight members to the Legislature and was part of the support given to the

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(31) This followed immediately on the Punnapara-Vayalar incidents.

(32) The Communist Party will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV.
Congress to enable its continuance in office. In 1954 its support of the
P.S.P. Ministry enabled the latter to form a Government with Congress
support. It was the withdrawal of the T.T.N.C. support that finally

By 1954 another party had emerged on the Kerala scene, and was
to be an important factor in party politics. This was the Praja Socialist
Party or P.S.P., under the leadership of the ex-Congress leader, Pattom
Thanu Pillai. Formed after the 1952 elections, it was the direct
descendant of the nationally organised Socialist Party. Created out of the
merger of the K.M.P.P. and the Socialist Party, the Party was by 1957, at the
national level, the second largest in India, and the largest among the
opposition. In Kerala the merger meant that the P.S.P. became with the
K.C.P., one of the two major groups in opposition to Congress. It also
indicated that henceforth Party politics developed into a three way fight
between the Congress, the Communists and the Socialists. In T-C in 1954,
and in the official Kerala State of 1957, it was the third party. This
has meant that in a situation as that which occurred in 1954 where no
one party had enough of a majority to form a Government, the attitude of

(33) Parties which made little or no impression at the 1951-52 elections in Kerala, or subsequently were the Tamil Nad's Peoples Front formed at the time of the first general election, the Travancore-Cochin Republican Party (organised by landlords and businessmen), the Cochin Party, which wanted the restoration of the identity of Cochin as a separate State - Kogekar and Park: Reports of the Indian General Elections 1951-52 p.248.

(34) In Kerala the Socialist Party was Pattom Thanu Pillai's Democratic Socialist Party.

the P.S.P. was of crucial importance. It (the P.S.P.) was eventually with the support of the Congress Party able to form a P.S.P. Ministry headed by Thanu Pillai in 1954. But the Ministry was to be plagued by instability. It was founded on instability, for it had only nineteen seats out of 117 in the Legislature, and it depended largely on how well it could carry on with Congress members. The P.S.P. was committed like the Congress (and the Communists) to a Socialist Government, but their paths differed. Disagreements with the Congress centred principally around the approach to and speed with which to implement, economic developments. The P.S.P. for example strongly attacked Congress attitudes towards agrarian reform in the Kerala area. According to Myron Weiner the P.S.P. is made up of three major ideologies - Marxism, democratic Socialism and (36) Gandhism. The P.S.P. attitude is thus a mixture of these three approaches. While under the influence of Jayaprakash Narayan, the P.S.P. moved increasingly towards a democratic socialism influenced by Gandhian thought, the three strands of thought have resulted in confusion within the Party over the line it should follow. In Kerala it has attempted to follow an idea expressed by Rammanohar Lohia that the Socialists were equidistant from both the Communists and the Congress. It should thus be prepared to tolerate but not participate in Congress or Communist Governments. It would form no coalition unless it was the largest single Party. The nature of the role of the P.S.P. as a major opposition party was raised in

(37) Rammanohar Lohia: 'Need for an Electoral Adjustment' in Janata 29 Nov. 1953.
February 1954 in T-C, when the Socialists were in a dilemma as to which party to support. Eventually Thanu Pillai formed a Socialist Ministry with Congress support, although it had negotiated an electoral alliance with the Communists, the R.S.P. and the K.S.P., in order to prevent a Congress victory.

Strained relations between the P.S.P. and other Left Parties especially the K.C.P. after 1954, was largely responsible for the lack of a single, strong opposition. There was an inability to reconcile differences, as evident in the Communist view of the Socialists as traditional social democrats and bourgeois-dominated, and the Socialist attitude to the Communists as a danger to democratic socialism. The P.S.P. in Kerala thus concerned itself with consolidating non-Communist, non-Congress strength, which considerably weakened its own strength. In 1957 the Communists seemed to offer the only viable alternative, after a period of Congress inability to maintain a strong majority, or any of the other opposition Parties to form a stable, united party.

It is now proposed to go into a more detailed look at the various Ministries up to 1957. The first Government to be formed through democratic processes, the Congress Government of 1948 in Travancore, was as has been noted earlier in this chapter, an overwhelming victory for Congress. The Communists were a small, loosely organised group, considerably weakened by the Punnapara-Vyalar incidents, and although they contested the elections

(38) 'So high was the prestige of the Congress in those days that it had just a walk-over in the election, securing all but one seat, and the solitary Independent who was elected, joined the Congress Party soon after'. - H.D. Malaviya: Kerala: A Report to the Nation (People's Publishing House, 1958) p.2.
in alliance with the Kerala Socialist Party, they made no impression on the results. The Ministry itself was to be plagued by communalism and the men forming the first Ministry was an indication of the strength of the communities. The small Cabinet of only three Ministries, consisted of Pattom Thanu Pillai, a Nayar, who was Chief Minister, T.M. Verghese, a Syrian Christian and C. Kesavan, an Ezhava. The Muslims, a weak community in terms of numbers in Travancore were not represented. The disintegration of this Ministry started early, within four months of being sworn in. One reason for factionalism was Thanu Pillai's action in enlarging his Cabinet without consulting his colleagues. Amid charges of favouritism and the threat of both T.M. Verghese and C. Kesavan that they would resign, Thanu Pillai compromised by dropping one of his Cabinet members, a fellow Nayar, P.S. Nataraja Pillai. The more fundamental struggle was between conservative and leftist elements, a struggle made more complex by its communal overtures. The left-wing faction sought to introduce necessary land reform legislation, but was opposed by vested interests within the Congress consisting chiefly of Syrian Christian planters and landowning Nayars. Legislation was proposed following a report of a Cabinet committee for agrarian reforms headed by C. Kesavan. Opposition to Pattom was initiated within the Congress Party by T.K. Narayana Pillai, on a procedural issue, namely that the President of the State Congress could not hold at the same time the Prime Ministership of the State. Church leaders

(39) This question will be analysed in depth in Chapter II.
(40) George Woodcock: Kerala p.258.
played a leading part in getting their members to oppose the Government. For example Catholic leaders, largely supported by Syrian Christian planters conducted a signature campaign to obtain support against Pattom's leadership.

On 17th October 1948 the Government was defeated by a non-confidence motion passed by members of its own Party. It was a debacle as far as Congress unity was concerned, and illustrated the factionalism and vested interests that was increasingly to characterise the Party. The leadership of the Government now passed to one of Thanu Pillai's principal opponents, T.K. Narayana Pillai. This Government remained in office at the time when the decision was taken to merge Travancore and Cochin on 1st July 1949. T.K. Narayana Pillai continued as Chief Minister of the new T-C State. His new Cabinet included most of the former Ministers of Travancore and Cochin, among the latter, Panampilly Govinda Menon. To the existing strife within the Party was added regionalism, and as a result of feuding between Travancore and Cochin members, Narayana Pillai was forced to step down in less than eighteen months after he had helped topple Pattom Thanu Pillai. Ezhava leader Kesavan who headed the Congress Ministry till the 1951-52 elections was merely a compromise between the Christian and Nayar rivals.

By the time of the 1951-52 elections, Congress in Kerala had lost much of its prestige. A principal factor in this was factionalism as the above events show. In addition to in-fighting within the Ministry, Pattom

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(41) In Kerala this campaign was known as 'oppian prasthanam'. Leading the campaign was Sanku Pillai, who ironically enough later joined the P.S.P. under Pattom Thanu Pillai's leadership. It also included P.T. Chacko, a Syrian Christian, who after 1957 was the leader of the Congress opposition in the Kerala Assembly.
Thunu Pillai had by this time broken away from the Congress to form the Socialist Party or Democratic Socialist Party. He took with him many Nayar Congress members. Also before the 1951-52 elections some Congress members joined the K.M.P.P. which at the national level was formed under Acharya Kripalani who had broken away from the Congress. A group of Congressmen in Southern Travancore had also broken away to form the Travancore Tamil Nad Congress (T.T.N.C.) and contested the elections on a linguistic issue. In addition to disunity, there was also a feeling at the time that Congress was doing little to initiate reform in vital areas, particularly agrarian problems. Involved in the intricacies of political manoeuvring and party politics, they affected the image of the whole Party, and indeed in States like Kerala, were preparing the way for their own disintegration. Commented one brilliant Congressman at this time:

The Congress Party is a house divided against itself. There are constant group erosions and internecine bickerings, and the result is that the Ministers have to spend a considerable portion of their time in consolidating their position vis-a-vis the party to the detriment of the administration. (43)

The Congress was increasingly associated with the Right, and opposition mainly with the Left, as has been indicated earlier in this chapter. Thus in 1951 it could be said:

The Conservative Forces are firmly in the saddle, and the chances are slight that opposition leaders can materially change Congress policies from within. (44)

(42) In Kerala K.M.P.P. ex-Congressmen included K. Kellappan and K.A. Damodara Menon, both active Congress members.

(43) V.P. Menon, chief architect of the States re-organisation in 1949, on part 'B' States like T-C, in The Integration of the Indian States p.493.

Thus already by 1948 the beginnings of a lack of confidence within and outside the Congress Party, was manifesting itself. It encouraged instability and when Congress was further weakened by defections, its hold seemed more precarious. Thanu Pillai's departure from Congress was particularly significant, for the defection of a man who was once the President of the Congress Party in T-C and the Chief Minister of the first Congress Government, was a severe blow to Congress prestige. When leading members of the Party demonstrated their lack of confidence in their own Party, it was little wonder that the people at large were dissatisfied. This was illustrated at the time of the 1952 elections, when the disturbing feature as far as Congress was concerned was the large number of Independents contesting the election, many of them its 'old stalwarts' like Narayana Pillai, who had headed the Congress after Thanu Pillai, and Ikkanda Warrier whose four-man Cabinet was in power in Cochin at the time of the T-C merger.

In the elections of 1952 Congress emerged as the largest single party, but the results were a strong public vote of censure, for its popular vote was reduced to about 36%. A number of Parties contested the election, among them the newly formed Democratic Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Socialist Party or R.S.P. The birth of these latter two Parties is important for they illustrate the kind of proliferation of Parties that Kerala was particularly prone to, and that accentuated political instability.

They also reduced their own chances of becoming powerful opposition groups. The way was therefore already being prepared for the emergence of a Party, which if strong enough would present itself as an attractive alternative to the small, weaker Parties. Though Congress was weak and inefficient it continued to remain in power, as its 1952 results showed, because the smaller groups were too weak or too disparate to offer effective oppositions. The swing was therefore increasingly to the Communists. The Socialist Party of Thanu Pillai was small and unable to offer real opposition to Congress, and was drawn chiefly from the middle classes with little mass support. The Socialists thus helped the increasing strength of the Communists:

The Socialists are too young as a Party here, to have seriously challenged this drift to the Left. (47)

This partly explains the success of the coalition of Leftist Parties the United Front of Leftists or U.F.L., at the elections. The Communists were able for a time to form the Front with the K.S.P. and R.S.P., and this was the first time that such an opposition bloc was formed, and was a potential threat to Congress supremacy. For the elections the Kerala Committee of the C.P.I. drew up an election manifesto for the whole of Kerala. This sixteen point document was published as the manifesto of M.N. Govindan Nair,

(46) '... they lack a raison d'être. To a degree they are characteristic of the mood of the people, critical and dissatisfied, but unwilling or unable to remove the causes of their feelings'. Werner Levi: 'India's Political Parties' p.172.

the Party's Secretary who stood as an Independent, the C.P. being banned at the time. The chief target of attack was Congress for its administrative inefficiency, particularly its food and labour policies, and factionalism within the Party. It emphasised the need for confiscation of landed properties of big landlords, nationalisation of estates and factories owned by foreigners, and guarantee of complete civil liberties. The U.F.L. joint manifesto called for the abolition of landlordism, the restoration of civil liberties, better living conditions for workers, and the establishment of a Peoples' State. The Leftists as a body campaigned vigorously for a Kerala, united on the basis of linguistic-areas, with the separation of Tamil-speaking areas, which gained much support from the voters.

All in all eight Parties and 38 Independents contested the elections. Out of 108 contested seats to the State Legislature, Congress won 44 and the U.F.L., 25. U.F.L. candidates jointly contested 80 constituencies, including eight Federal Parliament seats. Where the Front did not put up its own candidates e.g. Attingal and Karthikapally, it extended its support to the Congress, and in other areas where the Socialist Party had a chance to defeat the Congress e.g. Changanchery and Kottarakkara, withdrew its own

(49) Ibid p.247.
(50) This cry for a united Kerala was one very close to the Malayalee people, who are intensely conscious of their identity. The Communists, with their slogan of 'Akiya Kerala', one Kerala, made this one of the chief planks in their election manifesto. See Ibid pp.246 and 251.
(51) Figures taken from the Election Commission Report for 1951-52 General Elections (published by Govt. of India) and Fisher and Bondurants The Indian Experience with Democratic Elections (Indian Press Digests, Univ. of Calif., Berkeley, 1956).
greater loyalty and discipline among the ranks of the U.F.L., than among the other Parties. (53)

In polling 35.5% of the valid votes, Congress had been largely discredited, especially when compared to the overwhelming victory it had achieved at the national level, and in 1948 to the legislatures of Travancore and Cochin. In Malabar, then part of the Madras Presidency, Congress was defeated more dramatically. It won only four out of the 30 seats it contested. The majority of seats went to the Communist-Socialist electoral coalition. Malabar was becoming a Communist stronghold, and it was this that took much support from Congress. An election alliance between the K.M.P.P. and the C.P. put 24 candidates to the State Assembly of Madras, and six to the Lok Sabha. This alliance also supported three Independents and one Socialist to the State Assembly. Out of the 24 State Assembly candidates put up, 14 were Communists, 10 K.M.P.P.; of the six to the House of the People, four were Communists and two K.M.P.P. 24.1% of seats in Malabar were captured by the Communists which made this region, next to Andhra, the stronghold of active Communists.

In T-C, the performance of the Leftist groups was significant. The first Leftist victory of the State came from the district of Trichur (in

(53) Ibid.
(54) Fisher and Bondurant: The Indian Experience with Democratic Elections p.53. A total of 3,398,193 valid votes were polled here according to this source.
(55) House of the People, at the national level.
Cochin). There, a prominent Communist leader, Achutha Menon, won a victory over rival candidates from the Congress Party, the Socialist Party, two Independents and the Cochin Party. Menon polled 7,435 votes. In Cochin, the crisis over the integration of the States made people suspicious of Congress intentions. It was feared that the union would work to the advantage of Travancore, as Travancore members dominated the Government and Cochin Ministers had been incorporated into the existing Travancore Government. The situation of Congress in the Kerala area was viewed with alarm by the Centre, and Nehru, hoping to gain by personal appearances, made a whirlwind tour of T-C, to appeal on behalf of his Party. His presence no doubt helped gain votes for the Kerala Congress.

By 1952 Kerala was beginning to demonstrate the kind of voting behaviour that makes the 1957 election outcome intelligible. It saw the start of protest against Congress, rather than conversion to radical politics. Since this chapter is concerned primarily with describing the move away from Congress and towards the Left, subsequent chapters will analyse some of the important reasons for this protest. None of the Congress Ministries since 1948 had earned any particular distinction. Besides frustration at the factionalism within the Congress, there was added the feeling that the Congress had become isolated from problems

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(57) The Hindu, 15 Dec., 1951 p.4. 62% of the total electorate exercised their franchise during these elections.


(59) Nehru attacked the U.F.L. as a 'patchwork arrangement' by a number of groups against Congress and offering only a 'negative approach' to politics - reported in The Hindu, 26 Nov. 1951 p.6.
affecting the people as a whole:

Isolated from the peasants, the workers and the middle classes. The Communists and other Leftist Parties have found the people in this isolation.(60)

It was an isolation that led many increasingly towards the Left, and thus the leftward swing was to characterise protest against Congress. The following comment by one of the leading national papers, sums up the most prevailing opinion on the success of the Leftists in 1952:

'It was not entirely a genuine vote for the Left but was also in some part a vote against Congress in the State.'(61)

This pattern was to become significant, for the Leftist gains were not to remain mere abnormalities in Kerala politics, but indicative of a definite political trend. For the Communists an important development took place after these elections. Addressing the first Session of the T-C State Assembly on 24th March 1952, the Rajpramukh announced that the State Government had decided to lift the ban on the Communist Party. This move was made after much pressure within and outside the State against what was considered a suppression of civil liberties.

The Congress Ministry started its term of office under the leadership of the Congress Christian, A.K. John. It had only 49 members in a house of 109, so that when the ministry was sworn in on 12 March 1952, it did not command a majority in the House. Mr. John had earlier stated that most of Independents were expected to support Congress, whilst the leader of the

(60) Times of India, 26 Jan. 1952, p.6.
(62) Keesing's Contemporary Archives (henceforth ref. to as Keesings) 26 April - 3 May 1952, p.12174.
Socialist Party, Thanu Pillai, had given an assurance that they would not vote Congress out of office. In an effort to consolidate its position, it (the Congress Ministry) formed an alliance with the T.T.N.C. which had won eight seats. Although close in ideology, the two Parties differed over the question of the re-organisation of the Tamil speaking areas of Malabar and Travancore. The uneasy alliance between the two broke up following a crisis which arose when the T.T.N.C. withdrew its support from the Government. This resulted from the failure of its talks with the All-India Congress Party over the formation of a separate Congress organisation in the Tamil speaking areas of T-C. The T.T.N.C. wanted a Tamil Congress Prades Party that would be run independently by the Tamil areas.

The Government then moved a motion of confidence in the State Assembly, but the motion was rejected - 51 votes were cast in favour of the Ministry and 56 against. The Assembly was then dissolved by the Rajpramukh, but the old Ministry continued in office till new elections which were set for October 1953. The T.T.N.C. held a meeting at Nagercoil and passed a resolution recording:

(63) Ibid.

(64) A.K. John had in addition the support of four Catholic Independents. The Ministry indicated the importance of Communal factors for the elections in T-C had left the Christians the dominant group in Congress. (Many Nayars had joined the Socialists).

(65) The T.T.N.C. wanted the secession of these to Madras.

(66) The T.T.N.C. reiterated this demand as a condition for its alliance with Congress at the 1954 elections.

Its emphatic protest against the unconstitutional and illegal procedures adopted by the States Ministry in allowing the continuance in office of the Congress Ministry which has lost the confidence of the people of the State.(68)

It enjoined all its members to boycott all functions and meetings in which any of the present Ministers participated. However the Rajpramukh's action had the Presidential assent and the Congress Ministry continued for the next four months. It had held office for barely two years.

The new elections were held in February 1954. Several important changes had taken place. The most important was that the Left-wing groups had consolidated themselves into an even stronger position. They once again combined to fight Congress as the U.F.L. with the C.P. as the most important single Left Party. Unlike the last elections therefore, there was a polarisation in the political arena - it was almost a straight fight between the Leftist opposition Parties and the Congress. The Congress contested 115 seats, the P.S.P. 38, the C.P. 30, the R.S.P. 12, the T.T.N.C. 16, Jan Sangh, the Right-wing Hindu Communal Party, one. Among the 47 Independents, 8 were nominees of the K.S.P., 10 Communist supported, (69) 2 R.S.P., 4 announced their withdrawal. A significant development was the attitude of the P.S.P. towards the United Front. It had an electoral understanding with the Leftist Front for the purpose of avoiding triangular contests. The initiative for the electoral alliance came from the P.S.P. which had apparently been apprehensive of its electoral prospects. According to one source, the U.F.L. had agreed to give up some

of its demands for the P.S.P.'s co-operation. The P.S.P. leader had in turn given an undertaking that in the case of victory they (the P.S.P.) would support a Leftist Government. The understanding was apparently so firm that the Communists gave some of their safe seats to the P.S.P.

This arrangement was important, not so much because the P.S.P. was offering co-operation, but in the effect on Congress, of this action. It was a sharp blow to Congress prestige, and boosted up the image of the Communists.

The end of the elections saw the Congress once more winning more seats in terms of numbers, but without an absolute majority. The Congress won 44 seats out of the 118 contested, the Communists 23, and the various Socialist Parties between them, 31. The position of the major Parties was indicative of the nature of Kerala politics as a whole - no single Party could command an absolute majority. No single Party could offer stable Government without resorting to some kind of alliance with another Party, a situation that made instability inevitable. The Congress Party needed the support of the other Parties to operate as a Government. The P.S.P. had previous to the elections declared it would not support a Congress Government. While the last Congress Ministry under Mr. A.K. John, had maintained a precarious majority with the help of the T.T.N.C., the President of the T.T.N.C., which won 12 seats in the 1954 elections, P. Ramaswami Pillai, stated that any alliance which did not concede the minimum demand of his Party was of no use. Thus while it was prepared to wait for its demand for the linguistic division of the Tamil areas of T-C

(70) Article entitled 'The National Scene' in the Times of India, 10 March 1954, p.6.
and its merger into Madras State, as a first step it wanted a separate
Pradesh Congress Committee of the eight Tamil Taluks of T-C. He
emphasised:

If the Travancore-Cochin State Congress is not
prepared to accept these demands, there can be
no legislative alliance between us.(71)

However the possibility of any alliance this time was improbable. The
Congress was not kindly disposed towards conceding T.T.N.C. demands.
Nehru at the conclusion of his six-day election tour of Kerala, had in a
speech at Ernakulam, administered a severe rebuke to the T.T.N.C., and
charged it with betraying Congress principles and acting against Congress
(72)
discipline. The Leftist coalition had the backing of 59 members in a
House of 118. The P.S.P. was opposed to the inclusion of Communists in
the Cabinet, and the other Parties in the coalition could not be depended
upon because they refused to join a coalition from which the Communists
(73)
were excluded. The U.F.L. commanded 40 votes in the House - the
Communists 23, the R.S.P. 9, Socialists 3, pro-U.F.L. Independents 5.
The P.S.P. had 19 votes. Without the support of the P.S.P., the U.F.L.
was unwilling a Government, because it could not count on a stable majority.

The P.S.P. was thus in a pivotal position, for it would decide the
political complexion of the next Government. It could either by joining
the Congress or the U.F.L. have formed a coalition Ministry; neither could
operate a Ministry without it. The P.S.P. had previously stated it would

not form a coalition with the Congress, but it announced it would be willing
to form a Government. The P.S.P. faced a dilemma in this tricky situation
where no Party had an absolute majority. The Leftists were confident
that they would be asked to support the new Government. The P.S.P.'s
encouragement of this opinion has to be viewed against the pre-electoral
understanding between the P.S.P. and the U.F.L., mentioned earlier in this
chapter. Pattom Thanu Pillai had stated his refusal to have anything to do
with a Congress Government, and had intimated to the Rajpramukh that he
had been elected leader by 59 members of the new Assembly, a reference
to the support of the U.F.L. Dr. Ajoy Ghosh, of the U.F.L. had given his
Party's (the K.C.P.) unambiguous support to the idea of a P.S.P.-U.F.L.
Ministry and there were prolonged talks between Thanu Pillai and the U.F.L.
All this gave the impression that Thanu Pillai had made up his mind to
head a Leftist Cabinet, and that what was now needed was to convince the
National Executive of the P.S.P. of this. As late as 4th March, the
Leftists were almost sure of forming a Ministry under the P.S.P., and a
spokesman for the U.F.L. said that a coalition was almost a certainty.
The U.F.L. stated that as far as it was concerned, there was no question
of 'tolerating' a Congress Government or President's rule. The Politburo
of the C.P.I. in session at Delhi, was confident that a coalition would be
formed, and Kerala Communist leaders were reported to have assured the

(74) Times of India, 10 March 1954, p.6.
(75) Times of India, 4 March 1954, p.1.
(76) Ibid. The President, on the advice of the Rajpramukh was empowered to
declare Presidential rule if a Government did not prove strong enough,
or if a Government could not be formed.
Politburo that the P.S.P. would decide in favour of a coalition Leftist Ministry regardless of the wishes of the P.S.P. National Executive. 

E.M.S. Namboodiripad, as leader of the K.C.P., was in Trivandrum at this time, apparently with a clear mandate from the Politburo to continue discussions with the P.S.P. While P.S.P. spokesman in Kerala stated that there was 'no question of alliance with Congress', the 'Bombay group' at the National Executive was fiercely anti-Communist and prepared to fight any alliance with the Leftists at the National meeting. The National Executive went against the idea of a Leftist alliance. It decided that it would form a government if called upon to do so, and that it would welcome the support of the 45 member Congress Party in the Assembly, but would not allow the Congress to form a government. A. Kripalani, the Chairman of the National Executive meeting, stated that the P.S.P. would not form a coalition with the U.F.L. Thanu Pillai had earlier given a report on the Kerala situation to the National meeting, emphasising the need for the P.S.P. to change its policy to suit the special conditions in Kerala and had suggested that at least as an 'experimental measure', the P.S.P. should try a coalition with the C.P. He was also reported to have told the Executive that the people of the State did not want a Congress government, that they preferred to have an 'alternative Government'...

(77) Times of India, 5 March 1954, p.7. The P.S.P. National Executive was reluctant to form a coalition with the U.F.L. especially the strongest member of the Front, the Communist Party.

(78) Times of India, 5 March 1954, p.7.

(79) When asked how he expected to form a Government with only a voting strength of 19, A. Kripalani replied: 'I can form a Government with one man. If Gandhi were alive, he would have formed a Government with one man and got the support of every good man. We are sure that all Parties having the larger national interests at heart will support us'. Times of India, 12 March 1954, p.1.

(80) Ibid.
and that it was up to them to provide what the people wanted. However Ashoka Mehta, the Party's General Secretary, was opposed to any change. This reflected the general attitude of the majority of the Partymen at the National Executive, who shied away from the idea of any commitment with the Leftist Front. When the Congress offered a 'general and responsive co-operation', the Party decided to take up office. Congress support for the P.S.P. was an adroit move, intended primarily to break up the Left-wing alliance. In being the chief prop to a government of Praja Socialists who had only 19 seats, and gained only third place in the election, the Congress ensured that its weight in the new Ministry would be a formidable one. With regard to the other Parties, Kripalani stated that he expected every other Party to support them, but would not seek an alliance, and that:

Whatever Mr. Pattom Thanu Pillai may have done before stands cancelled by this resolution. Whatever he said was subject to the ratification of the National Executive and the Executive has given this as its considered decision. It is absolutely an unanimous decision.(83)

The spectacle of the P.S.P. with only 19 members in the Assembly forming a Government was unprecedented in the history of the Indian elections. Not only was this the first time that the P.S.P. was forming a Government in any State in India, but it was doing so with extremely small number of seats, an unusual state of affairs indicative of the peculiar nature of Kerala politics. The chances of the new Government

(82) Times of India, 16 March 1954, p.1. Panampilly Govinda Menon, Congress 'boss' stated: 'There is a great deal in common between the P.S.P. and the Congress'. Ibid.
providing a strong force were slim and the endemic instability of Kerala Ministries had already marked this latest experiment in Ministry-forming. Thus, although the P.S.P. Ministry constantly emphasised its independent role and determination not to let Congress dictate e.g. Kripalani’s statement:

We accept every support that comes to us. We fought the Congress and therefore, we cannot support the Congress. We accept the support without strings. (84)

The strings were an inevitable reality, given the relationship of the two Parties. Pattom Thanu Pillai was moving away from his former anti-Congress stand and also from his Left-wing anti-Congress partners. It was a novel state of affairs - the P.S.P. ruled the State, but the Congress kept it in power. Panampilly Govinda Menon was having the 'best of both worlds'; he criticised the P.S.P. Government, but kept it in power, he was the leader of the Opposition and played the double role of criticism and co-operation. In reality therefore, in spite of all its protestations of independence, the P.S.P. Ministry was dependent on the Congress for its existence. As for the tenure of its term of office, as one observer put it:

It [the P.S.P. Government] falls when the Congress says, 'thus far and no further'. (85)

In addition, the P.S.P. slight to the Leftists did not argue for intimate relations with this group. The general feeling that the P.S.P. had broken

(84) Ibid.
(85) Times of India, 12 April 1954 p.4.
its part with the opposition groups and joined Congress, lessened its appeal with those who resented Congress domination. This helped make the Communist Party the focus of opposition to Congress.

Although the P.S.P. held the balance of power in the 1954 elections, at least in terms of forming a government, a general Leftward swing was already apparent. With regard to the relative success of the major Parties, in the 1952 elections, on a Union-wide performance the Congress had won an overwhelming victory. Out of the 489 seats in the Lok Sabha, it had won 362. At the State level its successes were not quite so spectacular. In T-C the Congress did not obtain an absolute majority, although it remained the largest single Party in the Legislature, and 35% of the valid votes cast. The C.P. in 1952, fared better than expected. Although banned as an official Party it nevertheless dominated the opposition in the Assembly through the U.F.L. and as Independents. Congress, the ruling Party had emerged with about 35% of votes in T-C, and 44 out of the 108 seats. It won 5 out of the 12 Lok Sabha seats, while Independents belonging to the U.F.L. and the P.S.P. won 4 and the T.T.N.C.8. The remaining two seats were captured by Independents, of which one was in sympathy with the U.F.L. In Malabar as seen previously, the C.P.-K.M.P.P. alliance put 24 candidates to the Madras State Assembly and 6 to the Lok Sabha. 24.1% of the seats in Malabar were captured by the Communists. The ground lost by Congress was gained by the Communists,

(86) Fisher and Bondurant: The Indian Experience with Democratic Elections p.67.
and by 1952 it seemed there was a general Leftward trend in South India as a whole - in Hyderabad, Madras and T-C Communists were the largest opposition groups to the Congress. This trend was seen by most political observers as being the result of dissatisfaction with Congress. The fact that Congress was still able to emerge as the largest Party was attributed to the still largely unorganised and unco-ordinated nature of the opposition. The personal charisma of national leaders like Nehru and the veneration for Gandhi, rather than enthusiasm for the Party itself, ensured much popular support.

The bulk of their supporters have voted for them not because they like them or see much to approve in them or their work, but because of a variety of other reasons. They like some others even less; they are often afraid to trust themselves to untried hands; they do not find satisfactory organisation in some opposition Parties; they continue to hope that despite past indications, the great leader of the Congress, given another chance will justify their faith in him. (89)

Congress concern over T-C was shown when at a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, for the first time T-C was one of the main topics of discussion. The Congress High Command itself took the view that the election setbacks of 1952 was primarily due to division within its own ranks.

(88) Nehru's tour of T-C and Malabar made a tremendous personal impact on the masses, and much of the Congress vote was a vote for Nehru.

(89) Correspondent in the Times of India, 6 Feb. 1952, p.4.


(91) Times of India, 6 Feb. 1952, p.4.
The 1954 elections were taken as a test of Congress prestige. It had been ignominiously dissolved in the previous Ministry by a no-confidence motion. For the first time the electorate was given a choice between Congress and the Communist supported Front. In comparison with the 1951-52 elections, the 1954 elections saw some significant changes, for there were electoral changes to begin with. From a voting strength of 4,210,244 in 1951 there was an increase to 4,410,958 and from 97 constituencies to 106. Instead of 108 seats, the State Assembly now had 117, 11 being reserved for the scheduled castes. The increased tendency towards polarisation was displayed by the attitude of Congress to the Communists whom they regarded as their main opposition. During the 1951-52 elections, Congress had not seriously considered a Communist threat to their supremacy in politics. However in 1954, when Nehru toured T-C, his frequent point of emphasis was the Communists. At Trivandrum for example, he made a scathing attack on the U.F.L., and during a speech at Quilon, warned the people that it was a dangerous policy to support the Communists. At Alleppey, in his bitterest ever attack on the Communists, Nehru warned them that violence of any kind would be 'ruthlessly' suppressed. He commented too on the 'sheer stupidity' of the Left and regretted the P.S.P.'s departure from reality in extending its support to the Leftist Front - Congress alone could 'deliver the goods'. No single Party emerged from the 1954 elections with an absolute majority, as noted

(92) Figures in Fisher and Bondurant: The Indian Experience with Democratic Elections, p.67.
previously, but the Communists had made considerable gains. Congress did worse than before, for while it had secured a higher proportion of votes it had a reduced number of seats, 45 out of 118. The Leftists won a significant victory in terms of percentage of votes polled and seats gained. The K.C.P. gained 23 seats and the various Socialist Parties between them 31. From operating as a banned Party in 1952, to forming one of the major opposition groups in 1954, the Communists had come a long way.

The P.S.P. Government started its term of office with many curious eyes watching its progress. There was much to be curious about, for in terms of survival, the new Ministry had little in its favour. It had come into office as the result of a precarious balance of power. It was dependent on the Congress for its continuance in office, and the opposition of the U.F.L., did not make its chances any better. In a statement by the State Committee of the C.P., the Party claimed that the P.S.P. was being threatened by Congress, and that it could not agree to support the P.S.P. to enable it to remain in power. It stated too that a 'United Democratic Party' could form an alternative government, which it emphasised would not be a government of the Communist Party alone.

The Ministry was toppled within eleven months of its coming into office. The 'show down' came over an Agrarian Relations Bill introduced by the Government which promised new hope and genuine reform in agrarian

(95) 45.2% as against 36.7% in 1952.
(96) See Appendix I for comparative figures on 1952 and 1954 elections.
legislation. It was a surprisingly courageous move for the P.S.P. to have made, for the Bill made several far-reaching proposals that previous Congress Governments had not implemented. A Congress Committee insisted on the whittling down of the land proposals, which the P.S.P. was reluctant to do. Congress finally found it convenient to withdraw its support altogether when the P.S.P. came in for heated opposition over accusations of police lawlessness during the Budget session. The defeat of the P.S.P. Ministry was largely engineered by the Right-wing of Congress, particularly Christian landed interests, who were suspicious of the Government's proposed land reform legislation and protection of labour. The opportunity came when a T.T.N.C. agitation for separation of four Tamil taluks of Southern Travancore flared into violence and the police fired into the crowd, killing some. Panampilly Govinda Menon, head of the Cochin Congressmen immediately raised the objection that the P.S.P. Government had failed to maintain law and order. He persuaded two P.S.P. legislators to withdraw support from the Government and with the help of the T.T.N.C. succeeded in having a no-confidence motion passed against the P.S.P. Ministry. The Congress formed the next Ministry with T.T.N.C. support, and under the leadership of Panampilly Govinda Menon.

Factionalism and personal rivalries, were rife in this new Ministry,

(98) Will be discussed in more detail in Chapter IV on Agrarian Reform.
(100) The T.T.N.C. offered its 12 member support to the Congress Ministry and did not insist on a coalition Government. With the help of the 2 P.S.P. legislators, Menon's Government had the barest majority of 60 in a House of 118.
Disagreement arose over the pace of reforms and accusations of overly influence by some members between the Travancore Congressmen headed by Kumbalath Sanker Pillai, and the Cochin clique of which Panampilly Govinda Menon, the Chief Minister was the leader. There was constant rivalry between these two groups, which first came out into the open over the election of a new President of the T-C Pradesh Congress. The Cochin Congressmen had held control of the Congress organisation in the State in the past. Its decision to support the P.S.P. Ministry had not been kindly received by the Travancore group. The victory of a nominee of Panampilly Meon, A.P. Udayabhanu as President was a triumph for the Cochin side. The split between the Cochin Congressmen and the Travancore side soon widened and Kumbalath Sanker Pillai was joined by other prominent Travancore Congressmen among them T.M. Verghese, and K.M. Korah. The members of this 'rebel Congress' refused to support Menon's Government, and Panampilly demanded that immediate disciplinary action be taken against them. However many Congress members were against such a move, and the Congress High Command was reluctant to interfere in what it considered was a State matter. The personal intervention of veteran National Congress leader, C.P. Dhebar failed to heal the split.

(101) New Age, 10 April 1955, p.12.
(102) Members of the 1948 Congress Ministry under Pattom Thanu Pillai.
(103) This reduced Panampilly's support from 60 to 54 which would have forced his resignation.
Nominal disciplinary action was taken more as a face-saving gesture, although the rebel group remained defiant. In June, 1956 the Ministry fell from office in the face of internal dissension. President's rule was proclaimed once more, and this continued for one year till the next general elections of March 1957. These elections would vote members to a newly formed Kerala State Assembly, for the whole area of T-C and Malabar, now to form one State.

This then was one aspect of the political background to 1957. The elections of 1957 followed a period of political instability, factionalism within the Congress Party, a multitude of small Parties, unable to form strong opposition groups, and the atmosphere of a State under President's rule. In contrast to the Congress which faced the March elections as:

The most unpopular, discredited and disunited Party,(104) the Communists presented a relatively strong, disciplined and untried organisation, and in many ways offered an attractive alternative. The latter made the most of the prevailing situation, using Congress disunity (105) as a strong and effective propaganda weapon. Neither the P.S.P., R.S.P., K.S.P., nor the Muslim League had a sufficient enough following in the State to capture a majority in the Assembly. A United Front of Leftists, such as had contested the 1954 elections, could have won a major victory against Congress, but in 1957 there was no unity or possibility of

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(104) Fisher and Bondurant: The Indian Experience with Democratic Elections p.72.

(105) e.g. in the New Age, Congress disunity was constantly referred to.
an alliance among the Leftist Parties. Talks for a P.S.P.-Communist alliance failed over the question of electoral adjustments. The C.P. accused the P.S.P. of demanding more seats 'out of all proportions and reasonableness'. Each Party therefore decided to contest the elections independently. In terms of organisation and unity the Communists stood ahead of the opposition groups and by the time of the elections it was generally conceded that the Communist Party would be the main opponent of the Congress. There was already a marked indifference to Congress among the voters, as one eye-witness remarks:

Cars and lorries carrying the Communist flag paraded the streets of the capital and crowds cheered loudly every Communist addition on the official election scoreboard displayed prominently on the Sectariat lawn at the junction. In marked contrast, stony silence greeted any increase in Congress strength. (107)

The Communists emerged from the elections victorious and with a majority. Several significant facts emerge out of these elections. In 1957 the Communists polled 34.2% of the votes cast in comparison with its 1952 figures of 17.5%. The Congress vote fell from 42.3% which it had gained in 1952, to 36%, and the P.S.P. from its 1952 figure of 20.3% to approximately 11%. Thus all the Parties except the C.P. had reduced

(107) The Statesman: 10 March 1957, p.1. The correspondent also remarks that one noticeable sequel was the 'virtual liquidation' of the R.S.P.
(108) See Appendix II for figures on the 1957 election results.
numbers of votes. The Communists most spectacular gains from an All-India view, were in fact in Kerala. At the 1954 re-elections in T-C, the Communists had set up only 36 candidates and had secured 652,613 votes, and in Malabar 18 candidates and polled 300,000 votes. In 1957, it had 100 candidates all over Kerala, an increase of 85% in the number of seats contested. There was a corresponding increase in votes from 922,536 (1954 T-C, Malabar) to 2,152,101. The percentage of its vote to the total poll was also raised from 17.5% to 36.5%. The R.S.P. was liquidated for all practical purposes. Its last candidate at Ponnani in Malabar, lost his deposit and shared the fate of the majority of his Party's candidates. The Ponnani seat was won by a Communist.

The paradoxical feature of the election results was that while the Congress Party had won less seats than the Communists, it still had the highest number of votes (22 lakhs) although its votes had been reduced from its 1954 figure. The Communists won more seats, 60 to the Congress 43, but polled about 20 lakhs of votes. Congress however was routed in Kerala in 1957, and its performance was even worse than expected. Kerala was the only State where the Congress did not contest all the electorates. Seats where it was obviously weak were left uncontested.

(112) This position was reversed in the mid-term elections of 1960. See Appendix III for Districtwise figures on Communist gains in 1957.
In spite of this the Party suffered severe defeats, the extent of which may be illustrated by the performance of Congress in the Chalukudy Constituency in Cochin. Here the seat had been held by the former Chief Minister of T-C, Panampilly Govinda Menon, whose home Constituency it was. Menon was defeated by a P.S.P. nominee, by more than 3,300 votes. Menon's defeat significantly enough was achieved by a P.S.P.-Communist joint endeavour, the sole exception to independent electioneering in the 1957 elections. The crushing failure of a leading Congress figure in his home Constituency where he had never before been defeated, climaxed the fate of the Congress Party in Kerala at the 1957 elections. It was a dramatic indication of the extent to which the Party had lost touch with the masses.

If polarisation was writ large in the Kerala of 1957, it was the continuation of a process that had already begun to manifest itself in 1951-52, and one which Congress itself was largely instrumental in bringing about. An appraisal of post-mortem opinion on the elections shows that most observers held Congress responsible for the Left-ward trend. Nehru, in his first public comment on the Communist victory claimed it was 'discontent with local matters' rather than 'positive support for Communism' that enabled the Communist victory. The General Secretary of the I.N.C., emphasised too that political instability among other factors had helped engender dissatisfaction and discontent, and much of the blame for this was laid at the door of Congress:

(113) Times of India, 24 March 1957, p.l.
(114) Times of India, 24 March 1957, p.l.
... the vote for the Communist Party was not really a deliberative vote for Communism, as a vote for a stable government and a reminder to Congress that it should put its house in order, and radicalize its outlook. (115)

The Statesman in an editorial commented:

There can be little doubt that many people have voted Communist not because of a general belief in the virtues of Communism, but because of the continued political frustration to which they have been subjected during the last decade. (116)

There was above all the prevalent belief that Congress had failed to 'deliver the goods' to borrow Nehru's phrase, and that the lack of outstanding leadership had added to Congress confusion and disunity. It was a sentiment that the Communists themselves shared, as expressed by the leader of the K.C.P., the man to lead the first Communist Government, E.M.S. Namboodiripad:

The meaning of that vote for the Communists was clear; finding the Congress and Left Parties including the P.S.P. wanting, the people of Kerala decided to give a chance to the Communists. (117)

Thus in March 1957, the State awaited the outcome of its latest and most radical political experiment. It was the climax of four different administrations during its brief span of life as a democratic State. It had experienced the confusion of a series of short-lived Congress Ministries,


(117) See Ramakrishnan Nair: How the Communists came to Power in Kerala, pp.33-34.
a P.S.P. minority Government of eleven months duration, its successor of thirteen months, and President's rule covering twelve months. This chapter has attempted to show that the trend that was to draw support increasingly away from Congress and towards the Left, existed from 1948 onwards. Conditions were being created where the solution to political instability was to be sought and encouraged in a radical approach to the elections. These conditions were largely due to the inefficiency of Congress as a governing Party, and the inadequacy of the smaller Parties. The degree of political instability has been shown, and it now remains to analyse the prevailing situation that made instability a complex and seemingly unsolveable problem. One of the most important aspects of this was the politics of casteism and communalism, and it is with this question that the next chapter concerns itself.
CHAPTER II

CASTEISM AND COMMUNALISM

It has been argued in the preceding chapter that by 1957, none of the older, established Parties had been able to present a coherent, united Government for any appreciable length of time, that Congress, the ruling Party, was unable to claim an absolute majority or a stable government, and that in the proliferation of parties and succession of short-lived Ministries, the path was prepared for change. In this instance, the Communist Party of Kerala seemed to offer the only viable alternative to the political instability of the past decade. This chapter attempts to describe a significant aspect of the endemic political instability that contributed to the Communist victory, namely the influence of casteism and communalism on Kerala's political life.

It is often a temptation to identify societies statistically, as though they were abstractions and to disregard what is of primary importance in the study of living societies, the human factor. The response of the individual to a particular situation can often defy rational explanation, and much of this response takes what may be termed an emotional form; for example caste and communalism, two manifestations of a social system that are found in an extreme form in Kerala, can often override every other consideration. It is of course necessary to be cautious here and avoid a dogmatic correlation between communalism and politics - no situation, particularly one as complex as the one being examined here, can be explained away in such simplistic terms. But to emphasize the influence of caste and communalism is not to seek to provide a pat formula to answer the questions arising from Communist success of 1957, but to suggest a valuable factor contributing to an extremely interesting
development. Hence to discuss the situation in Kerala in any way that does not take into account this factor, is to provide only part of the answer.

According to popular legend in Kerala, the geographic area forming the modern state, was created for the Brahmins by Parasurama the ancient ruler of Kerala. The myth relates how Parasurama slew his mother Renuka at the command of his father Jamadagni, and in order to expiate his sin undertook to kill and exterminate the Kshatriyas, the enemies of the Brahmins. This he did then gave the whole earth to the Brahmins. He had, however no land to live on himself so he asked Subrahmanya, the father of the Gods, for assistance and by penence obtained from Varuna, God of the seas, some land, the extent of which was to be determined by the throw of his 'parasu' or axe. He threw it from Kanyakumari to Gokarnam, which became the land of Parasurama, today's Kerala. To people this land he imported Brahmins from abroad, settling them into sixty-four gramams (family groups) and making laws and institutions for them and for others who settled here. The Parasurama legend sets the background for a peculiar social system that distinguishes Kerala from the rest of India, in that it is more deeply entrenched and complex than elsewhere on the sub-continent; A social system that like elsewhere in India sets the Brahmin at the highest point and the untouchable at the lowest, but where the Kshatriya caste, well established in most parts of India, is only a very small, almost extinct group, in terms of political influence.

Before proceeding to an appraisal of the social system here, however, it is necessary to examine the concept of caste in the general context of the Indian situation.

Caste is a daily fact of life in India, and despite a prevalent belief that it is dying out, is still very much a part of the consciousness of the average Indian. As one writer put it:

Whatever changes are occurring, the dynamics of the system as a whole continues to retain amazing resilience. (2)

It pervades every aspect of life, and if the more extreme manifestations of the institution e.g. ritual pollution, untouchability etc., have disappeared, caste differences and caste identification, are still very much in evidence. While the nature of modern society does not allow for the rigid practice of caste, caste differences, especially in relation to namage, social status and social intercourse were, even after independence, strong. A leading Indian sociologist, Srinivas, taking issue with the assumption that caste is on the way out has agreed:

Caste is so tacitly and so completely accepted by all, including those who are most vocal in condemning it, that it is everywhere the unit of social action. (3)

What then is caste? It most often referred to originally four groups - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudhra. This is however an oversimplification of what is a very complex structure, for in India two distinctly different words are used in connection with caste. Thus 'varna' refers to the four main groupings mentioned above which are placed in order of status. In


(3) M.N. Srinivas: 'Caste in Modern India' in Journal of Asian Studies Vol. XVI, No. 4 Aug, 1957. This essay is also reproduced in M.N. Srinivas: Caste in Modern India and Other Essays (Asia Pub. House, Bombay, 1962) - the latter will henceforth be referred to as Caste in Modern India.
addition to the four varnas, there is an important classification known as 'jati', the nearest equivalent of which would be a sub-grouping, except that they are not just sub-divisions, but effective social groupings in themselves. These 'jatis' are of particular significance in Kerala where the sub-groups not the four varnas, form the main social divisions among the Hindus. Sub-groups reach a bewildering variety in Southern India as a whole, and is thus a difficult term to define conclusively. Hutton in 'Caste in India' attempts a description, that while not defining the term, describes its more important features:

A caste is one whereby a society is divided up into a number of self-contained and completely segregated units (castes), the mutual relations of which are ritually determined in a graded scale. (5)

The 1921 Census Report for Madras defined caste as an:

Endogamous group or collection of groups bearing a common traditional occupation, who are so linked together by these and other ties ... that they regard themselves and are regarded by others as forming a single, homogenous community. (6)

Caste therefore consists of small and complete social units in themselves, marked off definitely from each other, although functioning within the larger society. The Weberian analysis of status as guide to caste, endogamy, commensality and the exclusiveness of each grouping are all, as these definitions point out, important features of the system but this definition must not obscure the crucial fact that caste is a system of

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(4) Beatrice Pitney Lamb; India p. 136.
inter-relationships, every caste having its own special privileges and responsibilities. With regard to the Census definition, it must be remembered that common name and common traditional occupations are not always a safe guide. Birth determines a man's caste for life, individual transition from one caste to another is almost impossible and the whole system has revolved round the prestige of the Brahmin.

Caste then is an ever-present factor in Indian life, and in Kerala caste structures have been practised most rigidly. Vivekananda, the Hindu reformer, referred to Kerala as the 'madhouse of caste'. It is therefore necessary to describe at some length the place of caste in the social history of the State, in order to understand the attitudes of the Malayalee (native of Kerala).

The caste structure of the Hindus in Kerala is in many ways unique. Of the four varnas there are practically no Kshatriyas and few indigenous Vaisya castes, the bulk of the population comprises of various groups of Sudhras and untouchables. There are a number of sub-groupings but for our purposes three main divisions may be distinguished - the Brahmins particularly the Nambudri Brahmins, the Nayars, who form the dominant group in terms of influence and power and who are really a Sudhra sub-group, and the Ezhavas. The latter belong to the polluting castes. Even among these groups sub-divisions abound, for example there are groups among the Brahmins with whom even the higher caste Sudras would not

(8) See N.K. Dutt: Origin and Growth of Caste in India (Kegan Paul, French, Trubner London, 1931) and John Hutton: Caste in India p. 49 for further discussion on this.

associate. The Nambudris are a small but important 'Makkathayam' (patrilineal) caste at the very top of the social scale, titular priests of the community and usually wealthy landlords. Nambudri women would only marry within their own caste, but Nambudri men consorted with Nayar women, the children of such unions being deemed members of the Nayar caste and taking their inheritance from the female line. Ranking below them ritually, but economically equal, are the various cheftain castes, following the 'Marumakkathayam' line of inheritance, i.e. from the female line. This caste has supplied the Maharajahs of Travancore and Cochin, when these two areas were independent kingdoms. In terms of influence on political life this group has tended to become absorbed into either the Nambudri or the Nayar groups. The Nayars are a large, matrilineal group of castes that form the 'middle class' backbone of the society. Traditionally forming the militia of the country, today the Nayars are primarily farmers and civil servants and professionals in general. In the caste hierarchy, the Nayars are Sudhras, but in Kerala, they share what is in many ways a common culture with the higher castes and sub-castes. This culture is made more uniform by the practice of hypergomy by which higher castes and sub-castes took wives from castes below them, that is in the case of the Nambudris and the Nayars. The Nayars comprise about a quarter of the


Hindu population, the other caste Hindus, less than 10%. The remaining two-thirds of the Hindus are 'polluting' castes. These fall into two main groups - the 'upper' division consisting of the populous caste of labourers and small tenants, mainly of the Tiya or Ezhava caste, and below these the more inferior polluting castes of basket-makers, cobblers, artisans etc. Pollution was observed in varying degrees, and has been practised to almost unbelievable extremes in the Kerala area. An example of this is the observance of the ritual of 'distance pollution' whereby polluting castes were not even allowed to approach within certain distances of Hindu temples. Until quite recently in Kerala, certain castes were virtually unseeable i.e. they were required to maintain great distances between themselves and members of upper castes for fear of defiling the latter. An instance of this is the caste of washermen, the Purada Vannan who had to work between midnight and daybreak, and were not allowed to come out after daybreak because the very sight of them would pollute other castes. Jonathan Duncan in 'Remarks on the Coast of Malabar' written in the Nineteenth Century gives the following description of the pollution ritual:

A Nayar may approach a Numbudri Brahmin, but must not touch him, a Tiya (Ezhava) must keep thirty-six paces from a Nambudri, and must not come within twelve paces of a Nayar. A Pulayan (untouchable cultivator) must keep ninety-six paces from a Brahmin and thirty-six from a Nayar. If a Pulayan wished to address a man of higher caste, he had to 'stand afar off' and 'cry aloud'. If a Pulayan touches a Brahmin, the latter must at once bathe, read 'much of the divine books' and change his Brahminical thread. A


Nayar on the other hand, or any other caste polluted by a Pulayan's touch, need only bathe to purify himself. (14)

These observances were, moreover, not simply vestiges of a far distant past, for one scholar of the Kerala area, Aiyappan, writing as late as 1937, on the contemporary social structure, gives a similar scale of distance pollution as Jonathan Duncan. (15)

The most important of the so-called polluting castes are the Ezhavas, both in terms of numerical strength and in influence on the political life of the region. The Ezhavas have been known by different names - in North Malabar for example they are known as Tiyas or Tiyans, in Travancore and Cochin as 'Izhuvans'. The more modern term is Ezhava. The original Ezhavas were probably immigrants from Ceylon; the word Tiya means 'islander' and Ezhuvan, one who belongs to Izham, the ancient name for Ceylon. In the course of their migrations to the coast of Malabar, these early settlers brought with them the palmyra palm, and toddy-tapping has been traditionally, the most important occupation of the Ezhavas. The status of them up to the last century was very low involving what was virtually a state of bound servitude. Socially the Ezhavas were held to pollute the Nayars and Brahmins. Francis Day, writing as late as the latter part of the nineteenth century observes in 'the land of the Perumals'.

(14) Ibid p. 79.
(16) There is some claim made of the Kshatriya origins of the Ezhava e.g. H.A. Stuart writing in the 1891 Census Report comments: 'The toddy drawing sect was closely connected with the kingdom of Vijayanagar. It would seem probable that they were at one time in the service of Vijayanagar kings and formed an important element in the fighting forces of the Hindu kingdoms of the South' - quoted A.K.L. Iyer: Cochin Tribes and Castes Vol. II p. 279.
that if a Chogan or Ezhavan dared to pollute a Nayar by approaching nearer than the prescribed distance, the latter was at liberty to cut him down.

Although associated as a toddy tapping caste, the Ezhavas have in increasing numbers tended to spread out into other occupations. Today in Kerala they are predominantly agriculturists and form the bulk of the agricultural labouring group. Mateer observes:

The special occupation of the Ilavars is the culture of the coconut palm, and the manufacture from it of toddy and ardent spirits ... they are also general agriculturists; some are weavers and boatmen, and a few are petty traders, teachers, priests, doctors and suchlike. (17)

Thus in the Hindu social system in Kerala, the main divisions are between the Nambudri Brahmins and Nayars who together form the higher castes on the one hand, and the Ezhavas and 'untouchables' who compose the lower castes on the other. The Nayars and the Ezhavas are the most important in terms of their influence on political events.

Apart from the divisions among the Hindus, the non-Hindu section of Kerala society is also divided into communities on the basis of religion. These function in much the same way as the caste groups in their exclusiveness and group feeling, and may be regarded as extensions of the caste system. They are deeply pervaded by the atmosphere of caste engendered by the Hindu communities. Communalism may be described as the sense of 'differentness' and rivalry based on religious and caste differences. Thus the Brahmins, the Nayars and the Ezhavas, while all Hindus by religion belong to three

(18) The Ezhavas are not untouchables in terms of the traditional caste hierarchy, but are considered among the lower 'polluting' castes.
communal groups. The most important non-Hindu communal groups both numerically and influentially, are the Christians. The Christians of Kerala are in the unique and unusual position of being descendants of a Christian community which was in existence long before any European advance in Asia, and are proportionately greater in numbers here than anywhere else in India. As a community, the Christians constitute only a very small minority in most other Indian states. According to a well-established tradition held generally by Christian scholars of both Eastern and Western worlds, the Apostle St. Thomas is believed to have established churches along the coast of what is now the State of Kerala. The Syrian Christians in Kerala trace their origin to the Christian community established by St. Thomas among the upper caste Hindus. Even if the St. Thomas tradition is historically unfounded, it is certain that a Christian Church calling itself Syrian was in existence in Kerala by the second century A.D. These were subsequently reinforced by migrations of Christians from Syria, Iraq and Iran. Their liturgy is celebrated in Aramaic or old Syrian, hence their name. The forms of worship used by the Syrian Christians are among the oldest Christian liturgies in the world and the 'St. Thomas Christians of all denominations are, at times, inclined to look upon most Western Christians as "parvenus" in the Christian Church'. The Syrian Christians were early accepted into the social system and special grants and privileges were given to them by the ruling Maharajahs of Travancore and Cochin. While Christians on the whole have been regarded as inferior to the upper caste Hindus, the Syrian Christians were considered as ranking equal if not superior to the upper castes.

It is not unusual to find caste being practised among the Syrian Christians, who for example used to have separate churches built for converts from the lower castes. It was not till after the coming of the Portuguese between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that Latin Christianity in its Roman Catholic form made any impact on the St. Thomas Christians, when by the Synod of Diamper in 1599 the bishops and clergy of the Syrian rite were induced to accept the primacy of the Papacy and amend some of their liturgy. The liturgy however continued to be celebrated in Aramaic.

Various splits occurred among the Christians over the question of allegiance to Rome, and today the main Christian groups are the Syro-Malabar Catholics, the Catholics of the Latin rite and the Jacobites. The latter derive their name from the fifth century West Asian revivalist, Jacob Baradai, and celebrate, in common with the Catholics (Syrian), a liturgy in Aramaic. The Catholics (both Latin and Syrian) are the most numerous. In a communication to the press in 1962, the President of the All Kerala (Syro-Malabar) Catholic Congress claimed that 60% of the Christian community of Kerala were Catholics, that Catholics of the Latin rite numbered at least 1,200,000, and that the Christian community comprising one-third of the State's population, were entitled to six of the eighteen Lok Sabha constituencies in Kerala. The Christians predominate in the Travancore and Cochin areas. They are farmers or engaged in trade and commerce, especially banking. Many of the poorer Christians are labourers,

(20) Delhi Information Sheet entitled 'The Christians of Kerala' (Govt. Press, New Delhi, Jan. 1962).
workers, or small tenants, while in Travancore several of the plantations are owned by wealthy Syrian Christians. As a community the Christians are able to wield a great deal of influence on the politics of the State. They are also responsible for many of the private educational institutions in Kerala. Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India. When it is considered that much of the education in this State is conducted through private institutions, mainly Christian and Nayar, it will be seen that the Christians have a vital interest in the political life of the State, especially where there is any attempt to interfere with private rights in education. After the Communist government came into office in 1957 and the controversial Education Bill was introduced, which aimed at a substantial measure of Governmental control over private schools, the main source of opposition came from the Christian, particularly Catholic community, and this subsequently helped topple the Ministry.

(21) 'Much of the modern capitalist enterprise of Southern Kerala has been carried out by Christians, but Christians span the class structure and include almost every occupation' - Kathleen Gough: 'Village Politics in Kerala - I' in Economic Weekly 20th Feb. 1965 p. 365.

(22) See figures on Literacy in Appendix.

(23) In an interview published in the New Age (W) 21st July 1957 p. 3, J. Mundassery, the Education Minister in the newly formed Communist Government put the number of schools of all types in the State at 9,000. He also stated that approximately 60% of elementary schools and little less than 50% of high schools were under private management, while 50% of these private schools were under the Catholic Church.

(24) The Kerala Education Action Committee formed to oppose the Bill was Catholic inspired, and organised the closing down of almost all the Catholic managed schools in Trivandrum District (a Catholic stronghold), which affected about 120 schools, as a gesture of protest.- The Statesman 14th Sept. 1957 p. 4.
Another important minority especially in the Malabar region of Kerala is the Muslim community, known locally as 'Moplahs'. Muslims were converted here for several centuries Islamic influence having been in Kerala from the seventh century onwards, from the Middle East. Malabar was also under the influence of the Zamorin of Calicut and later Tippu, Sultan of Mysore, the latter a staunch Muslim. The Moplahs in comparison to the other communities, are more backward and poor. The majority are illiterate and until very recently, their women have not been encouraged to have any education at all. Occupationwise, they are mostly agriculturists or fishermen. Of their position in the early half of the century, Mateer writes:

They have little taste for education, scarcely a single school or publication of their own ... In the Government service 384 persons are employed, chiefly Tulukkans and Pattanis, mostly in the humble position of peons or policemen. About a fifth of the whole body are cultivators; one-fifth traders; a tenth are labourers; a few are weavers, men of property etc. (25)

Numerically the Muslims form a substantial minority, particularly in Malabar, and by virtue of their numbers are able to exert influence on the political fortunes of the Parties canvassing for support among the various communities.

Kerala society is therefore unique in this aspect, that the various minorities exist together in one area in communities that are strong enough not to be completely dominated by any one of the others, as is true in the rest of India. Thus the Christians' proportion in Kerala compared

to the All-India percentage is almost ten times higher - the Kerala figure being 21.22% and the All-India, 2.44% (1962). The percentage of Muslims in Kerala, compared to the All-India number is slightly less than double - Kerala 17.91%, All-India 10.69%. The Hindus comprise about 60.83% of the total population of Kerala. The Hindus as one community are the largest majority, but are not in a position to be completely dominant, for as pointed out earlier, the Hindus are not themselves united, but divided into three main groups, each of which function as a separate community. This is particularly true of the upper caste Nambudris and Nayars who together form about 40% of the total Hindu population, and the more socially and economically backward Ezhavas.

The major communities are hence, more or less evenly balanced, and it is this, the existence of these large communal groups, that partly threatens political cohesion in the State. The interaction between them must necessarily have a far-reaching effect on the nature of their society. Given the social situation that has been described, it is not surprising that although the overt manifestations of the system have disappeared with the coming of independence and the passing of legislation to remove the more glaring differences such as untouchability, caste and its corollary, communalism, have played a key role in Kerala, principally because of its division of society into 'almost irreconcilable factions'.

(26) 1962 Census of India figures.
(27) Article 17 of the Indian Constitution 1950, abolished untouchability and forbade its practice in any form.
activity has been modified, rather than abolished, for as a noted student of the system points out, it has found new fields of activity, especially in politics.

Of this kind of activity, Kerala is a supreme example. The attacks and strains on the traditional structures of the various groups has added to the tendency towards crystallisation of communal groups. The breakup of the old systems of inheritance like the Tarward and the Ilom, among the Nambudris and the Nayars, has meant that members of these communities increasingly turned to areas of activity which threw them into competition with others, for example in the Government service and in politics. In the Nayar Tarwards for example many of the younger, ambitious members of the family group were frustrated by the limitations imposed on them by the Tarward. Often too, unable to compel partition of family property they sought employment elsewhere, more commonly in the civil service or the professions. Then too the effects of joint inheritance and subdivision of ancestral land has made land an uneconomical proposition for younger members of the Tarwards. In addition to the frustrations of a changing social system, pressure on the amount of land available has forced many of the educated middle-classes of the Nayar and Christian communities to seek opportunities elsewhere. These are seldom the traditional positions in society sanctified by time and tradition, but areas of activity where the main element is rivalry. Then too, there is the unwillingness of the

(29) M.N. Srinivas: Caste in Modern India, pp.5-7.
(30) 'Tarward' refers to the Nayar family group, the 'Ilom' to that of the Nambudris.
Christians and the Ezhavas to let the government service be allegedly
dominated by the Nayars, so that rivalry is intensified. The Ezhavas are
no longer willing to remain a depressed group.

With particular reference to the Ezhavas, who now exert considerable
influence on Kerala politics, as a community, their social background has
undergone profound changes, and reform has been the operative word in their
activities and efforts to rise above the rigid structures of a system which
has traditionally confined them to a status similar to bound labour. It is
paradoxical, that in Kerala where casteism reaches its most intense form
today the authority of the Brahmin is being challenged at every point. With
the introduction of modern political institutions, the traditional
prerogatives of the higher castes is no longer unquestioningly accepted.
Many of the disabilities suffered by the Ezhavas as far as economic hardships
were concerned, were applicable to similar 'backward' groups in India,
but the response of the latter has not been barely as articulate as that of
the Ezhavas. For one thing the drawbacks suffered by the Ezhavas especially as
far as economic hardships were concerned, were intensified in the context
of the Kerala situation. They have suffered socially from extreme disabilities
from the ritual of pollution, to caste traditions that have affected every
aspect of their lives. Traditions that for example even dictated the kind
of house they could live in. In Malabar, an Ezhava was not allowed to
build a house, above one storey, nor was he allowed to carry an umbrella,
wear shoes, or gold ornaments, milk cows or use the ordinary language.

(32) Chapter III will elaborate on this point.
(33) G.S. Ghurye: *Caste, Class and Occupation* (Popular Book Depot, Bombay
1961) p. 12. By 'ordinary language' is meant that the lower castes
were not allowed to use the same forms of address or language usage as
the higher castes. For example in talking to a person of higher caste,
the lower caste person would use forms of language debasing himself when
referring to his own person.
However, far from being submissive or listless, as much of the Indian peasantry tended to be, the Ezhavas have displayed a receptiveness to change. This started long before the rise of leftist elements within the Congress Party during the struggle for Independence and the dissemination of Communist propaganda among the Ezhavas. Under pressure from religious reformists, and in Travancore with the cooperation of the relatively enlightened Maharajah of Travancore, all temples in Travancore were open to all Hindus, including 'untouchables', by the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1937. This was an important gain to the Ezhavas socially and psychologically. A whole series of 'progressive' rulers occupied the Travancore throne, not only encouraging religious reform, but initiating political reform. Thus the State of Travancore was the first in India to introduce some semblance of democratic government in the form of the Representative Assembly nominated as early as the 1890's. A slow social revolution was being initiated that was reinforced in the field of education. The activities of the Hindu reformist groups, and the private educational institutions run by both Hindus and Christians, have given, as mentioned before the highest literacy rate to Kerala. While literacy does not extend to all sections of the population, the percentage is very high. There is a general awareness of issues and a corresponding response that is not confined solely to the upper castes or more wealthy groups. The activities of the Ezhava leaders have resulted in the forming of the community into organisations such as the Shri Narayana Dharma Pillai Yogam (S.N.D.P.) to agitate for Ezhava rights, and has helped encourage the community's assertiveness. The

(34) See literacy figures in Appendix.
S.N.D.P. has pledged itself to 'One God, one caste, one religion'. Before the emergence of fully fledged political parties, it was an important means of articulation, both political and social for the Ezhavas. It required monogamy of its members, 'sanskritisation' of their religious rites, and repudiation of caste inequalities and:

A kind of Protestant (and indeed capitalist) ethic of thrift and independent enterprise. (35)

The 'sanskritisation' process that characterizes the growing Ezhava reform movement, is defined by Srinivas as:

The process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently 'twiceborn' caste. (36)

The Ezhavas claim to Kshatriyac origins and their desire to be regarded as having warrior traditions in the past may be cited as part of this process. The Ezhavas are no longer willing to stay purely within the occupational categories defined by caste, and are demanding a share in the running of the country along with the other communities. Ezhavas early joined the Congress movement in the 1930's, although the movement was dominated by Christians and upper caste Hindus. The first Travancore ministry of 1948 was already beginning to reflect the strength of the

(35) Kathleen Gough: 'Village Politics in Kerala - I' p. 367. In one village studied by Kathleen Gough, Palakkara, the Ezhavas had in fact partly abstracted themselves from the traditional caste system of the village, economically through wage work and morally through the S.N.D.P.

communities - it had a Nayar President, Pattom Thanu Pillai, one Syrian Christian, and one Ezhava minister. In the Ezhavas' continuing struggle for recognition and equality, the Communists were to provide one way of achieving this recognition, and the Ezhavas were willing to give the Communists a chance to prove their intentions.

Thus what is happening, and what has been happening in Kerala since the attainment of and prior to Independence, is unrest in the social system. Where previously the dictates of caste had created a strictly controlled, ordered community where each member of society knew his allotted place and function, there has now been a movement away from this, that is causing the cleavages between the groups to blur. The social system has tended to become more complex and dynamic, and there is evidence that these cleavages are cutting across one another. There is a danger however, in seeing this blurring of caste lines, as implying that caste considerations are becoming unimportant. It is true that castes are moving out of the traditional boundaries, and the lower castes are ignoring the limits set against their venturing to do so, i.e., and this point is vital in understanding what happened in Kerala, they are entering into the competitive era. In this sense there is disintegration in the system. Kathleen Gough regards such activity as among the many symptoms of caste disintegration in South India, and R. Leach as a 'defiance of caste principles'.

Competition, the crucial element in analysing caste and communal conflicts in Kerala.

(38) In introduction to Aspects of Caste in South India etc.
politics, is, it is true, breaking down one aspect of caste, namely the clear
demarcation of a group's place and occupation. This however does not mean
as has been suggested, a disintegration of caste itself. While on the one
hand, the obstacles placed by caste are being eroded, the group consciousness
created by caste has tended to crystallize into communal loyalties; the
concept is still there, only its application has been modified. Eric
Miller, drawing on material compiled from research in the Malabar district
and Cochin State observed:

The breaking down of the territorial cleavages is
fundamental to the transition from a system in which
castes were interdependent within small areas to a
system in which they are becoming widely ramifying
classes in opposition to one another. (39)

- this being particularly evident in the dichotomy between upper castes
and lower polluting castes. Thus the protest is not that of the
individual against the system, but of the groups against the status-quo.
Hence the Ezhava still considers himself as part of the Ezhava community,
as do the Nayars, the Muslims, and the Christians. Participation in
political matters is to a significant extent affected by the identification
of individuals with their communities. Given the fact that four communities
comprise approximately 80% of the total population, it would follow that
the communal groups are particularly important, especially here in Kerala,
where communal identification is strong. As one observer put it:

(39) Eric J. Miller: 'Caste and Territory in Malabar' in American
(40) Ibid.
The Malaylis have a double system of political loyalties, to community and to party, and except among the most dedicated Communists, community usually comes first. (41)

The figures showing communal strength in the State, indicate that none of the groups have an absolute majority.

The 1961 Census figures show the varied dominance of the communities in the different regions of Kerala:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Malabar</td>
<td>62.65</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>32.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Cochin</td>
<td>54.00</td>
<td>34.42</td>
<td>11.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Travancore</td>
<td>61.18</td>
<td>29.24</td>
<td>8.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Kerala</td>
<td>60.83</td>
<td>21.22</td>
<td>17.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. India</td>
<td>83.51</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>10.69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Castewise breakup of Hindus is not available in the Census figures). (43)

The Nayars and the Ezhavas are the most significant groups in the Hindu grouping in terms of political influence. The Nambudris have more or less ceased to exert much influence as a bloc on political affairs. Individual Brahmins have been important members of the Congress Party, and the President and Chief Minister of the Communist Party and First


(42) A remark made by R. Shankar of the Congress Party on the situation in Travancore, may be applied, from the communal point of view, to Kerala as a whole. Shankar called Travancore a land of minorities alone - the presence of these large minorities in Kerala testifies to this - Shankar's 'Minute of Dissent to the Travancore Reforms Committee' in 1947, quoted in R. Nair: Constitutional Experiments in Kerala p. 112.

(43) 1961 Census figures as compiled by K.G. Krishna Murthy and L. Rao: Political Preferences in Kerala - table on communities. See also figures on communal strength in I-C in Appendix.
Communist Ministry, E.M.S. Namboodiripad, comes from one of the leading Nambudri families. However, in terms of wielding group influence, the Brahmins are weaker and less articulate than the Nayars. An added complication in the communal factor, is that each of the communities has its power relatively stronger in one part of the region than in another. Nayars tend to be dominant in Travancore, while the Ezhavas are most numerous in Malabar and Cochin. Malabar is also the stronghold of the Muslim community, where it constitutes 32.96% of the population. The largest percentage of Christians are found in Cochin and Travancore. Malabar with about 4%, has the smallest number of Christians. Christian influence is strongest in Cochin. Travancore tends to be dominated by the Nayar Service Society and is traditionally a favourable arena for Congress support. In Cochin both the Communists and Congress have a strong foothold. Malabar is very vulnerable to Communist propaganda largely because of its lower literacy and unemployment. Political alliances are often shaky, since the base of support would vary in the several regions of Kerala. The strength of the communities has resulted in what is a central point in the political instability in Kerala, that no government can survive unless at least two of the major communities support it.

Strong communal feelings have found expression in the various caste organisations that are found in Kerala. The Nayar Service Society or N.S.S., The Ezhava S.N.D.P. and the Catholic Church and the Muslim League, all act

(44) To be explained below.
(45) See K.G. Krishna Murthy and L. Rao: Political Preferences in Kerala p. 27.
as influential lobbies. While the Muslim League alone may be considered an independent political party, the caste organisations are powerful blocs, that safeguard primarily the interests of the communities they represent. They exacerbate rivalry between the communal groups and the extent to which they influence political behaviour is peculiarly characteristic of this State; the members of these bodies tend to vote in the interests of their particular community. The importance of communal considerations may be illustrated by the Muslim League in Kerala - elsewhere in India, the performance of the League has been negligible, but in Kerala it has been more successful than anywhere else. If at the all India level it was an anachronism, in Kerala it wielded considerable influence on the Moplahs. Although League members deny that their party is primarily a communal organisation, the League was formed to protect the interests of the Muslims. Few non-Muslims support it and its performance has been good where there are considerable numbers of Muslims, as in Malabar.

The politics of Kerala, cannot therefore be separated from the existence of these large communal groups and their alignments; they can often, and do, control the bloc vote of the communities they represent. As one writer points out, these caste organisations are 'disciplined pressure groups' looking after the political, educational and economic interests of their various communities. They have made caste more comprehensive, and caste group feeling has created a feeling of solidarity that, Ghurye describes as 'caste patriotism'. Ghurye's observation is made of the Indian situation generally, but it could be considered as particularly true of the Kerala area. Here, generally, especially at the village level, loyalty to political

(47) G.S. Ghurye: Caste, Class and Occupation p. 208.
movements on the basis of policies is not as well developed, as loyalty to community or what Myron Weiner terms 'ethnic groups'. This loyalty to community in the political area is operative as loyalty to the caste associations:

The caste association seems to have a more complete and intense command of its members' commitments than is usually the case with voluntary associations.

Thus caste in the form of political behaviour being discussed, has brought a new dimension into politics. As Myron Weiner puts it, in the new context of modern democratic procedures, and the participation of the masses, however imperfect this involvement in the process may be, this traditional loyalty takes on a new meaning and function as political lobby groups. The communal organisations have become significant as a means of political articulation; Kothari and Maru examining this point in a case study of two districts in Gujerat, see the motivation behind caste groups as a secular one in the mobilization of group support behind a competition for power. The emphasis on their activity is political.


This secularisation in Kerala is particularly reflected in the demands of the Ezhavas. Caste associations have sought to maximise caste representation and influence in State Government bodies, and their main impact on Indian politics has been at the State level.

In Kerala loyalty to community is further strengthened by the existence of roughly common economic interests. Kathleen Gough observes that in Kerala caste rank is still closely related to socio-economic class and that Congress/Communist cleavage at the mass level is at least partly based on class. Broadly, occupational and social lines coincide with communal-social lines, thus the higher castes also tend to be landowners and businessmen and the lower castes, like the Ezhavas, to form the bulk of the labouring force. This is not to deny that an increasing number of the higher caste groups have members among the poorer sections of society. For example while in Cochin, the Christians are relatively well off, in Malabar they are usually very poor. Kathleen Gough confirms this tendency.

Writing on Kerala in the late 1940's and early 1950's, she observed that most of the poor peasants came from 'relatively low or "backward" castes' e.g. Ezhavas or low-ranking Muslims and Christians. The same held true of landless labourers. However she also noted that in more recent decades, their numbers were being augmented by high-caste people such as Nayars and Syrian Christians. There is therefore, rarely complete occupational and

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income uniformity within communities, but there is often, as Myron Weiner (54) puts it, enough unity to further cement the 'ethnic ties'. Long conditioned, as has been described in this paper, by a tradition where the all-pervasive theme was caste, the response of the Malayali, cannot be completely separated from communal considerations. These were present as late as 1848 in Travancore over the recruitment of Government jobs. With the traditional occupations being eroded into, the Christians and the Ezhavas viewed with increasing concern, Nayar domination of the Government. This conflict, for a share in the government service, was later shifted to the Parliamentary sphere, and when Travancore initiated the beginnings of Representative Government in the Kerala region, in the form of demands for a more evenly distributed participation. In the 1930's the Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims rallied together against the upper caste Hindus to protest their superior representation in the Legislative Assembly.

The fight for national independence, brought together many of the separate factions. During the early part of the movement, the Nayars had held themselves aloof, and in 1924, formed themselves into the Nayar Service

(54) Myron Weiner: Political Change in South Asia p. 128.
(55) Srinivas cites a Times of India comment on the communalism prevalent in the Public Service since the inception of T-C: 'The public, the newspapers and the people's representatives, all tended to identify and equate Government employees with this or that community. Appointments and promotions of clerks and sub-inspectors of police became front page news and reached the agenda of Cabinet meetings. The failures and fortunes of Government employees were identified with the failures and fortunes of their respective communities' - Times of India, 26th Jan. 1952 quoted in Caste in Modern India p. 35.
(56) Both Horst Hartmann: 'Changing Political Behaviour in Kerala' p. 165 and M.N. Srinivas: Social Change in Modern India mention this, but I have been unable to obtain detailed information.
Society or N.S.S. The N.S.S. was not a political party but a communal organisation catering for the interests of the Nayar community. It became a powerful body owning schools, colleges, hospitals and rubber plantations. Its goals have been Nayar education, the development of commercial enterprise and subsequent economic and political competition with Christians and Ezhavas. As the Independence struggle gained momentum, a large number of Nayars joined the Congress, the N.S.S. continuing to function as a caste organisation. Before 1947, the Congress Party in Kerala was able to operate effectively amongst all the communities, largely because it was at the time, more a national movement than a political party. In the common goal of independence, the various group conflicts were for the time being submerged, and Congress was able to provide a rallying point for various groups. Although at the period under survey, the Congress seemed more aligned with right wing, conservative elements of society, and a party of privilege rather than of the people, its basis of support had been broad, and included many aspects of the Indian political spectrum.

The first Congress Government in T-C in 1947 was supported by the major communities, but cracks soon appeared in this show of unity. Christians have long tended to dominate the Congress Party, while the Nayars have been supporters of the Democratic Socialist Congress later to become the Praja Socialist Party. This factor soon became a bone of contention, with the Hindus resenting Christian strength in Congress, and the Christians resenting what they considered anti-Christian discrimination. With the attainment of independence and the introduction of outward forms of democracy, such as the franchise, elections and political parties, the age of competitive politics was ushered in, and as an inevitable corollary, the major communities
started to manoeuvre for power. By the time of the fall of the first Congress ministry, headed by the Nayar leader Pattom Thanu Pillai, the obstacle of communalism was steadily growing to wreck any government that did not have the support of at least two of the major communities. The 1948 Congress ministry was viewed by the Christians and Ezhavas as Nayar dominated, and when Pattom Thanu Pillai expressed the desire to extend his ministry, to include what he claimed would give rational representation to the different communities, his proposal was rejected by the Christians and the Ezhavas who felt this would only increase Nayar influence. They subsequently withdrew their support, and Pattom Thanu Pillai resigned. He crossed the floor to form the Democratic Socialist Party, later to become the Praja Socialist Party or P.S.P., in opposition to the ruling Congress Party. Pillai's break with the Congress, took away a large portion of Nayar support from Congress, and the loss of the Nayar bloc vote helped ensure that no Congress Government would remain stable for long. Communal alignments had begun to assert themselves. Although the Government continued under another Nayar, Narayana Pillai, the feeling persisted among the Hindus, that Christians dominated the Congress Party if not the Ministry. The Ezhavas looked elsewhere for a solution to their problems; Congress did not provide the necessary confidence and they were beginning to shift their alliance increasingly to the young Communist Party. The latter had by the 1930's, already begun to entrench themselves among the socially and economically backward classes in Malabar and Travancore-Cochin. If the Ezhavas looked to the Left for inspiration, and the Nayars to the Democratic Socialist Party, and later the P.S.P., the Muslims feeling themselves neglected by the Congress, rallied round the newly reformed Muslim League. By 1948, therefore, a development was discernible that influenced the
the political affairs of the State for the next decade:

Communal rivalries found their distinct political outlets with the result, that the political structure became particularistic rather than unitary, although there were elements of every community in all the political parties. (57)

This particularistic element engendered by communalism, was a major contribution to the proliferation of parties and division in the Congress vote. Large groups were alienated from the ruling party, making it impossible for it to operate as a stable government. The interplay of this with other factors, led to a loss of Congress power, which in turn left a power vacuum, that in 1957 was filled by the Communists.

During the early stages of democratic government in T-C, Congress remained the ruling party for it was able to attract votes from most of the communities, or at least two of the three. The communities had not found a common political ally to form any kind of an adequate foil to the Congress - their own particular caste organisations could not stand as independent political parties and hope at the same time to gain any measure of support from the others. What was required was a party that could appeal to and gain the support of at least two-thirds of the electorate, and this meant the sympathy of two of the major communities. The Communists were able to do this, in 1957 their most important impact was that they offered an alternative to the ruling party.

By the time of the 1951-52 general elections, religious and caste cleavages coincided roughly with party membership. The mainstay of Congress support in T-C was the Christian community, which has tended to support the

rightist elements in Kerala politics. The most powerful section of the Christian community, the Catholic Church wielded much influence over Kerala politics, in its authority over the Catholic community. As an avowed enemy of the Communist movement in Kerala, it has solidly supported Congress to counteract the influence of the Leftists. The Church has not been averse to exhorting its members to vote Congress as a spiritual duty, to combat Leftist influence. Christian support of Congress in the 1951-52 elections exacerbated Nayar-Christian rivalry in T-C. For a whole year before the elections, Thanu Pillai's Party, the Democratic Socialists, carried on a steady and hostile campaign insisting that the local National Congress Party was dominated by the Catholic Church. This caused many Hindus, i.e. Nayars and Ezhavas, to look askance at the Congress, and to withdraw their support. Ironically enough, as a result of charges of communalism within the Congress operating against the Christians, the Christian vote did not go en bloc to Congress. A large section of the Christian, particularly Catholic population, was alienated over a proposed educational bill that aimed at the greater Government control over educational institutions. This affected the Catholics who had run most of the private schools in T-C. The Catholics also resented the sudden electoral alliance between the Democratic Socialist Party and the National Congress, which was seen as a manifestation of anti-Christian sentiment in view of the anti-Christian campaign waged by the Democratic Socialists. The Catholic response was to vote for independent Catholic members, especially in the Catholic stronghold of Trichur. Five of the eleven independent members

The Hindu reply to the Catholic vote for independent Christian members was to vote against Christian Congressmen in several constituencies, where the Hindu electorate normally voted Congress. The Congress vote was thus split in several ways by communalism — it had lost Christian votes and anti-Christian Hindu votes. In addition, during the latter stages of the elections, before the alliance of the two, the Democratic Socialists had pursued a hostile anti-Congress line, which drew away many Nayars and some Ezhavas from the Congress to the Democratic Socialists. When the Democratic Socialists suddenly joined the National Congress to contest the elections, it disillusioned those Ezhavas who had joined the former in the hope that it could form an effective opposition to the Congress. Many of them turned to the Left, particularly to the Communist Party. Congress losses worked in favour of the Leftists who contested the election as the United Front of Leftists, especially as far as the Ezhavas were concerned.

When the 1954 elections were announced after the fall of the Congress ministry, the major cleavages of 1951-52 continued. Fisher and Bondurant who made an on the spot of the 1954 elections, after a study of the caste influences, came to the conclusion that communal considerations were significantly affecting the performance of the main parties. It has not been possible to obtain detailed communal statistics of the 1954 voting.

(59) From "A Vote of Protest" - I - Post-Mortem on Kerala' in Times of India 25th March 1952 cols. 7,8, p. 6 and col. 6,p. 6

(60) Ibid.

(61) M.N. Srinivas: Caste in Modern India p. 34.

but if the opinion of Fisher and Bondurant is considered along with the
general tone of extreme communal feeling and loyalty to communal groups and
with what occurred at the 1957 elections, then it is reasonable to suppose
this conclusion to be valid. The Communists used Hindu-Christian
differences as a useful propaganda weapon. They lashed out at Christian
support of Congress and sought to make Church interference an election
issue. A.K. Gopalan, a prominent Communist member in Kerala, declared in
Bangalore that if Congress won in T-C, it was only 'with the help of the
Church'; another Communist sent an open letter to Nehru complaining of
Christian activity. He wrote:

Almost all Churches in Travancore-Cochin have been turned
into election offices of the Congress Party. (63).

There was some justification for Communist accusations that the activities
of the Church were jeopardizing the chances of the U.F.L. (United Front
of Leftists). (The Communists contested the 1954 elections as a legitimate
party and the chief partner in the coalition of the various leftist groups
that combined to form the U.F.L.). The Archbishop of Varapuzha for example,
issued a circular warning Catholics not to vote for any of the Leftist
parties and denounced Marxism as an 'immoral political doctrine'.
Nor was it just the Communists who were involved in the controversy. The 1954
elections were notable for polarisation between the Congress and Opposition
forces. Congress was challenged for the first time in a straight contest, by
agreement among all the opposition groups except the T.T.N.C. (Travancore

(63) Ibid p. 65.
(64) Times of India 3rd Feb. 1954 col. 2, p. 10. See Chap. One for
Tamil Nad Congress. The charges made by the Communists were echoed by the other members of the Front. Congress leaders were charged with approval of Church interference in favour of Congress. This was one of the chief accusations thrown at Nehru during his election tour of the State. However, although much noise was made during campaigning, only one election petition was filed alleging 'undue influence' by the Church, and this was subsequently dismissed by the Election Tribunal. The 1954 elections resulted in a victory for the Leftists and a defeat for Congress. Significantly, no single party emerged with an absolute majority, and part of the reason for this was that none of them was backed by an inter-communal alliance.

By the time of the 1957 elections, the major communities consisted of approximately the following numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The breakup of Hindus was approximately:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ezhavas</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayars</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sch. Castes</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Brahmins as individuals formed some of the leadership in the Communist Party and Congress, but as a group they were not a major factor in politics.

(66) Fisher and Bondurant: *The Indian Experience with Democratic Elections* p. 65.
Communalism again played a key role in determining the nature of the results. The 1957 election was the climax of Congress failure and Leftist victory; the communal distribution of votes was approximately the following: (the figures are for T-C and Malabar, now Kerala State)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congress</th>
<th>Communists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>1,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayars</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezhavas</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sch. Castes</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and others</td>
<td>120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main support of Congress remained the Christians, particularly the Catholics, while Nayar votes were divided between Congress and the Communist Party. What was also significant was the small number of Ezhavas voting Congress in comparison with their support for the Communists. While some Muslims voted Congress, others were increasingly attracted to the Communists, but the majority voted for their communal party, the League. The Muslims remained more traditionally right-wing than others suffering the same economic disabilities. Thus in Malabar, where the Muslims have the heaviest concentration, communalism seemed to dominate, over the effects of Communist propaganda. One political observer comments on this attitude during the 1957 elections:

(68) Above figures are taken from Dr. Jitendra Singh: 'Communism in Kerala' in B.E. Pentony (ed.): Red World in Tumult (Chandler Pub. Co. San Francisco, 1962) p. 247. The Election Commission Reports do not give a communal breakdown of the votes, but Dr. Singh was 'on the spot' during the elections and these figures were compiled from material he had access to both official and unofficial.
That communalism in Indian politics is far from dead was fully in evidence when I visited Manjeri, Malapuram and Tirur.(69) While the Congress also for most of the seats in these areas set up Muslims as its nominees, there is no evidence in these Moplah areas that despite Mr. Nehru's frantic appeals to give up communalism, these credulous and comparatively unsophisticated people will vote any candidate other than those set up by the Muslim League.(70)

As the figures on communal distribution indicate, while the Nayars and Ezhavas together formed the bulk of Kerala Communist leadership, the Ezhavas formed the mass base for the Party. Of the sixty-one Communist Legislators elected in 1957, twenty-three were Nayars and twenty-one Ezhavas.

One of the most dramatic features of the 1957 elections was the Congress loss of support with the masses, especially at the village level. The village aspect of Kerala life is one that is particularly significant in attitudes of the people. One of the most profound indications of Congress failure was its disassociation from local village support, a disassociation that was followed by an intensive propaganda drive by the Communists. By 1957, the Communists had firmly entrenched themselves in the local villages. They succeeded where Congress had failed, in identifying themselves with agrarian labour. The agricultural labourer was most responsive to an anti-Congress Leftist appeal, and as early as the 1930's first in Malabar and then in T-C, the Communists had begun to identify themselves with the cause of agrarian reform. It was a cause that mainly involved the

(69) Places in Malabar.
(72) Chapter Three attempts to analyse the relationship between agrarian discontent and subsequent disillusionment with Congress.
depressed classes, of which the Ezhavas were the most articulate. Members of the Party made intensive efforts to gain the confidence of these peasants, efforts that began at the most personal level— as one Communist writer relates:

...The Party members try to maintain day-to-day contact with every section of the people, really living among them and taking up every issue relating to their lives—a school here, or a case of eviction there, a worker discharged, or his child requiring medical treatment, a road or a bridge, ...(73)

Granted the propaganda and polemic nature of such utterances, there still remained the fact that much of Communist activity, did involve the kind of fraternization described above, and that much of the success of the Party was due to this kind of painstaking effort. Besides fraternization, propaganda took all forms from Trade Union work to popular dramas, from the distribution of political pamphlets to the mass circulation of 'progressive' fiction. The Communist Party of Kerala had involved themselves very early among the Hindu communities and communal organisations. For example Namboodiripad and his colleagues had organised a Nambudri movement among young Brahmins, directed at social reform. This group sought to challenge Hindu orthodoxy and traditionalism. Work among the Ezhavas as a community receptive to socialistic ideals was also, as mentioned before, an early activity of the Party. The various social reform movements among the communal groups such as the young Nambudris and within

(74) Ibid.
the N.S.S. and the S.N.D.P., produced a left-wing, revolutionary group, within the caste organisations at the same time that a similar, radical movement was emerging within the Congress in the late 1930's. The formation of the Congress Socialist Party, later to become the K.C.P., drew the large numbers of these two dissident groups, so that the caste organisations were linked to the young Communist Party.

The Communists used communalism in two ways. On the one hand they stood above communalism and casteism, and in their attacks on Congress as racked with the canker of communalism, drew many supporters. E.M.S. Namboodiripad for example strongly attacks the evil of the caste system which he wrote were more acute in Kerala than anywhere else in India, and its divisions as:

As serious a political disease as the superiority or inferiority and its manifestations, untouchability. (77)

Namboodiripad argues that the development of the caste system is akin to that of feudalism in Europe, the caste organisations being a modern expression of this feudalistic structure. He therefore sees the caste organisations as a necessary fact of the historical development of Kerala. The extinction of these caste organisations was necessary to free the land from the feudal state, but as a preliminary step competition between the castes was a necessary stage in the elimination of feudalism. The structure of society was built on the privilege of the Brahmin, with the Brahmins


(78) The National Question in Kerala
at the top and the untouchables at the bottom. The position of the Brahmin with his social and economic dominance had to be destroyed before feudalism could be erased. It was therefore important that the lower 'classes' represented by the lower castes, should fight for the rights and privileges denied to them. It was only possible to do this by organising the lower castes. It was to this task that the Communist Party should bend its energies. Namboodiripad argues further, that since the evolution of casteism was closely tied to the evolution of private property, the higher castes being by and large the biggest landowners was one manifestation of this, the abolition of caste would be concomitant with that of landlordism.

The Ezhavas as the largest deprived group, socially and economically, were the natural choice for the Communists to identify with. They could take advantage of communalism in the sense that they could cultivate the Ezhavas as a community, and of economic discontent because of the disabilities of the community, to the point where votes for Communist candidates could be as much an expression of caste loyalties as of economic discontent. The Communists were thus able to exploit the existence of communalism and casteism, and to the extent which they used them, utilised inter-caste relationships. They were able to do this successfully as far as the Ezhavas were concerned, for the strong stimulus in this community was reform, and at this time economic reform more especially. They were convinced that it was only through the Kerala Communist Party that they could achieve this, and hence:

(80) Ibid. p. 36.
(81) Myron Weiner: Political Change in South Asia. p.43.
Between the Ezhavas and the Communists there has been no fundamental meeting of minds but rather a fortunate confluence of program and action. (82)

While the Communist Party contained many dedicated Party members, the mass of its supporters were not, as in most other places, ideologically committed Communists, but people who found in the party the means to dramatise their protest and their hopes that the Communists would do better by them. They were therefore more responsive to a revolutionary propaganda not so much in terms of ideology and theoretical Marxism, but in the promise of better things to come.

In 1957 Communist support was not entirely provided by the Ezhavas. If it had been, the Left would not have gained a victory. The split in Congress worked in favour of the Left. The cry of Christian support for Congress was reiterated in 1957 as it had been in 1951 and 1954. In 1957 the Nayars held the balance. The Ezhavas were for the most part Communist supporters, and those Christians who did not vote Independent, which many of them did, voted Congress. In 1957 the Nayars were able to bring about a polarisation between the Communists and the Congress. It was the direction of the Nayar vote that finally decided the majority party. (83) This vote was split between the Congress, the Communists and the P.S.P. For Congress this proved disastrous, for it meant the loss of support of two major communities the Nayars and the Ezhavas. It is in this situation that we find one of the most interesting aspects of the events of 1957;

in the crucial result that by 1957 two of the large communities had found a political ally, namely the Communist Party. Previous Congress ministries had stayed on in office, though precariously, through the fact that no one party could emerge with an absolute majority. Part of the reason for the Communist victory was that by 1957, they attracted more than one section of the popular vote, so that the split in the communal vote was a major factor in favour of the Communists. As one paper put it:

The communal votes went either for the Congress or for the Communists. But the Communists got a larger number of votes from the larger communities. (84)

While the Communists cashed in on communal differences, and indeed much of its appeal to social groups was of a communal nature, it nevertheless realised the dangers of casteism and communalism to its ideology. One of the reasons for much disillusionment with Congress was its involvement with communalism. A blatant example of this was shown during the 1957 elections, when despite Nehru's repeated warnings, the Kerala Congress and the P.S.P. formed an alliance with the Muslim League. It was an open appeal for a communal vote and did not do either of the parties any good.

This danger was clearly stated by Namboodiripad:

It is easy enough to see that these caste organisations are not the class organisations of the peasantry; they do on the contrary, consolidate the caste separatism of the people in general and of the peasantry in particular, so that the grip of these caste organisations have to be broken if they are to be organised as a class. (86)

(84) 'Kerala Newsletter' in *Times of India* 25th March 1957.
(85) Ibid.
(86) E.M.S. Namboodiripad: *The National Question in Kerala.*
There was a commitment to theory and Party that overrode caste considerations. Up to 1957 this commitment could not realistically exploit purely 'class' feelings which were not wholly relevant to the Kerala context. On the other hand, casteism and communalism were two loyalties that were very close to the people of this area, and in appealing to particular social groups, the Communists were by and large attracting at the same time, communal groups. However, the Communist Party was never unlike the other political parties in Kerala, including Congress 'brokers for communal interests'; its ideological commitments precluded this. Hence while having and cultivating an appeal to certain communities, it also attracted others disillusioned by the blatant communalism of other groups. The Communists in Kerala, have perhaps also, more than the other parties, been active in attacking religious and social divisions between the high and low castes and have consciously involved themselves with the low castes.


(88) Kathleen Gough: 'Village Politics in Kerala - II' p. 416. She quotes a Nayar Congressman on the tremendous effect on the villagers in one village, Palakhar, of a Nambudri Communist Party member eating 'kanji' (rice gruel) with the Vettuvas (a low caste group).
CHAPTER III

THE AGRARIAN PROBLEM

Political instability and communalism combined to create a situation in which the Congress Party found itself lacking the confidence of a large section of the population of Kerala and the Leftists, chiefly in the form of the Communist Party, were given the opportunity of offering an alternative. There was however, a more important factor in the situation which was crucial in bringing Congress to defeat and the Leftists into office. This was the agrarian question, a fundamental aspect of the general discontent that afflicted Kerala from 1947 onwards. There are few facets of Indian life that are not affected directly or indirectly by agrarian problems, and a predominantly rural area, with a predominantly rural population, like Kerala is even more closely involved with agricultural problems.

This chapter is concerned with the nature of agrarian discontent (1) from 1947 onwards. It will be argued that it was the inability of the various Congress and Congress backed ministries to adequately tackle this problem that brought about the Congress defeat, in the sense that this unresolved economic issue intensified the political discontents already examined, to the point where Congress rule was no longer acceptable to a large majority of the population. The interaction between rural and political unrest was particularly intense in Kerala, as a result of the large discontented agricultural population, in particular the agricultural labourers. The most deeply distressed section of the population, it became

(1) Where the present tense is used, it refers primarily to the period up to 1957.
the mass base supporting the Communist Party in 1957. The agricultural labourers made up not only the most depressed, but also the largest group in the State, so that to a major degree, the agricultural problem was the problem posed by their disabilities.

Even before the coming of Independence to the former princely States of Travancore-Cochin and Malabar, the Kerala region had enormous problems of complexity in the agrarian structure confronting it. Besides being the most densely populated area in terms of density of population, it is also a predominantly rural area, a land of villages rather than of large towns. Even its' village structure is different from the typical Indian village, in the predominance of nucleated home dwellings rather than compact villages:

The unit of settlement is the individual homestead situated within its own compound and agricultural lands. These homesteads extend in almost unbroken lines along the roads and in other areas suitable for settlement. The 'village' here is a purely artificial creation created by the revenue administration and has no existence on the ground.(2)

An intensively cultivated State, the majority of its people are engaged in some kind of agricultural occupation. Indeed in its rural aspect, the face of Kerala has not changed much since the time of the Arab traveller Ibn Batuta who visiting the coast of Malabar in the twelfth century commented:

... in all this space of two months journey, there is not a span free from cultivation.(3)


(3) Quoted in W. Logan: Malabar Vol. I p. 86.
In Travancore-Cochin alone, in 1951, out of a population of 9,280,425 persons, 7,792,133 were listed as rural and 1,488,292 as urban. This represented an increase of 1,250,917 in the rural population since 1941 onwards, while the total increase in population was 1,780,368. Kerala is the most densely populated State in India. For example in an area of approximately 15,000 square miles (about 1% of India as a whole, and about a third of which are mountain wastes and forests) about 4% of Indians as a whole live. By 1960 there were just over sixteen million in this area of land. In 1951 the density of population in the State of Travancore-Cochin was the highest in India, about 1,015 per square mile. This high density of population, coupled with the fact that overall, it also has the highest proportion of people engaged in agricultural occupations, results in a very drastic pressure on the land. Over 50% of the population derives its principal source of support from agrarian occupations, and the problem of availability of land in a restricted area, is one of the most severe problems facing Kerala. Travancore-Cochin for example, had in 1951, the lowest availability of land per capita net sown area, about 0.30 acres in comparison with the All-India

(4) Figures compiled from Census of India 1951, Vol. XIII. T-C Part II, Tables p. 6. Figures for 1961 show that this high proportion of rural elements, has been maintained for Kerala as a whole e.g. Malabar 85.35%; Travancore 85.22% and Cochin 83.40% – Krishna Murthy and L. Rao: Political Preferences in Kerala, pp. 21-22.

(5) Approx. figures taken from established figures for 1960 based on 1951 Census of India in J. Thomason's Kerala Guide and Trade Directory p.62. For district-wise break-up, see Appendix - figures on population.


(7) See Appendix on Region wide Occupational Distribution (1961 figures) for some idea of the situation.
figure of 0.77 acres. The agricultural situation affects the majority of the people and any agrarian disturbance and/or discontent has an effect either directly or indirectly on the overwhelming majority of the population. It is this ever prevailing importance of the land question that places Kerala in a peculiar situation, for its land problem is due in part to its agrarian tradition.

One of the most outstanding features of the agrarian problem in Kerala, is an exceedingly complex land tenure system. Land tenure is an all-pervasive influence on the region, and for centuries land has provided almost the only and most important source of investment and saving. The tenure system affects economic, legal and social relations:

The principles and methods on which land is owned and cultivated, determine the relation between man and land and owner and tenant. (11)

Eric J. Miller, examining the village structure of a North Kerala Village, says that in the village he studied, there were hardly any families which did not at some time of the year, have a connection with the land even if it was only to supplementary labour for the harvest.


(9) Nehru, isolating factors that enabled the 1957 election results to take the form it did, emphasised that it was local conditions, particularly local land conditions that affected the Communist victory in Kerala, in that local discontent had aided the Leftists - The Statesman, 30th March 1957 col. 1, p.1.


While there are variations in the different regions of Kerala, the area forming the modern Kerala State, has a land system that is unique, in that many of the types of tenure are not found elsewhere in India. The most significant result of the tenurial system, is the existence of an extremely complex intermediary structure. Indeed, the curse of the Indian land system, the intermediary, is found here in its most acute form.

At the apex of the agrarian structure is the 'janmi' or landholder, who holds what is called a janom tenure i.e. absolute proprietorship of the land he owns. Although, technically, Kerala's land system has come under the Ryotwari classification of land holdings, whereby land is held by the State and revenue is paid directly to the State, in effect the janom tenure is in a different category from the Ryotwari areas of Western India. In Kerala, land is leased from the 'janmi' not the State. The janom tenure also differs from the Zamindari areas of India, where the State not the Zamindar is the owner of land, although revenue is paid through the Zamindar. E.M.S. Namboodiripad argues that the absence of any centralised administration resulted in a village system and tradition of private ownership that is unique in India; that it is only in Kerala (13) that land was not in the hands of the village communes. The Madras Government in the late nineteenth century, commented on the individual nature of land ownership in Kerala:

(13) E.M.S. Namboodiripad: The National Question in Kerala.
The characteristic of the whole of the Kerala country was the presence of a strongly developed personal and individual landed property, the absence of a government tax on land, the absence of a concentrated village system such as obtained in the Carnatic ... etc. (14)

Under the rule of the Maharajahs, and before the coming of the British, the janmis, while holding ownership of the land, had traditional responsibilities and obligations to the tenants under them, which gave the latter some measure of security. With the introduction of British legal concepts, the traditional landholding practice underwent some change. It conferred a status on the janmi that was really different from the traditional one, in the sense that the traditional Malayali right over land was different from the Western concept of property in the soil. It embodied more the idea of authority that land ownership bestowed i.e.: What in fact the Malayalis were buying and selling ... was not the soil, but a position with emoluments ... conferring authority of different kinds, and of varying degrees over the two classes resident within the limits specifically laid down in the deeds. (15)

With the introduction of Civil Courts and the impact of Western law, the rule of contract rather than customary rights and obligations, was introduced, the janmi becoming, what Logan terms a 'dominus'. This put the janmi, in what was in effect, a stronger position, and his tenants more at his mercy. By native custom the cultivator could not be ousted

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(15) W. Logan: Malabar Vol. I p. 603. Author's emphasis.
except by order of the 'Tara' or Nayar guild, so that many of the tenants were in fact permanent tenants. The recognition by the Courts of the janmi as 'dominus', and the enforcement by them of contracts, deprived the tenants of their rights, many of whom, at least at the 'kanamdar' level, were co-proprietors. As Logan, who was Special Commissioner for this area in 1887, pointed out:

... the Courts have viewed the janmis' payment of the customary improvements rates as permanent in full to the cultivator for the improvements made by him in the soil, whereas there can be no doubt that the rates so established by custom were intended merely as compensation for the customary share of produce - the 'pattam' - due to the 'padu' or 'janmi' by reason of those improvements and as in no sense whatever compensation to the cultivator for his customary share of the net produce. (19)

In other words, it had been customary for the tenant to pay extra in terms of produce gained for improvements made by him, for which the landlord compensated him through the customary improvement rates. However the Courts then regarded these rates as payment for the customary share of the produce usually received by the tenant, which made the janmi the gainer and his tenant the loser.

(17) Ibid p. 608. Examples of this were holders of 'kanam' and Kulikanam tenures, to be discussed later in this chapter.

(18) Type of tenure to be explained later.

In Kerala, land has seldom been sold outright. It was very much a part of social status and prestige, and the most common form of security. The janmi considered it below his traditional honour to part with the 'janam' title on land. Given this reluctance to part with land title, and the scarcity of land, it is not surprising that a complicated system of tenures and sub-tenures has developed, whereby the janmi leases out land to tenants under various types of leases and these tenants in turn lease them out to others. By leasing land out to tenants, the janmi is able to obtain money without selling land, and thus gradually to divest himself of his rights to the soil, while still retaining the title of Janmi.

It is necessary to give here some description of the kind of land tenures found in Kerala, as the fact of agrarian tenure was very important in the discontent that developed against the Congress party and the success of Communist efforts in the agrarian question. Tenancy may

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(21) (i) Definition of tenant: 'A person lawfully cultivating any land belonging to another person, if such land is not cultivated personally by the owner and if such a person is not:

(a) a member of the owner's family, or
(b) a servant on wages payable in cash or kind but not as a crop-sharer or a hired labourer cultivating the land under the personal supervision of the owner or any member of the owner's family, or
(c) a mortgagee in possession.

Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee - All-India Congress Committee, New Delhi, 1949 p.45.

roughly be divided into three principal kinds, although innumerable types are found within these three major types. First there is the 'kanam' tenure. Kanam is one of the commonest types of tenures. In its original sense it seems to have denoted the function of supervision, and was largely the duty of the Nayars. Used in this sense it implied more the duty of looking after and overseeing rather than the modern one of 'possession' or 'mortgagee'. Today, as a carry over from the function of supervision, the majority of kanamdars, or tenants holding the kanam tenure, are Nayars. The kanamdar pays a certain sum of money to the janmi, who pays interest on this sum as if it were a simple loan. Every year he also pays a fixed rent from which the interest on the kanam sum is deducted. Once in every twelve years he pays a renewal fee to the janmi which gives him the right of possession for a further period, the renewal fee being three times the annual rent. The kanamdar has the right to cultivate or sub-lease the land. The kanam tenure is the best type of tenure both in terms of security and status. The kanamdar holds land directly from the landlord i.e. there are no intermediaries, and since 1930 the janmi is able to evict only if the kanamdar could not or did not wish to pay his rent, or if the janmi needed the land for his own cultivation. The kanamdar thus has qualified security of tenure whether he cultivates the land or leases it to another.

(22) W. Logan: Malabar Vol. I p. 597, including foot-notes.
(23) A. Mayer: Land and Society in Malabar pp. 80-81.
Secondly there is the 'verumpattom' lease - The Tenant under this kind of lease is known as a Verumpattomdar. It is a simple kind of tenure that can be leased either from a kanamdar or janmi. It is held usually annually and is applicable only to paddy lands. The verumpattomdar can either be a cultivator or an intermediary verumpattomdar in which case he sub-lets the land. Some security of tenure is given, by restrictions on evictions if the verumpattomdar cultivates at least 90% of the wet land.

The third type of lease was the 'kuzhikanam' tenure - This tenure is given for the cultivation of waste lands that are to be made into vegetable gardens or palm gardens. These are usually inferior quality lands and held by a simple lease usually a share of the produce from reclaimed land. The kuzhikanam lease reflects an important aspect of the agrarian situation, that all land, including waste land and forest is owned by someone. There is none of the freedom to cultivate unused, waste lands that is met with in some other societies. Even the cultivator of waste lands has to bear the burdens of tenancy.

These three are the most common types of tenure although others exist, such as the 'panayam' lease, where the possession of land is made over as security for money loaned. Rent is paid to the janmi after deducting interest on the amount advanced at the rate prescribed in the deed, and the amount of land revenue, in certain cases wherever it is conditional

(24) A. Mayer: Land and Society in Malabar p. 81.
(25) Ibid. p. 82.
that the mortgagee should pay it to the Government. The janmi can take possession of the land after repayment of the amount advanced at the rate prescribed in the deed, and the amount of land revenue in cases where it is conditional that the mortgagee should pay to the Government. The janmi can take possession of the land after the repayment of the amount advanced at any time he likes, if the period is not specified in the deed. Usually the mortgagees are not allowed to make improvements on the land, and as such the question of compensation does not arise.

Another type of tenure found mainly in the Travancore-Cochin is the 'kuthagapattom' lease whereby Government lands are given on lease for limited periods. There is no fixity of tenure, as the tenant can be evicted at any time for breach of any of the terms of lease and three month's notice, if the land is required by the Public Service. He is not entitled to compensation for improvements made.

This system of leasing and sub-letting is practised very extensively all over Kerala, resulting in the setting up of a scale of intermediaries, so that there is a tremendous gap between the janmi and the actual cultivator of the soil. Land in fact is owned by a relatively small number of people, but the extent of the principle of tenancy and intermediaries is so widespread that the majority of the agricultural people have some kind

(26) H.D. Malaviya: Land Reform in India (Economic and Political Research Dept., All-India Congress Committee, New Delhi, 1955. 2nd ed.) p. 189 - A rather partisan work but contains much useful material on official Congress attitudes to land reform.

(27) Ibid. p. 328.
of interest in the land. Many of the tenures are held by persons who are not actual cultivators, but possess some interest varying from the right to receive a small rent to one short of absolute proprietorship. One source cites a taluka (municipal district) in the Malabar region, Kurumbranaa, where there were at least three to four intermediaries each with distinct rights, between the original land-holder and the actual tiller of the soil. When leases are held over a long period of time, there is at least one intermediary. The effect of this on the land is intense fragmentation for the purposes of tenancy. Small holdings are most widespread in the Kerala region, and the extent of this varies in Malabar and Travancore-Cochin. The following table gives an idea of the size of land holdings in these areas -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Travancore-Cochin</th>
<th>Malabar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of Holdings</td>
<td>Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 2.50 acres</td>
<td>86.47</td>
<td>36.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 2.50 - 5</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td>20.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 5 - 10 &quot;</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>16.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 10 - 20 &quot;</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>10.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 20 - 40 &quot;</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>6.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot; 40 -100 &quot;</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 acres and above</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>9.85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Travancore-Cochin, in 1951, the average size of a holding was the lowest in the Indian union, about 2.4 acres in comparison with the All-India figure of 7.5 acres.

(28) V.V. Sayana: The Agrarian Problems of Madras Province p. 224.

(29) From 'Kerala, 1959, An Economic Review' (Govt. of India, 1960) reproduced in Krishnamurthy and L. Rao: Political Preferences in Kerala Table 11.4, p. 23.

The problem in Kerala has been less large scale landlordism, and more the small-holdings that have resulted from the traditional land practices and increasing pressure on land. 80% of the landholdings are usually below ten acres. The big peasants whom the Communists call the landlords, are those holding twenty acres and above, and are more prevalent in Malabar than in Travancore-Cochin. The Land Policy Committee of Travancore-Cochin in 1950, commented on the overwhelming number of 'pattadars' or cultivators of very small uneconomic holdings:

The total number of pattadars who own 50 acres and above comes only to 2,370 in the Travancore area and of these 601 are estates holding 50 acres and above. Of the rest a few represent religious institutions, charities and trusts, charitable and religious endowments etc. The total area of cultivated lands in the Travancore area is about 27 lakh areas and the existing pattadars are about 11 lakhs. (32)

According to a report presented by the Finance Minister in May 1956, about 85% of paddy land and 75% of garden land in T-C was under the ownership of people having holdings of less than one acre.

The effects of this structure are manifold. The pressure on land, the fragmentation of holdings, the complexity and range of intermediaries, leads to a very unsatisfactory situation, especially with regard to security of tenure for the smaller tenants, and land for the poorer cultivators. The most explosive factor, as far as agrarian discontent is concerned, is that the largest group interested in, or involved in the land as a means of

(31) The inheritance system which further split a holding among members of the family also contributed to this.


existence, the landless agricultural labourer, does not even have a part in the tenure system. The victim of a system, which has the janmi at the top, the labourer at the bottom, and a number of intermediaries in between, the real tiller of the soil is largely alienated from the land he works. The agricultural labourer and the petty tenant are the most depressed groups, for the income they earn from the land they cultivate, is barely enough to provide them with sufficient food even to live at subsistence level.

Before considering in more detail the problems of the abovementioned section of the agricultural populace, it is necessary to consider the social significance of the land tenure system. A. Mayer emphasises that any analysis of the groups interested in the land, loses significance if the social system is not considered. The influence of land is far-reaching, for not only is it an 'economic and a legal system, but a system of social relations.' In Chapter II, I had attempted an analysis of the importance of caste and communalism and argued that they are inextricably linked up with status. With regard to land tenure and the relations of sections of the agrarian population, the influence of these two factors is reinforced by the interaction between economic and social status. The possession of land is an important adjunct to social status and the structure of land tenure strongly reflects social stratification. Eric J. Miller

(34) Adrian Mayer: Land and Society in Malabar p.3
(35) M.S.A. Rao: Social Change in Malabar. p. 32.
in his study of a North Kerala Village finds that the relationship of the land to the various social groupings is an 'important expression of their differential rank'. Thomas J. Shea, after an intensive study of the agrarian problems of South India, observes that in Travancore-Cochin, there is a high degree of correlation between 'caste and communal position and economic status.' This opinion is reinforced by the 1941 Economic Survey of Travancore which compares caste groups to income i.e. income that is mainly derived from agriculture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Below Rs 60</th>
<th>61-120</th>
<th>120-180</th>
<th>181-300</th>
<th>301-480</th>
<th>481-840</th>
<th>Above 840</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nayar</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezhavas</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Hindus</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backward Commun-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ies</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Castes</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relationship between caste, status and land-ownership was emphasised by the Government sponsored All-India Rural Credit Survey of 1951-52 which noted that leadership in Kerala villages was associated with land-ownership and caste structure, and dominated by the higher castes in terms of wealth and influence. The report quoted the work of Eric J. Miller cited here

previously, which showed that caste rank in the villages was still closely
related to the land, especially paddy land. Thus in a North Malabar
Village, the family of the headman were chiefly landowners and in Cochin, this
position was occupied by the Nambudris.

The Nambudri Brahmins have traditionally been the 'landed aristocracy'
of Kerala. They claimed the land as 'jamman' or birthright, tracing their
title to an alleged original gift by King Parasurama, The Brahmin janmis
have rarely cultivated the land themselves, but let them out to tenants,
usually Nayars, under various kinds of tenures - one account relates with
reference to the Nambudris:

It is seldom that they earn their livelihood by personal
exertion. They are such a favoured class that from the
king downwards to the lowest peasant everyone would fore-go
even his necessity, to pander to their luxury ... In fact,
it is the Nambuthiris of all Brahmans in India who strictly
follow the injunctions of Manu 'Never Serve'.(41)

Another historian of this area writes:

As a class, they are averse to manual labour and are,
the majority of them, jemmies or landlords, possessing
proprietary rights over landed property in greater or
smaller degree, the property itself being leased out to
tenants or 'kudians'.(42)

(39) All-India Rural Credit Survey: Vol II The General Report (Bombay, 1954)
pp. 56-57.

(40) Ibid. p. 72 - This article quoted by the Rural Credit Survey reprinted


In order of social precedence thus, the Nambudris have held the highest position with regard to the ownership of land. However more recently, landownership has not been the complete prerogative of the Brahmin. High-caste Nayars are more and more becoming landowners, and the Nayars and Christians (predominantly the Syrian Christians) are the landed 'middle class'. They usually held the 'kanandar' or 'verumpattondar' type of leases, that are more or less semi-permanent. Many of the Nayars and Syrian Christians, the latter particularly so in Travancore, are landholders and substantial farmers. However, many from these two communities are also very poor, being petty tenants, and/or agricultural labourers. The Nayars come after the Nambudris, in terms of status and relationship to land, and as mentioned before, the kanan tenure in its original sense, seems to have denoted the function of the Nayars in the body politic - the duty of supervision. The kanandars are largely Nayars. The Nambudris and higher caste Nayars have tended to be, between them, either landowners or non-cultivating tenants. The system of inheritance practised by both the Nayars and the Nambudris, has helped to maintain land ownership as the 'luxury' of the upper castes.

It is important to consider the kinship tradition in the land question today, since the Nambudris and the Nayars have provided most of the janmis and kanandars. In the traditional Nayar household or 'tarwad', descent

(43) See Anannthakrishna Krishna Iyer: Cochin Tribes and Castes Vol. II - Sections on Nayars and Christians.


(45) Eric J. Miller: 'Village Structure in North Kerala'.

property is vested in the tarwad. The land is supervised by a 'karanavan', who is usually the most senior male member of the family, either a maternal uncle or eldest brother. Since land is held by the female member of the family, the tarwad property is not divided up, as partition is not allowed and no-one is entitled to more than a maintenance and residence. The children have no claim of inheritance, and the nearest heirs of a Nayar man are his mother, brothers, sisters and sisters' children. A Nambudri family group is called an 'ilom', and is similar to the Nayar tarwad, in that land is owned and enjoyed in common by all the members of the family. To preserve this, a law of entail is observed, so that the family property may descend undivided, the eldest son alone being permitted to marry. While the Nayar family is traditionally matrilineal, the Nambudris are patrilineal since it is only the children of the eldest son who can claim inheritance, the inheritance being known as 'Makkathayam'. The management and enjoyment of property belonging to a Nambudri 'ilom' does not differ much from that of a 'tarwad'. The rights and privileges and liabilities of the head of the 'ilom' are co-extensive with those of the karnavan of the Nayar tarwad.

(46) Succession is through the nephews.

(47) For detailed descriptions of the Tarwad inheritance see Samuel Mateer: Native Life in Travancore pp. 169-73, and Gopal T.K. Pannikar: Malabar and Its Folk - Chapters on 'A Malabar Nair Tarwad' and 'Marumakkathayam'.


(49) Gopal T.K. Pannikar: Malabar and Its Folk p.209. Pannikar in his chapter entitled 'The Nunbutiris of Malabar' says that the only difference between an 'ilom' and 'tarwad' is that in the former, the offspring of marriage and the married woman, both become members of the father's or husband's family and are allowed to enjoy the property after death.
With the influence of modern ideas, the joint family systems of both these communities are breaking up. This does not mean however, that land has become more evenly distributed amongst society at large. Rather, what has occurred is a further sub-division of land rights between the various members of the groups, already holding land. This has led to a worsening of the agrarian problem. On the one hand the sub-division of land among more members of the family group has meant increased fragmentation of holdings. This has in turn led to an increase of sub-tenancy and agricultural labourers, as these tenants find their holdings uneconomic, or insufficient to provide a living and turn to agricultural labour to augment their incomes.

Sub-tenants and agricultural labour, that is the cultivating groups tend to belong to those sections of society both economically and socially depressed. The Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee had this to say of the agricultural labouring groups:

...[They] frequently belong to castes or communities, weak both economically and socially, their wages depending on a variety of influences amongst which the consideration of caste to which the agricultural labourer belongs is even today an important factor.(50)

Eric J. Miller in his study observed that the inferior Nayars and some Ezhavas were cultivating sub-tenants, either on permanent leases (cultivating kanamdars) or on annual leases (verumpattandar). The majority of the 'upper polluting castes' were landless labourers, while the 'lower polluting castes' were until recently serfs, tied to a particular block of land and if the land was transferred, they themselves being transferred

(50) Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee Report p.122. See also Chapter II for the relationship between social and economic status.
to the new owner. Another study of this question finds that in Malabar, the lower castes are largely agricultural labourers. In asking how strong the connection between caste and occupation was, D. Kumar states that from a study of the 1901, 1911 and 1921 Census figures, he found that the majority of the agricultural labouring castes, followed their traditional occupations, in the sense that they form the bulk of those engaged in labouring and menial tasks. The Ezhavas in Kerala, though originally toddy tappers, were involved in the tilling, not the ownership of land, and today form the major group in the agricultural labouring force. The numbers of these labourers have been augmented by poorer Nayars and Christians, and Moplahs (in Malabar). The Census of India for 1951, listed four kinds of tenures - non-cultivating owners; cultivating owners; cultivating tenants, labourers, in a hierarchical scale. This division reflects to a large extent the communal-caste divisions. It is impossible to give a correlation for the whole State but the pattern so far described may be roughly used as following the general rule.

Adrian Mayer in examining a typical village in Malabar, found the following divisions - the janmis were usually Nambudris, some were Syrian Christians; the kanam tenures were held by Nayar kanamdars, and these used hired and tied labour to cultivate their lands. The verumpattandars were predominantly Ezhavas and some Moplahs. Casual labour was provided

(53) Ibid.
(54) See Chapter II.
by the Ezhavas and the Cheramans. The higher castes have had generally, greater monopoly over land, and this reflects the hierarchical nature of the social system. The body of the agricultural working masses are being alienated socially and economically from the landowning groups, and thus additional problems arise from the combination of low social status with economic disabilities for the large proportion of the 'rural proletariat'. This is not to deny that there is flux and that many Ezhavas are at the present time acquiring land, and becoming landowners.

The economic disabilities suffered by the agrarian working mass are acute. While the larger tenant cultivators enjoy security of some kind, very often the smaller tenants have virtually none. At the very bottom of the land system and deriving little or no security, are the agricultural labourers, owning little or no land, and depending solely on the soil for their livelihood. The small tenant and the agricultural labourer without land, may for the purposes of this paper be classed together, for they suffer from the same disabilities. They bear the brunt of the agrarian system and the short-comings of the legislation passed to deal with it. They may therefore be considered as one group:

Many of the small cultivators who are listed as 'owners' tenants with certain rights, can hardly be distinguished from landless labourers.

(55) Adrian Mayer: Land and Society in Malabar p. 96. 'Cheramans' - section of the 'lower' polluting castes.


The following definition of 'agricultural labourer' would also include the small tenant:

Agricultural labourers are those tillers of the field who are either entirely landless or who possess land to a very negligible extent. (58)

They are the victims of the various inequities of the agrarian problem, such as tenancy due to the prevailing traditions of land tenure, holdings of uneconomical sizes as a result of this system, the pressure of land hunger, and the inability to earn a decent wage. The land has to support the cultivator, a number of intermediaries, the proprietor of the soil and the Government; The problem is that there is not enough land. This scarcity hits the agricultural labourers most of all and they are the predominant element in the Kerala region. As a whole in India, they constitute the largest single section of the national labour force, with the heaviest concentration in South India. Thomas J. Shea, who has done a considerable amount of research on the agrarian problem in South India, puts the agricultural labour population in Travancore-Cochin at 37%, which is one of the highest proportions in any Indian State. In Malabar district in 1951-52, landless agricultural labourers constituted 51% of the total population engaged in agriculture. (62) In this area,

of total cultivated land was in the hands of absentee landlords who formed only 4% of the population. Much of this land was held by intermediaries. Actual cultivation in the rice-growing areas was carried out by 44% of the agricultural population, whom the 1951 Census returned as agricultural labourers, having no rights to the soil. The most discontented group in Kerala, the landless labourer is economically the most depressed, and socially among the 'lower' groups. The inequities of this situation has intensified their discontent with, and alienation from, the Government and public service, largely dominated by Nayars and Christians. This alienation has been emphasised by growing Congress disassociation from the problems that confront this particular group, many of which still remain unsolved, in spite of Congress legislation.

Agricultural labour is of two kinds, attached and casual. According to the definition provided by the First Agricultural Labour Enquiry, attached workers are those who are more or less in continuous employment and under some kind of contract with employers during the period of employment. Casual workers are those other than attached, who are employed from time to time according to the exigencies of work. In former times attached or tied labour formed the main agricultural force, and consisted of the lowest castes usually Cheramans and Pulayas. This still exists in a modified form today, where labourers remain with the families they had been traditionally tied to, in a kind of bound servitude, but are paid nominal sums as wages.

(63) Ibid.
Now however wage labour is more predominant and this is provided chiefly by casual workers. For South India as a whole, 95% of the agricultural labouring families are casual, and in Travancore-Cochin almost all are casual. For Kerala as a whole casual labour is predominant. The main problem of casual labour is uncertain employment and the question of employment is extremely acute in Kerala. Dependent solely on what they can gain by working on the land, since they have no land of their own to sustain them, they are unable to earn enough throughout the year by working directly on the land. Underemployment remains in all but the busiest agricultural seasons.

The number of days when agricultural labourers are unable to find work could be established as ranging between one hundred and twenty and two hundred days, and in Cochin it was estimated that two hundred days a year was the maximum number of days of work of agricultural labourers in a holding.

The cultivator thus is unable to earn enough from cultivation, and this added to the revenue and taxes he has to pay, keeps him almost perpetually in a state of debt. Indebtedness is one of the chief disabilities suffered by agricultural labour. The rate of rural indebtedness is highest in the South of India, and the agricultural labourers are the ones most burdened by it. According to the Agricultural Labour Survey of 1950-51, 45% of agricultural labour families as a whole were in debt. The All-India Rural Credit Survey 1951-52 found that in Malabar 90.3% of cultivating

(65) Ibid. p. 21.
(66) Adrian Mayer: Land and Society in Malabar pp. 73-74.
(68) Chao-Kuo-Chun: 'Agricultural Labour in India'. p.27.
families were in debt. Malabar was among the first ten districts with the highest proportion of indebted families among cultivating families. The survey also showed that proportion of indebtedness was increasing. Considering the trends in the level of debt between 1929-30 when the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee Survey was conducted, and 1951-52, it was observed that the period was characterised chiefly by the inability of the cultivator to repay the principal amount of old debts in most cases, and default even in the payment of interest charges to a certain extent.

The two largest single factors depleting the peasants' income were isolated by the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, as the exploitation by the money-lender in his 'double capacity as the credit agency and the marketing agency of the village' and secondly, the high rates of interest on the loans and low rates for their products. The Committee had this warning to make:

...extreme poverty forces the peasant into the clutches of the money-lender, and the exploitation of the poorer and a less efficient producer than before, which makes his income still less.

Daniel Thorner writing in 1950 just after this report, had this to say:

The present economic position of the peasantry throughout South Asia is very black; stark poverty, heavy indebtedness, loss of land resulting in tenancy, and (particularly in India) a formidable growth of landless labourers, a low level of nutrition leading to poor health and low resistance to disease.

(69) All-India Rural Credit Survey, Vol. I pp. 64-65.
(70) All-India Rural Credit Survey, Vol. I p. 225.
(71) Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee Report, p. 85.
(72) Ibid.
(73) Daniel Thorner: South Asia in the World Today (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1950) p. 143. See also by the same author: Land and Labour in India p.173.
This refers to the Indian situation as a whole, and when it is considered that in Kerala the agrarian problem is aggravated in the instances mentioned, the picture of agrarian discontent that emerges is very acute. An idea of what is being experienced in Kerala may be gathered from observations made by Thomas Shea in the Malabar district. The Malabar area, one of the worst areas of agrarian discontent, is one of the most densely populated rural sections in India (800 per square mile). The tenure structure is very complex as seen early in this chapter, and sub-division and fragmentation of holdings, common at all tenure levels. Large estates are scattered throughout the district in numerous separate plots. Cultivators till plots less than one-tenth of an acre in size, landowners had leased holdings to intermediaries, then sub-let portions of these same lands from their own tenants as cultivators! Tenants hold lands on half a dozen tenures, from as many landlords who have in turn sub-let them to fifty or more sub-tenants. Productivity is low, capital investment in any form other than the purchase of lands 'almost nil'. Most of the actual work of cultivation is carried on by agricultural labourers working for a wage, which in many parts of the district is below subsistence. Rents are high and in the case of paddy lands usually absorb the whole surplus produce i.e. anything left over subsistence requirements. A large proportion of these rents go into the hands of the professional and commercial classes, who treat land simply as a means of investment. All this was prevalent as late as 1956 when Shea published his paper.

It is conditions such as these that have to be considered when examining the reasons for political discontent and support for Leftists. As Shea points out with regard to the Malabar region, Communism is strongest in areas such as Malabar. It is understandable given this situation that the Communists have found the agricultural labourers as their major base of support. The agricultural labour force is vital to agricultural production, while socially and politically, they are a potentially dynamic force. As a class that is over-crowded, under-privileged, and under-paid, they are a very responsive and fertile ground for the seeds of political unrest. Communist agitation has been well-rewarded among these sections. The Leftists gained support principally because Congress had proved itself incapable of meeting the problems facing the large mass of the people in Kerala.

When the Congress Party assumed power in what was to become the one State of Travancore-Cochin in 1947, its election manifesto was a recognition of the importance of the agrarian question. Agrarian reform was a major part of its proposed programme. The key slogans were 'abolition of intermediaries', 'land to the actual tillers', 'ceilings on land-holdings', 'security of tenure'. In fact much of the early enthusiasm and support for the Congress Party by the kisans (peasants) was engendered by the proposals for agricultural reform that the party had advocated, both at the All-India and provincial level. For example there was kisan support for Congress and the Non-Co-operation Movement, and the INC slogan of non-payment of land revenue which had a great effect. The peasants saw the political struggle for Swaraj or Independence in terms of a struggle against
effort to deal with these problems, and the period 1947-57, saw a number of agrarian measures passed at the All-India level. The guiding principles of this legislation was the abolition of landlordism and intermediaries, and land to the tiller. The Party was aware too of the main deficiencies of the agricultural situation. The Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee initiated by the Party in 1949, presented a comprehensive account of the prevailing agrarian injustices and set out concrete and far-reaching proposals, which if implemented, would have gone a long way towards removing the more glaring inequities of the agrarian system. The Committee recommended that in the Indian agrarian economy:

There is no place for the intermediaries and land must belong to the tiller subject to conditions mentioned hereafter. (76)

Sub-letting was to be prohibited except under special circumstances (e.g. widows, minors and 'other disabled persons'). It also recommended a set of rights for 'the actual tillers who are themselves not owners of land,' and made important proposals with regard to the size of an economic holding and ceilings on holdings. The main principles guiding the Committee in the matter of agrarian policy were:

(77) Ibid.
(i) The agrarian economy should provide an opportunity for the development of the farmer's personality.

(ii) There should be no scope for exploitation of one class by another.

(iii) There should be maximum efficiency of production.

(iv) The scheme of reforms should be within the realm of practability.(78)

Apart from this Congress Committee, an Economic Programme Committee headed by Pandit Nehru had been set up in 1947-48, and put forward proposals that were by far the most radical that have been called for. For example, it recommended ceilings on incomes and existing holdings, and recommended that all non-cultivating landholders would either have to become cultivators or lose their land. Therefore it was not as if Congress was unaware of what was needed to deal with the agrarian problem. The difficulty was the gap between proposals and implementation. The States are responsible for legislation on matters such as agrarian reform. Although national organisations such as the Planning Commission may suggest a particular course of reform, actual drafting and implementation of tenancy laws are the exclusive responsibility of each State. Thus the attitudes of State Governments towards reform, although run by Congress, tend to vary markedly. The recommendations of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee and the Economic Programme Committee were not taken note of, and many of them still remain to be put into effect. The proposals of the Economic Programme Committee were considered too radical for implementation.


(79) Economic Programme Committee's proposals quoted in Daniel Thorners The Agrarian Prospect in India (Delhi, 1956) pp. 55-56.

As far as Kerala was concerned, even much of the agrarian legislation passed between 1947 and 1951, that affected the agrarian structure elsewhere in India, did not do much in the State itself. One of the most important aims, in the spate of Congress Agrarian legislation in the 1950's, was the abolition of the Zamindari system. This however, had little relevance in Kerala, which does not have a Zamindari system, so that the legislation passed was of no import as far as Kerala was concerned. The aim of the Zamindari abolition was to put an end to landlordism and intermediaries. In Kerala, where the latter problem is rampant, no legislation was passed. Only tenants under the Zamindari and related forms of ownership were affected, and Kerala is technically, under the ryotwari system. Acts were passed in the Kerala area with regard to the agricultural situation, but the important question is, just how far this legislation was effective. The answer is not very encouraging. Very few of the Acts passed made any basic alterations to the existing structure. The abolition of the Zamindari system which the Congress Government claimed as one of its most important achievements, did not, as has been mentioned before, have effect in Kerala. The various Tenancy Acts passed in Travancore-Cochin and Malabar, while very laudably giving security of tenure to certain types of tenants, who had


Daniel Thorner points out that even in the Zamindari areas, under the new legislation, 'intermediaries' were not really abolished. He cites the U.P. Zamindari Abolition Law to show how former intermediaries were enabled to live on the land. Although Zamindars have disappeared, these same persons were confirmed as landholders, and although intermediaries as such were not allowed, and the leasing out of land prohibited, it was possible to retain one's status as 'cultivator' while tilling solely with the labour of hired workers or giving out one's fields to crop-sharers. Daniel Thorner: The Agrarian Prospect in India, pp.19-25.
previously enjoyed less, by and large only affected the upper rungs of the tenancy ladder. This was the most glaring drawback as far as much of tenancy legislation was concerned. The most depressed group i.e. the almost landless and landless labourers, the actual tillers of the soil, were little concerned in the provisions of the various Acts, which aimed at the tenants primarily:

When Government spokesmen speak of the aim of legislation to help the 'tiller of the soil', they usually mean the cultivating not the landless labourer. (82)

The cultivating tenant was usually a landholder, often hiring most of his labour. The failure of legislation prior to 1951 to deal with the agricultural worker was recognised by the Planning Commission in its proposals on land re-organisation. In spite of this however in 1956, when the Commission drew up the Second Year Plan, it could report little progress as far as the agricultural worker was concerned. It pointed out that most land reform had been confined in the main to adjustments in relations between owners and tenants, but:

Very little has been done to provide land for landless agricultural workers. (84)

Its general conclusion was that little of direct benefit for landless labourers had been achieved.

The inadequacy of agricultural legislation over this period, was admitted even by Congress supporters;

(83) The Planning Commission commented that tenancy and other legislation enacted in recent years did not to any significant extent bear upon the problems of the agricultural workers - The First Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline, Govt. of India, Planning Commission, July 1951 p. 106.
(85) Ibid p. 80.
These enactments[^agrarian legislative measures] ... do not touch all aspects of the problem with regard to the kinds of tenures dealt with by them. There remain vast sections of the actual tillers to whom the hands of protection have not yet been extended.(86)

Under the Congress and Congress-backed ministries there was little improvement as far as the agricultural labourers were concerned. An analysis of the Rural Credit Survey, the two Agricultural Labour Enquiries of 1951-52 and 1956 and the Report of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee of 1949, reveals several trends indicative of the period 1947 to 1957. Broadly these are an increase in fragmentation due to the nature of the land system and pressure on land; an increase in the percentage of agricultural labourers, that is those depending on agricultural labour as a primary means of livelihood; a decrease in the average income earned by this group. In the last instance, together with this decrease, there was an increase in rural indebtedness. The debt of the landless labourer and the smaller tenant increased more than that of the other groups.

While the wage rates rose as a whole, the agricultural labourer had nothing to gain from this rise except when paid in kind i.e. in terms of share of the harvest, clothing, etc. According to a survey carried out by the Government in 1954, a comparison between the increase in wages on one hand


(88) Agricultural Labour Enquiry 1950-51 Vols. I and II and the Agricultural Labour Enquiry 1956-57 (Govt. of India, Ministry of Labour). In 1954 the Agricultural Labour Enquiry also carried out a survey on Agricultural Wages in India - Vol. I of this has been cited in this chapter.
and prices on the other during the past decade in Travancore-Cochin, showed that agricultural wages had lagged behind the prices of articles (89) commonly used by labouring families. For example the price of rice, the staple food had gone up 8.50 times but increase in wages for the same period was less. Wages for ploughing and sowing had gone up only 4.5 times, and it was only in harvesting, which was less strenuous than the other two, that wages appeared to have kept pace with the prices:

All other agricultural operations are paid at rates which bear no relation to the striking increase in the prices of paddy, gram, coconut, chillies and gur.(90)

Wages more often than not also went into high interest paid to money-lenders, rates and so on. Acts passed to relieve indebtedness in Malabar district and Travancore-Cochin were not always successful, and some of them:

while reducing the amount of debts sought to be recovered by sale and attachment might have at the same time helped to maintain these debts in respect of which creditors contented themselves with biding their time until the arrival of a more opportune moment for recovery.(91)

Although a direct comparison between the two Agricultural Labour Enquiries cannot be made to ascertain the changing conditions of the agrarian working

(89) Agricultural Labour Enquiry: Agricultural Wages in India Vol. I Section on 'Wages and Prices' in Travancore-Cochin p.289.

(90) Ibid p.290.

(91) All-India Rural Credit Survey Vol. I p.226.
classes, because of differences in definition, certain trends are discernible. There was an increase in the number of agricultural labour households without land, and a fall in wages employment in Kerala. Above all, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that in the period covered by the two Enquiries there was deterioration in the economic condition of the agricultural labourers in Kerala. The size of landholdings decreased on the whole, and the ranks of agricultural labourers was swelled by many tenants who had been displaced by landlords in expectation of forthcoming changes in the land law. These were

(92) For varying opinions on the feasibility of comparison between the two Enquiries see V.R.R.V. Rao (ed): Agricultural Labour in India (Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi, 1962).

A United Nations report points out that although the definition for agricultural labour 'household' was redefined in the Second Agricultural Labour Enquiry, income being used as the criterion for demarcation of agricultural labour families instead of employment, it did not materially affect the constitution of agricultural labour households, as the results of the two Enquiries show that agricultural labour families derived a major part of their income from agricultural wages only - United Nations: Progress in Land Reform: Third Report 1962, p.51 footnotes.

(93) N.A. Khan: 'A Comparison of the Results of the First and Second Agricultural Labour Enquiries' in V.K. Rao (ed): Agricultural Labour in India p.99. Also includes a Table (p.101 Table I) showing increase or decrease in 1956-57 over 1950-51, also p.103 showing decrease in wage employment in Kerala.

(94) H. Laxminarayan in an article entitled: 'Regional Variations in Condition of Agricultural Labourers' writes that despite the inherent difficulties of comparing the results of the two Enquiries, there was a worsening in the economic condition of the agricultural labourers in Kerala, since the First Enquiry (1951-52) - in V.K. Rao (ed): Agricultural Labour in India p.140.

labourers owning a little land, but forced to depend on agricultural labour as the principal means of support.

The implication was that Congress had not achieved much. It had in fact implemented few of its key slogans. Measures passed in the 1930's and 1940's were often relied upon to provide relief, and many of these had long since outlived their usefulness. For example the Malabar Tenancy Act of 1930, later enlarged into the Madras Tenants' and Ryots' Protection Act in 1946, gave temporary protection to some tenants in the Malabar district, but the Act, itself never gave full security of tenure. The Cochin Agriculturists' Relief Act in 1939, which provided for a compulsory scaling down of debts, was still in existence, long after it had ceased to be effective. Few applications were made under the Act, even after 1941, as the following figures show:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Applications disposed of</th>
<th>Total Amount Involved</th>
<th>Av. Amount per Application disposed of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1945-46</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20,871</td>
<td>1,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6,342</td>
<td>1,262 (97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly only a very small number took advantage of the Travancore Debt Relief Act of 1940.

In terms of the extent to which the agrarian structure in Kerala had been affected by developments in the post-war years, whether by the enforcement of land reforms, or the fear of coming land reform, or other

(96) For detailed account of this Act see G.D. Patel: The Indian Land Problem and Legislation (N.M. Tripathi, Bombay, 1954) pp.311-313 - An excellent text on the nature of agrarian legislation up to 1954.

(97) From All-India Rural Credit Survey: Vol. I p. 225.
factors, Daniel Thorner, a noted authority on the agrarian question and quoted previously in this chapter, observed of Travancore-Cochin and Malabar, that these were among areas of 'little change or very little change'. His general conclusion was that in spite of Congress legislation, the core of the agrarian problem remained unaffected. The progress of any far-reaching reform was constantly impeded by the inability of Congress to pursue a line acceptable to both the right and more radical views within its party. The left-wing pressed for a radical view, demanding that the proposals made by Congress at the beginning of its term of office be implemented; the right-wing wanted to preserve the status-quo by insisting on a more conservative line, which meant further review and delay of any proposed basic reform. Congress was unable to take the initiative in sponsoring the type of reforms essential to a 'balanced development of the rural economy', because it was the more conservative elements that dominated its policy making. Thomas Shea, in his studies in South India, found that this was because of the Congress' relationship with the wealthier sections of the community. These were the people they depended upon for support and who generally, according to Shea, 'oppose all legislation aimed at altering the traditional system in rural areas'. It was this too, that decided the fate of the

(98) Daniel Thorner: *The Agrarian Prospect in India* p. 29 - He makes this comment in terms of the extent to which the older agrarian structure of the region has been affected by developments after 1945, either in regard to 'enforcement of local reform laws, fear of coming land reform or other factors'.

(99) Thomas J. Shea: *Agrarian Unrest and Reform in South India* p. 82.
resolutions made by the Congress Economic Programme Committee. The resolutions had advocated ceilings on landholdings and incomes, abolition of non-cultivating landlords. It was characteristic that these basic recommendations were thoroughly rejected. The Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee had also come out flatly in favour of a ceiling to the size of holdings that any one farmer should own and cultivate. It was firmly of the opinion that there was no place in Indian agriculture for intermediaries. Ceilings on landholdings, as far as Kerala was concerned, did not mean so much the limiting of large scale landholding per se but landlordism. It has been shown that the Kerala region is primarily one of small landholdings and the problem is scarcity of land. However the imposition of ceilings, if implemented rigorously would have curbed large scale landlordism. By stipulating that landholders could hold a specified area of land of self-cultivation only, it would have cut down on intermediaries by making it illegal to lease out land not cultivated by the holder for his own use. It would also have discouraged fragmentation. The First Five Year Plan outlined ceilings on landholdings, the abolition of intermediaries and security to tenants as of major importance, but little was done to

(100) See Daniel Thorner: The Agrarian Prospect in India pp. 55-56.
(102) A United Nations report on land reform makes the point that landlordism in Asia, may be termed 'absentee landlordism' but not in the Western sense - 'Absentee ownership is important in so far as non-residence leads to a growth of intermediary rent collectors who take a share in the product and so increase the burden of rents, but it has no effect on the supply of capital' - United Nations: Progress in Land Reform 1954 - Analysis of replies by Governments to a U.N. questionnaire. (U.N., N.Y., 1954) p. 20.
(103) First Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline. Chapter 4 on 'Reorganisation of Agriculture'.
settle the conflict over how far legislation should go. While the First Five Year Plan had recommended ceilings on holdings, it left the various States the responsibility of setting the limits. This in itself was a drawback as the State Governments were far from enthusiastic. An illustration of this attitude was their response to the Planning Commission's request for statistics in order to work out an agricultural reform programme. The Commission's work was held up by innumerable delays due to the reluctance of many States to provide the information required.

When the data was finally collected, it tended to minimize the extent of concentration of land-ownership and thus cast doubts on the advisability of placing ceilings at all. Travancore-Cochin, for example, only after much pressure from the Centre, finally agreed to take a census covering one out of every ten villages, which was still inadequate. While the Planning Commission could suggest several lines of reform, actual drafting and implementation of tenancy laws was the exclusive responsibility of the States. Although the Central Government was Congress run, as were the States' Governments, the Provincial Congress Governments differed widely in their attitudes. In the Kerala area, legislation was delayed, largely because the ministries under Congress rule had been 'hesitant about instituting comprehensive reform'. Thus while in theory, Congress and the Congress Governments, were committed to a limitation of landholdings, 

(104) 'We are ... in favour of the principle that there should be an upper limit to the amount of land that any individual may hold'. - Planning Commission - First Five Year Plan p. 168 quoted in Prasada Rao Congress Agrarian Reforms (published by All-India Kisan Sabha) p. 13.
(105) Daniel Thorner: The Agrarian Prospect in India p. 65.
in practice little in this direction had been actually implemented, and Congress was increasingly becoming aligned with the wealthier landed (107) groups. This was particularly true of Kerala. It is this, in fact, that sums up the failure of Congress in Kerala, as far as agrarian discontent was concerned. It was a failure that worked to the advantage of the Left. The growing conservatism of the Congress made it reluctant to espouse any radical change, and added to the growing disillusionment among its younger members, many of whom turned to the Left. It was this reluctance that partly decided the fate of the 1954 ministry of the P.S.P. headed by Pattom Thanu Pillai. This ministry had, during its brief term of office, presented an agrarian bill that would have gone a long way towards implementing the original promises made by Congress. The bill however never got off the ground. Congress, on whom the P.S.P. ministry depended for its existence, withdrew its support, and the Pattom Thanu Pillai government collapsed. The most dramatic provisions of this proposed 'Restriction on Possession and Ownership of Land Bill' were that no family (of five persons) were to be allowed to own or hold (as owner or tenant) more than fifteen acres of double-crop paddy land. A family which held over this limit was required to dispose of the excess within six months after the date on which the Act took effect. The New Congress Government which succeeded the P.S.P. ministry, amended the Bill and suggested

(107) One commentator writing as recently as 1968 says: 'In Kerala the role of the Congress is still further pronounced in safe-guarding the interests of the landowning classes'. - Kulsum Hyder Ali Khan: 'Politics of the Congress High Command' in Mainstream 27th April 1968, p. 28.

(108) See Chapter One for an account of this.
that the limit be raised from fifteen to twenty-five acres, an increase of nearly sixty-six and two-thirds percent. The Congress Committee was blamed for whittling down the reforms, and the Party came in for a strong attack, particularly from the Left.

Congress reluctance to initiate radical reform was further in evidence by the delaying tactics often employed to slow down the implementation of reform. In Travancore-Cochin, the pace was dictated by landed and other interests who wanted to go as slowly and as cautiously as possible. They offered several excuses for delaying tenancy legislation; for example they would plead the need for a thorough review of existing statutes before initiating proposed reform or they would also argue the necessity for drafting legislation only after making a comprehensive inquiry into land records, the economic conditions of different sections of the agricultural population, or views of specialists, and so on. Tenancy Bills could also be 'sabotaged' in the Committee stage and during Legislative Assembly debates. The appointment of Committees was a particularly effective way of delaying action, for discussions on the appointment of Committees lingered on interminably. An instance of this was the appointment of the

(109) Daniel Thorner: The Agrarian Prospect in India, p. 35.

(110) See New Age (W) 3rd July 1955 cols. 1,2,3, p. 14. There was also a controversy within Congress ranks, over ceilings on landholdings elsewhere. In 1953 the Delhi State Govt's Draft Bill for land reforms, provided for enforcement of ceilings on present holdings, but this provision was later dropped. Although Nehru emphasised that it was up to the State Governments to make the decisions, it was felt that the Centre had been persuaded into not making changes to the existing form - editorial on Land Reforms in The Hindu Weekly Review, 23rd Nov., 1953, p. 2.

Cochin Agrarian Problems Committee in 1949. This Committee made very basic recommendations that the Government shelved, saying it needed time to consider them. Two years later, instead of implementing the proposals, another committee was formed in 1951, the Travancore-Cochin Land Policy Committee. This typically made proposals that were never put into practice. Apart from the delays caused by the kind of attitudes described above, the entire process of what Daniel Thorner terms the 'life-cycle' of legislation was time consuming and cumbersome. The considerable length of time that elapsed between the first introduction of land reform legislation and eventual enforcement, often consolidated the position of landholding interests, and weakened the faith of the peasant. The wide gap between agrarian proposals and implementation was always present.

It was a measure of the achievements of the various Congress ministries since 1947 in Kerala, that even at the time of the general elections of 1957, it was making the same promises with regard to agrarian reform, that it had made a decade ago. In the late nineteenth century, William Logan had pin-pointed the most important step that was required to provide

(112) See Karuna Mijkerji: Land Reforms.
(113) Daniel Thorner: The Agrarian Prospect in India p.16.
(114) An illustration of the kinds of attitudes that caused Congress to fail in Kerala, may be seen by an example of its pre-war approach to the agrarian problem, for the conditions present in this period were similar, and in fact, intensified after 1947. Robert Crane in a study of Congress and the agrarian problems of U.P., observes again and again that the Congress record was not good in the matter of agrarian reform - in U.P., which was regarded as foremost in the matter of agrarian reform, Congress basically failed to make the changes it had promised. (See Robert Crane: 'The I.N.C. and the Agrarian Problem 1919-1939'). If this was true of U.P., then in Kerala region which was largely in the backwaters of agrarian reform, Congress had remained stagnant.
any kind of a solution to the agrarian problems of Kerala. He wrote:

... it is obvious that the person to whom the first consideration is due is the actual cultivator of the soil, whatever he be, proprietor, farmer, a labourer. It is he who, by his industry and skill, pays the Government revenue and contributes to the general welfare of the State ... The mistake made in 1818 (as far at least as regards Malabar) was to drop the actual cultivator out of sight, and to substitute for him an ideal 'ryot'.(115)

In 1957, Congress was still saying that it was the 'actual cultivator', the 'tiller of the soil', who had to especially be considered, and reiterating the need for something to be done. At the Conference of the All-India Congress Committee at Agra in July 1953, for example, one of the important resolutions passed was with regard to the distribution of land, and part of this read:

... much yet remains to be done in order to make the actual tillers of the soil, the owners of the land. The State Governments should take immediate steps in regard to the collection of the requisite land data and the fixation of ceilings on landholdings, with a view to redistribute the land, as far as possible among landless workers.(117)

The call for 'immediate' action was always there, but the problem was the gap between promise and action. This gulf was already apparent by the end of 1947, as one observer states:

(115) The 1818 British Board of Revenue defined Ryot as 'that particular class only among them ("the cultivators of the soil in general")... who employ, superintend, and sometimes assist the labourer, and who are everywhere the farmers of the country, the creators and payers of land revenue.' - But as Logan points out, the mistake lay in regarding the rights of the janmis, kanakkars and pattakars as equivalent to those of the 'ryot', whereas many janmis and kannakkars and some pattakars had no title whatever to be regarded as 'cultivators' or 'farmers', 'creators', or even 'payers' of the land revenue. Both from W. Logan: Malabar Vol. I, p. 678 and p. 679, respectively.

(116) Ibid p. 679. Logan's emphasis.

(117) Text of this resolution in H.D. Malaviya: Land Reform in India p. 95.
Slogans, promises and hopes for major land reform spread throughout the countryside during and after the 1945-46 election campaigns far more rapidly than the pace of effective political organisation in support of such action. (118)

In effect the basic problems remained unaffected. Some of the legislation had, true enough, removed some of the worst features of economic exploitation - some fixity of tenure was granted, and steps taken towards fair rents; rent courts were set up in Malabar in November 1954. But legislation had not solved the fragmentation or sub-division of holdings, and most of all, had not created conditions where the agricultural labourer could earn a decent wage. The Minimum Wages Act of 1948, for which Congress claimed much credit, had yet to be implemented in Kerala. In March 1954 the Ministry of Labour announced that the Government would implement the Minimum Wages Act in respect to agricultural labourers without delay, but since the matter was left to the States, there was much delay in putting into practice. Agrarian proposals were made more often than not, to counteract the pressure of leftist agitations and to gain votes. However many of the proposals remained vague, as the Leftists were quick to point out. In an amendment to its 1957 Election Manifesto, the Congress Party made special mention of the plight of the landless labourers, but made only vague promises towards remedying the situation, such as '...


Even when legally passed, the Minimum Wages Act often worked against tenants (both with land and share-croppers) - for example the landlord would withdraw clothes, loans, gifts on births, deaths and festivals, traditionally given to their labour, for the minimum wage which was more to the disadvantage of these people.
'... there should be expansion opportunities, fixation of minimum wages, allotment of house sites and free settlement schemes'. It also reiterated its goal as socialism but what the nature or extent of this socialism was, it did not elaborate. The C.P.I. raised this objection, in its paper the **New Age**:

> ... nowhere does the Manifesto state specifically what the Congress proposes to do during the next five years. Nor does it make an effort to define in clear lines what it means by socialism.

Congress and Congress controlled Governments had failed in Kerala adequately to deal with the agrarian situation. The same problems plagued the administrators in 1957 that had been present in the last century, and there was a growing alienation of the rural masses, from Congress, an alienation that was marked by Communist entrenchment in the rural areas. Kisan Sabhas soon came to be largely dominated by Communists or Communist supporters. Painstaking efforts were made by the Communists in the villages with the poorer sections, particularly agricultural labour. The first basis of the Communist Party was in fact their influence in the villages, influence that was largely possible because of agrarian discontent. By 1957 the appeal of the Congress had waned as far as the rural masses were concerned, and its legislative record did not inspire

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(121) Ajoy Ghosh's article 'Into the Battle' in *New Age* 13th Jan., 1957, p. 3. Nehru in reply to the last criticism, stated that he did not see why he had to define socialism in precise, rigid terms, when it was something that should not be rigid - *The Statesman* 5th Jan. 1957 p. 7 cols. 1,2.

much confidence. It was this that contributed substantially to its failure in the elections of 1957, and it was this that gave the Communists a tremendous advantage. The Communists engaged strongly in anti-Congress propaganda, and its most convincing argument was provided by Congress, in the ability of the Leftists to point out the defects of the Congress approach to the agrarian problem and to put forward its own proposals for reform.

(123) Thomas J. Shea says of Congress legislation in the South: 'Agrarian reform in South India has been slow and uneven, suggestive more of sporadic, grudging concessions, to the pressure of Communist agitation than an integrated attempt to reorganise the agricultural sector of the economy in the interest of social welfare and increased productivity' - 'Agrarian Unrest and Reform in South India' p. 81.
CHAPTER IV

COMMUNIST TACTICS

It has been the theme of this thesis that the Communist victory of 1957, was not a sudden surprise sprung upon an unsuspecting electorate. It was the climax, for the moment at least, of a process that had begun as far as the early years of the century, and predictable given the conditions prevalent in Kerala. We have already examined important aspects of this in the chapters on agrarian, social and political instability. Another significant factor was the nature of Communist policy in 1957, in an environment where it was able to take advantage of existing discontent, and win at the polls. It is with its development to this point, that this chapter will concern itself.

By 1957 disenchantment with Congress over political instability and agrarian resentment, enabled the Communists to present themselves as the Party of opposition. But it was more than just another party of opposition in the conglomeration of political parties that characterised the Kerala political scene at the time. The significant fact was that the voters were willing to give the Communists a chance, and that the slogan of an alternative government presented by the Communists, was viewed by many not just as an electioneering propaganda cry, but a feasible idea. In other words, a Communist government seemed to offer a real and attractive alternative. The reason for this situation was not only that the people of Kerala, or at least a large majority of them felt a sense of disillusionment at the lack of progress in the State under Congress, a disillusionment that has been analysed previously, but it was also because the Communist approach
appeal to even moderate opinion for support.

Before assessing the nature of this new approach, it would be necessary to trace the development of Communist policy up to the 1957 elections in Kerala. The victorious party at that election was the end product, for the time being, of a series of changes in party attitudes that the Communist Party of India (C.P.I.) in general had been undergoing ever since its beginnings as a fledgling political group in the early 1930's. Before one can understand the Kerala Communist Party, it is necessary to know the background against which its activities were played, and that background was the C.P.I. The Kerala party emerged out of the C.P.I., and developments within Kerala and its impact on the thinking of the national party through the Kerala party were to have a great deal of influence on the future of the C.P.I. as a whole. This was particularly true of major developments regarding, to anticipate the content of this chapter, for example the recognition of the importance of the peasant in the Socialist Revolution, and the adoption of a policy whereby the bourgeoisie could be included as allies. The Kerala victory of 1957 was important therefore not only in terms of the context of the State itself, but also in its repercussions on the policies of the C.P.I.

The early history of the Communist Party in Kerala is mainly that of the C.P.I. There was little in the early stages of this regional group to distinguish it from the mother party. When in 1957 Elamkulam Mana

(1) There is little primary material available here on the growth of the Party & in Kerala, but sources that have provided much useful and well-documented (2) material on the C.P.I. as a whole have been: Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller: *Communism in India* (Univ. of Calif. Press, Berkeley 1959) John H. Kautsky: *Moscow and the Communist Party of India: A Study in Postwar...
Sankaran Namboodiripad took the oath as the Chief Minister of the Communist led State of Kerala, the Communist movement in Kerala was less than thirty years old. The first Communist organisation had been the Communist League, formed in Trivandrum (now the capital of Kerala State) between 1930-31. Up to 1939 the Communists functioned, both at the national and regional level, within the Congress Socialist Party, then a branch of the Indian National Congress. The majority of prominent Communist leaders in Kerala, in fact began their political careers in the nationalist movement, then represented almost wholly by the I.N.C., which had one of its branches in Kerala. In Malabar for example, where a unit of the I.N.C. had been in existence since 1921, the leadership while in the hands of wealthy landlords, included active members such as E.M.S. Namboodiripad, A.K. Gopalan, K.P. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai, names later to become prominent in the leadership of the Communist Party of the area, and at the national level. Namboodiripad himself made his first acquaintance with Marxist radicalism through his association with the Nationalist movement. Involved in the movement for Independence as a college student, in 1932 he joined the Civil Disobedience campaign and went to prison. It was in

(2) Same notes as for (1) above.
(3) For the early background see K.P. Karunakaran: 'Social Background of Political Radicalism in Kerala' in Iqbal Narain (ed): State Politics in India, pp.163-64.
(4) Ibid.
prison that he first came into contact with Marxist literature. The formation of the Congress Socialist Party, the C.S.P., within the I.N.C. drew most of the Communists in Kerala into the fold of the Socialist Party. The Communists found an environment more suited to their ideas in the Socialist Party. As one prominent Kerala Communist, A.K. Gopalan comments on this period:

Very radical changes were taking place inside Congress, and there emerged a well-defined group of revolutionary Congressmen, who, though organizationally within Congress, were outside the sphere of Gandhian leadership.

Particularly after the Bardoli decision was taken to withdraw the mass non-co-operation movement, differences between younger members of the I.N.C. and orthodox leaders became wide and with the suppression of the Civil Disobedience movement in 1934, radicals welcomed the formation of the C.S.P. within the Kerala Congress Party. The Communists became very influential within the Socialist Party in Kerala, for they confined their activities primarily within the Party (it was possible then to be a Communist and a Congressman simultaneously). In 1934, when the Congress Socialist Party was first formed within the Congress Party, Namboodiripad was joint secretary of the Socialist Party in Kerala and secretary of the Kerala Provincial Congress, the Malabar branch of the I.N.C. In 1939

(5) See New Age - (references to this publication refer to the Communist Weekly of the C.P.I.) 7th April 1957 - special issue containing a homage to the Kerala Chief Minister entitled, 'A Profile of E.M.S.'/ Also Marshall Windmiller: 'Constitutional Communism in India' in Pacific Affairs March 1958 Vol. 31 p. 25.


(8) 'A Profile of E.M.S.' in New Age 7th April 1957.
he was returned unopposed to the Madras Legislative Assembly on a Congress ticket. In the same year serious differences arose within the Socialist Party over attitudes to the second World War and the Party split. Within the Socialist Party too there was growing resentment and what was felt to be a Communist takeover within the Party. Namboodiripad, leading the extreme Left group, left the Party, taking with him most of the members of the C.S.P. and founded the Kerala Communist Party (K.C.P.) In effect though, in the face of accusations of Communist dominance, rather than openly expelling the Communists, M.R. Masani says that the Kerala Socialist Party was allowed to be run by the Communists i.e. that the leaders of the I.N.C. particularly people like Jayaprakash Narayan failed to take strong action against Communist activities within the Party or were not aware of what was taking place. Thus the Kerala Communist Party (K.C.P.) that E.M.S. Namboodiripad formed was in reality the C.S.P. since it took with it most of the membership of that Party in Kerala. Kerala was to remain a Communist stronghold in the years to come. The Party was formed out of the Kerala Provincial Committee in Malabar, the Cochin Congress, the Praja Mandalam in Cochin State, the State Congress and Youth League in Travancore.

(9) Ibid. Malabar was until 1956 part of the Madras Presidency.
(10) For a Communist account of this see New Age 17th March 1957 p. 8.
(11) M.R. Masani: The Communist Party of India p. 69. Minoo R. Masani, one of the founder members of the Congress Socialist Party, he came into very close contact with the Communists but later became their avowed enemy. He repeatedly warned the leaders of the C.S.P. of the danger of a Communist take-over.
(12) Jayaprakash Narayan, the foremost leader of the C.S.P., was particularly keen that the Communists should not be alienated from the socialist movement. A Communist during his student days, he had renounced Bolshevism but was eager to unify the various Marxist groups under the C.S.P.
(13) Ibid. All these organisations except the Youth League were offshoots of the Congress Nationalist movement.
With the formation of these Left wing elements into a political party, the history of its fortunes was closely connected to policies dictated by the C.P.I. The activities of the K.C.P. were to be carried out against the background of decisions made by the C.P.I., and it is to this aspect that we now turn. The Kerala Communist Party had come into being at a time when the C.P.I. was espousing United Front tactics, tactics which to put it briefly aimed at the consolidation of left-wing elements in the Congress. It was also hoped to infiltrate the Congress leadership, through activities within the I.N.C. aiming at Communist party members holding important posts within the I.N.C. A major force in this move was the influence of R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.), a guiding light to the C.P.I. during the 1940's and 1950's. The infiltration of the Communists into the Socialist Party was greatly aided by the enthusiasm of Jayaprakash Narayan, at this time General Secretary of the Socialist Party, who saw in this United Front, a chance for Socialist unity. The tolerance of the leadership of the C.S.P. towards the Communists, made possible the taking over by the latter, of important positions. For example by 1937-38, the C.S.P. had two Communists as joint secretaries and two others in the Executive Committee.

(14) For an account of this period and prior to the birth of Kerala Communism, as well as the texts mentioned the following works have been very useful: M.R. Masani: The Communist Party of India and Madhu Limaye: Communist Party: Facts and Fiction (Chetana Prakashan Ltd., Hyderabad, Deccan, 1951). Although both these writers are Socialists and anti-Communists, their close acquaintance with C.P.I. proceedings gave them direct access to C.P. documents which were subsequently published in the above works. I have found them of value in obtaining notes and quotations regarding C.P. documents.


(17) Ibid p. 68.
In Kerala, as mentioned previously, this kind of infiltration resulted in a virtual take-over of the C.S.P. by the Communists. Communist activity within the C.S.P. at the national level, almost wrecked the Party. Four of its founding members, Achut Patwardhan, Rammanohar Lohia, Asoka Mehta (18) and M.R. Masani, resigned in protest. Jayaprakash Narayan in a statement made in 1941, soon after this, admitted the error of previous C.S.P. policy towards the C.P. and stated:

It is desirable once for all to give up vague talk of unity with the Communist Party.(19)

Ever since its beginnings as an independent political party, the C.P.I. had attempted to adhere to international Communist policies, which were chiefly embodied either in Moscow directives or instructions from the C.P.G.B. From its early days, the movement was associated with a foreign power and never really taken seriously by many Indians. It was noted for its often unimaginative approach to the Indian environment and its incredible mindlessness in matters of strategy. Its dependence on foreign advice, for example Moscow, in matters of party strategy was to cost the Party dear in terms of its understanding of what was needed in the Indian situation. Kautsky in his study of Moscow’s relationship with the C.P.I. sees the most glaring mistake of the C.P.I. as always attempting to give

(18) Ibid p. 75.


(20) For an excellent discussion on the C.P.I.’s relations with Moscow see John H. Kautsky: Moscow and the C.P.I. and David N. Druhe: Soviet Russia and Indian Communism.
the same answers as Moscow to the three major questions determining Communist strategy— who was at any given time the main enemy, and hence, what classes and groups were eligible as allies of Communism, and lastly the kind of alliance to be formed with them. The end of the second world war thus saw the Party largely unpopular and discredited. It had opposed the nationalist-inspired Quit India Campaign, it had opposed and then supported the Allied side during the war in response to Moscow's directives. Its change of slogan from 'Imperialist War' to 'Peoples War' only confirmed the belief of most people that the C.P.I. was a puppet of the Moscow Party.

In the general elections to the Central Legislative Assembly in 1945, it did not carry a single constituency.

During the second world war, party policy had consisted of a constant shift between what was termed 'left' and 'right' strategies, the change being usually influenced by opinion abroad, particularly in the Soviet Union. 'Right' strategy regarded imperialism, feudalism as the main enemies of socialism. It envisaged first a bourgeoisie-democratic and only later on a proletarian socialist revolution. This strategy called for an alliance of the C.P.I. with anti-imperialist and anti-feudal elements, both labour and bourgeoisie. It advocated the United Front "from above"


(22) I do not propose to discuss Communist policy prior to 1947 except in the briefest terms, since I am concerned with developments after 1947, in so far as they affected the situation in Kerala.
or Popular Front tactics. The 'left' strategy regarded foreign imperialism and capitalism as the main enemies. Thus while the Right strategy advocated co-operation with the native bourgeoisie, the Left hoped for an early Socialist revolution merging with or even eliminating the bourgeoisie-democratic revolution. It sought a United Front 'from below' in its appeal to the workers, poor peasants and petty bourgeoisie. It exhorted these groups as individuals or local organisations to leave labour and bourgeois parties and work within the Communist movement.

These two strategies Right and Left, were represented respectively by two men during the 1940's and 1950's, P.C. Joshi and B.T. Ranadive. Ranadive, a strong opponent of any moderate line, rose into prominence within the Party in Bombay and was the leader of an ultra-leftist faction. An opponent of the Dutt-Bradley policy of moderation in the C.P.I.'s attitude towards the Congress, he had been temporarily suspended from the Party. However when he led the opposition against P.C. Joshi's moderate line, he became the general secretary of the C.P.I. in 1948. Joshi, generally regarded as the leader of the rightist faction within the Party was elected general secretary in 1935. Joshi had advocated support of the I.N.C. and the nationalist movement as part of the fight against imperialism, but he soon lost control of the Party to Ranadive, who took over in 1948. The Party was henceforth to come under the Left line directives favoured by Ranadive. This involved working against the I.N.C. and opposing the nationalist movement as a pro-Capitalist, pro-feudal body and as a bourgeois

(23) Taken mainly from John H. Kautsky: Moscow and the C.P.I. p. 183.
dominated reactionary group. Throughout the post-war period, Moscow remained indecisive, more concerned with affairs within its own organisation rather than Indian Communists. Thus the Indians lacked any clear directive from the Russians on the course to follow. Russia, could however have done little at this stage, because it had not as yet developed any 'line' for the Indian situation. The Indians in spite of this, still sought their direction from outside, their attitude to the Nationalist movement being indicative of their failure to grasp the realities of Indian events. By December 1947 C.P.I. policy had undergone a complete reversal from Joshi's moderate line, and by March 1948, Ranadive was the recognised leader of the C.P.I. which was disastrous as far as the political future of the Party was concerned. It ushered in a period of violent, including terrorist activity. In Kerala the Punnapura-Vayalur incidents where several people were killed as the result of a Communist inspired peasant riot and the Telengana rebellion in Hyderabad were (24) products of this period of violence. It did much damage especially to the popular appeal of the Party in Kerala. It did not make a mark in the elections in Travancore which it contested in 1948 after adult suffrage had been introduced in this State. In Travancore-Cochin, after the integration of the two princely States, the militant tactics employed by the Party

(24) The Kerala incident provided martyrs for the rhetoric of the Party e.g. the New Age writes of this incident: "An unforgettable saga of heroism for the coir workers of Alleppey who in their thousands fought there". New Age March 17, 1957 pp. 8-9.
caused the State Government to ban the K.C.P. which had as a result to work underground. The Government of Madras tightened its security measures and had to send troops to Andhra and Malabar, among the most affected areas. Communist violence reached the point where the Central Government became seriously perturbed. Prime Minister Nehru in a speech to the Constituent Assembly in February 1949 articulated a generally held opinion when he said:

The Communist Party of India has, during the past year, adopted an attitude not only of open hostility to the Government, but one which can be described as bordering on open revolt. This policy has been given effect to intensively in certain limited areas of India and has resulted in violence, indulging in murders, arson, and looting as well as acts of sabotage.(26)

This 'adventurist' policy pursued by the Party heightened the sense that the Communists were alienated from the body of Indian opinion. This feeling is seen in its more extreme form in Masani's statement in 1951 that the Communists:

constitute primarily a fifth column in the Soviet Union and not a political group concerned primarily with the problems and needs of the Indian people.(27)

A similar attitude persisted when the Communist Party contested the 1952 elections in Travancore-Cochin, although by this time there were signs that the Kerala party was pursuing a new line:

The Indian Communists know they are playing with fire, but their conscience is in the safe-keeping of Moscow.(28)

(25) From Govt. pamphlet 'Communist Violence in India' (pub. by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Delhi, Sept. 1949).

(26) At this time part of Madras.


Madhu Limaye writes (although his, as is Masani's a biased view): "... the most characteristic feature of Indian Communism is its utter lack of self reliance and self assurance, and its total and unqualified subservience to and pathetic dependence upon the directives and lead from abroad" - Communist Party: Facts and Fiction p.15.
A movement of enormous significance to international Communism and Indian Communism had been taking place in the development of Chinese Communism under the leadership of Mao-Tse-Tung. The tactics employed by Mao were to introduce a new element into the controversy regarding the correct line the C.P.I. should take. The adoption of Maoist tactics in the form of what was commonly known as Neo-Maoism, was to be particularly significant in the strategy employed by the Communist Party in Kerala. Namboodiripad had been greatly interested in the Chinese revolution and in the writings of Mao-Tse-Tung and was one of the three C.P.I. leaders who attended the Eighth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in September 1956. Neo-Maoism like the 'Right' strategy of Joshi's faction saw the two main enemies of socialism as imperialism and feudalism, and expected two separate revolutions, the bourgeoisie-democratic and only later the socialist revolution. Taking his basic starting point from Lenin, Mao had emphasised that the two stage process, that is the democratic and then the socialist was a necessary preparation for the ultimate socialist revolution. Mao thus rejected what he called 'Right opportunism' which did not look beyond the first stage and neglected the necessity for struggle, and 'Left opportunism' which only aimed at the socialist revolution through struggle. Like the 'Right' strategy Neo-Maoism


sought an alliance with workers, peasants, petit bourgeoisie and the
anti-imperialist bourgeoisie. However unlike the 'Right' and more like the
Left it approached these groups not from above through the major political
parties, but 'from below' i.e. groups in opposition to these parties. A
United Front from below and including sections of the bourgeoisie, is the
characteristic distinguishing the Neo-Maoist strategy from its Right and
Left predecessors. These United Front tactics strongly influenced
the Party's thinking in Kerala, and Mao's elaboration of his idea of what
constituted the United Front was subsequently adapted to the Indian
situation, but initially in South India only. Mao stressed the need for
a broad United Front in certain conditions. These certain conditions were
in colonial or semi-colonial countries where it was possible for the
proletariat to establish an understanding with the national bourgeoisie,
since the latter were also oppressed by imperialism. The mistake of 'Left
opportunism', as Mao called it, was to isolate the proletariat and the
poor peasant, thus there was 'all struggle and no unity'. The Left
rejected the idea of unity because it had not recognised the dual character
of the national bourgeoisie, while the Right had committed the same error
and denied the necessity for struggle. Mao steered a course between the
two. The essence of the Maoist Revolution was thus unity with the
bourgeoisie as well as struggle against them. Such a national front was
the realisation of 'the consistency of the national struggle with the class

(32) Mao-Tse-Tung: 'Problems of Independence and Autonomy within the United
Front' in Chen Po-Ta: Mao-Tse-Tung on the Chinese Revolution pp.45-56.
Mao's contribution lay in making the most extensive use of the contradictory role of the bourgeoisie in a colonial country, in recognising the dualism of this class in a pre-industrial society. His theories on the role of the bourgeoisie are not strikingly original, but rather drew its basis from Leninism. Lenin had pointed out that the national bourgeoisie in colonial or semi-colonial countries were also oppressed along with other sections of society by imperialism, and hence could play a vital part in the revolution. Mao built on this, to develop a strategy that brought in the bourgeoisie groups, but did not, as the Right had tended to and as Soviet policy in the under-developed areas often foundered, but did not subordinate the struggle to the interests of the bourgeoisie.

In his work 'The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party' this is made very clear = broad collaboration, but leadership of the proletariat from the beginning to the end of the revolution.

In Kerala this approach was to be eagerly applied by the K.C.P. It sharply rejected the anti-bourgeois line of the extreme Leftists, advocated a United Front which included sections of the bourgeoisie, and was also a new approach to peasant involvement. In an agrarian country like China

(33)"Problems of Independence and Autonomy within the United Front" Ibid.

Mao had emphasised the importance of revolutionary bases among the peasantry, and the significance of the peasantry in the establishment of Socialism. (35) The new approach towards the bourgeoisie and the role it could play in the initial bourgeois-democratic revolution, enabled the Communist Party in Kerala, in 1957, to claim to represent not only the exploited classes but the smaller capitalists, as well. They could claim legitimacy for their tactics by citing Mao's 'bloc of four classes' approach which was to result in the 'New Democracy' rather than move immediately to the Socialist Revolution. (36) This 'bloc of four classes' strategy may be elaborated on at greater length, since it is particularly relevant to Kerala and to the strategies used by Namboodiripad. An ingenious expedient employed by Mao to make an appeal to national union, he evaluated the strength of the different classes exclusively on numbers, thus minimizing the influence of the bourgeoisie, and effectively answering any criticism that the 'New Democracy' would be bourgeois dominated. The four classes that Mao refers to in the rural context are the middle bourgeoisie who constitute the small landowners, the petty-bourgeoisie who are the peasant-landholders, the semi-poletariat who are the peasants who own part of their land and rent the rest, while the agricultural labourers were the proletariat. The fifth category Mao isolated were the big bourgeoisie who were mainly the big landowners against whom the four other classes would unite. In Kerala the big bourgeoisie were identified with Congress interests.

(37) Stuart R. Schram: The Political Thought of Mao-Tse-Tung p. 203.
(38) From extracts from Mao's article (Analysis of all the Classes in Chinese Society' in Stuart R. Schram: Ibid p. 211.
Initially the Kremlin apparently ignored the implications of Neo-Maoism in international Communism, and Ranadive to the detriment of the Party approached Maoism as a reinforcement of the need for a violent revolution, and hence guerrilla warfare and sabotage. This resulted in the alienation mentioned before and the banning of the Party in Kerala, among other things. This militant line followed by Ranadive however further weakened the unity of the Party, already barely recovered from the vacillations of the Party's war policies. Not only was Ranadive's leadership felt to be detrimental but controversy arose with regard to the Party's attitude to the Congress Government. The accepted Communist line up to the 1950's had seen the two major goals of democratic forces as freedom and peace - Britain and capitalism were the main enemies and India under the leadership of the I.N.C. was still regarded as being under imperialist control. At the Madurai Conference of the Party, it was decided that the British Government was the chief enemy of freedom, this in contradiction to the Nehru Government which regarded American imperialism as the main threat to India. Problems soon arose over the feasibility of this approach. Nehru had improved relations with the U.S.S.R., while Panch Shila and Chou-en-Lais visit to India brought apparent peaceful co-existence with China. Centrists within the Party such as A. Ghosh and E.M.S. Namboodiripad advocated some kind of co-operation with the Congress Government. Ghosh for example, proposed either co-operation and criticism of

(39) Documents purporting to be those circulated at this Congress were subsequently published by the Democratic Research Service in Indian Communist Party Documents 1930-56 (Bombay, 1957) and Communist Conspiracy at Madurai (Popular Book Depot, Bombay, March 1954).
specific acts or opposition and support for specific acts. P.

Ramamurthy, the editor of the New Age at this time, prepared in 1954, a slogan for a 'national platform for peace and freedom' that advocated support for any moves for peace, and attacked the U.S. as the chief aggressor. Although at the time the Central Committee was sharply against what it termed 'reformism' within the Party, the climate of opinion however was changing. R. Palme Dutt, of the Executive Committee of Great Britain and a guiding influence on the C.P.I., argued the importance of the peace movement in the fight for national independence. He also hinted at a reappraisal of the Party's attitudes towards the Nehru Government, which while still mainly representing the interests of the 'big bourgeoisie', showed signs of limited opposition to the imperialists.

Every step taken in the direction of anti-imperialism was to be welcomed by the Party.

With this single statement, the international Communist policy of irreconcilable hostility toward Nehru, maintained for three years, was replaced by a policy of qualified opposition with the possibility that common ground might be found in the realm of foreign policy.

Dutt also clarified the new line of a broader front, previously postulated.

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(42) R. Palme Dutt 'Situation in India' quoted in Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller 'Communism in India' p. 304.

(43) Ibid.
by P. Ramamurthy, as an agreement with other progressive parties. In an interview with two other Indian Communists in London, Dutt further defined the Communist attitude towards the Nehru Government, identifying two strands of opinion within the Congress Government, one represented by Patel and leaning more heavily on the imperialist side and the other by Nehru which adopted a foreign policy which was not 'always in agreement with the policies of the Anglo-American imperialists'. The Party must apply itself to promoting the anti-imperialist stand. By the time of the Fourth Congress at Palghat on 1st April 1956, the tactic of collaboration with other parties was accepted practice and:

Ramamurthi's heresy of July 1954 has become orthodox doctrine. (47)

As far as the K.C.P. was concerned, this made its own image much more acceptable.

While this kind of thinking promised a more realistic approach to the country's problems, it was also accompanied by a growing tendency away from the extreme militancy of Ranadive, in the United Front tactics that


(45) Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller: Communism in India p.305.

(46) Report of this interview under heading 'Talks with Comrade R. Palme Dutt and Other Impressions Gained Abroad by Deven and Bal Krishna (January-March 1951)' in Democratic Research Service: Indian Communist Party Documents pp.62-70. There seems to be no reason to doubt the authenticity of this report which is mentioned under the same heading as being circulated by the Party Headquarters, and the content being almost identical to the one described by Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller: Communism in India p.305.

were to be so successfully employed in Kerala. Splits were occurring in the Party over the tactics to be employed and these conflicting opinions were particularly apparent at the regional level. Already by the end of 1949, the Party was facing serious dissonance and dwindling membership in its own ranks. P.C. Joshi, expelled from the Party in 1949 over his 'reformist' views, wrote of this period:

Of all our sectarian mistakes this has been the most disastrous, *i.e.* judging the present situation to be a revolutionary one - a reference to Ranadive's policies for it has led to the adoption of tactics suited to an insurrectionary or semi-insurrectionary situation. The result has been that the masses have not responded to our calls and our comrades have landed themselves into the terrorist mire ... Passivity, frustration, demoratisation constitute inner party morale.(49)

The Andhra Communists had already started to move away from Ranadive's directives by broadening their base to include wealthier peasants. This line was promptly attacked by Ranadive as a contradiction to the working class base of the Tamil Nadu party and 'poor peasant' base in areas like Kerala. Andhra justified its policies by drawing the Politburo's attention

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(48) The C.P.I. has seemed to function more effectively at the provincial than at the national level *e.g.* the Party's success in Kerala, Andhra, West Bengal. There was even at times a tendency for the provincial organisations to function indifferent of the Centre. *e.g.* in Andhra - See H. Gelman 'The Communist Party of India: Sino-Soviet Battleground' in A. Barnett (ed): *Communist Strategies in Asia* (Frederick A. Praeger, N.Y. 1963) pp. 103-104.

supported the new strategy of the Chinese, and advocated both the specific Chinese elements of the strategy (rural guerrilla warfare and chief reliance on the peasantry) as well as the more important general policies concerning the concentration on imperialism and feudalism rather than capitalism as the chief enemies. It envisaged as Mao had done, first the 'democratic' revolution and the establishment of the 'New Democracy' prior to the socialist revolution. It called too for united fronts modelled on Mao's theories, with sections of the bourgeoisie, including more well to do elements and the 'rich' peasantry.

This change in direction in South India had enormous repercussions on the line the Kerala Communists were to follow in the next two decades. Maoism provided the party here with a theoretical framework for the United Front strategy that was employed in the State. However the acceptance of the validity of the Chinese approach in Kerala and to the national party had still to be decided on officially.

Initially the Central Committee of the Party refused to accept the premises of the Andhra thesis:


(51) Guerrilla warfare was subsequently eliminated as essential to Communist strategy in India, and at the Amritsar Congress in 1958, peaceful methods were endorsed.

The Communist Party of India has accepted Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin as the authoritative sources of Marxism. It has not discovered new sources of Marxism beyond these. (53)

Ranadive in opposing what he regarded as a 'right' deviation (i.e. collaboration with the peasants and a less rigid interpretation of the proletarian dictatorship) wrote:

They [Mao's formulations] are in contradiction to the world understanding of the Communist parties ... He condemned Mao's theories as 'horrible and reactionary', against the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and did not think they could offer anything to the C.P.I. If the Centre could see no direct relevance, the regional units certainly did, and as Kautsky points out the Leninist (54) basis of Mao's strategies, was never really understood by Ranadive.

The Central Committee however was soon to be persuaded to change its attitude towards the relevance of Maoism to India. The climate of opinion in Moscow was changing towards an approval of Mao's tactics. E.M. Zhukov, an eminent Soviet spokesman on Asian affairs, and head of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Science, had condemned only the 'big bourgeoisie' in contrast to previous Soviet identification of the whole bourgeoisie with imperialism. Zhukov attacked Nehru's government as representative of the big bourgeoisie and hence of monopoly capitalism but hinted at


United Front designed to appeal not only to the petty, but the middle bourgeoisie too. In addition another important Party member, A. Zhdanov, made a much publicised speech to the Cominform in 1949, and subsequently published in the Cominform's journal 'For a Lasting Peace, for a Peoples' Democracy' which elaborated on the line of alliance with bourgeois groups. While Zhdanov emphasised the need for an intensified anti-imperialist campaign in the colonies, and thus an anti-Nehru policy, he did not openly advocate complete anti-capitalism; nor did he state that all the bourgeoisie were reactionary. All the implications of these were not taken much note of, at the time, they were indicative of a change of mood in Moscow. Both advocated two important elements of the Chinese revolution, in combining co-operation with the working class with 'progressive' capitalists. Of considerable importance in convincing Moscow of the significance of China, and also a strong influence on the ideas of Namboodiripad was Liu-Shao-Chi, a leading theoretician of Mao's revolution. Liu maintained that while the party should retain its proletarian character, it was necessary to draw in what he termed, other 'advanced elements':

Only then will it be possible for our Party to become a powerful Party embracing the broad masses of the people.

In the January 27, 1950 issue of the Cominform journal 'For a Lasting Peace, For a Peoples' Democracy', an editorial upheld the line advocated at Andhra and pointed out that the path taken by the Chinese people was one that India could emulate. It quoted Liu-Shao-Chi's directive that India draw from the example of China:

The path taken by the Chinese people ... is the path that should be taken by the people of many colonial and dependent countries in their struggle for national independence and Peoples' Democracy. (59)

A statement by the editorial Board of the Communist, the monthly journal of the C.P.I., subsequently endorsed the arguments put forward, and the validity of the Chinese experiment to India. It favoured the alliance with the bourgeoisie and all anti-imperialist elements. Thus the struggle was not to be limited to the working classes alone:

The working class must unite with all classes, parties, groups and organisations willing to fight the imperialists and their hirelings and to form a broad, nationwide front headed by the working class and its vanguard the Communist Party. (60)

It also, and this was a bold move to make, pointed out that while the Party centre had correctly maintained one of the essential conditions of the victory the Indian revolution, the ruthless struggle against 'all shades of bourgeois nationalism', it had failed to realise that:

(59) From extracts of this article quoted in M.R. Masani: The Communist Party of India p. 103.

(60) 'Statement of the Editorial Board "Communist" on L.P.P.D. article' in Democratic Research Service: Indian Communist Party Documents, p. 52. (L.P.P.D. refers to 'For a Lasting Peace, For a Peoples' Democracy'). This statement is also mentioned briefly in Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller: Communism in India p. 298 as being published in the Communist July-August 1950.
Various sections of the bourgeoisie, mainly belonging to undeveloped nationalities, can still at one time or other play the role of 'fellow-travellers' in the national liberation struggle, that the working can enter into temporary agreements on national democratic issues with those sections of the bourgeoisie for common struggle against imperialism, feudalism and the national big bourgeoisie.(61)

Thus two important elements of Mao's approach were given official approval - that initially it was feudalism and imperialism that were the principal enemies and that the base of the Party's support must be broadened to include sections of the bourgeoisie, and the mass base of the peasants. The May Day Manifesto of the Party in 1951, endorsed the new strategy of United Front 'from below':

Honest Congressmen, and above all, the 'lakhs' of workers, peasants, middle classes, intellectuals, non-monopoly capitalists and other progressives.(62)

This development is highly significant in providing one reason why in 1957 the Kerala Communists were to be considered seriously as an alternative Government. By 1957 the Party was able, in its election manifesto to declare:

The Communist Party recognises that in the present stage of our development, patriotic-minded Indian capitalists, can make an important contribution towards the economic development of our country. The Party desires that Indian industries should be protected against foreign competition, that all legitimate rights of the capitalists should be ensured and that their active co-operation should be secured for implementation of the plan of national reconstruction.(63)

(61) Ibid p.55.
(62) Cross Roads 27 April 1951
This kind of moderate approach, coupled with a situation of deep-seated discontent that previous chapters have examined, made the Communist appeal in Kerala in 1957, a persuasive and attractive one.

There was however another important development with regard to Party strategy, that was important in making its appeal in Kerala as wide as possible. This was the eschewing of violence. The Andhra Communists had brought to the forefront the significance of the Maoist line, but they had also advocated the methods of armed conflict that characterized Neo-Maoism. The Andhra leaders saw the achievement of Socialism through rebellions on the model of the Telengana revolt. E. Zhukov, the high-ranking Soviet authority on Asia, as far as the attitude of the Soviet Union was concerned, seemed to give sanction to violent revolt in India as the path to national liberation. A document published by the Democratic Research Service and purporting to have been circulated to members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party at time of the Third Congress of the Party at Madurai, December 1953, claimed that while resorting to all forms of struggle was necessary, the existing set up in India with its absence of 'genuine democratic liberties', made the establishment of a Peoples' Democratic State, possible only through an armed revolution of the people.


(65) 'Tactical Line (1953)' in Democratic Research Service: Indian Communist Party Documents pp. 72-85. Also published by the same authors under heading Communist Conspiracy at Madurai.
By the 1950's however there were indications of a shift away from violence. On the part of those who advocated Neo-Maoism, there was an increasing tendency to support peaceful Neo-Maoist strategy. Illustrative of this new mood was R. Palme Dutt, who on the feasibility of violent tactics in the new period of the 1950's, dismissed the use of armed struggle in the existing situation in India. Replying to questions specifically on this point, he maintained that while ultimately the revolution in India would take the form of an armed struggle, the conditions existing at the time were unsuitable for this strategy to be pursued successfully. Considerable legal opportunities existed in India which had to be used more fully, and the Party should attempt to win greater legality. By the late 1950's there were definite signs that armed violence was being considered as a non-essential element in the socialist revolution. After the Amritsar Congress of the C.P.I. in 1958, the Party reiterated:

... The Communist Party of India strives to achieve full Democracy and Socialism by peaceful means. It considers that by developing a powerful mass movement, by winning a majority in Parliament and by backing it with mass sanctions, the working class and its allies can overcome the resistance of the forces of reaction and ensure that Parliament becomes an instrument of peoples' will for effecting fundamental changes in the economic, social and state structure.(68)

(66) R. Palme Dutt: 'Situation in India' in Gene Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller: Communism in India p. 305.

In May 1951, Ajoy Ghosh, a moderate was identified with the section eschewing violence. Also in Oct. 1951, the Communists in Telengana unconditionally surrendered.

The slogan of peaceful methods of socialism and willingness to work within
the Parliamentary framework were important vote-catchers in Kerala - as
Ajoy Ghosh, General Secretary of the C.P.I., said in a closed session of
the Congress of the C.P.I. at the Palghat Conference in 1956:

This thesis of peaceful transition to socialism is
a big weapon in our hands. It enables us to heal
the split in the socialist movement. It enables us
to forge links with socialists who sincerely desire
socialism but abhor civil war.(69)

The Andhra Communists had dramatized the need for a new look at Party
strategy. Soon events in Kerala were to help convince the Party of the
need to be more flexible in its approach to particular situations. The
success of the strategies discussed in this chapter and their acceptance
into official Party thinking were indicative of the increasing tendency of
the C.P.I. to be more effective at the State rather than national level.
The importance of State units in the power base of the Communist Party
leadership has meant not only more flexibility, but also more autonomy
(70) for the State Parties. Thus Namboodiripad had in practice, a relatively
free hand in organising Party strategy in his home State. The Central

(69) Published under title 'Report of Ajoy Ghosh to the Fourth Congress of
the C.P.I. (1956)' in Democratic Research Service: Indian Communist
Party Documents p.335 - Extracts quoted emphasised in original text.
This document was first published by the same authors in Communist
Double Talk at Palghat. The Palghat Conference was also noted for
the continued insistence on the maintenance of the C.P.I.'s United
Front with various Leftist groups.

(70) See Ralph H. Retzlaff: 'Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist
Party of India' in Robert A. Scalapino (ed): The Communist Revolution
in Asia - Tactics, Goals and Achievements (Prentice-Hall, Inc. New Jersey,
1965) p.310.
Committee of the All-India Communist Party had met in November 1951, to discuss among other things events in Travancore-Cochin, where the State Legislature had been dissolved and the State was preparing for the first general elections of 1951-52. It was decided that the existing Communist or Leftist Front to be broadened to include the P.S.P., dissident Congressmen and 'other democratic elements'. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, S.A. Dange and A.K. Gopalan were empowered to work out election strategy, keeping in mind the broad principles outlined above. This was subsequently endorsed by a State Conference of the K.C.P. held at Quilon from 9-13 September 1951. The situation in Kerala was such that special concessions made to Party strategy there enabled the K.C.P., in broadening its base, to offer an alternative government, needing the collaboration of forces, even if they were not in the least committed to Communism, were at least disenchanted with Congress socialism. The success of the Kerala Communists' tactics bears out the comment that:

The State Party units have been more sensitive to the need to define the relationship of the C.P.I. to other political parties and social groups in their particular areas. (73)


(72) Ibid.

(73) Ralph H. Retzlaff: 'Revisionism and Dogmatism in the Communist Party of India' p. 316.
Several of the important office bearers in the national Communist movement came from Kerala - besides Namboodiripad, S.A. Dange and A.K. Gopalan were Keralites, and mainly responsible for the working out of election strategy in Kerala. Namboodiripad was the most important figure in the implementation of the strategies discussed above to the Kerala situation. One of the leading theoreticians of the Communist Party, his prominence in the articulation of Party policy at the national level, tended to make developments in Kerala all the more significant. Namboodiripad as head of the Kerala Communist Party and a respected officer in the national party played an influential role in making the new strategies more acceptable. As Marshall Windmiller points out, it is difficult to define factional groups in the Communist Party, but he places Namboodiripad among the 'fairly consistent centrists', or those between the Leftists and the Rightists. This has been a crucial factor in Kerala where the Party by 1957 had become flexible enough to alter its approach from the Punnapura-Vayalur mentality, to providing an alternative government, and hence to make its appeal as wide as possible. When after the First General Elections of 1951-52, Centrists such as Namboodiripad, A. Ghosh and P. Ramamurthy, filled key posts in the Central Committee of the C.P.I., the new strategies were much more readily approved. Namboodiripad himself was strongly influenced by the methods employed by Mao and in the success of the Chinese revolution. He was among the three Indian Communist

Party members to represent the Party at the Eighth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in Peking in September 1956. A critic of the extreme Left militant line followed during Ranadive's period in office, he emphasised the necessity of broadening the Party base at the mass level to include peasant groups and dissatisfied elements of the bourgeoisie. As a centrist, Namboodiripad was strongly attracted to Maoism in respect of its midway course between Right and Left. In Kerala, he emphasised that the Party, as the Chinese Communist Party had done, had to cultivate peasant support rather than a purely working proletariat consisting of the urban labour force. The K.C.P. itself had been responsible for the strengthening of the working class movement, from its inception as a political party. The First All-Kerala Trade Union Congress convened at Calicut in 1935 was organised by the Communists, and the First political strike in Kerala at Alleppey in the then Travancore State in 1938, was Communist inspired. Namboodiripad, drawing closely from Mao's development of the four class approach to oppose the big bourgeoisie in the rural content, brought a new emphasis to the Communist concern with the proletariat in India, to include the 'rural proletariat' as well as the urban proletariat:

(76) Prominent party members involved in the working class movement were - in Travancore M.N. Govindan Nair, P.T. Punnoose, T.V. Thomas, and in Cochin Achutha Menon. All became prominent members of the First Communist ministry.

The Party should help the peasant masses to realise their objective as they themselves think best; while doing this, of course the Party will carry on its work of explanation to the peasant masses. (78)

The Party, according to Namboodiripad was to identify itself with peasant demands, rather than at this stage, pushing Party policy. This meant heavy involvement in the cry for agrarian reform and support for the peasant associations or kisan sabhas. The cultivation of various sections of peasant support was an important part of the approach of a broad United Front 'from below' on Chinese lines. At the national level it took the form of attempts to build up the All-India Kisan Sabha, but the strongest movement among the peasant associations was in Kerala. The credit for this goes largely to Namboodiripad, whose formulation of the importance of peasant associations was along the lines of that suggested by Liu-Shao-Chuo. This meant the advocacy not only of the cause of the poor peasants and the agricultural labourers but the 'middle' peasants in the guarantee of their rights and property:

Active middle peasants must be absorbed into the leadership of the peasants associations ... peasant associations must unite into an anti-feudal United Front, all elements outside the associations who are opposed to feudalism - including enlightened gentry who support agrarian reform - to fight hand in hand against the system of feudal exploitation. (80)

(78) E.M.S. Namboodiripad: The Peasant in National Economic Reconstruction p. 79 author's emphasis.
(80) E.M.S. Namboodiripad: The Peasant in National Economic Reconstruction.
The success of the Party would depend not merely on drawing leadership from, but on forming a 'real alliance' with the middle peasants and above all providing a 'real protection of their land and property'. Mao, in emphasising the importance of the peasantry of China, had divided them into three grades - rich peasantry (bourgeoisie), middle peasants and poor peasants. He had advocated the importance, particularly of the middle peasants and poor peasants, for the new revolution had to be essentially a peasants' revolution led by the proletariat (rural and urban).

In China the 'middle peasants' formed the vanguard of the revolution, and were composed of those peasants who hired no landless labourers. They were mainly from the petit-bourgeoisie, semi-proletariat groups that Mao identified in his five classes of Chinese society. In Kerala this group of middle peasants, hiring no landless labour is according to studies made by Kathleen Gough, 'almost non-existent'. In Kerala, the middle peasants would own a few acres, manage most of it (that is they did not hire overseers, as most landowners did), do some manual labour, but also would regularly hire labourers. They are either kanam tenants or lease land out on kanam

(81) Ibid p.82.
(83) See Mao-Tse-Tung: 'Analysis of All the Classes in Chinese Society' in Stuart R. Schram: The Political Thought of Mao-Tse-Tung p.211.
(84) Kathleen Gough: 'Peasant Resistance and Revolt in South Asia' in Pacific Affairs Vol. XLI No. 4, 1968-69 (Winter) p.529. Her survey was based on fieldwork in Kerala in the late 1940's and early 1950's.
tenure. Thus the Kerala Communists' strategy included the support of smaller landowners more widely than in China. Kathleen Gough also points out that although traditionally the poor peasants come from the Ezhava group or low ranking Muslims and Christians, the middle and poor peasants have been considerably augmented by higher castes such as Nayars and Syrian Christians. This has worked in favour of widening the appeal of the Communists to include upper caste members as well. It has also meant a greater reliance on middle bourgeoisie sympathies than in China, where the Maoist United Front was made broad enough to include the middle bourgeoisie, but the strength lay with the middle peasants, a much more 'rural proletarian' entity than that of Kerala. Thus, in fact the enormous potential of the rural proletariat has only been partly tapped even by the Communists. While the landless labourer and poor peasant have been the greatest and most consistent Communist supporters, the leadership is being increasingly drawn from the 'middle class' families of high-caste Hindus, Christians, and Muslims belonging to the 'middle peasant' status. As well as seeking to the smaller landowners, Namboodiripad also wanted the building up of what he called a 'rich peasant' economy by encouraging capitalists to create the industry needed to support a surplus agricultural labour force. In 'On the Agrarian Question in India' he writes:

(85) Ibid p. 529.

... the only way in which this process / i.e. fragmentation and sub-division of holdings that swelled the unemployed work force and made land itself uneconomical / can be stopped is to industrialize the country so that a good part of the present agricultural population as well as the growing population can be drawn away from the land
... this is exactly what is being done in China. (87)

In this same pamphlet he emphasises the use that can be made of capitalistic activity. The avoidance of a categoric condemnation of capitalism, was well in keeping with the new policy of fighting the forces of feudalism and imperialism before that of capitalism. In another pamphlet entitled The National Question in Kerala, Namboodiripad elaborates on this last point - the struggle was not so much between capitalism and socialism but between imperialism-feudalism and the mass of the people:

In this struggle capitalist economy, the capitalist class, has a role to play and ... the mass of the people led by the working class can make use of it, provided they take all precautions that the capitalist elements are not allowed to drag the people into the arms of imperialism and feudalism. (88)

By 1956 Namboodiripad's ideas on the line to be approached in Kerala had become part of the C.P.I.'s official policy statement:

The Party has to defend resolutely the interests of the oppressed masses - the working class, the agricultural labourers, the poor and middle peasants, the artisans and urban middle classes, who are the worst sufferers under Congress rule. It is they who form the majority of our people and therefore must constitute the firm basis and the main force of the democratic movement in all stages of its development. The Party must simultaneously champion the just demands of the rich peasants and of the

(87) E.M.S. Namboodiripad: On the Agrarian Question in India (Peoples' Pub. House, Bombay 1952) p. 45. Brackets inserted by me from earlier section of text quoted.

small manufacturers and businessmen. In order to strengthen and advance the struggle of our people to achieve economic independence, the Party will support the national bourgeoisie against foreign competition and in whatever effort it may take to overcome economic dependence. (89)

While the rural areas provided strong support to the Communists, in the towns there was wide fluctuation in support. The direction of this fluctuating vote was an important factor in the 1957 Kerala elections. The urban bourgeoisie from the middle-size towns, for example, provided 38.68% of the Communist vote. It is important to note that this was a fluctuating voting pattern. In other words the Communists could not count on these votes as secure preferences. Thus even though in 1957 the Communists won, it would seem that a large proportion of these votes were given in order to offer the Communists 'a try' rather than to show confidence in them. The development of Party strategy in a direction that took advantage of this situation meant that the Party was considered as an alternative government by a large majority. However the mandate was a precarious one as events after 1957 illustrated. After less than two years the Government was overthrown. The slogan of an alternative government was widely publicised, before the 1957 elections, by the Communists. At a plenary meeting of the Kerala Committee of the Communist

(89) Political Resolution, Delhi, C.P.I. 1956 - text quoted in Marshall Windmiller: 'Constitutional Communism in India' in Pacific Affairs, Vol. 31, March 1958, p. 25. I have quoted this at some length to illustrate the extent to which the Party was attempting to make a moderate appeal designed to draw in a variety of dissatisfied groups.

(90) K.G. Krishna Murthy and L.R. Rao: Political Preferences in Kerala, Table VI.1, p. 65.
Party at Alwaye, in January 1957, the slogan was put forward for the forthcoming elections:

The formation of a stable alternative government based on the broadest unity of the Communist Party, other Left groups and democratic groups and individuals for a programme of Kerala's economic, social and cultural progress. (91)

It was an effective appeal, and although in terms of Party membership, the Communist Party did not achieve anything dramatic, its influence widened considerably, and its election committee meetings were attended with great interest. (92)

Thus far, this analysis has shown the trends within the Communist Party, both national and in Kerala, that enabled the United Front tactics to be successfully employed in Kerala. This United Front extended to more than just election strategy with the other political parties opposed to the Congress. It involved as has been seen, drawing in various sections of the peasantry, as well as gaining the support of those elements among the bourgeoisie opposed to the rule of the Congress Party. By 1957, these tactics were accepted as official national policy by the C.P.I.

It is now proposed to show in more detail what the United Front involved besides the broadening of the Party base in order to appeal to a wider and more diverse public.

It was at the Madurai Congress of the Party in 1953 that the Draft Resolution of the Congress endorsed the new United Front tactics. It

(91) 'Forward to an Alternative Government in Kerala' in New Age, 13 Jan. 1957, p. 4.
(92) See New Age 17 Feb. 1957 - General Election special.
emphasised however that the Communist Party must maintain its identity, as must the other groups forming the United Front. That is, it was to be a Front acting in unison, but not presenting a monolithic bloc. The Communist Party while striving to develop common action by all opposition parties or groups in legislatures and co-ordinating committees was to function under its own name. The United Front was thus to include a variety of opinions without requiring that the parties or groups involved should submerge their identities. The slogan for a Government of Democratic Unity used successfully in the Kerala area during the 1951-52 elections was to be reiterated as important for 1954. In Kerala, the Communists had contested the 1951-52 elections as the U.F.L. but the latter was not strong enough to form a ministry, and needed the collaboration of other elements of the opposition - the T.I.N.C., the P.S.P. and independents. In the face of this, the K.C.P. declared its objective of collaboration of all forces in opposition to Congress. The slogan of a Government for Democratic Unity made necessary by the conditions in Kerala, meant a further broadening of the United Front base, wherever the possibility of forming an alternative government arose. Such a situation existed in Kerala where the large majority of people had shown itself in opposition to Congress, and where the Communist Party was the largest single force

(93) From Draft Political Resolution of the Third Congress of the Communist Party of India, Madurai pub. under heading 'Draft Political Resolution (1953) by the Democratic Research Service: Indian Communist Party Documents pp. 123-24. This document and others pertaining to the Madurai Congress were also pub. by the same authors under the heading Communist Conspiracy at Madurai.

(94) In T-C, the United Progressive Bloc was formed with the K.M.P.P., the Kerala Socialist Party and the Revolutionary Socialist Party. In Malabar an agreement with the K.M.P.P. on broad lines of policy was achieved.

(95) United Front of Leftists consisting of the K.C.P., the R.S.P. (Revolutionary Socialist Party) and the K.S.P. (Kerala Socialist Party).

in the opposition. The Central Committee made it clear however that it was only in such conditions, the most important of which was that 'the Communist Party and other genuinely democratic elements should be in a (97) dominant position within the Opposition.' However the Congress at Madurai clarified the nature of this unity. While the United Front would be united on agreed questions, it was not to be a Front having a 'programme, organisation and discipline' of its own. There was to be a United Front to fight for issues and for co-ordinating opposition to the ruling Congress (98) but each party would retain complete freedom. The Party Congress emphasised that the independent nature of the groups forming the Democratic Front in for example Travancore-Cochin, should be understood. Democratic Front should not be considered as a new political party in which the separate identities of the constituent political parties are submerged.(99)

This is important in noting how the Kerala Communists were able to draw in moderates and to provide a focus for dissatisfaction as the Democratic Opposition to the Congress Party. In maintaining, and understandably so, the necessity of keeping its own independence of action, the Party encouraged those groups who feared they might be 'selling out' to the Communists in the event of alliance with them. This was particularly true of the P.S.P. in Kerala, a party that the Communists were eager to woo,

(97) Ibid p. 156.
for the nature of the United Front demanded, as the Draft Resolution of 1953 recognised, the drawing into a common struggle of Congressmen, P.S.P. followers and 'progressive' individuals:

The tendency to look upon all Congressmen and all P.S.P. members as reactionary, because of the reactionary policy of the Congress leadership and the disruptive policy of the P.S.P. leadership must be combated. (100)

This was particularly so in the case of Travancore-Cochin, where the impatience of the electorate was of advantage to the Leftist political parties and what was described as a 'qualitatively new situation in Indian politics' created real possibilities for the defeat of Congress. The success of the Travancore-Cochin and Malabar Communists in extending the United Front tactics, were reinforced by the K.C.P.'s performance in the 1954 elections. For example, at the municipal level, Leftist influence was already strong in the Malabar District and on the Panchayat Boards. According to a Report on the Malabar Panchayat elections, cited by a Communist paper, in elections held at Chirakkal taluk and at Kalliassey village Panchayat for the Panchayat Boards, the results gave the Citizen's Front of Communist and 'democratic elements' all eleven seats and the Presidentship. In addition, it reported that these Communist and 'democratic elements' won eleven out of the fifteen Panchayat Boards in Malabar.

By July 1956, in preparation for the elections of 1957, an 'Appeal for Unity of the Parties of the Democratic Opposition' issued by the C.P.I. called

(100) 'Draft Political Resolution (1953)' pp. 113-114.
(102) See Chapter I.
upon all parties in opposition to Congress to work together.

In making this kind of appeal, the Party showed a tone of moderation and an assessment of past mistakes that was apparent not only in the acceptance that mistakes had been made but in inviting more discussion on Communist policy. Thus, for example a letter from Jayaprakash Narayan that welcomed the Party's break from militancy and called on the Communists to re-examine their attitudes particularly in the light of events in Russia was given full coverage in the Communist New Age, as was the ensuing discussion on Narayan's comments. At the Palghat Conference of the C.P.I. in 1956, an important declaration was made that reiterated the willingness of Communists to adopt peaceful means:

The Parliamentary form of Government will be retained in the Socialist India of our concept together with all legitimate rights of parties that prefer to remain in opposition and conduct their activities in a peaceful and constitutional manner. (108)

Granted that much of this stance was taken up for election propaganda purposes, it is undeniable that the willingness of the Party to work within the Parliamentary framework added much to its popular appeal. This view of the place of different parties and the emphasis on the peaceful

(105) The Gandhian social reformer mentioned earlier in this chapter in connection with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party. A man of integrity, he is much respected by parties of the Left and Right.
(106) The disclosures of Krushchev concerning the Stalinist era.
transition to Socialism, not only strengthened the stand of the Kerala Communists as the alternative government, but took away much of the effect of the Congress Party resolution at Avadi in January 1955. The Avadi resolution stated the Congress Party's objective as the 'Socialistic pattern of society':

Planning should take place with a view to the establishment of a socialistic pattern of society, where the principal means of production are under social ownership or control, production is progressively speeded up and there is equitable distribution of national wealth. (109)

Given the record of Congress in Kerala as far as progress towards this goal was concerned, the Resolution sounded more than a little hollow. It was a situation the Leftists there took advantage of, the development of a line and strategy suitable to this occasion contributing much in enabling the Communists to win in 1957. When the Party came into office under Namboodiripad as the First Communist Government to be elected by democratic processes, it emphasised again and again that the Government had pledged itself to working within the Constitutional Framework. The Party had come a long way from Punnapura and Vayalur.

In may be added, in conclusion, that the stand of the Party in Kerala, in 1957 has had significant repercussions on its development. In terms of pursuing the struggle for the establishment of socialism through class conflict, these policies of electoral alliances and adjustments with parties not committed to revolutionary socialism, obscured for the time being the ideas of class conflict and hence direction in terms of a clear

ideological line. This ambivalence caused largely by the direction of
the Party's energies towards providing an alternative to Congress rule,
has resulted in factionalism within the Party over policy and approach.

In Kerala today there is more than one Communist Party, and the
Party which in 1957 seemed to many to offer the much needed panacea
for Kerala's ills, has itself succumbed to the disorders plaguing the
State. The dilemma that faces the Party is how much to be influenced by
the peculiar conditions prevailing in Kerala, and how much to be guided by
purely ideological considerations. This dilemma was voiced by
Namboodiripad just after India's dispute with China, when, referring to
the Indian Communist movement as a whole, he put the main problem as:

How to integrate patriotism of Indian Communists
as Indians to their sense of proletarian internationalism
as Communists. (111)

The comment has relevance to Kerala after 1957. How much was the Party to
accommodate itself to the peculiarities of the Kerala context and how
much to the tenets of 'proletarian internationalism'? The development
of a strategy and policy that was made acceptable to Communists at large
enabled the Kerala Communists to a great extent to assume power. Its
approach was hailed enthusiastically while the Party was in the process of

(110) In 1964 the C.P.I. split into two - one party retained the name C.P.I.,
the other calls itself C.P.I. (Marxist). They are usually referred to
as the Communists and Marxists respectively.

(111) Quoted in Ralph H. Retzlaff: 'Revisionism and Dogmatism in the
Communist Party of India' p. 336.
attempting to unseat the long-entrenched Congress Party. However once established in power as the legitimate government of the State, the whole question of its role and ultimate goal had to be reconsidered. Differences smoothed over in the interests of electoral success have begun to assert themselves, and reconsideration and clarification is perhaps more vital in the interests of the Party itself in terms of unity, than of the State.
CONCLUSION

There is a well-loved legend in Kerala that relates the story of Mahabili, once the ruler of the whole Kerala region. Mahabili’s rule was wise and just, there were no social or economic inequalities, and peace and happiness reigned supreme in an atmosphere reminiscent of the Arthurian legend. So popular was Mahabili with his people that he provoked the jealousy of the Gods, who sent one of their number, Vishnu, to destroy the King. Tricked into giving up all his possessions, and condemned to the underworld for eternity, Mahabili asked as a last request that he be allowed to visit his people once every year. This was granted, and every year the people of Kerala celebrate the feast of Onam, the day on which Mahabili returns to visit his people. In the folk lore of Kerala it is believed that Mahabili’s rule will eventually be restored. The ideal represented by the Mahabili myth is one that has consistently evaded Kerala. The Communist Government voted in in 1957, did not realise the hopes of the people in terms of stability for it was toppled less than two years after it came into office. The results of 1957, however realised other things. It brought to a head the resentment against Congress rule, a resentment that is now being expressed nationally. For most of the decade after Independence, Congress was firmly in the saddle. It seemed that nothing could dislodge it, especially in view of the reverence in which it was held for its contribution to the national Independence movement, and in view of the veneration felt for leaders like Nehru. The victory of the Communists dramatically brought home the fact (1) Communist election propaganda played heavily on the Mahabili legend, likening its programme and objectives as a return to the days of Mahabili.
that Congress could no longer regard itself as politically sacrosanct. It indicated that there was a fundamental desire for change, not in an ideological commitment to Communism, but in support of an alternative to Congress rule.

Kerala's action in 1957 was the fore-runner of what now seems to be becoming a general pattern in India, with the Congress Party rapidly losing ground and even destroying itself. 1957 was a symptom of a general malaise afflicting the governing of the country, a malaise that if not heeded by any Party in power, could erupt into general chaos, for vast areas of valid discontent remain unsolved and the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' widens. The Communists won in 1957, not because of the people's commitment to the inevitability of the Socialist revolution, but because the desire for change had become inevitable, given the failure of the various right-wing governments to initiate real reform. Thus even though the ministry itself was short-lived, Congress has not been able to regain its former position of dominance. The Communists remain, in spite of disunity and factionalism, very much the vital factor in Kerala politics.

The Communists fulfilled a long awaited need when they challenged the supremacy of Congress, but the instability of the Communist ministries since 1957 has demonstrated that the Communists cannot take their successes complacently. A major drawback to the effectiveness of the Party has been the split between the pro-Peking Marxist Party headed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad and the C.P.I., non-Marxists. The Marxists dominated the most recent ministry in Kerala, till Namboodiripad stepped down over a charge of corruption brought against a Communist (non-Marxist) member of
the Marxists are now the major opposition, and retain control of the peasant mass base.

The split within the Kerala Communists has been exacerbated by the current Sino-Soviet controversy. Neither Peking nor Moscow is willing to give up their claim to authority within the international Communist sphere. While Moscow has favoured a so-called 'peaceful expansion' of Communism, Peking insists on 'revolution' and 'wars of national liberation'. The Chinese Communists strongly maintained that to reduce the international Communist movement to 'peaceful co-existence', 'peaceful competition', and 'peaceful transition', was to:

discard the historical mission of proletarian world revolution, and to depart from the revolutionary teachings of Marxism-Leninism.(2)

The Sino-Soviet split over strategy, has made the dilemma of the Communists in Kerala more painful, a dilemma touched upon in the last chapter, and concerning the conflict between the demands of the local situation and that of 'proletarian dictatorship'. The Marxist-Communist split is a result of the inability to reach a satisfactory solution,

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(2) 'Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement (June 1963)' - full text in Winberg Chai (ed): Essential Works of Chinese Communism pp. 362-363. This proposal was originally offered in the letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in reply to the letter of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U. 30th March 1963, calling for a 'top-level meeting between representatives of the C.P.S.U. and C.P.C. in Moscow' to discuss 'the most urgent problems' concerning 'the struggle for peace and peaceful co-existence', 'the national-liberation movement', and the 'consolidation of the unity and cohesion of the socialist community' - from introduction the proposal by Winberg Chai: p.359.
and a reminder of the need for the Party as a whole to restate itself in terms of the local situation. Mao was a useful guide to revolution in the under-developed countries - the success of Namboodiripad illustrates this. The development of a strategy that was shown to be successful in a predominantly agrarian country like China, pointed to enormous possibility for repeating such achievements in other Asian countries. Mao adopted Marxism to non-European countries in a significant way; Kerala has shown how effective elements of this adaptation were. But Mao's interpretation of revolution has in recent years become more China than Asia orientated. This has created problems for the Communists in India, in the need to work out a programme orientated to local, rather than international conditions. In Kerala the so-called pro-Peking Marxist Party is not strictly speaking Maoist, as Chapter Four pointed out. It is ironic that the Communists who were inspired by neo-Marxist strategies in 1957 seem to have succumbed to the very dangers that Mao warned about in relation to the bourgeois-democratic revolution - the proletariat has yet to take real control, and the bourgeois-democratic revolution seems to have stopped at the point of domination by bourgeois elements, as illustrated by the present 'Mini Front' Communist led coalition, now in power in Kerala.

(3) This coalition ministry was formed on 1st November 1969 and consisted of three members of the C.P.I., two of the Muslim League, one of the Kerala Congress and two of the Indian Socialist Party. The Chief Minister, Chelat Achutha Menon of the non-Marxist C.P.I., was Finance Minister in the Namboodiripad Ministry of 1957.
Although the Communist movement lacks unity, it remains, particularly the Marxists, the most powerful factor in Kerala politics. It has yet to work out a strategy that will make the most of its enormous potential for leadership among the working masses, agrarian and urban. They have yet to develop something similar to the slogan put forward by Mao as early as 1938, of 'Sinification of Marxism'. Mao maintained:

A Communist is a Marxist internationalist, but Marxism must take on a national form before it can be applied. There is no such thing as abstract Marxism, but only concrete Marxism. What we call concrete Marxism is Marxism that has taken on a national form ...(4)

Kerala Communists face the problem of working out the nature of this 'national form' in the face of crisis in international Communism and disunity at home. Mao had also said:

If a Chinese communist ... talks of Marxism apart from Chinese peculiarities, this Marxism is merely an empty abstraction.(5)

Congress espousal of Socialism has proved in Kerala to be an 'empty abstraction', the Communists have yet to show that they are different, if they are not to earn this appellation too. For in the present situation where the State is once more headed towards instability and possibly chaos the only hope seems to be a radically new Congress, or a new Communist approach, an approach that will give the voters what they hoped to get in 1957.


(5) Ibid.
APPENDIX I

COMPARATIVE FIGURES FOR THE 1952 AND 1954 ELECTIONS
IN TRAVANCOORE-COCHIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>No. of Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.S.P.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.T.N.C.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.S.P.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.S.P.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Banned as a Party, contested elections as Independents.

COMPARATIVE POSITION IN TERMS OF % OF VOTES POLLED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parties</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1954</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.S.P.</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.S.P.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.S.P.</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.T.N.C.</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX II

**NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF VALID VOTES POLLED BY THE PARTIES IN THE CONTESTED CONSTITUENCIES IN 1957 (1)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Won</th>
<th>Valid Votes Polled</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22,09,251</td>
<td>37.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20,59,547</td>
<td>35.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents supp. by the C.P.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3,18,465</td>
<td>5.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.S.P.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6,28,261</td>
<td>10.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.S.P.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,88,553</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim League</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2,75,623</td>
<td>4.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Independents</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,58,077</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncontested</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58,37,577</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

(1) From Ramakrishnan Nair: *How the Communists Came to Power in Kerala*, p.16.
APPENDIX III

DISTRICTWISE FIGURES ON COMMUNIST GAINS IN 1957 IN KERALA STATE (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
<th>Votes Polled</th>
<th>Votes Polled for Communists + Independents*</th>
<th>% of Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>6,89,316</td>
<td>5,46,423</td>
<td>2,37,054</td>
<td>43.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>7,99,298</td>
<td>7,86,312</td>
<td>3,44,895</td>
<td>43.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleppey</td>
<td>8,40,988</td>
<td>6,95,094</td>
<td>3,44,024</td>
<td>49.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>7,32,499</td>
<td>5,91,196</td>
<td>2,26,120</td>
<td>38.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>7,94,074</td>
<td>5,66,905</td>
<td>2,48,473</td>
<td>43.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>7,01,795</td>
<td>6,34,098</td>
<td>2,43,858</td>
<td>38.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palghat</td>
<td>8,99,133</td>
<td>5,80,995</td>
<td>2,56,391</td>
<td>44.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>11,39,586</td>
<td>7,74,376</td>
<td>1,94,826</td>
<td>24.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannanore</td>
<td>9,17,939</td>
<td>6,62,179</td>
<td>2,85,321</td>
<td>43.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>75,14,628</td>
<td>58,37,578</td>
<td>23,77,962</td>
<td>40.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* i.e. Independents supported by the C.P.


### AREA AND POPULATION OF KERALA DISTRICTWISE

(Approximate Figures for 1960 based on 1951 Census of India)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malabar:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cannanore</td>
<td>2,226 sq. m.</td>
<td>1,605,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Kozhikode</td>
<td>2,555 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>2,370,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Palghat</td>
<td>1,971 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1,815,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cochin:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trichur</td>
<td>1,147 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1,636,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ernakulam</td>
<td>1,558 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1,826,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travancore:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Kottayam</td>
<td>1,998 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1,595,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Alleppey</td>
<td>705 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1,808,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Quilon</td>
<td>1,981 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1,774,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Trivandrum</td>
<td>846 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>1,596,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14,987 &quot; &quot;</td>
<td>16,025,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## APPENDIX V

**LITERACY FIGURES FOR THE KERALA AREA**

### I. India Kerala

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>1951</th>
<th>1961</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All-India</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Overall State</td>
<td>53.76</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-India Male</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>64.47</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-India Female</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43.23</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### II. RURAL AND URBAN LITERACY BREAK-UP IN KERALA COMPARED TO ALL-INDIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Malabar</th>
<th>Travancore</th>
<th>Cochin</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>All-India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban Pop.</td>
<td>14.65</td>
<td>14.78</td>
<td>16.60</td>
<td>15.11</td>
<td>17.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Pop.</td>
<td>85.35</td>
<td>85.22</td>
<td>83.40</td>
<td>84.89</td>
<td>82.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Literacy</td>
<td>38.93</td>
<td>52.29</td>
<td>49.57</td>
<td>46.85</td>
<td>24.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Literacy</td>
<td>49.28</td>
<td>57.62</td>
<td>58.80</td>
<td>54.94</td>
<td>46.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Literacy</td>
<td>36.94</td>
<td>51.37</td>
<td>39.81</td>
<td>45.41</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

(1) Compiled from Census Figures for 1951 and 1961 (The 1951 figures for Kerala would be for T-C only, the 1961 figures include Malabar as well).

(2) Table from K.G. Krishna Murthy and L.R. Rao: *Political Preferences in Kerala*, p.22, recompiled from 1961 Census figures.
APPENDIX VI

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN KERALA, 1951
(For Travancore-Cochin only) (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9,280,425</td>
<td>5,587,852</td>
<td>721,227</td>
<td>2,968,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trivandrum District</td>
<td>2,154,192</td>
<td>1,432,869</td>
<td>169,283</td>
<td>551,951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon District</td>
<td>3,026,822</td>
<td>1,972,2622</td>
<td>258,254</td>
<td>795,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam District</td>
<td>1,783,771</td>
<td>811,868</td>
<td>83,338</td>
<td>888,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur District</td>
<td>2,315,640</td>
<td>1,364,573</td>
<td>210,354</td>
<td>731,874</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Compiled from Census of India 1951, for Travancore-Cochin, Part II, Table DII
## Appendix VII

Rural-Urban Population by Districts for 1951

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population 1941</th>
<th>Population 1951</th>
<th>% Variation 1941-51</th>
<th>Density 1941</th>
<th>Density 1951</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I-C</td>
<td>9,144</td>
<td>7,500,057</td>
<td>9,280,425</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8,846</td>
<td>6,541,216</td>
<td>7,792,133</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>958,841</td>
<td>1,488,292</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>4,991</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) From Census of India 1951 for I-C Part II Table E.
APPENDIX VIII

(1) REGION-WIDE OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Malabar</th>
<th>Travancore</th>
<th>Cochin</th>
<th>Kerala</th>
<th>All-India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivators</td>
<td>19.86</td>
<td>22.99</td>
<td>18.68</td>
<td>20.92</td>
<td>52.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agric. Labs.</td>
<td>20.78</td>
<td>15.67</td>
<td>14.63</td>
<td>17.38</td>
<td>16.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labs. for every 1000 cultivators</td>
<td>1046.00</td>
<td>682.00</td>
<td>783.00</td>
<td>831.00</td>
<td>316.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining, quarrying, livestock, forestry, fishing, plantations etc.</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>10.36</td>
<td>6.89</td>
<td>8.65</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Industry</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>8.68</td>
<td>6.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuf. and other than Household Industry</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>10.19</td>
<td>10.27</td>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade and Commerce</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, Storage and Communications</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>27.62</td>
<td>21.24</td>
<td>29.17</td>
<td>25.28</td>
<td>10.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### DENSITY OF POPULATION IN DISTRICTS OF KERALA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Population (Lakhs)</th>
<th>Density/per sq.m.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trivandrum</td>
<td>17.45</td>
<td>2067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>19.41</td>
<td>1062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleppey</td>
<td>18.11</td>
<td>2558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kottayam</td>
<td>17.38</td>
<td>706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernakulam</td>
<td>18.60</td>
<td>1442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichur</td>
<td>16.40</td>
<td>1442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palghat</td>
<td>17.77</td>
<td>897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozhikode</td>
<td>26.17</td>
<td>1018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannanore</td>
<td>17.80</td>
<td>812</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) From Bureau of Economics and Statistics in *Quarterly Bulletin of Statistics*, June 1962, in Dr. R.S. Kurup: *The Population of Kerala*. (The Demographic Research Centre, Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Trivandrum, Paper No. 27) p.4. Kurup states that between 1951 and 1961 there was nearly a 25% increase registered in Kerala, and that while Kerala State was only 1.27% of the whole area of the Indian Union, 1 out of every 25 Indians would be a Keralite - Ibid pp.2-3.
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(1) The Bibliography compiled is a selective one, and includes texts found particularly useful, not all consulted.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
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