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

THOMAS ISAAC

Centre for Development Studies
Ulloor, Trivandrum 695 011
Kerala

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Introduction.

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

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

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

We begin with a discussion of the objective formation of the coir working class. We briefly describe the development of the coir weaving industry in Alleppy. The coir weaving had no indigenous tradition on the Malabar Coast and was introduced by the Europeans in the mid-nineteenth century. The social origin of coir workers from the Ezhava caste and the acute labour scarcity experienced by the industry till the end of the 'twenties are important factors to be borne in mind while analysing the systems of labour regulation within the coir manufactories. They also explain the support extended to the TLA by the Indian employers at the time of it's formation.

The Indian employers perceived in the TLA a possible instrument to instill a sense of discipline amongst the workforce. The workers, on the other hand, exhibited little interest in organising against their employers.

They were, however, deeply involved in the social reform movements within their own caste. The emerging bourgeois elite in the Ezhava caste...
in their effort to gain a social status befitting their new economic power, brought the Ezhava masses into the agitational path against the savarna domination in social and political life of Travancore. The coir workers were actively involved in the anti-savarna movements and were strongly influenced by them. Our discussion mainly revolves around the problems of transition from caste consciousness to class consciousness i.e. the process through which the coir workers came to consider themselves primarily as members of a class rather than as members of a particular caste or community and how the anti-savarna struggle became but one aspect of the general working class struggle.

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

The economic struggle of the workers began to intermingle with the general political movements in Travancore. We describe the course of evolution of the class consciousness from the stage of 'economism' to radical political consciousness i.e. the awareness of common political interests among the workers as opposed to/different from those of the capitalists and their political movements and the conviction for the need to overthrow the capitalist system itself if the workers interests were to be permanently safeguarded. The general strike of 1938 proved to be the school of mass political education. We emphasise the leading role played by the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) in this latter transition.
The process of class polarisation was accelerated by the emergence of a class of coir capitalists from the Ezhava caste itself and the ascendency of conservative trends in the Ezhava caste movement. The vacillating and ambivalent attitude of the caste leadership to the economic and political struggles of the working class, forced the workers to move away from the communal leadership and ideology. It was the working class movement that carried forward the radical legacy of the BSRM.

**The Coir Weaving Industry**

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

Since the weaving of coir mat and matting had no indigenous tradition in the Malabar Coast, a new labour force had to be trained up in the new art. In Darragh's manufactory, a number of Bengali weavers (probably the remanants of Mr. Darragh's unsuccessful attempt to start the industry in Calcutta) under the supervision of a master weaver from England, trained the local workers. "The art was known only to the newcomers and they had confined to themselves all the secrets of the art as well as trade in the manufactured goods." Perhaps, it was the need for close supervision and the desire to have a closer control over the skill of the workers, in
order to prevent the entry of competitors, that explain the surprisingly large scale of operations of the early manufactories. The pioneering firm of James Darragh employed 1170 workers in 1900. The handloom technology employed in the coir manufactories did not necessitate this scale of concentration of production and wage labourers. The large scale of operation of the early manufactories was more an expression of their isolated character.

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

The exports of coir fabrics, on which the industry in Malabar coast was dependent for its survival, on the whole, fluctuated at a low level. It was only in the early decades of the present century that the exports began to increase steadily. In 1908-09, the total exports of coir fabrics from Travancore was around 12,936 qtls. By 1911-12, it had increased to 68,481 qtls. During the First World War years, the exports ranged around 30,000 qtls. Thereafter, the exports rapidly increased and ranged around 1,60,000 qtls. during 1921-22 to 1925-26 period.
This period of rapid expansion was also marked by increasing profits. The rise in prices of raw materials and wage labour was relatively lower than that of the unit value of exports.\(^{13}\) The increase in demand for coir fabrics as well as the "large profits ... made in the manufacture"\(^{14}\) attracted the leading European west coast mercantile houses into the industry. They either set up new manufactories or took over the existing ones at Alappuzha. A number of Indian enterprises also came up in the industry helped by the buoyant market conditions. These entrepreneurs came from diverse social backgrounds such as the Gujarati and Muslim merchants in Alappuzha, the prosperous Ezhava and Syrian Christian farmers who had taken to trade in coconut products and the former employees of the European firms who had acquired the necessary market contacts and mercantile skills while in the European service.

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

Not before long, these two divergent interests in the industry began to crystallise into two separate organised factions, each pursuing
its special interests and trading allegations against the other.\(^{16}\)

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

One of the features of this period of expansion of the industry in the first two decades of the century was the localisation of the industry in and around the town of Allepy. Many factors such as the mercantile and administrative facilities available in Allepy, the chief port town of Travancore, as well as the plentiful and cheap supply of region weaving yarns over which the Travancore had a monopoly, was responsible in making Allepy the centre of coir weaving industry.\(^{21}\)
The industrial expansion of this period was mainly through the expansion of the large-scale manufactories. In 1921, of the 36 manufactories, 12 employing more than hundred workers, accounted for 80 per cent of the total employment. In 1931, there were at least 16 such large-scale manufactories accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the 7132 workers employed in the industry. The continued expansion of the large-scale manufactories is partly explained by the use of mechanical power in the dyeing and finishing processes which increased the optimum size of coir manufactories.

In the larger manufactories there was detailed division of labour both according to the wares produced and the processes employed. The products of the industry consisted of various types of pile and non-pile mats, mattings, carpets, mourzouks and rugs woven on handlooms similar to the textile looms that were very much more sturdier to handle the coarser yarn, or on wooden frames or boards from coir yarn. The workforce was predominantly adult and male. Women were mostly employed in the processing of yarn and children in the preparatory processes for weaving. Though mechanical power came to be used to a limited extent in the finishing and packing processes, the rest of the production processes continued to be entirely based on manual labour. Thus, the coir weaving was a labour-intensive industry. Further, it also required a large reserve of workers to continue the production smoothly given the wide fluctuations in the export demand from month to month.
Labour scarcity seems to have been a problem faced by the industry from its inception. When James Darragh started his manufactory, he had to seek workers from the rural areas since he could not get sufficient 'hands' in the town. Accustomed to working in the open fields and not exposed to the rigours of factory discipline, most of the rural workers were hesitant to accept work in the "fenced compound" (as going to work in Darragh's manufactory used to be then called). Caste restrictions also probably played an important role in restricting the supply of wage labourers. The inadequate supply of wage labourers which seems to have been a general feature of Alleppy town in the early years of the century was further aggravated by the rapid expansion of the industry after the First World War. While the exports of coir fabrics nearly doubled from 91,826 qtls. in 1921-22 to 1,67,358 qtls. in 1931-32, the employment in the industry, according to the Census of 1931, had increased; only by around 40 per cent from 5101 in 1921 to 7132 in 1931.

A significant proportion of the workers, especially in the preparatory and finishing activities, were employed through contractors. The management paid the contractor on a lumpsum basis. For all practical purposes the contractor was the employer of the workers. He was responsible for recruitment, fixing of wage rates, supervision of work, payment of wages and ensuring the security of tenure of the workers under him.
The majority of the workers, especially the weavers, were

directly employed by the company managements. Their wages and service

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

The moopans were trusted skilled workers who had been in the employment
of the company for a long period. Usually they were men of considerable
influence among the workers. They were responsible for the maintenance
discipline in their respective departments and had the right to impose
fines. The wages were dispersed through the moopans whose earnings

consisted of a commission (Moopan Kasu) deducted from the wages of the
workers.32/

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

Therefore, monetary incentives and disincentives formed an
important element of the system of labour regulations. The work in the
"work compound" started every day at 6 in the morning and continued to 7
in the evening. Every one who arrived at the factory gate before 6 in the
morning was given a cup of coffee free.33/ And for those who came:
regularly for the work there was a bonus for regular attendance at the end of the month. In Darragh Small & Co., there was a tradition of paying a commission of 20 per cent on out-turn till the mid 'thirties. It was not a part of the wages and not all the workers were entitled to it. It was a discretionary payment given to workers based on the quality and regularity of work. Some of the European firms used to even provide a pension to the workmen who had been in their regular employment. It is interesting to note that, when the Factories Bill (Regulation V of 1908) was circulated for eliciting public opinion, the coir firms saw in it "nothing objectionable ... from a manufacturer's point of view" apart from the need for reducing the eligibility age of the children.

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

The Indian manufacturers saw in the TLA, the first union to be formed in the industry, a possible instrument to decrease the labour turnover and instill a sense of discipline amongst the workforce. In this, the sevappans who took initiative in forming the union also had a stake.
The TLA was formed on March 31, 1922 in a meeting convened by P.K. Bava, the yard superintendent in a leading Gujarati firm, with the help of a number of his friends who were moopans in the other companies. N.Krishnan and K.M. Cherian, the managers of two important Travancoreean coir firms, and Khatau Kimji, the proprietor of the Empire Coir Works, actively co-operated in the venture. Still, when the intention of the formation of the union was announced, there was a furor. According to P.K. Bava, it was only after long discussions and explanations, in which he and some of his fellow moopans also participated, that the employers agreed to the formation of the union. Bava was successful in convincing them that the formation of a Labour Union would also promote their interests. However, the European managements continued to be hostile to the TLA. They were never friendly towards the union and watched its activities with suspicion.

The Indian employers usually attended the annual conferences of TLA and some among them regularly contributed to the union funds. N.Krishnan, the manager of Travancore Products and Industrials, even served as the President of the TLA for a brief period. The secretary of the TLA in 1937, writing the official history of the union, considered the contribution made by the management of Empire Coir Works in the development of TLA, a matter that deserved formal acknowledgement. Not only did it's proprietor contribute to the union funds and give facilities for union activities within the factory premises, but he declared that he will not give job for a worker who did not join the union. According to a trade union activist of the period, through measures in active support of the union, the management of the Empir...
Works was able to win the deep loyalty of its workers. As a consequence, the workers began to consider the jobs in that factory as their own and execute them very sincerely. All the merchants were in agreement that no product could compete in quality to those of that factory.45/

This close cordial relationship which the management of the Empire Coir Works and some other companies had with the union was a source of bickerings within the union, instigated by rival managements. In 1924, M.L. Janardhana Pillai of General Supplies Agency even sponsored a short-lived rival 'Thozhilali Sangham'.46/

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

According to the Industrial Census of 1921, 65 per cent of the workers in the coir weaving industry were from the Ezhava caste. About 19 per cent of the workers were Christians and 12 per cent Muslims. The Nairs, who constituted around 20 per cent of the population were virtually absent in the work force, constituting a bare 0.3 per cent.48/

Further, it must be remembered that most of the Christian workers belonged to the Latin Rite. Latin Christians were largely converts from the backward castes such as the Ezhava. During the following decades, the
proportion of the Ezhava in the work force further increased. At the end of the 'thirties it was estimated to be around 80 per cent.\textsuperscript{49} The social origin of the coir workers from the Ezhava caste and their relative homogeneity had important implications. As a worker himself noted in 1926, "Unlike the workers in other parts of Travancore, the workers in Alleppy, who are more urban, progressive and educated, have some sense of rights and urge to develop. Therefore the masters do not deal with them harshly."\textsuperscript{50} To understand these aspects of working class development in Alleppy we have to shift our discussion from coir industry to Travancore society at large.

\textbf{The Coir Workers and the Anti-Savarna Caste Movements}

The formation of the new social class of wage labourers in Alleppy was taking place in an atmosphere surcharged with great social and intellectual ferment, unprecedented in the annals of Travancore. The traditional social structures and values were being challenged by the new social forces unleashed by the nascent capitalism.\textsuperscript{51} Trapped in the old world, the Nair aristocracy could not take advantage of the new possibilities of bourgeois enrichment that the mid-nineteenth century opened. The economic base of their social dominance was steadily undermined by the new social classes of commercial farmers, traders, petty capitalists and industrialists emerging in Travancore. The origin of these forces from the non-dominant castes and communities of Ezhava, Syrian Christians and Muslims gave rise to a new social contradiction.
The traditional inferior social status, that the emerging bourgeoisie was assigned to by the conventional caste hierarchy no more accorded with their new economic power. The traditional caste and social structures became barriers to the advancement of the emerging bourgeoisie elite. This was the background of the social reform movements in the Ezhava, Christian and Muslim communities in Travancore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The ESRM constituted the most radical aspect of this social awakening that accompanied the rise of capitalism. In the traditional caste hierarchy, the Ezhavas occupied an intermediate position between the ex-slave Pulayas and the Navarana Nairs. Because of the diversified traditional occupational roles of the Ezhavas, they were able to exploit the new opportunities that were emerging with the modernisation of the economy. With the rise in the demand for coconut products and liquor (the processing and trading of which were the most important traditional occupations of the Ezhavas) many of them moved into the roles of small-scale capitalists and traders. A small segment of the Ezhavas were able to acquire superior tenancy rights and landed property. A western educated elite who spearheaded the reforms also emerged.

Numerous associations advocating reforms sprang up within the Ezhava caste. The movement received a new impetus with the ascendancy of Sri Narayana Guru, a saintly ascetic, into prominence among the Ezhavas. Sri Narayana initiated a mass campaign to emancipate the social customs, rituals and ceremonies of the Ezhavas. This apparently conservative programme was a radical challenge to the caste hierarchy and it's
traditions that had denied ritual purity to the Ezhavas. And therefore, it fully accorded with the aspirations of his fellow men. The success of his programme gave the Ezhavas a new sense of pride and self respect. 'The Society for the Protection of Sree Narayana Dharma' (Sree Narayana Dharma Parimalana Yogam hereafter SNDP Yogam), under his patronage, developed into the most important and the common organisation of the Ezhava caste.  

The Alleppey-Shertallai region was one of the most important centres of the ESRM. Besides the SNDP Yogam, there were numerous other caste associations active in the region. P.K.Bava, the guiding spirit behind the formation of the TLA, was a person who had been deeply influ-

enced by the reform movement. By his own narration, his initiative in forming the TLA was a reaction to the social insults he had to bear while he was a worker. The last straw seems to have been the humiliation he had to suffer in a legal court. On the insistence of Bava, a worker filed a case against some rowdies who had brutally assaulted him. The judge dismissed the case ignoring the evidence produced by the worker who was from the low caste. Whatever be the truth about this particular incident, it is certain that Bava was motivated by a deep sense of social justice in organising the workers.

Numerous early trade union leaders like C. K. Velayudhan, V. K. Vel-
yudhan, P. K. Madhavan and R. Suguthan were important activists of the SNDP Yogam. The first three even served in the Board of Directors of SNDP Yogam. The importance given to the temperance movement in the activities of the TLA may be directly traced to the influence of the
refers movement. Sriv Narayana advocated that the Ezhavas should leave their traditional occupation of toddy drawing. It was a part of his campaign to raise the ritual status of the Ezhavas.

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

However, it was the nationalist streams within the ESRM that had greater influence among the coir workers. Not only did the coir workers present a purse to the Salt Satyagraha Jatha from Travancore to Calicut, but they also volunteered to participate in the struggle. Many union activists participated in the foreign cloth boycott agitation at Allepy. The TLA gave an official reception to Jawaharlal Nehru when he visited Allepy.

Caste leaders like T.K. Madhavan attempted to link the anti-savarna struggle of the Ezhavas with the broader national movement.
Under his influence, the Indian National Congress began to actively take up the grievances of the lower castes in Travancore. The satyagraha struggle at Vaikom temple in 1931, to end the pollution practices in the temple and its premises, was the culmination of this co-operation.

The Satyagraha which lasted for one year and eight months aroused widespread enthusiasm among the Ezhavas as also among the coir workers in the adjacent industrial belt. The TLA strongly protested against the repression at Vaikom and sent a batch of 51 volunteers, selected at the Union Assembly Conference, to participate in the struggle.

In Shertallai, the Temple Entry Movement was transformed into a movement to boycott the temples that observed pollution practices. P.K.Bava was once dismissed from a coir factory because of a provocative leaflet he published in connection with the 'Temple Boycott Movement'.

The temperance movement was also reactivated with the co-operation of Congress nationalists, who perceived it yet another opportunity for government agitation. The coir workers in and around Shertallai were active in this new phase of the temperance movement in the Alleppy-Shertallai region. The agitation drew severe government repression and was suppressed.

In spite of the widespread enthusiasm it created, the Vaikom Temple Satyagraha had to be withdrawn with a face saving compromise. The discriminations against the Ezhavas and the non-Hindus in public employment as well as legislative representation continued. All these made the avarnas suspicious of the sincerity of the savarna class and the savarna national leaders. The absence of a powerful secular
democratic movement reflecting the just demands of the avarnas prepared the way for the entry of their communal political organisations.

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

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

The government was forced to concede most of the demands of the petitionists. Once the interests of the minorities had been safe, the Joint Political Congress sought to join a wider alliance.
with the *savarna* nationalist to fight for a constitutional monarchy responsible to the people. These efforts culminated in the formation of the Travancore State Congress in 1938.\(^7\)

Thus, the ESRM brought into action the whole Ezhava people and was the most sweeping mass movement that Travancore had known. The bourgeois class was able to mobilise the masses in this manner because their challenge to the established order reflected also the sentiments of their less fortunate caste men. Their demands were in that sense the demands of the whole Ezhava caste, even though it was the elite who stood to gain most from the success of the movement. Unlike the Nairs and Syrian Christians, the *savarna* Ezhava bourgeoisie felt the injustice of the caste hierarchy more keenly and were not weighted down by religious sentiment. Indeed, their struggle was precisely against the Hindu religious structures which relegated them to the bottom of the social ladder. This implied an ideological position that had strong elements of bourgeois radicalism. The Radical rhetoric was necessary to mobilise the masses.

For example, in the heat of the Vaikom Satyagraha campaign, carried away by his own rhetoric K. Aiyappan exhorted the coir workers at their annual conference: "Just as the Russians managed to obtain liberty by putting an end to their royal family, the Ezhavas also must fight the very end without caring for the guns of the Sepoys, batons of poli or even the Maharaja".\(^7\) Aiyappan was banned from addressing public meetings in Travancore for this speech. And a disturbed Dewan noted that most of the agitators were "imbued with some form of communism."
They...talk(ed) of the equal rights of men.\[72\] Aiyyappan, the founder of the Brotherhood Movement that preached inter-caste marriage and inter-dining, was very much inspired by the revolution in Russia. He organised one of the earliest trade unions in Cochin and published a journal Volaharan (Worker) from Alleppy for brief period.\[73\] It was through his poems that the news of the Soviet Revolution first reached the Alleppy workers.\[74\]

Reformers who preached the renunciation of the caste ridden Hindu religion had wide popularity among the coir workers. There were strong advocates for conversion to Islam and Christianity. P.K.Bava had embraced Islam for a brief period as a young man.\[75\] R.Sugathan, another important labour activist, entered public life as a worker of the Sikh mission at Alleppy.\[76\] The militant members of the Sikh community at Alleppy founded by K.C.Kuttan, alias Sardar Jai Singh, were very active in the labour movement.\[77\]

The enthusiasm of Muslims and Christians for proselytisation created considerable tension in Alleppey and resulted in a violent communal riot in 1936. Perhaps, the riots only strengthened the belief in the irrationality of all religions amongst the coir workers. There is no involvement of coir workers in the riots. It was reported that the employers were nervous in moving about in the town and attending to work "because they feared that generally workers (would) have some grudge against factory owners" and might try to settle their scores in the general turmoil.\[78\]
The rationalist and atheistic philosophies advocated by K. Aiyappan and E. Madhavan spread rapidly among coir workers. Sree Narayana Guru's call for "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man" was transformed into a novel slogan by them: "No Caste, No Religion, No God for Man".

E. Madhavan rejected all religions as irrational. He argued that Ezhavas should renounce all religions and declare themselves to be a 'free society' outside the fold of all religions and castes. There was nothing to be lost by the rejection of the anti-scientific, irrational and unethical religious beliefs. Wasn't Soviet Russia's success a great victory of the irreligious movement? This was how Soviet Union and its leader Lenin entered his book 'Free Society' (Swatantra Samudayam). This book became the bible of a whole generation of Ezhava young men organised under Akhila Kerala Thiyya Yuva Jana Sangham which was very active in the Alleppy-Shertallai area. It is important to understand these influences in the making of the Alleppy coir working class if one wants to explain the surprising pace with which Marxist ideology spread among the workers at the end of the 'thirties.

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

P. S. Mohammed, who presided over the first gathering of the TLA, was the editor of the 'Muslim', a journal that took strong nationalist positions during the Khilafat agitation. M. K. Antony, a local medical practitioner, was the first president of the Union.
Though most of the Union activists were involved in communal organisations, the Union had carefully avoided any formal communal affiliation. The Union, in 1926, had appealed to the communal organisations in the state to hold separate labour meetings along with their annual conferences. Only SNDP Yogam conducted such a labour conference along with its annual conference at Quilon. The participation of the TLA in the above meeting was misrepresented and criticised by some sections of the press. Thereupon the Union decided not to participate officially in such conferences.

The open sympathy of the TLA with the anti-savarna movements as well as the affiliation of its' office bearers with the communal organisations must have been a source of many unsettled arguments within the TLA. There was always a small section of 'pure' nationalists who held all communal organisations as anti-national and disruptive. A perusal of the proceedings of the 12th Annual Conference of the TLA in 1937, gives very interesting insights into the nature of these conflicts.

The following resolution was moved by some of the fraternal delegates from Quilon in the Conference: "This great conference of the wage workers declares that the real interests of all workers in different communities of this country are the same and that the different communal and religious organisations that we see in this country are only for the purpose of concealing this real unity of interests from the public. The conference appeals to the wage labourers to resign from all such organisations and work for their economic and political interests in class lines." The resolution created a furore in the conference.
The defense of the organisations of the lower castes and their import... met with wide approval at the conference. It was alleged that the resolution was a clever move of the higher castes to deflect the labouring masses from the anti-caste struggle. It was the following resolution, moved by R. Sugathan, that was finally unanimously adopted: "This conference resolves that since the economic interests of all the labour organisations comprising of people from different communities and religions are the same, within the labour organisations there is no relevance for religious or communal interests". 83/

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

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

It appears that CSP sympathisers in Alleppey did not have sufficient mass strength or well articulated arguments to make a determined intervention in the debate on workers and communal organisations. The first resolution was evidently far removed from/CSP's attitude towards...
communal organisations. CSP correctly perceived the link between the anti-imperialist struggle and the struggle against savarna domination, and therefore, had supported the Abstention movement despite its communal overtones. At the same time, the CSP stood for the development of independent class organisations of workers and peasants, which were to rise to the leadership of the national and anti-savarna struggles. The unanimously adopted compromise resolution, as we have already noted, set the political task for the working class.

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

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

Though one may trace isolated instances of disturbances, generally speaking, the relationship between the employers and employees was cordial during the early periods of the industry. It was stated at the 3rd Annual Conference of the TLA in 1926: "It must be admitted that hitherto there has not been any serious difference of opinion between the workers and the industrialists. Likewise, it cannot be said that the employers have caused any great hardship to my labour brethren.... Even in the matter of working hours and wage rates there have not been any irreconcilable competition between the employers and the workers..."
is something that both deserve to be congratulated.\textsuperscript{87}

As we have already noted, the Indian employers actively co-operated in the formation of the TLA. The name of the union was changed from 'Labour Union' to the less aggressive sounding 'Travancore Labour Association' within a few months of its formation. The TLA, it was advised, should concern itself to improve the social status of the workers than their economic conditions.\textsuperscript{88} Social welfare activities such as the formation of a reading room and library, an evening education centre, a death benefit fund scheme, an ayurvedic hospital and co-operative society for the workers constituted the main burden of the TLA's functioning in the early years.\textsuperscript{89} Speeches of the union leaders at labour meetings on such themes as the virtues of thrift and education and the vices of drinking and indiscipline.

These being the nature of the main activities of the union, the employers were not seen as antagonists but as friends. The early appeal made by the TLA contained no reference to any capital-labour conflict in the industry or the grievances of the workers. The misery, illiteracy and poverty of the workers were all legacies of their uncivilised past and the Association was setting out to eradicate them with the help of benevolent capitalists: "Know ye workers that the Labour Union is formed to offer you the necessary comforts, to educate you and your children to raise you from the agonies of poverty and save you from your dangers. We assure you that the union will be with you as a benevolent lord in poverty, as a teacher in ignorance, like daughters and sons in misery. Therefore each one of you, dear friends, must join the Union..."\textsuperscript{90}
Thus read one of the earliest printed appeals circulated by the TLA in 1922.

From the progress of the union membership it was evident that the workers were not very enthusiastic about their union in the early years. In the words of K.C. Govindan: "It was very rare that the workers joined the union by themselves. Therefore in many companies messages had to be taken into the executive committee. It was their influence and compulsion that connected the workers to the Association initially." P.K. Bava admitted: "Apprently the workers were under the impression that organising/labour union was a subversive activity against the capitalists. However much I tried to change this understanding I did not succeed. They expressed the stand that they had nothing against the employers."

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

An equally important factor in this connection is the probability of an improvement in the material conditions of the workers shifting from agricultural activities into the industry. R. Sugathan, describes
this period to be the 'golden age' of coir workers — a worker, at times, earning as much as Rs. 17.50 a week.\textsuperscript{34} Further, we have already seen that the systems of labour recruitment and regulation were not harsh or oppressive. In a situation of acute labour scarcity, the moopans and contractors had to develop patron-client type of relations with the workers in order to ensure an adequate labour supply. On its success depended their position in the company and prospects for prosperity. These conditions changed rapidly from the end of the 'twenties.

In the 'thirties, labour availability far from being scarce any more, exceeded the requirements of the industry. This was partly due to demographic causes\textsuperscript{35} but mainly due to the impact of the economic depression.\textsuperscript{36} With the sharp decline in the prices of agricultural products there was a significant reduction in the employment of labour in plantations and coconut farms. The redundant labour flocked to Alleppy in search of jobs. This resulted in the creation of a "floating population of which considerable portion [was] unable to find regular full time employment" and hung about the factory gates hoping to be "taken in as substitutes or part time workers".\textsuperscript{37} With such surplus population knocking at the factory gates the employers could successfully reduce the wages.\textsuperscript{38} The labour conditions rapidly deteriorated.

Paradoxically, it was also a period of rapid expansion of the industry. Because of the decline in the purchasing power of the common people due to the economic depression, the demand for cheap floor-cover like coir fabrics rapidly increased in the West. The exports of coir
fabrics from Travancore which was around 91,826 qtls. in 1921-22, steadily increased to around 2,69,150 qtls. in the peak year of 1936-37. 99/

At the same time, the export prices of coir fabrics which had begun to stagnate from around the mid-'twenties, began to rapidly decline from 1927-28 onwards. The export prices slumped to the lowest level in 1933-34, the mat prices being 64 per cent and matting prices 50 per cent below the 1925-26 level. From then onwards, the prices began to slowly recover. However, till the Second World War they continued to be around 40 to 50 per cent below the prices in the mid-twenties. 100/

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

There were around 100 registered shippers of coir products in 1938. The four leading European manufacturer-shippers controlled 50 per cent of the exports. The other important urban manufacturer-shippers, numbering around 15, controlled another 30 - 35 per cent of the exports. This meant that the rest of the shippers had an insignificant share of the exports. In fact, around 30 of them made no shipments at all in 1938. Most of the smaller shippers made only occasional shipments and they came into and dropped out of business year after year. 102/

The small scale of the business transacted by the smaller shippers did not allow them the services of any reputable agents as
representatives in foreign countries. The only way in which they could capture the markets was by cutting down the prices. The foreign importers exploited the situation by circulating orders for coir products and the shippers and encouraging them to underquote each other. Though the exports of each of these individual shippers was very small, their offer of low prices depressed the prices of the goods of all other shippers. Often their agents in Europe failed to honour the contracts made and consequently the goods had to be dumped in the market for whatever price they might fetch.

Of the 69 shippers active in 1930, only 23 transacted any business in 1929. Thus, the majority of the shippers that existed in 1938 had entered the trade in the 'thirties. The emergence of a large number of scale rural manufactories in the 'thirties was the background of this proliferation of shippers in coir export business.

Spurred on by the rapid increase in demand, the industrial capacity had increased several fold in the 'thirties. In 1930, there were 290 coir manufactories with 4335 matting looms and 7350 mat looms employing around 25000 -30000 workers in the industry. Though the large-scale manufactories continued to expand and the Alleppy town remained the major centre of the industry, the most important feature of the industrial expansion was the growth of small-scale manufactory sector in the countryside between Alleppy and Shertallai. 45 per cent of the matting looms and 70 per cent of the mat looms were in the manufactories outside the town of Alleppy. While the average number of looms in Alleppy coir manufactories was 111, the average number of looms in the rural manufactories was only 30.
The lower cost of production in the countryside was the main attraction for this locational spread of the industry. Lower cost of land, building and other establishment charges, and "the many small economies that could be effected in the villages" all contributed to the cheaper production in the rural areas. The most important factor, however, was the 'comparative cheapness of labour'. According to the factory returns data, the rural wages were around 50 per cent below the urban wages.104/

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

The subcontracting system enabled the urban manufacturer-shippers to operate at an optimum level of production capacity, delegating the excess orders to rural manufacturers, who bore the brunt of seasonal variations in demand. It also enabled them to reduce the cost of production and maintain the profit margins, which was already under pressure due to the rivalry amongst the Indian and European manufacturer-shippers. There was considerable excess capacity in the rural manufactories
so that the manufacturers competed amongst themselves to secure orders, at times, even "execut(ing) orders below the cost prices".  

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

Because of the rivalry and lack of co-operation between the Indian and European firms, the urban manufacturer-shippers could not press a common front against the new entrants into coir trade. They failed to agree upon a common scheme to regulate the industry and arrest the decline in profits. Experience had already shown that in Alleppy the powerlooms were "unable to compete with the country looms". The increase in the productivity consequent upon the application of the then available modern technology was not high enough to out compete the rural cheap labour based handloom production.
The options before the urban manufacturers were therefore either to increase the subcontracts to rural manufactories or to reduce the wages in their urban manufactories. Thus, the urban coir workers experienced a steady erosion of their earnings, in a period of rapid expansion of the industry, no fault of their own. Their keen awareness of the underlying process - the reckless inter-capitalist rivalry - increased their resentment.

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

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

Average Wage Rates in Four Leading Alleppy Manufactories

between 1925 and 1937

(Real wages at 1925 prices given in the brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>Two rural manufactories (1937)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td>Rs.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. 2 shaft 4/4 size Anjengo Matting</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>-50.6</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.19)</td>
<td>(7.19)</td>
<td>(6.60)</td>
<td>(+ 6.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 2 shaft 6/4 size Anjengo Matting</td>
<td>12.06</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>-60.6</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.06)</td>
<td>(13.49)</td>
<td>(10.25)</td>
<td>(-15.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 2 shaft 8/4 size Diamond Matting</td>
<td>16.31</td>
<td>19.94</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>+53.6</td>
<td>4.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16.31)</td>
<td>(16.99)</td>
<td>(16.32)</td>
<td>(+0.1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. 4 shaft 4/4 size Anjengo Matting</td>
<td>7.30</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>-53.4</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.30)</td>
<td>(8.63)</td>
<td>(7.43)</td>
<td>(+1.5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. No.1 to 5 mats binding rate per 100</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>-45.9</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.56)</td>
<td>(4.08)</td>
<td>(4.06)</td>
<td>(+14.0)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. No.1 Mat weaving charges for 24/14 size</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>-42.8</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.13)</td>
<td>(+18.2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Note: The money wages have been deflated with an appropriate price index. The prices of the commodities have been taken from relevant issues of the Statistics of Travancore and the weights from the family budget survey conducted by the Board of Trade Disputes in 1938.
Table 2

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Coir factories</th>
<th>Other occupations like assets income etc.</th>
<th>Total family income</th>
<th>Average income per worker from manufacture</th>
<th>Percentage of families in debt</th>
<th>Average debt per family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alleppy</td>
<td>13.50</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>16.29</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>90.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>10.31</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>14.44</td>
<td>7.36</td>
<td>98.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ujlukuzhi</td>
<td>8.16</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>11.94</td>
<td>5.91</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varkala</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>92.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>7.99</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>11.14</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>96.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollam</td>
<td>10.40</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>14.40</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>77.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paravoor</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>84.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Centres</td>
<td>10.73</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>14.63</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>88.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


86.9 per cent of the working class families surveyed were found to be in debt. The average debt per family was nearly three times the average monthly income of the family from all sources.
According to the Board of Trade Disputes, "the average standard of living of the workers in the industry is not satisfactory. They live in small huts, entirely made of coconut leaves with a single living room in which an average family of 5.6 members huddle together, and considering the exhausting character of their work, particularly of those who labour at the looms, the quality and quantity of their food cannot be regarded as sufficiently nourishing. We do not say that their standard of living is worse than that of those working in other industries and agriculture. But we have no doubt their conditions call for improvement."  

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

Perhaps, one should not exaggerate the role of the decline in the standard of living in arousing protest and promoting class consciousness among the masses. As we have seen, the whole inter-war period was a period of rapid expansion of the industry and therefore a significant segment of the labour force must have been new entrants into the industry. What was important was that a core section of the working class with service tenure dating to the 'twenties did exist in the urban areas.
It was the workers who actually experienced the full impact of the growing crisis in the industry. Their radical response to the situation struck sympathetic notes among the masses of workers given the ferment created by the NSRM discussed earlier.

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

The first recorded strike against wage reduction took place in 1928 at the Williams Goodacre & Co. The Union severely reprimanded the striking workers. However, it was forced to come out against the management as no one could justify the disciplinary dismissal of the entire work force in the factory. This inaugurated a period of spontaneous strikes in a number of manufactories. It became a normal practice for the workers to declare the strike first and then seek the support of the union leadership.114/ The leadership had a difficult time trying to settle "the numerous strikes that broke out one after another without damaging the interests and prestige of the capitalists as well as the workers".115/ Need for self discipline and restraint was a constant theme of speeches of the president of the TLA: "... It is most necessary that you should have respect and affection towards your employers. You should keep in mind that the prosperity of..."
the employers is also your prosperity. ... It is because this understand is lacking mutually that the peace and calmness in the country is declining..."116/

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

In 1928, K.C.Govindan became the Secretary ousting P.K.Dava who had sided with the management of Empire Coir Works in a labour dispute. 
"... a fluent Malayalam speaker.... on several occasions advocating strikes"119/ he symbolised the new growing militancy of the union. He led the three month long strike at Bombay Company in 1931 which was one of the first well organised strikes called by TLA. In 1934, P.S.Mohamed was removed from the Presidentship and P.Kesavadev, a firey progressive writer, was elected as the Secretary. The Alleppy workers had been captivated by his radical speech at the Annual Conference in 1933 and sought him out to be their Secretary.120/

The short period in which Dev was actively associated with the TLA may be correctly characterised as a nodal point in it's history. It was the end of the collaborationist trends as the mainstream in the TLA.121/ The TLA decisively moved on to a confrontation path.
Towards a New Consciousness

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

The workers found that the labour conditions of the rural manufactory of the Ezhava capitalists were the worst even though the latter belonged to the same caste as the majority of the workers. The excess labour supply situation tended to depress the wage rates that were being fixed in the new rural manufactories. Further, given the close connections between the workers in the rural industry and the agricultural sector, the wages in the country manufactories tended to conform more to the low
wages prevalent in the other rural occupations than the traditional urban wage rates prevalent in the industry. It should also be noted that the rural workers derived a significant portion of the reproduction costs of their labour power from outside the industry. As can be seen from Table 2, they derived 43 to 26 per cent of their monthly family income from other rural occupations and assets. This also tended to keep the rural wages low.

The workers employed by the rural capitalists were mostly hutment dwellers living on the lands of the rural Ezhava capitalists and farmers and therefore "more accommodating and easy of control than the workmen in the urban areas." The caste affinity, the control over the dwelling place and the traditional customs enabled the rural capitalists to increase the exploitation through various subtle ways. A good portion of the wages of the workers were expropriated by the management for various reasons such as moopan's commissions, tickets for dramas, cinema and other entertainments, festival collections and charity donations.

The Board of Trade Disputes fully concurred with the TLA on the miserable conditions of the rural workers. "... even [the low wages] are not paid at regular intervals or in full at any time. They maintain rice and provision shops, tea shops and, in some instances, even barbershop. A running account is kept with the labourers who receive, on account, 'chits' to these shops. Only a small portion of the wages is given in cash. In other words, the labourer is given enough to keep him alive and his account is seldom completely settled, and very often the poor labourer does not know what is due to him."
The trade union movement in Alleppy realised that the existence of an unorganised sector in the rural countryside was a major threat to their bargaining power. The European manufacturer-shippers held that as long as the rural manufacturers were permitted to continue their reckless competition, the deterioration of the labour conditions in the urban areas could not be arrested. The fault lay with the TLA which had "neglected to endeavour to improve the conditions outside Alleppy where there was more wage cutting...".  

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

The caste organisations like SNDP Yogam could do little to stem, the growing class conflict within the Ezhava caste itself. The suffix of Muthalai (the owner of capital) after the names of the Ezhava employer became a common expression. The class rivalries were replacing the earlier caste affinities.

The growing class consciousness found rich expression in the cultural life of the workers. The Alleppy workers had been deeply influenced by the literary renaissance that accompanied the ESRM.
Coir workers had a surprisingly high level of literacy. In 1938, 65.6 per cent of the coir workers were literate. The poems of Kumaran Asan and K. Aiyappan enjoyed wide popularity among the masses. These influences continued to flourish in the poetry recitals at labour meetings and the marching songs at demonstrations. The literary ferment was very widespread among the masses and deserves a more detailed study. Poets and short-story writers emerged from the ranks of the workers. Many of these new writers published their poems and stories in small booklets and sang their poems at workers' gatherings and factory gates. The sale proceeds often went to fund some cause of the Union. A perusal of this vast and scattered literature may not impress one with its literary qualities, but they should be seen as the first stirrings of a class realising its identity. The advertisement of a Malayalam prose drama, 'Raveendran or the Workers' Leader, produced by the coir workers emphasising "This story is about the poor. And the actors of this drama are those who have through their life experience known the real side of poverty and repression." A labour weekly published by the TLA from 1924 (with some brief period of interruption until it was banned by the government in 1938) became a mirror of the emerging new consciousness and culture. Under the impact of the growing struggles the journal began to slowly move away from its' early moderate positions. Under the editorship of Kesava Dev, the journal was transformed into a radical cultural weapon challenging every established order and galvanising the workers into tempestous moods. The circulation of the weekly, which was around 500
between 1924 and 1933 more than doubled to 2000 in 1934. Poems and short stories dealing with the life and struggles of the workers of the workers were published. Thozhilali claimed that the new literature to be a reflection of the growing social struggles and the social awareness generated thereby.

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

"Time calls on us to stand firm hand in hand,
The path for forward march is all clear now.
There goes the grand train of revolution
Come on Comrades! Enough have we suffered
The cruelty and hunger of this wicked world..."

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

The emotional tempo unleashed by these cultural movements was an important factor that made the workers receptive to the radical ideology. Though P.S. Mohamed, the president of the TLA, frequently
assured the employers that the Alleppy workers were "loyal to their King and Country" and had no intention whatsoever "to imitate the workers' movement in foreign countries". This was precisely the course upon which the Alleppy working class was set.

A significant space of Thozhil was set aside to explain the international developments, especially those in the Soviet Union. The basic principles of Marxism and socialism were explained in a popular style. Even parts of 'Capital' were serialised. The Union conferences, attended by prominent radical leaders and thinkers, were another important source of dissemination of the radical ideas. For example, at the 9th Annual Conference of the TLA, E.V.Ramaswamy Naicker, who had just returned from a trip to the Soviet Union, spoke at length appreciatively of the new social system there.

It was in the background of this growing class consciousness among the workers, that the TLA decided to launch an agitation to draw the attention of the government to wage reductions. It was decided that a jatha of 50 workers should march to Trivandrum to wait in deputation to the Maharaja, the 'Dear Lord and Bread Giver'. It generated great enthusiasm among the workers. The jatha anthem written by R.Sugathan, exhorting workers "destined to achieve the equal world, to start the march", became a very popular song among the workers.

All these generated approval among the capitalists and tensions in the industrial belt. Both the Mian Chambers of Commerce at Alleppy joined together to forbid the TLA of dabbling in politics. They alleged that the jatha programme was intended to further the Abstention Movement which was in full swing at that time.
The government banned the jatha and arrested the jatha leaders. It was convinced that "if the jatha or the worker's demonstration was allowed to proceed to Trivandrum on foot, it would create enmity and distrust between the employers and the employers in the state."143/ In an unprecedented exhibition of class solidarity the workers all over the industrial belt struck work in protest. They amassed in front of the police station and refused to disperse till the arrested leaders on the request of the friendly police, appealed to the workers to disperse peacefully.

The worker's struggle came into direct conflict with the state power. Anti-government sentiments began to mount and the workers began to lose faith in constitutional agitations. Attacks on the king were raised from the public platforms of the Union. When a lawyer, who happened to preside over one such meeting, reprimanded the speaker for criticising the jatha and prevented him from speaking, the agitated crowd hooted the loyalist president and resolved that they should not have gentleman lawyers' to preside over the meetings.144/ In fact, K.P. Panicker, the President of the TLA, who had disassociated with the Union on the eve of the government ban of the jatha, proved to be the last of the gentleman presidents of the Union. The masses were searching for a new leadership. Even Kaseva Dev, despite his radical convictions was unable to bear the state tensions in the industrial belt and had withdrawn, from the trade union movement. It was at this juncture that the CSP made its entry into the coir industrial belt.
The Congress Socialist Party and the General Strike of 1938

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

The workers refused to be placated by the labour bills initiated by the government or by the farcical enquiry conducted by the District Magistrate into the grievances of the workers. The indignation of the workers reached its zenith when the government nominated P. S. Mohamed, who had by then been totally discredited because of his reformist and communal views, as the worker's representative in the Legislative Assembly, despite the strong protests of the TLA. Further, the government denied legal registration to the Union. With a vengeance it continued the prosecution against the jatha leaders and had them convicted. All these strengthened those who were arguing for a general strike in the industry. The CSP group began pushing the Union to take a bold stand in favour of open agitation and strike action to end the wage reductions.
The rising tempo of the working class protest coincided with the agitation for the "responsible government" started by the Travancore State Congress. The brutal repression unleashed by the government only helped to win greater sympathy for the movement. Since all the basic civil rights were denied in Travancore, the State Congress decided to start a civil disobedience movement from August 26th. Thereupon the government banned the State Congress and the Youth Leage. There was a popular upsurge of protest and for the next two months. The whole of Travancore was thrown into a violent turmoil. Though the town of Alleppy was one of the relatively more peaceful centres of the struggle, in the adjacent countryside the agitation often took a violent turn. The police had to be instructed not to pursue the crowds to the countryside without adequate armed strength.

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

The State Congress leaders rushed to Alleppy and strongly condemned the repression against the trade union movement. They introduced a censure motion in the Legislative Assembly on this issue, the debate of which was prominently reported in the Thozhilali. The above expression of solidarity with the working class by the State
Congress was an important factor that won widespread sympathy among the workers for the cause of the State Congress agitation. Besides, many of the important leaders of the TLA were also prominent State Congress activists. The CSP also strongly advocated the workers should join the State Congress in mass.  

To conclude it all, the Chambers of Commercials and the employers in Alleppy, held the State Congress responsible for the growing labour unrest in Alleppy. This left little choice for even those workers who were not political in attitude. Political demand of the State Congress began to be raised openly in connection with the general strike.

The development of the general strike may be divided into three broad phases. The first phase starts with the preparations of the strike up to the end of the first week of the struggle. Though the decision for the general strike was taken in March, the leadership of TLA in the characteristic State Congress style, had not made any serious attempt to prepare the workers for the struggle.  

By October, most of them were in jail having courted arrest in the State Congress Satyagraha or were away from Alleppy on political campaigns. Thus it was left to the CSP cadres at Alleppy, who were assisted by a group of cadres in Malabar under the leadership of P. Krishna Pillai, the main architect of the Communist Party in Kerala, to prepare the workers for the strike. The union was reorganised in factory level committees and a disciplined volunteer force was raised. The most important element of the preparations was intense political campaign through factory and regional level meetings of the workers.
Such was the politically surcharged atmosphere created by this campaign that when in a massive gathering of workers on October 19th the strike declaration was read, the loudest applause was for the political demands for establishment of a responsible government, repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, release of political prisoners and withdrawal of ban on the State Congress and the Youth League. The main economic demands were — minimum wages of Rs.30 a month, 48-hour work week, unemployment allowance, maternity benefits and ending of the truck system, contract labour and unjust fines in the industry.

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

However, the tension in the town was mounting. The boatmen all over Travancore were already on an indefinite strike. Water transport being the chief means of transport in Travancore, this strike had virtually paralysed the port town of Alleppy. Oil mill workers had also declared their intention of joining the strike movement. 25 red shirt uniformed workers from Alleppy participated in the huge State Congress demonstration in Trivandrum on October 23rd. They marched at the head of the demonstration to the
beat of a song that declared the determination and the resolution
of the striking workers:

"Slaves no more we are, bow down no more we shall,
Standing firm the battles we will fight,

---------------------------------------------------------------

Oh tyrant rule! we have seen your true colours
In death we shall no more be frightened.159/

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

The military and the police began the offensive against the
coir workers from the night of 23rd itself.162/ The provocation was
the attempt of some of the workers returning from the worker's rally
on the beach to obstruct the transport of stocks of coir goods from
the factories. The violence by the police infuriated the crowd and a
coir factory was set fire in the night. The next day, the police let
lause a reign of terror in the town ransacking the union office, beating up the picketeers, raiding the working class quarters and torturing the arrested workers. Five workers were killed in the police firing and more than 260 workers injured in the lathicharges. The workers put up sporadic resistance by felling trees to set up road blocks and resisting the rowdies with arms. However, the odds were against them. The terror made the open functioning of the Union impossible and broke up the old organisation. When the Strike Committee set to take stock of the situation, there was no quorum for the Committee to meet.168/

The second phase of the general strike started with the reorganisation of the Strike Committee. In the place of the former factory committees, the town and suburbs were divided into a number of wards, each under a ward committee of militants. By the end of the second week of the strike, the repression and starvation had begun to take their impact felt on the morale of the workers. Workers began to trickle back to work into the factories.164/ The Strike Committee chalked out a programme of picketing. To nip in the bud the rumours spread by the interested quarters that the 'Malabar leaders' had withdrawn to safety after instigating the trouble, it was decided that leading cadres were to lead the volunteers to the factory gates defying the military. The picketeers were publicly assaulted and tortured and rumours spread amongst the workers that K.K.Karmier, a much respected CSP cadre from Malabar, had died in the police lock-up. The indignation rallied the lagging spirits and the tide turned.165/ Thus, in this
phase a set of young militant cadres began to assume leadership of the movement at all levels. The picketing programme and the resolute lead given by the CSP increased it's prestige among, and hold over, the masses.

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

Matters took a collision course when the old guard declared the massive demonstration that the Strike Committee had planned as 'unauthorised' and postponed it. They feared that the secret negotiations they were carrying on with the employers would be jeopardized by the demonstration. However, the negotiations failed and P.N. Krishna Pillai, who was leading the discussions, was arrested. Evidently, the negotiations were on
a clever scheme by the authorities to create a rift among the workers. The Managing Committee had to admit its mistake in calling off the demonstration and make a public appeal to the workers to resolutely continue the struggle. This temporarily ceased the tensions.  

However, the secret negotiations continued behind the scene, between the employers, Managing Committee leaders and the District Magistrate. On November the Managing Committee withdrew the strike and appealed to the workers to resume their work. The only tangible gain was an immediate increase of 6½ per cent rise in wages. The managements gave an assurance not to victimise the strikers and the government reiterated the decision to appoint a committee with employer-employee representatives to enquire into the disputes in the industry.  

Now the conflict within the union became open. Angry workers even attempted to attack the house of V.K.Velayudhan where R.Suguthan lived. The Strike Committee members disowned the appeal and held that only it was authorised to take decisions regarding the strike. The Managing Committee retaliated by dissolving the Strike Committee. It took a whole night of discussion and persuasion by CSP leaders, like M.Krishna Pillai and A.K.Gopalan, to make the Strike Committee agree to withdraw the struggle. It was resolved that the action of the Managing Committee was improper and inopportune. It had isolated and weakened the position of the rural workers who were not covered by the agreement. There was also no assurance for the withdrawal of cases registered against the workers. However, it would have been suicidal to continue the struggle with disunity in the ranks in a
situation when the State Congress agitation had virtually subsided.

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

The CSP did not wish to create a split in the Union and destroy the workers' unity. The refusal to undertake any witch hunting enabled the genuine and devoted sections of the moderates to continue in the Union. Thus, while P.N.Krishna Pillai and V.K.Velayudhan drifted away from trade union activities, leaders like R.Suguthan and C.K.Velayudhan grew into socialists and community party leaders. The experience of the 1939 strike radically transformed R. Suguthan. It forced him to discard his moderate positions. He was arrested and sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment for a militant poem he wrote for the May Day of 1939.
The emergence of Radical Hegemony

The general strike of 1938 was a turning point in the history of Alleppey working class. It proved to be a school of mass education for the workers. Reviewing the struggle, P. Krishna Pillai noted that the widespread repression and violence by the police had convinced even the most backward sections among the workers of the repressive class nature of the state. The experience left behind a strong streak of anti-government feelings in the subconsciousness of the Alleppy workers. Defending the decision of the Union to host the All Kerala Labour Conference of 1939, an union activist declared to an approving audience: "I heard somebody saying that it [the Labour Conference] is revolutionary. I wish to say that the workers are nothing but revolutionary. The disruption of the power of this autocratic government and destroying it to build a new state and society are what the workers desire and struggle for...."

The strike decisively isolated the moderates in the Union leadership. The workers began to perceive their interests as distinct from the bourgeois national movement that had virtually ignored the strike after their compromise of October 23rd. The participation of the State Congress in the struggle was limited to a resolution of the Working Committee and a formal visit of an enquiry committee, whose report never saw the light of the day. The determination of the Alleppy workers to continue their struggle against all odds won the admiration of the Youth Leaguers and the radical elements within the State Congress who were disillusioned by
the vacillations of the bourgeois national leadership. The solidarity campaing started by these radical elements brought them into close contact with the working class movement. This collaboration led to the formation of the 'Radical Group' in May 1939, with M.N. Govindan Nair as its secretary. The Radical Group was to function as an organised socialist fraction within the State Congress on the lines of the CSP in Malabar. The authorities watched this political development with deep concern. "Their [labour activists'] coalition with the Radical Section of the State Congress as exemplified by 12 members of Labour Managing Committee joining the Radical Section is ominous" reported the police to the District Magistrate. The fears were well founded. The members of the Radical Group, except for a small faction led by N. Sreekantan Nair, became the leading core of the Communist Party in Travancore. From this stream came T.V. Thomas, who replaced P. N. Krishna Pillai as the president of the Union in 1940.

The rapid politicisation of the masses and the emergence of socialist leadership undermined the communal hegemony over the workers. The slow transformation that was taking place in the Ezhava caste leadership and movement was very evident to the workers. The victory of the Absenteeism movement and the Temple Entry Proclamation had removed the immediate grievances of the Ezhava elite. Weak as they were, when faced to the well entrenched Christian capitalists, they wanted now to withdraw from all anti-government agitations. Given the new industrial policy of active state intervention to promote rapid industrialisation, an attitude of compromise rather than confrontation suited the interests of the Ezhava-bourgeoisie.
The chauvinist and conservative elements who were gaining ascendancy in the ESRM actively demanded a change in the tactics of the SNDP Yogam. In 1933, 100 eminent Ezhavas of North Travancore demanded that C. Kesavan be removed from the secretaryship of the SNDP Yogam as he was an "atheist and rationalist". They threatened non-cooperation if the SNDP Yogam continued to participate in the agitations against the government "since most of the grievances of the community [had] been met."\(^{162}\)

Ezhavas who had joined the government service and had risen in the hierarchy were another important pressure group demanding a change in the policy of the SNDP Yogam.\(^{183}\) Finally, in 1939, the SNDP Yogam withdrew its support to the State Congress and all forms/anti-government agitation.

The Ezhava coir capitalists fully endorsed the decision to withdraw from the national movement. In the annual conference of the SNDP Yogam of Shertallai, in 1939, the report of the Secretary was allowed to be passed only after the deletion of the passages that could have been interpreted as veiled criticism against the government.\(^{184}\)

This pro-government tilt in the policy of the SNDP Yogam severely undermined its hold over the workers. Unlike in 1937, when any attack against caste organisations led to emotional protests even in labour conferences, we now find severe indictment of the SNDP Yogam by labour leaders being warmly received even in caste gatherings. K. Aiyappan, once-time hero of the Alleppy workers, but who now became the chief architect of the new strategy of the SNDP Yogam, was often singled out for criticism.\(^{185}\) C.K. Velayudhan, who had been in the SNDP Yogam Board,
as a representative of Alleppy workers, reflected the popular mood when he declared in a local meeting of SNDP Yogam at Alleppy: "I do not think that there is anything to be proud about the present situation in SNDP... Sree Narayana Guru held that all religions and castes must unite. But I am not aware of the SNDP doing anything to remove caste consciousness and religious hatred... I who know the inner secrets of the organisation can vouch that in the near future the SNDP and its branches are going to fall into the hands of the reactionaries."  

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

Thus, by the end of the thirties, the Alleppy workers developed into a class conscious of its aims and future. The change that had taken place about between 1922 and 1938 is best exemplified in the following experience of K.C. George, the Provincial secretary of the CPI in Travancore in the 'forties. In 1928, the young George, fresh from college and
brimming with enthusiasm paid a visit to Alleppy, the major working
class centre in Kerala. Being a 'pure' nationalist who could stand
in communal organisation, he had to return deeply disenchanted with
the workers. "It was a time when even the workers could not rise above
communal feelings," he recollects. In 1938, disappointed with the
leadership of the State Congress, he went once again to Alleppy
where the workers were heroically upholding the flag of the struggle.
The working class continuing the struggle for the independence of the
country, fighting most cruel repression, without the support of the
State Congress and relying on their own strength showed me a new
field for work and new style of work."

It is this transformation of the Alleppy workers that we have
attempted to chronicle in this paper.
[The paper is a revised version of a series of articles published in during Malayalam in Chintah / 1982-C3. I wish to acknowledge the helpful comments and discussions on the paper by the following people: N.Krishnaji, A.Vaidyanathan, Mihir Shah, Nata Duvvury, V.Meera, P.R.Gopinathan Nair, Ram Manohar Reddy, P.K.Michael Tharakan, Amit Mitra, Ashok Babu and the participants of the seminar in Centre for Development Studies in March, 1982. Discussions with numerous trade union activists in Alleppy were extremely helpful in gaining important insights into the various aspects of the development of Alleppy working class. I would like to specially acknowledge K.K.Kunjun, V.A.Simon, P.G.Padmanabhan, K.Das, N.P.Purusotham and K.C.Govindan. The last mentioned made available to the author numerous invaluable records of the early trade union movement, including copies of the Thozhilali. The reminiscences of K.C.Govindan's experience in the early trade union movement in Kerala will be shortly published from Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, as a part of the A.D.Neelakantan Endowment Studies. Needless to say, none of the above mentioned, is in no way responsible for any of the errors of commission or omission present in the paper]
Through coir woven products had been exhibited at the Madras exhibitions of 1855 and 1857, it is unlikely that there was any commercial production of coir mat and matting. The exhibits were probably the products of experimental attempts for only "few [were] employed in the industry". W.T. Wenn, Cochin-Malabar Palms and Pageants, Calicut, 1948, p.197.


Government of Travancore, Report of the Administration of Travancore for the year 1900-01, Trivandrum, 1901.

V.I.Lenin, The Development of Capitalism in Russia, Moscow, 1977, p.344.

Samuel Morse, Native Life in Travancore, London, 1883, p.244.

See the papers regarding the law suit between James Darragh and Josiah Dow C.P.No.4161, ERC, Trivandrum.


Estimated from the data given in Report, BCTDMR, pp.70-72. It is assumed that value of 4656 qtl. of coir fabrics was Rs.11 between 1900-03 and 1912-13 and that 66.6 yds of matting weighed 1 qtl.
13/ The Indices of Unit Value of Export of Coir Products from the Alleppy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Coir fibre</th>
<th>Coir yarn</th>
<th>Mat</th>
<th>Matting</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913-14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914-15/1918-19</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918-19/1921-22</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-22/1926-27</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


17/ For a detailed description of tariffs against the coir products in foreign countries, see K.S. Venkataraman, op.cit., JUB, Vol.10, No.1, July 1941, pp.73-5.


21/ K.S. Venkataraman op.cit., JUB, Vol.6, No.4, January 1940, p.70.

24/ Census of India 1931, Vol.XXVIII, Travancore Part 1, p.253 and
Government of Travancore, Statistics of Travancore 1107 ME/1931-32,
Trivandrum, 1932, pp.134-49.

24/ K.S.Venkat raman, op.cit., JUB, Vol.9, No.4, January 1940, p.77.

25/ For a discussion of the products and production processes in coir
weaving industry see Council of Scientific and Industrial Research,
Coir It's Extraction Properties and Uses, New Delhi, 1960, pp.29-39,
and K.Bhasharan Unnithan, Coir Industry in India with Special Reference

26/ Percentage Distribution of Male, Female and Child Workers in
Coir Manufactory in 1930-39.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>93.7</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>83.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


27/ For a description of the seasonal variations in demand for Coir fabrics
see H.Smith, Report of the Unemployment Enquiry Committee, Ernakulam,

28/ N.S.Anirudhan, 'Coir Vyavasayathil Researchum Yantimavalkaranavum
Anivarpan', Souvenir, p.206. See also Volkart Bros.Ltd., Product
Report, Cochin, 1940, p.3, quoted in Bhaskaran Unnithan, op.cit.,
pp.10: "Even as early as 1900, two thirds of the employees were
migrants..."

29/ The social position of factory workers, particularly of those who
live in the factory and those who go out of the country, is looked
upon by home workers. The former form themselves into separate
castes and inter-marry. But the influence of wealth goes a great
way in all these matters", Census of India 1931, Vol.XXV, Travancore,
Part 11, p.156.

30/ Read the Report on the scarcity of coolies in the Alleppey port

31/ Census of India 1931, Vol.XXVIII, Travancore, part 1, p.253 and
Report, BCXGMI, p.72.

32/ Report, BCXGMI, pp.85-86.

Report, DCTDMM, p.11.

Ibid., p.82.

See the letter from M/s Darragh Small & Co., dt. 30.1.1909 to the Secretary Legislative Council, Leg.Dept.46/52/1916; Re.Factories Bill Vol.III, EBC, Trivandrum.

Census of India 1931, Vol.XXVIII, Travancore, Part 1, p.496.

KOG, Charitram, p.179. Read also the following: "In those days of the industry, when the labour was scarce the moopans had to go about and canvass the workers to whom the managements paid the advances", Report, DCTDMM, p.91.

This tradition of 'indiscipline' seems to have continued into the 'thirties: "In this connection it has to be pointed out that several workmen leave their work without the permission of their employers and get themselves employed in other places. In certain cases the workmen are alleged to have left factories without the notice even after receiving advance payments. It is therefore desirable that workmen seeking employment are required to produce certificates from their former employer". Coir M.: and Matting Industry: Alleppey Chambers Reply to the Memorandum of Travancore Labour Association, (mimeo), undated, RACC, Alleppey.


P.S. Mohamed, Thiruvithamcore Labour Association's Ettamathu Varshika Sammathil Sthiram President Mr. P.S. Mohammed M.L.C. Chaitha Swagatha Prasangham, (Mal.), Alleppey, 1932, p.5. The European managements did not permit the collection of the union funds within the factory premises. See K.K. Narayan, op. cit., p.15.


KOG, Charitra Sangraham, p.5.
See the report on the speech of V.K.Purushothaman at India Nut Company, Quilon dt.28.9.114. C.S.No.D.Dis.3958/44.ERC, Trivandrum.

NG, Charitra Sangraham, p.8.

The development of extensive land reclamation and labour intensive commercial paddy cultivation in the adjacent Kuttanad area probably was responsible for the dearth of agricultural workers for factory work. For a history of the land reclamation and commercial cultivation in Kuttanad see V.R.Pillai and P.G.K.Panikar, Land Reclamation in Kerala, Bombay, 1965. See also A.V.Jose, Trade Union Movement Among Agricultural Workers in Kerala: The Case of Kuttanad Region, CDS Working Paper No.93, Trivandrum.


For a detailed history of the SNDP Yogam see P.S.Velayudhan, SNDP Yoga Charitram, (Mal.), Quilon, 1976.

Despite the rapid growth of the SNDP Yogam into a comprehensive and well-knit organisation, the strength and resilience of the local Ezhava organisations in Shertallai - Alleppy area is evident from the fact that even in 1930, there still existed 6 Ezhava caste organisations in that region prominent enough to be listed in the 'List of Political and Quasi Political Societies and Sabhas in Travancore', see C.S.No.D.Dis.746/30, ERC, Trivandrum.


NG, Charitra Sangraham, pp.6-7.
58/ E.M.S.Namboodiripad, _cit., pp.261-2. See also
E.M.S.Namboodiripad, _Swanum Malayala Sahityavum, (Mal.) Trivandrum, 1981

59/ KCG, Charitram, p.192.

60/ K.C.Govindan, 'Thiruvithancore Labour Association', (Mal.), Punnattu
Vavalar Silver Jubilee Souvenir, Alleppy, 1971, p.113. See also the report on TLA, C.S.No.D.Dis.746/30, ERC, Trivandrum

Charitram, Rantam Pusthakam, (Mal.), Quilon, 1947, pp.130-212.

62/ KCG, Charitram, p.183.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population (in lakhs)</th>
<th>Public employment</th>
<th>Elected representatives in Legislative Assembly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>1925</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>50.95(100.0)</td>
<td>24,720(100.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mahr</strong></td>
<td>8.60(17.04)</td>
<td>13,435(54.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nahas</strong></td>
<td>8.70(17.00)</td>
<td>913(3.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other depressed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Castes</strong></td>
<td>9.20(18.06)</td>
<td>422(1.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other non-depressed castes</strong></td>
<td>4.79(9.40)</td>
<td>5,257(21.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christians</strong></td>
<td>16.89(31.50)</td>
<td>4,042(16.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Muslims</strong></td>
<td>3.53(6.93)</td>
<td>613(2.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td>0.00(0.00)</td>
<td>46(0.19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: P.S.Velayudhan, SNDF Yoga Charithram, Quilon, 1920.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\) P.K.Nachavan, op.cit., p.11.


\(\text{\textsuperscript{5}}\) The Inspector of Police to District Superintendent of Police dt. 4.9.1899 Vaikon Bundle, No.7, ERC, quoted in Robin Jeffrey, 'Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics in Robin Jeffrey (ed.) People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States, Delhi, 1979., p.156.

\(\text{\textsuperscript{6}}\) A.Viragahava Aiyengar, Memorandum, 24 April 1924, Vaikon Bundle, No.1, ERC, quoted in Ibid.

See K. Aiyappan, Sahodarante Padhyakrithikal, Kottayam, 1901, pp. 92-8 and 74.

1919, Aiyappan welcomed the Soviet Revolution and held the revolutionary youth of Russia as the model for the Ezhava youth.

See C.S.No.D.Dis.975/34, Re: Particulars about the Managing Proprietor of Travancore Coir Mills, ERC, Trivandrum.

Puthupally Raghavan, Sakhavu Sugathante Jeeva Charitram (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979, p.20.


See E. Madhavan, Swatantra Samudayam (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979. This book was a revised version of the Presidential address delivered by E. Madhavan at the 3rd Annual Conference of the Ezhava youth organisation at Pattanad, near Shertalli in 1936. The publication of the book was advertised in Thozhilali. See Thozhilali, Sept. 20, 1936.

See Leg.Dept. No.R.Dis.100/39 Re: Return of the newspaper 'Muslim' and also, C.S.No.D.Dis.584/24 Re: The objectionable verses printed in the 'Muslim'.

KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p.12.

See the report on the 12th Annual Conference of the TLA, Kerala Kaumudi, Trivandrum, 1937 May 30, p.16.

Ibid., p.17.

One of the earliest recorded disturbances in the industry before the First World War was over working hours in the Darragh Smail's. The management had to concede to change the opening time in the morning from six to seven o'clock. R. Prakash, Kerala Trade Union Prasthanathinte Charitram, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979, pp. 34-5.

P. K. Bava narrates 3 incidents of work stoppages before the formation of the TLA; see K. K. Narayan, pp. 5-6.

Report, BCTDMMT, p. 91.

K. Govinda Panikker, op. cit., p. 4-5.

See the speech by N. Krishnan at the Union's General Body meeting in April 1922. KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p. 7.

KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p. 102-3.

W. A. Vijnapanam, (Mal.), flysheet, PKCG, Quilon.

In the first one month 116 workers were enrolled. (TLA, Vijnapanam, (Mal.), fly sheet, date not fixed, PKCG, Quilon). By the end of the year, the number of members had increased to nearly 600. (TLA, Notice (Mal.), fly sheet, dated March 1923, PKCG, Quilon). The number at the end of 1923 stood at 800 (P. K. Padmanabhan Asan, Thozhilalikalude Daya-nayavasthayum Nivaranangalum, (Mal.), Alleppey, 1924, p. 3). Though the membership increased rapidly in 1925 with the reduction in membership fee, thereafter it declined and was only 251 in 1925. (KCG Charitra Sangraham, p. 11 and P. S. Mohamed, Ezhamathu Varshika Sammelanathil Chaitha Prasangam, (Mal.), Alleppey, 1931, p. 1). But since then the membership steadily increased. In 1930, it was 1098 and in 1931 it grew to 2145 (P. S. Mohamed, op. cit., p. 2 and Secretariat Report, (Mal.), Alleppey, 1931, PKCG, Quilon). In 1930 the union membership was around 14,000 (P. Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhayile Pothu Panimudakkam', (Mal.), in Anthattal (ed) Shakkakalp Munnottu, Vol. II, Trivandrum, 1978, p. 59).

KCG, Charitra Sangraham, p. 7.

K. K. Narayanan, op. cit., p. 4.

R. Sugathan, Thiruvananthapuram Lekhanangal, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1979, p. 73.

The decennial rate of growth of population of Travancore was 16.2 in the first two decades of the century. During 1921-31, the population increased by 27.2 per cent. See P. G. K. Panikkar, T. N. Krishnan and N. Krishnaji, Population Growth and Agricultural Development A Case study of Kerala, Pro, Rome, 1978, p. 1.
According to the Magistrate, "this kind of treatment of the labourers [was] due to the fact that there [were] more labourers than necessary and consequently labourers can be got for at very cheap rates, and also due to the disorganised condition of the labourers and keen competition among them". See the letter of the Division First Class Magistrate to District Magistrate dt. 15.2.113, Ind.Dept.No.R.Dis.2787/30, EBC, Trivandrum.

UNIT VALUE OF EXPORTS OF COIR MAT AND MATTING FROM ALLEPPE PORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1925-26</th>
<th>1931-32</th>
<th>1933-34</th>
<th>1936-37</th>
<th>1938-39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mat</td>
<td>61.77</td>
<td>41.10</td>
<td>22.13</td>
<td>28.85</td>
<td>37.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matting</td>
<td>68.64</td>
<td>42.96</td>
<td>34.32</td>
<td>43.18</td>
<td>39.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Coir Board, Handbook of Coir Statistics, Kallawa

See the comments of Ms William Goodacre & Co. on the TLA Memorandum submitted to the Enquiry Officer, Ind.Dept.No.R.Dis.2787/38, EBC, Trivandrum.

THE REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION AND THE AVERAGE SIZE OF COIR EABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre</th>
<th>No. of Establishments</th>
<th>No. of Matting</th>
<th>No. of Total Ave. Looms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alleppe</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2374</td>
<td>2180 4554 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punnapra</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>723 734 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalavoor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>598 641 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.L. Puram</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>557 873 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shertallai</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>1272 2083 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuthiyathode</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>179 573 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaikom</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>40 143 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muhamma</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>1780 1800 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quilon</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>24 193 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>4335</td>
<td>7350 11685 46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report BCDMMI, p.73.
In 1930, the average daily wages of the urban workers was Rs.0.61 while in the rural worker received only Rs.0.30. Calculated from Statistics of Travancore 1113ME, 1938-39, Trivandrum, 1939, pp. 116-117.

Ibid., p.111.

Ibid., pp.131-14 and 169-80.


Report, DCTOMM, pp.111.

Ibid., p.110.

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


See the statement issued by Alleppy Chamber of Commerce in MH, Vol.XXXIX, No.40, January 27, 1934, p.3.

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

WCC, Charitram, p.105.

P.S.Mohammed, op.cit.

Ibid., p.2.
Presidents and Secretaries of the TLA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Occasion</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Secretary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1922 Foundation Conference</td>
<td>M.K.Antony</td>
<td>P.K. Dava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>T.C.Kesavan Vaidyar</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924 1st Annual Conference</td>
<td>N.Krishnan</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>K.Velayudhan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925 2nd Annual Conference</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926 3rd Annual Conference</td>
<td>P.K.Madhevan</td>
<td>S.Vasudevan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>P.K. Dava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926 4th Annual conference</td>
<td>P.S.Mohammed</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929 5th Annual Conference</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930 6th Annual Conference</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931 7th Annual Conference</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Siva Prasad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>V.C.Vasu VeI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932 8th Annual Conference</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>M.C.Narayanan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>V.K.Achuthan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 9th Annual Conference</td>
<td>A.Dalakrishna Pillai</td>
<td>P.Kesavadev</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>V.K.Velayudhan</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>Pandavathu Sgl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 10th Annual Conference</td>
<td>N.Krishna Menon</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>K.C.Govinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>K.P.Panicker</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 Special General Body meeting</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936 11th Annual Conference</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937 12th Annual Conference</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KCG, Charitram, pp.179-200.


At the 8th Annual Conference he had won the admiration of the workers when he ridiculed the didactic speeches of the other guests and leaders and gave a new slogan to Alleppy workers: "Let us now become rowdy rebels". Interestingly, the prominent among the workers who approached him the next year to request him to contest for the secretaryship reemerge at the end of the 'thirties as the CSP cadre. See P.Kesava Dev, Ethurppu, (Mal.), Kottayam, 1979, pp.310-6.


KCG, Charitram, pp.193.

For a description of the linkages between the agricultural sector and the rural coir weaving industry, see H.Smith, op.cit., Ernakulam, 1952, p.9.
Report, BCTOMMI, p.80. According to a survey of coir workers at Shertallai, in 1941, only 12 per cent of the workers owned any land, 19 per cent were tenants and the rest were all hutment dwellers. See Robin Jeffrey, 'Indian Working Class Revolt: Punnappra Vayalar and Communist Conspiracy of 1946', The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol.XVIII, No.2, April-June, 1981, p.103.

R. Sugathan, Thiruvithamcoore Labour Association and Managing Committee Samarppikkanna Memorandum, (Mal.), Alleppy, 1938, p.3.

Report, BCTOMMI, pp.130-1.

See the comments by M/s William Goodacre & Sons on the TLA Memorial submitted to the Enquiry Officer, Ind.Dtpt. No.R.Dis.2787/38, ERC, Trivandrum.


See the resolution No.2, the proceedings of the Committee of ACISU dt. 3.10.117, Minute Book (Managing Committee), RACISU, Shertallai.

Report, BCTOMMI, p.201. Fee concession for the children of coir workers had been one of the earliest demands raised by the TLA. See the report on the 2nd Annual Conference of the TLA, MH, Vol.XXI, No.16, June 13, 1925, p.5.

Thaio Singh's 'Daridra Deepam: [Light of Poverty], depicting the travails of a couple dedicated to the cause of the toiling masses "was sold everywhere with a view to raise funds for the expenses in connection with a labour meeting" to be presented by K.P. Thayyil — the advocate of Ezhava conversion to Islam. See C.S.No.D.Dis. 4187/44, ERC, Trivandrum. The proceeds from the sale of 'Thozhilali Ganam' [Song of a Worker] went to fund a reading room for the workers. See M.K. Padmanabhan, Thozhilali Ganam, (Mal.), 1930, Shertallai.


Thozhilali, (Mal.), December 20, 1934, Alleppey, p.8.

136/ Ibid., p.128. See also his poem 'Velakkarude Pattu' (Song of the Sigh of Relief). Thozhilali, Thulam 28, 111, Alleppy, p.1.

137/ Ibid., p.76; and KOG, Charitram, p.193. The Union activists pub a collection of his poems titled Aswasa Miswasam [Sigh of Relief]. The advertisement of the book in Thozhilali carried the caption: "Real Literature must be the reflection of ordinary peoples' daily life". Thozhilali Viseshalprathi, Alleppy, 1937, p.51.

138/ P.S.Mohammed, op.cit., p.5.

139/ N.E.Balaram, op.cit., pp.87-8.

140/ KOG, Charitra Sangraham, p.19.

141/ Puthupally Raghavan, op.cit., pp.50-1.

142/ KOG, Charitra Sangraham, p.22. See also the article 'Factory Bill Nere' (Mal.), Thozhilali, Vol.9, No.36, November 28, 1935, p.8.

143/ N.E.Balaram, op.cit., p.90.


145/ The proceedings of the Labour Conference at Colicut were explain at workers meetings. See the report of the Jatha Propaganda meet in Thozhilali, December 25, 1935, Alleppy.

146/ M.T.Chandrasenan, op.cit.

147/ KOG, Charitra Sangraham, p.25-7.

148/ In September 1937, a meeting of the CSP cadres was called in Cochin by P.Krishna Pillai to discuss the possibilities of a general strike. See M.T.Chandra Senan, op.cit. P.Krishna Pillai describing the labour situation in Alleppy, in an article published in Mathrubhumi in 1935, argued that the only solution a general strike in the industry. P.Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhay Thozhil Vazhakkku' (Mal.) in Antallat, op.cit., p.51.
For a detailed description of the struggle of the State Congress see C.Narayana Pillai, Tiruvithamcore Swatantriya Samaya Charitram, (Mal.), Trivandrum, 1972. The Youth League was a loose group of young radicals who actively participated in the Congress activities but claimed themselves to be a separate organization. Though they had no clear ideological perspective, they opposed the vacillations of the State Congress leadership and stood for uncompromising struggle against the Dawan. For a brief description of contemporary CSP perspective on the struggle see K.Damodaran, 'Thiruvithamcorile Swatantri Prakshobam', Thozhilali, 1938, August 25, p.2-3.


See the statement of the TLA Managing Committee dt.3.4.1938, in Antallat, op.cit., p.75.


See the speech of K.Damodaran at the labour meeting at Muhamma, C.Narayana Pillai, op.cit., p.328.

"Till the party cadres reached Alleppey, because of the lack of experience, pretty little had been done by way of preparation except the passing of the resolution for a general strike. Even among the workers there was lack of confidence that the strike will materialise". P.Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhayile Pothu Panimudakkam', Antallat, op.cit., p.62.


P.Krishna Pillai, op.cit., in Antallat, op.cit., p.61.

Interview with K.K.Kunjian, 6.01, Alleppey, See also P.Krishna Pillai, op.cit., in Antallat, op.cit., p.60.


T.V.Haridas, 'Thiruvininthapurathu Chuvappu Sena' (Mal.), Souvenir, p.104.


162/ For an account of the police terror on 23rd and 24th of October, see P. Krishna Pillai, 'PothuJananangalodu State Congressionodum' (Mal.), in Antalatt, op.cit., pp. 55-7 and also P. Krishna Pillai 'Alappuzhile Thozhilalikaloode, (Mal.) in Antallat, op.cit., p. 83.

163/ See the reminiscences of P. A. Solomon of the strike in Antallat, op.d p. 471.

164/ See the letter to the Dewan dt. 3.11.1930 from Mr. Haydon, the manager of William Goodacres & Sons. "Factories are still idle but this morning ten men have been to me and announced whether the leaders allow them to do or not, they intend to return on Monday...The poor fellows are literally starving. I have never seen such a change in the appearances of men in such a short time." Ind.Dept. No.R.Dis.2707/30, ERC, Trivandrum.


166/ P. Krishna Pillai, 'Alappuzhayile Pothu Panimarakkam', (Mal.), in Antalatt, op.cit., p. 66.

167/ Ibid., p. 60-9.

168/ See the letter of the District Magistrate to the Chief Secretary dt. 30.3.114 and the letter of Chairman of Travancore Chamber of Commerce to Chief Secretary dt. 15.11.1938, Ind.Dept.No.R.Dis.2707/30, ERC, Trivandrum.


170/ "Yesterday we succeeded in getting a manifesto published by the labour union office bearers...to call off the strike. Knowing this, the other fellows approached the extremists (the strike committee members) and persuaded them to disown the manifesto published by the union as that the strike need be called off only after P.N. Krishna Pillai, Achuthan and others who are in custody are released. We knew about this only in the night and we persuaded the union to meet at once and dissolve the strike committee so as to avoid its functioning any longer. Anyhow a split has been created in their camp." Letter of the District Magistrate to the Dewan dt. 30.3.114, C.S. No.R.Dis.2707/30, ERC, Trivandrum.

See the report of the State Congress meeting at Allepy dt.11.12.1938. "Mr.C.X.Velayudhan a member of the Managing Committee of TCFMU who along with R.Suyuthan, the former general secretary... was largely responsible for the termination of the labour general strike... was hooted down several times and even after the request of the president, the gathering that consisted mainly of the workers did not allow Velayudhan to proceed." C.S.No.D.Dis.213/38, ERC, Trivandrum.

See P.Krishna Pillai, Alappushayile Thozhilalikalodu, (Mal.) in Antallat, op.cit., pp.77-85. The emphasis of this appeal was on the need to preserve the unity: "What is immediately needed is that we should forget the unpleasant incidents among us for many reasons... Our future lies in a strong organisation", Puthupally Raghavan, op.cit., p.110-1.


See C.S.No.D.Dis.4098/42, ERC, Trivandrum.
See the Presidential address of O. Madhavan, the retired Chief Secretary to the Government of Travancore, at the 3rd Annual Conference of the Shetallai SNDF Yogam. C.S.No.D.Dis.3705/44, ERC, Trivandrum.

See the proceedings of the 3rd Annual Conference of Shetallai SNDF Yogam in February 1940. C.S.No.D.Dis.4090/44, ERC, Trivandrum.

See the speech of V. K. Karunakaran dt.12.3.115 at annual meeting of the Punnapra Vadakkumbagham SNDF Union Branch No.609. C.S.No.D.Dis. 3690/44, ERC, Trivandrum.

See the speech of C. K. Velayudhan at Thekkent Aryad the 4th annual conference of the SNDF Union Branch No.290. C.S.No.D.Dis.3660/44, ERC, Trivandrum.

K. C. George, op. cit., MMA, Book 26, No.1, February 21, 1901, p.4.

Bibliographical Abbreviations

NC
English Records Cellar, Government Secretariat, Trivandrum.

C.G.
Confidential Section.

C.F.
Cover File.

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