

cultivators being usurers, the labourers working under semi-serf conditions, etc.

Third, traders, wholesale and retail. They are the direct representatives of capitalistic economy, being the agency through which the national market operates. They, too, however, are tied to feudal modes of production and exploitation in several ways, their customers and they themselves being mostly tenants or landlords.

Fourth, government officials and professionals (lawyers, doctors, journalists, teachers, etc.) and other intellectuals. They too, are drawn from classes which are tied to feudal forms of exploitation as landlords or tenants. They are, however, part of an administrative apparatus which is designed to keep the Indian economy tied to the world market and which, therefore, is an essentially capitalistic state machine.

Fifth, industrial capitalists, though comparatively few in number, are the people who are tied to the capitalistic mode of production to a far greater extent than anybody else, since they, together with capitalist farmers, are the first real appropriators of surplus value. They, too, however, are indirectly tied to feudal forms of exploitation—many of them even directly. Some of them are themselves feudal landlords, who, of late, have gone into industry. Several others are such that, though they started as industrialists, have recently acquired the status of landlords as well, since they had nowhere to invest their profits except in land. The rest are tied to feudal forms of exploitation not as exploiters but as the exploited; for, they are tenants of feudal landlords and are thus subjected to payment of rent and other forms of feudal exploitation.

Finally, there are the artisans, peasants, workers and low-paid salaried employees. They are subjected on the one hand to the exploitation of the manipulation of the market and of the capitalistic system of taxation; on the other hand they are in several ways, tied to feudal exploitation.

The growth of these classes and strata of society dealt as

7

The Great National Upsurge and The Disgraceful Betrayal

We saw in an earlier chapter that the industrial bourgeoisie is very weakly developed in Kerala because our economy is feudal-colonial rather than capitalistic. This, however, does not mean that there is no bourgeois class. The development of market relations in our country necessarily led, as we have seen, to the development of certain classes and strata of society which, though closely tied to pre-capitalist modes of production, are simultaneously tied to the system of world capitalism.

Which are these classes and strata of society? First, that section of the landlords, usurers and non-cultivating tenants who look upon their land not as the expression of feudal power and privileges as it had been but as a form of investment on which they should get adequate return, in other words, those who have made it their practice to look upon land as a commodity to be bought and sold in the market. The characteristic feature which marks them off from other landlords is that their outlook towards property is capitalistic; the feature which marks them off from capitalists is that their mode of exploitation is partly feudal and not fully capitalistic.

Second, the well-to-do cultivators and landlords, who do not themselves work in the fields but employ wage-labour to get their lands cultivated, or engage far more of wage-labour than their own or family labour. Here the direct mode of production is capitalistic, i. e. appropriation of surplus value. But it is tied to the feudal form of exploitation in several ways; liability of the cultivator to pay to landlords; mortgage on land; some

heavy a blow to the social and ideological superstructure of pre-capitalist Kerala as the development of market relations did to its economic basis. Just as the development of market relations broke the self-sufficient economy of Kerala, bringing it into the fold of the capitalistic world market, so did the growth of these classes and strata of society bring the social and ideological system of Kerala under the influence of world capitalistic culture. Just as it was under the British capitalist system that Kerala was made part of the world capitalistic system, so was it under the British that capitalistic culture was brought into Kerala. Just as the development of market relations did not destroy the pre-capitalist economy, but transformed it from a militarist-feudal to feudal-colonial economy, so was the introduction of capitalist culture a superimposition on, and not the destruction of, the pre-capitalist ideological superstructure.

One of the distinguishing features of the new classes and strata that grew up in British days is that they were drawn from all castes. Disregarding all caste injunctions that so and so should take up such and such a job since he belongs to such and such a caste, everybody got such training for and sought such jobs as he or she could get. Government officials, professionals, traders, etc., grew up from all castes, including those on the lowest rungs of the ladder; on the other hand, people of even the highest castes became pauperized and were forced to seek jobs that could not have been dreamt of by their predecessors a couple of generations ago.

It is true that the higher caste people had greater opportunities of getting better jobs than their lower-caste brethren; even as recently as in 1941, Brahmins who formed only 1.6 per cent of the total population in Travancore constituted 20.5 per cent of the professional classes earning above Rs. 1,200 a year; while Ezhavas with a population of 17.5 per cent of the total got only 4.2 per cent of the professional jobs of the same income group (*Travancore Economic Survey*). But the very fact that at least a few of the low caste people got jobs that are considered respectable, that the people of high castes had to compete with their low-caste brethren in schools, offices,

factories, markets, etc., was enough to make a dent in the social system based on caste separatism. Real day-to-day life, the intense competition between individuals and groups to live better than others, made it impossible for people of higher castes to claim that they are superior to other castes; it also gave hope and confidence to the people of lower castes that they need not submit to their humiliating position.

It was out of this that the first form of the modern democratic movement took its origin in Kerala — the movement for social equality. The Nairs, the Ezhavas and the Syrian Christians took the lead into it because they are the most enlightened among the unprivileged sections, or rather sections with comparatively few privileges. Very soon, however, it spread to other castes like the scheduled castes and even to Brahmins. Each of these castes began with agitation for some of the specific demands of that caste alone, but they all moved steadily forward and, in a couple of generations, came to the general slogan of “abolition of all caste restrictions”.

We saw in the last chapter how the Ezhavas under their saintly leader, Sri Narayana Guru, organized themselves in their caste organization and how Nairs also were at that time fighting against Brahmin domination. It was this very Sri Narayana Guru who coined the slogan, ‘One Caste, One God, One Religion’. The slogan brought about a veritable social revolution among the Ezhavas to begin with, but very rapidly caught the imagination of radicals belonging to all castes. For, it gave concrete expression to the dissatisfaction felt not only by the peasant but by the middle classes as well, against the outmoded system which kept some castes below others. Inter-caste dining, and marriage, began to be preached on a large scale and practised too, though on a much smaller scale.

This movement, however, did not confine itself to the demand for the abolition of inequalities based on caste. It also demanded the total overhauling of the family system, i.e., conversion of the family from matriarchal to patriarchal; prohibition of polygamy, polyandry and other forms of marital relationships that had been handed down from ancient tribal society;

an end to the impartible character of the joint family (both patriarchal and matriarchal). At the same time, this movement encouraged and advocated marriage on the basis of love and not on the basis of the will of parents. The objective of the movement was thus the establishment of the bourgeois family.

It was through this aspect of the movement that the higher castes — the Namboodiris, the Nairs and other caste Hindus — came into the movement for social reforms. Individual partition of joint family property became the rallying slogan first of the Nairs, then of the Namboodiris and ultimately of all caste Hindus. Abolition of the matriarchal family and its substitution by the patriarchal family, right of partition for members of joint families, abolition of polygamy and other outmoded forms of marriage were demanded by all progressive Hindus. These demands of the progressives of various castes were given legislative approval in the form of a series of enactments like the Nair Regulation, the Marumakkathayam (Matriarchal) Act, the Namboodiri Act, the Kshatriya Act, the Ezhava Regulation, etc.

The thirst for basic transformations in the social system was reflected in the field of culture. One of the leaders and organizers of the caste organization of the Ezhavas, Kumaran Asan, was also the pioneer of modern lyrical poetry in Malayalam. It was he who took the initiative in describing the emotions of ordinary young men and women in love, instead of confining himself to describing the heroic deeds of gods or kings as conventional poets used to do. Together with Asan the founder of lyrical poetry, was the founder of the Malayalam novel, Chandu Menon, whose *Indulekha* was the first effective exposure of the decadent practices of the *jennmis* and their satellites. Other branches of literature like the essay, the story, the newspaper and magazine article, the book review, etc., began to take shape. Grammar, rhetoric and other branches of the science of language and writing also appeared. Forms of cultural activity such as the drama, painting and other arts, music, etc., began to develop.

The combination of these social and cultural activities of the middle classes and of the enlightened sections of the upper classes with the spontaneous discontent of the peasant masses — the combination, very often, in the same person or group, of the social reformer, the leader of cultural life, the organizer of a caste association — was really the initial form in which the national and democratic movement emerged. It was in this combination that the unorganized and leaderless mass of peasantry was first brought under the leadership of those sections of the bourgeoisie that had started developing.

This movement was not yet a national movement in the real sense of the term, since it was not directed against the national oppressor — the British imperialists. Nor was it even a genuine anti-feudal movement, since it was not directed against the princely order, nor was it for the total abolition of landlordism. It was, however, the beginning of the national democratic movement, since it united the cultivating and landless peasant with the bourgeoisie, and even with the enlightened section of the feudal, ruling classes.

The literary associations and activities of the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, in which members of the ruling families of Cochin and Travancore and other families of the feudal class cooperated with the members of the untouchable, Christian and Muslim communities; the caste associations in which people of all walks of life (in a particular community) joined in demanding and collectively enforcing particular social reforms; the tenancy movement which united the highest-paid government official and the professional with the humblest peasant—these were the beginnings of a new form of united action of the immense majority of the people for the benefit not of a small minority but of the entire nation. It was, in other words, the initial form of the national upsurge which swept the country in the twenties and thirties of this century.

II

It was, however, only in the years after the end of the First

World War that the national movement described in the last section went out of its purely social reform and cultural limits and acquired the character of a political movement. For, it was then that the middle classes and the peasantry were drawn into the big political upheaval that was then sweeping over all parts of India.

Political activity had, of course, started long before the First World War. Professionals from among the Malayalees who were residing in Madras, and had thus had the opportunity, participated in the activities of Indian National Congress. One of them, the late Sir C. Sankaran Nair, was even elected to the presidentship of one of the earlier sessions of the Congress. It is also remarkable that the first Malayalam novel, *Indulekha*, is not only an exposure of the decadent *jenmi* and joint family system of Kerala but contains appreciative references to the Congress. But this was confined more to the professional Malayalees living outside Kerala than to the people of Kerala.

The years between the partition of Bengal and the beginning of the First World War, which made tremendous change in the political situation of India, were years of comparative political inactivity in Kerala. The solitary incident which may be said to be an indication that the Malayalee middle class was slowly but unmistakably coming into political activity was the determined fight put up by K. Ramakrishna Pillai, a radical journalist of Trivandrum, against the then Dewan of Travancore. His articles in the paper *Swadeshabhimani* were so powerful an exposure of the Dewan's misdeeds that Ramakrishna Pillai was exiled from Travancore in 1910. It is significant that Ramakrishna Pillai was the first author in Malayalam language, and to the knowledge of the writer of these lines, one of the first two in any Indian language, the other being Har Dayal who wrote in Hindi, to write a biography of Karl Marx; his *Karl Marx* appeared in 1912. Had Lenin come to know of this as he came to know of the 1908 strike action of the Bombay working class, he would have said not only that the Indian working class was coming into action but that the Indian intellectuals were on the way to becoming the vehicles of socia-

list consciousness.

Ramakrishna Pillai, however, was a solitary figure in the political field in those pre-war years. It is true that he had the sympathy of thousands of ordinary men and women in Travancore: as he himself describe in his article on 'Exile' tens of thousands of people crowded around him at Trivandrum and on the way to the border of Travancore when he was being taken out of the state. The middle class as a class, was however not yet conscious enough to transform this popular sentiment into a militant peoples movement. What is more, Ramakrishna Pillai himself did not go further than exposing the misdeeds of the Dewan; he did not realize the necessity of ending either the system of princely autocracy in the state of Travancore or of imperialist domination in India, or even bringing about reforms in the system. Hence, though Ramakrishna Pillai's fight against the Dewan may be considered to be the beginning of the entry of the middle class into the arena of politics, the solitary nature of his fight should be taken as an indication that they had a long way to go before becoming an active political force.

In the years of the First World War and after however, the situation changed. The Home Rule Movement, initiated and powerfully led by Annie Besant, caught the imagination of the middle class in Kerala. A significant incident took place at Calicut where a meeting was being held under the chairmanship of the Collector to canvass support for Britain's war effort. A member of the audience started to speak in Malayalam, but was asked by the chairman to speak in English; he refused to do so. This led to a commotion. It was, in fact, far more significant than a single incident; it showed that the young and growing middle class was no more prepared to let the domination of the British rulers go unchallenged. The speaker was opposed not only to speaking in English in his own country, but also to India giving war loans to Britain, for he said: "It is strange that a debtor (India) should give loans to a creditor (Britain)."

The Young man who attempted to speak in Malayalam at the

Calicut meeting, was not a solitary figure as Ramakrishna Pillai was a few years ago. Other men and women of the middle class had become politicalized. Home Rule Leagues were springing up all over Malabar. But it was the students of Trivandrum who played the role of pioneers of political demonstrations. On November 2, 1919 was organized the first political demonstration of protest in front of the Thampanur Hall where government stooges were holding a meeting, in the name of the public of Trivandrum, in support of the constitutional reforms that were then being introduced in Travancore. This was an index showing that the students had already entered the arena of political activity. This was followed two years later (in September-October 1921) by the mass students' strike against the enhancement of fees that was done by the government at that time, followed by the first ferocious attacks on students by the minions of the government.

The entry of the middle class into the arena of political activity gave the peasants what they had been lacking ever since the days of Velu Thampi and Pazhassi Raja—organized leadership in militant struggles. Home Rule Leagues in the later years of the war and the first post-war years, Congress and Khilafat Committees in 1920-21; Tenancy Committees which worked hand in hand with the Congress Committees—these were the organs of struggle through which the middle class of Malabar tried to organize the broad masses of the people against British imperialism and feudal landlordism. The Malabar District Political Conference (1920) held at Manjeri, where the battle was fought between the advocates and opponents of the policy of non-cooperation, was the first example of peasants being mobilized by the radical middle class in support of a militant political line. It is significant that, together with the issue of non-cooperation, the issue of tenancy reform was also put before that political conference, the opposing camps on the issue of non-cooperation more or less coinciding with the two camps on the issue of tenancy reform.

It was a year after the Manjeri (Malabar District) Political Conference, i. e., in April 1921, that the First Kerala Provincial

Conference was held at Ottapalam. The movement for non-cooperation was then in full swing; a large number of students had already left their educational institutions while a number of lawyers had given up practice. As at Manjeri a year ago, so at Ottapalam, thousands of peasants assembled from all over Malabar. The most significant aspect of this conference was, however, that delegates came from all over Kerala and were not confined to Malabar as they were at Manjeri. The official historian of the Congress in Kerala remarks that the conference was the first all-Kerala gathering since the days of Mamankam (the gathering of the leaders of Kerala to settle national questions which, according to tradition, used to be held once in twelve years).

The movement for social reform and cultural advancement, described in the previous section of this chapter, also got a new impetus from this political movement. The middle class that was entering the field of political struggle was radical in every respect. What they wanted was not just some constitutional reforms but basic change in the existing social order. It can be seen that it was in the period of the non-cooperation movement that the caste organizations of the Namboodiri, the Nair and the Ezhava began to get a new generation of cadres who wanted not minor reforms but a radical transformation in the system. It was again in this period that a group of young Muslims started advocating progressive changing in their own social practices. Political literature and other forms of new writing also began to take shape as part of the political mass movement. (The poet Vallathol became famous in this period through his patriotic songs).

Here, therefore, was a combination of all those factors that together make a real national democratic movement—the movement of the entire people for freedom from alien rule; of the peasants for freedom from landlord exploitation; of the Malayalee as a people for national unity; of the masses belonging to the lower castes, as well as of the progressive belonging to the higher castes, for major and basic changes in the existing social order: of the intellectuals for the development of a modern progressive culture. Nor was this movement confined to one

or two classes, strata and groups of people, but like all genuine national democratic movements, embraced the entire people, from illiterate peasants, to the enlightened and patriotic sections of the feudal upper classes.

III

It was in the states part of Kerala that the national movement in its first phase, the phase of social reform, tenancy movement, etc., was stronger and deeper. Each of the caste organizations took shape first in Travancore and then spread to Cochin and Malabar. The various legislations like the Nair Regulation, etc., went into the statute book first in Travancore, then in Cochin and lastly in Malabar. The tenancy Act also took the same course. While Travancore had its Tenancy Regulation in 1896 conferring fixity of tenure on *Kanamdars*, an identical regulation was passed in Cochin only in 1915 and in Malabar in 1930.

But when the national democratic movement entered its second phase, the phase of political struggle, the states part of Kerala lagged behind Malabar; in Malabar the 1919-21 national upsurge took stronger roots than either in Travancore or in Cochin. Travancore and Cochin had, of course, their political agitation; Congress committees were formed in these states also; a good contingent of the delegates who attended the First Kerala Provincial Conference, held at Ottapalam in April 1921, came from the states part of Kerala. All this, however was confined to the middle classes and that, too, mainly in the towns. It was in Malabar that the distinguishing feature of a national democratic movement—the combination in action of the middle classes in towns with the ‘million-headed peasantry’ in the villages—manifested itself. Furthermore, the political national movement in Malabar embraced all castes and communities—as a matter of fact, the fraternization of Hindus and Muslims was one of the specific features of the movement, while the movement in the states part of Kerala was more or less confined to the Hindus and that, too, mainly to caste Hindus.

The difference in the tempo and strength of the national movement in its two phases can of course be explained partly by the

differences in the historically-evolved material conditions of Malabar on the one hand and Travancore and Cochin on the other. For, one of the ‘reforms’ made by the pre-British rulers of these two states (Marthanda Varma in Travancore, Shakthan Thampuran in Cochin) was that they confiscated the landed properties of all the feudal chieftains who resisted the attempts of the ruler to create a centralized administrative apparatus. The result was that a considerable part of the lands in both these states became *Pandara Vaka* or rulers’ property. Travancore had an additional ‘reform’ under ‘Resident-Dewan’ Munro (Col. Munro who followed Col. Macaulay as Resident was simultaneously the Dewan of Travancore and Cochin and Resident) : all the landed properties of Hindu temples (*devaswams*) were transferred to government which met the expenses of the temples out of its revenue.

The lands that are thus the property of the government in one or another sense constitute in Travancore seventy five per cent of all cultivable lands in the state plus all the fallow, waste and forest lands. The percentage of such government lands in Cochin (where the confiscation of the feudal chieftains’ lands was less thorough than in Travancore and where *devaswam* lands were not transferred to the government) was fifty per cent. Malabar, on the other hand, had virtually no government land, all the cultivable, waste, fallow and even forest lands (except government reserves and small stretches of poramboks) being declared private property.

The grip of the rent-receiving landlords was, therefore, far greater in Malabar than in Cochin or Travancore where there was greater opportunity for well-to-do cultivators to make savings and to develop into capitalist farmers, money-lenders, etc.,. It was under the strong pressure of these elements what may be termed the rising rural bourgeois elements—that Maharaja of Travancore issued his 1820 proclamation advising the *jenmis* not to eject *kanamdars*, followed by the 1867 proclamation and the 1896 act which totally prohibited ejectment. It was also under the pressure of the same elements that the Maharaja of Cochin had a Tenancy Act passed in 1915. It was these elements that started the agitation against caste inequalities and

for the reform of the family, inheritance and marriage system in respect of which again we find that Malabar had its legislations passed more than a decade later than Travancore and Cochin.

While this difference in the historically-evolved material conditions explains the greater tempo in the states of the social reform phase of the national movement, it is not by itself an adequate explanation for the greater tempo in Malabar of the later anti-imperialist, political struggle phase. For, the greater strength and vitality of the rising rural bourgeois elements in the states part of Kerala had also expressed itself in the political field, as witnessed by the example of Ramakrishna Pillai at a time when Malabar was politically quiet. Even in the period of the great post-war national political upsurge, Travancore and Cochin contributed their share of militant anti-imperialists. It was because of the pro-feudal policy of the bourgeois national leadership—which, under the false assumption that the struggle was only against Britain and not against 'Indian' rulers, evolved the theory that 'the national movement should not interfere in the internal affairs of Indian states'—that the cultivating and landless peasants in the states were not drawn into political activity.

Travancore and Cochin would have the same combinations as Malabar—of middle class democrats with the revolutionary peasantry—if only the national bourgeoisie which headed the 1919-21 upsurge had realized that the princes and their satellites in the so-called 'Indian' states are as much the stooges of British imperialism as big landlords and other feudal elements in 'British' India. It may be recalled that it was the combination of the political struggle of the entire people with the anti-feudal struggle of the peasantry (for tenancy reform) that made 1920-21 in Malabar memorable for its glorious national upsurge. There is no doubt that the same thing would have happened in Travancore and Cochin if only the leadership of the national movement had made the same judicious combination of the anti-British and the anti-feudal struggle. For, as Ramakrishna Pillai's struggle against the then Dewan of Travancore showed, and as the suppressed discontent against the rulers' favouritism in both states even in 1920-21 showed was acute discontent

against the rotten and corrupt administration in these states; the absence of a conscious leadership to head it alone prevented this popular discontent from transforming itself into a powerful political movement.

Such a leadership, however, was absent not only in the 'Indian' states but even in 'British' India. For, it is notorious that the bourgeois national leadership under Mahatma Gandhi was more anxious to restrain the revolutionary masses and to keep them strictly within 'non-violent' limits than to deal a powerful blow against British imperialism and its reactionary Indian allies. It had, to this end, worked out the anti-democratic 'theory' that the exploiters are the 'trustees' of the exploited, as well as the 'theory' that the masses have no moral right to offer militant resistance to the exploiter and oppressor.

Such an anti-democratic leadership was bound, at some stage or other, to come into clash with the Moplah peasants who were roused to activity in Malabar in 1920-21. For, they were unlike the leadership, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal in the real and full sense of the term. They were genuinely anxious not only to end British rule in India and make the country free, but also to end the British domination in Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries. Their hatred for the alien oppressor was deep-seated. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of them being either landless, or poor peasants holding lands on verumpattam tenure, they wanted not only fixity of tenure for the kanamdar as was demanded by the leaders of the tenancy movement but major changes in the land system, including substantial reduction in rent payable by verumpattadars.

This anti-imperialist and anti-feudal character of the Moplah peasantry naturally made it extremely unlikely that they would remain for long confined to the limits of non-violence laid down by the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. It was not for a non-violent non-cooperation movement but for real militant action of the masses that the Moplah peasantry was being organised by their local middle leadership. And this organization was so thorough that the soldiers of the mighty British

empire had to fight hard nearly six months to quell the revolt. The fact that leaders of the rebellion like Haji Kunjahamed established a real people's government in the areas controlled by them; and the skilful use made of the terrain of South Malabar for guerrilla tactics showed that the Moplah peasants, when roused to action, were resourceful enough to devise ways and means of fighting an enemy superior in every respect except in that of people's support.

The bourgeois leadership of the national movement, however, was not prepared for such a combination of the national and agrarian revolutionary movements. On the other hand, the more well-organized and militant the peasants grew, the more panicky became the leadership. Instead of trying to learn the art of revolutionary resistance from the peasantry, they tried to teach the peasants the art of 'non-violent' surrender. Instead of helping the Moplah peasantry, the vanguard of the agrarian revolutionary movement in Kerala, to unite the agrarian revolutionary movement in Kerala, to unite the entire peasantry, they abandoned the vanguard to the tender mercies of the British troops. Had it not been for this disgraceful betrayal by the leadership at the crucial moment, the history of the glorious rebellion of 1921 would have been different.

IV

It is necessary at this stage to dispose of the false 'theory' that the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 was a 'Moplah Rebellion'. This 'theory' has gained currency because it was the Moplah peasants who acted as the vanguard in the movement. Nor need it be disputed that, at a subsequent stage of the movement, i. e., at the stage when British troops had started their depredations and when the British rulers and their Hindu stooges had spread the canard of Muslim fanaticism being the source of the militancy of the peasants, the movement acquired a communal colour. It is, however, far from the truth to say that the rebellion was a communal riot, that the objective of the rebels was the destruction of Hindu religion and that the six months of rebellion were six months of anti-Hindu atrocities.

This will be clear from a few extracts from the booklet on

the 'Moplah Rebellion' by the late C. Gopalan Nair, a retired Deputy Collector and a natural champion of the official view. It should also be stated that this booklet had been commended to the readers by no less a person than the Collector of Malabar. On the incident of the rebellion, the author says :

The house of V. Mohammed, the local Khilafat Secretary, was searched by the police for a gun alleged to have been stolen from the Pookottur Palace of the Nilambur Thirumulpad and this gave the Moplahs the opportunity for which they were waiting, of asserting the authority and force of the Khilafat movement. On the pretext that the search was unjust and uncalled for, a crowd of several hundreds of Moplahs armed with knives, swords and spears, collected with astounding rapidity and advanced to the Palace. It transpired that they had been summoned from various neighbouring and outlying villages by a tocsin of drums beaten in local and neighbouring mosques. They levied blackmail from the landlords on threat of murder and also threatened to murder the Circle-Inspector of Police who recognized the necessity of dealing tactfully...

No evidence has yet been forthcoming to warrant the allegation regarding agrarian discontent, but it would appear that there was some trouble - what it was, it is not possible to say - between Pookottur Moplahs and the Manager Thirumulpad of the Pookottur Estate. Their lack of cordiality was aggravated by the police search instituted at the instance of the manager and V. Mohammed exploited the Khilafat Movement and the fractious temper of his co-religionists to wreak vengeance. The Moplahs demanded their wages at 9 O'clock that night, threatened the manager and became turbulent. And in this jungly, remote and fanatical hamlet of Pookottur, the civil administration practically ceased to function from 2nd August, 1921. (p. 21-23)

On page 30 he says : In the realm of industry, the Moplah has no rival : his good qualities in ordinary life are admitted : *during the rebellion several instances have occurred of Moplahs having helped Hindus to escape*, but individual instances do not

prove the rule. (Emphasis added)

The short biographical sketches that he gives on pages 76-80 of some of the rebel leaders are illuminating.

Variankunnath Kunhamed Haji, of a family of outbreak traditions, as a lad was transported with his father for complicity in a previous outbreak; on his return six or seven years ago he was not allowed to settle down in his native village but after a time he went up to his village and started life as a cartman. On the introduction of the Khilafat Movement, he joined it and became one of its chief workers, organized Sabhas and became the guiding spirit of the Khilafat in Ernad. On the outbreak of the rebellion he became King, *celebrated his accession by the murder of Khan Bahadur Chekkutty, a Moplah retired Police Inspector.*

He styled himself as the Raja of the Hindu, Amir of the Mohammedans and Colonel of the Khilafat Army. He wore a fez cap, wore the Khilafat uniform and badge and he had a sword in his hand. He enjoyed absolute Swaraj in his kingdom of Ernad and Walluvanad. *He announced that he was aware that the inhabitants have suffered greatly from robbing and looting, that he would impose no taxation on them this year (1921) save in way of donations to the yudha fund and that next year the taxes must be forthcoming. He ordered members of agricultural labourers to reap and bring in the paddy raised in the Thirumulpad's lands, the harvesters being paid in cash and the grain set apart to feed the Haji's forces. He issued passports to persons wishing to go out-side his Kingdom and the cost of the pass was a very negligible figure, according to the capacity of the individual concerned.*

He was captured on the 6th January and shot on 20th January, 1922. (Emphasis added)

This was the most outstanding of the rebel leaders. Now about two of the lesser ones :

Seethi Koya Thangal of Kumarampathur set himself up as the Governor of a Khilafat Principality. *He issued fatwas warn-*

ing his men against looting and other depredations pointing out that the country had become theirs. Three of the rioters implicated in Elampalasseri were punished by him holding his own court-martial. The offenders were ordered to be shot, taking care only to use blank cartridges. The men terrified fell down. When they rose there were no injuries which the Thangal attributed to his own marvellous powers and added that his men will similarly be immune from British military attacks. He was captured and shot.

Chembrasserai Imbichi Koya Thangal held his court about midway between Tirur and Karuvarakundu on the slope of a bare hillock with about 4000 followers from neighbouring villages. *More than 40 Hindus were taken to the Thangal with their hands tied behind their back, charged with the crime of helping the military by supplying them with milk, tender coconuts etc., and 38 of these were condemned to death. He supervised the work of murder in person and took his seat on a rock near a well, witnessed his men cutting at the necks of his victim and pushing the bodies into the well. 38 were murdered, one of whom a pensioned head-constable, to whom he owed a grudge, had his head neatly divided into two halves. Surrendered and shot on 20th January, 1922 (Emphasis added).*

Mohammed, the Khilafat Secretary who led the Moplahs against an unpopular estate manager; Kunhamed Haji, the murderer of a Moplah retired police inspector; Seethi Koya Thangal who punished looters in his own camp; Chembrasserai Thangal who murdered thirty-eight persons *for helping the military*—these are not the type of leaders of fanatical Moplahs whose one object in life is to harass and exterminate *kaffirs*. But the most crushing evidence against official apologists is the number of Hindu temples destroyed or desecrated during the five months of more or less rebel domination. On November 14, 1922, the government spokesman answered on the floor of the Madras Legislative Council as follows : 'No statistics have been compiled, but the number of temples destroyed or desecrated must exceed 100. The number is probably large, but for obvious reasons the government have purposely refrained from

attempting to collect accurate figures'.

Now the number of *amsoms* (revenue villages) affected by the rebellion are 220. Calculating at the very conservative rate of five Hindu temples per *amsom*, this 100 comes to nine per cent. Even out of these, it is difficult to know how many were desecrated on suspicion of being used by the military. But leaving that aside and taking it for granted that all were desecrated on purely religious grounds, nine per cent seems to be a surprisingly low figure for a communal outbreak during the first weeks of which the rebels were entirely dominating the scene.

The figures of civilian casualties tell the same tale. On page 58 of the booklet already quoted, the author says : 'It is impossible, in the absence of a census of the rebel area, to state number of persons who were killed by the rebels but the number of persons among the civilian population is believed to be between 500 and 600 according to information supplied by government.' 'No statistics have been compiled regarding the number of women and children among the killed.' (*Madras Mail*, November 14, 1922)

Five hundred to six hundred civilians killed in an area with about four lakhs of Hindus is not an impressive record for a communal riot of more than five month's duration. Its full significance is seen when it is remembered that this 500 to 600 include Khan Saheb Chekkutty, the Moplah retired inspector, the 38 Hindus killed by Chembrasser Thangal on the charge of helping the military and such similar incidents. How many out of the 500 to 600 were in fact killed for purely religious reasons, it is difficult to say. Their number, however, cannot be very large.

What about forced conversions ? Pandit Rishi Ram, the Arya Samaj missionary, says in a letter : 'In the Arya Samaj registers alone 1,766 cases of forced conversions have been recorded and if the figures from all relief committees were collected, their number is sure to exceed 2,500' (p. 119 of the booklet already quoted). Two thousand five hundred forced conversions in an area with four lakhs Hindus is very low indeed, if it was a

communal riot !

All this, however, does not mean that religious fanaticism was absent in the rebellion. The number of forced conversions which did take place (even if Pandit Rishi Ram's figures are excessive, coming as they do from an Arya Samajist) cannot by any stretch of imagination be explained by any other motive than religious fanaticism. Nor it is to be wondered at that the intensely religious, extremely uneducated and highly organized community of Moplahs should contain among them a few fanatics who took it into their heads that every 'kaffir' killed or converted was a stepping stone on their own path to heaven. A certain percentage of casualties should be so counted. One can and should, however, state explicitly that the main force behind the rebellion was not fanaticism which was simply a by-product of the rebellion.

The following extracts from the official history of the Congress in Kerala, published by the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee in 1935, are revealing :

Down to August 28th, when the battle of Pookottur took place, the British administration may be said to have ceased to exist in Malappuram, Thirurangadi, Manjeri, Perintalmanna — all these places were the fields of unrestricted activity of the rebels. Nobody resisted them, hence they had no need to resist anybody or to organize revolt against anybody. Only Police Inspector, Chekkutty, a police Head Constable and a few men of the Nilambur Thirumulpad were murdered by the rebels at this stage. The statement of a witness cited by the prosecution itself says that *the behaviour of the rebels at this stage was not such as to frighten the ordinary people in any way...*

With the coming of the military, the mentality of both the rebels as well as of the common people underwent a change. The 'battle' of Pookottur and the clashes with the military at several other places disrupted the hitherto solid forces of the rebels; the loss of the personnel and the dangerous situation facing them made the rebels

desperate. The common people in their turn had to face a very difficult situation since, as in all wars, neutrality was dangerous. Those Hindus who did not give all cooperation to the military would be considered sympathetic to the rebels. The helpless Hindus, therefore, were sometimes forced to give information to the military regarding the whereabouts and movement of the rebels. This naturally created suspicion among the Moplahs who began to get furious against the Hindus. It was thus that the originally non-communal movement of a section of the common people was ultimately transformed into a communal Moplah rebellion. (Emphasis added)

V

It was natural for the people of the country with a feudal-colonial economy and caste-ridden society to start their struggle for democracy in the form of a struggle for the equality of all castes and from there to go forward to the struggle for political and economic democracy. This, as we have seen, was the course taken by the people of Kerala in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

But, since the people were led by a class that was not prepared to go as far as their followers wanted them to go—by the national bourgeoisie which was not prepared to smash the feudal-colonial economy and replace it by an economy that would satisfy the needs of the people, but only to make such adjustments in the economy as would help them to get a bigger share in the fruits of exploitation, the movement received a severe setback. The years after 1921 may be said to be a period of reaction as far as the national democratic movement is concerned.

Although the Congress-Khilafat-tenancy movement in Malabar started as a movement of all communities, it was transformed into a communal movement mainly because the national (bourgeois) leadership of the movement refused to direct and lead it against imperialism and feudalism. The result was not only that imperialism could crush the movement, not only that South Malabar, the scene of the 1921 rebellion, was put under

martial law for some time and then under severe police rule; not only that over 20,000 peasants were sent to jail for long terms and to the Andamans; but that the very atmosphere of the country was vitiated by the poison of communalism.

The Hindu intelligentsia of Malabar started going more or less in the same direction as their counterparts in North India. The Arya Samaj and other Hindu communal organizations came and started their work in Malabar, first by way of affording relief to Hindu refugees fleeing from the areas of the rebellion, then by reconverting those Hindus who had been forcibly converted to Islam by the rebels and ultimately going to the extent of converting Muslims to Hinduism. The Muslim intelligentsia were terror-stricken because of the post-rebellion repression that they had to go through but were nevertheless extremely indignant. They could do nothing but be resentful for the time being, but that was by itself sufficient for the creation of an atmosphere ideally suited for communal squabbles.

It is true that this did not lead to the communal tension and communal riots so familiar to the people of North India. The Shudhi, the Sanghtan, the anti-cow-slaughter and anti-music before mosques campaign, etc., did not catch the imagination of the Hindus here as they did in North India. The main reason is that the Hindus here are so caste ridden, the caste rules regarding their mutual social relations are so rigid, that it is extremely difficult to create a real sense of Hindu solidarity. The 'low-caste' people felt more at home with Muslims and Christians than with their own co-religionists of the higher castes. The caste Hindus in their turn could not see why, if they could interdine and intermarry with low-caste Hindus, they could not do the same with Muslims and Christians. As a matter of fact, there was a movement among certain 'low-caste' people for their wholesale conversion into any other religion, since that would give them greater social equality. The Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, etc., could not therefore take deep roots in Kerala.

This, however, does not mean that there was no Hindu and

Muslim communalism. In fact, the Malabar Congressmen themselves were split into Hindus and Muslims. When they started reorganizing the Congress in the post-rebellion years, there were virtually two centres of the Congress — one Hindu and the other Muslim — each having its own paper, *Mathrubhumi* and *Al-Ameen*. It is also remarkable that some Hindu Congressmen were themselves the organizers of the Hindu Mahasabha. The gulf between the two groups was so wide that, though each claimed to be a group of Congressmen, one could not cooperate with the other even in organizing the Congress. It was only long after the Muslim League started becoming strong, and even then not to any considerable extent, that the gulf was bridged.

The main form of communalism, however, was caste against caste, rather than Hindu versus Muslim. The non-caste Hindus of Malabar like the Tiyyas were organized against the Congress on the plea that the Congress was an organization of caste Hindus, particularly Nairs. Demands of these backward or untouchable castes for special consideration with regard to educational facilities, sharing of government jobs, etc., were pushed to the foreground in place of the national demand of freedom from imperialism. The British administrators were even looked upon as 'friends of the backward and untouchable castes', and sincerely anxious to protect them from the oppression of caste Hindus. The unity of castes and communities that had been brought about in the years of the anti-imperialist upsurge was thus disrupted.

This phenomenon was particularly strong in the states part of Kerala where there was no political movement of any sort. Malabar did have, at least nominally, a skeleton Congress organization which held its meetings and conferences, enrolled members and carried on other political activities, including participation in elections. (In the election both to the Madras and Central Legislatures, Congressmen contested as Swarajist candidates in the post-1921 years.) What is more, Congress committees also participated in the campaign for the enactment of tenancy legislation. The states part of Kerala did not have even this much of political activity, since the policy of the

Congress continued to be one of non-interference in the internal affairs of Indian states. The result was that politics in the states revolved entirely around castes. Almost every election that took place in Travancore and Cochin was fought on the lines of which caste is to have its representatives in the legislature.

It is true that caste conflicts had taken place even in the pre-1921 years but the caste conflicts of those earlier years had the character of conflicts between the masses of slowly-awakening 'low-castes' and 'higher castes' that were opposing them. The conflicts of the post-1921 years, on the other hand, had the character of conflicts between the upper class elements of various castes for their respective shares in government jobs and other spoils of office. For example, there was the Nair-Ezhava conflict in Central Travancore in the year 1905 which had its origin in the hostility of certain aristocratic Nair families to the admission of Ezhavas into government schools. There was also the Nair-Pulaya conflict near Quilon in 1915 which had its origin in the hostility of the Nair gentry to the movement for dress reform among Pulaya women. There was on the other hand, the Nair-Christian electoral conflict in Central Travancore in 1922 which had its origin in the competition between Nairs and Christians in the matter of starting a school.

This change in the character of caste conflicts can be seen in the character of the caste organizations as well. While, in the first stage of their development, they more or less concentrated on social reform, they began, in the second stage, to put greater emphasis on getting their share of government services, seats in the legislatures, etc. Even 'higher' castes like the Namboodiris, who had a disproportionately greater pull in the bureaucracy but were backward in the matter of modern education and hence in government service, began to speak in terms of shares in government services.

The manner in which the national bourgeoisie reacted to these developments was in keeping with its betrayal of the great national upsurge. It dismissed these caste conflicts and caste organizations as nothing but the false slogans of imperialism. It refused to see that these caste conflicts had a real basis in

socio-economic reality and that these conflicts would continue to burst out again and again so long as this socio-economic reality continued.

After all, the leaders of the caste organizations are able to mobilize the masses belonging to their respective castes not because these masses are inherently caste-minded but because the oppression and exploitation of classes is concealed behind the cover of caste inequality. Caste conflicts can, therefore, be ended only if the national movement concentrates its fire against the common enemy of the overwhelming majority of the people of all castes — imperialism and feudalism. If only the leadership of the national movement had taken a clear and consistent stand against imperialism and feudalism and to that end championed the particular demands of 'lower castes' for social equality, it could have rallied the masses belonging to all castes behind the banner of nationalism.

It was just this that the national leadership refused to do. Not only did it betray the revolutionary struggle of the masses for freedom from imperialist oppression and exploitation, it also looked with hostility at the movement of the 'lower' castes for social equality. Special facilities for the 'backward' castes to enable them to catch up with the 'higher' castes in respect of education, employment, etc., were, in their eyes, 'caste separatism' and not an integral part of the struggle for equality and democracy. The masses belonging to the 'lower' castes therefore could not be roused to action under the flag of nationalism; they were roused instead by the separatist slogans of the leaders of caste organizations.

VI

The reaction that set after the 1921 rebellion was enough to check the growth, but not to quench the fire of anti-imperialism that had been set alight in the years 1919-21. Although much reduced in number, a band of Congressmen carried on the minimum organizational work of the Congress; khadi, Hindi, anti-untouchability and other items of 'constructive' work also helped to keep the flame of anti-imperialism alive. People responded to these activities magnificently, as was witnessed at Vaikom (in

Travancore) where a satyagraha launched to establish the right of untouchable castes to walk through the road adjoining the temple, brought hundreds of young men and women into activity.

The significance of these post-1921 activities was that they kept the flame of anti-imperialism alive and prepared the ground for the next wave of struggle. For, it was as the further development of these activities that the new and far bigger round of struggle started all over Kerala. While the Kerala Provincial Political Conferences of the years 1922-27 were routine affairs which only helped to keep the Congress organization alive, the Conference that was held in 1928 marked a turning point in the history of our anti-imperialist movement. The lively discussion that took place at the Conference on the question of Dominion Status versus Complete Independence was an indication that new and vital elements had started emerging inside the Congress. Following as this did the hostile demonstrations which greeted the arrival of the Simon Commission on the soil of India, it showed that the youth of Kerala were not lagging behind their brethren in other parts of India.

This new awakening of the youth of Kerala manifested itself in the 1930 civil disobedience movements as well as in the 1931 satyagraha at Guruvayoor for the right of the untouchables to enter the temple and worship there along with caste Hindus. The younger generation of Congressmen beat down the opposition of the older ones to the inauguration of civil disobedience in Malabar and forced them to start it. Youth from all parts of Kerala assembled at Calicut, marched to Payyanur, the venue of the illicit manufacture of salt, a magnificent anti-imperialist rally, and made the civil disobedience at Payyanur a success. Many were the heroic actions that they organized in the ten months of 1930 and the year-and-a-half of 1932-33. So too, were the march to Guruvayoor, the two-month-long satyagraha at the gates of the temple, the militant turn given to the satyagraha at one stage of the struggle and the countrywide propaganda in its support. It was becoming increasingly clear that the youth of Kerala was coming into its own.

Had it been left to the bourgeois leadership of the national movement to lead the struggle as it liked, this wave of anti-imperialist struggle would have been disgracefully betrayed like the earlier 1919-21 wave. For, the plan of campaign worked out that leadership left nothing to chance and made all guarantees that the participants in the movement would not resort to revolutionary forms of struggle. When it was found that, despite these guarantees, the rank and file Congress volunteers were seeking out new and militant forms and struggle, the leadership successfully diverted the whole struggle from anti-imperialism to anti-untouchability.

In Kerala, too, the Guruvayoor temple-entry satyagraha, which in its initial stages was a campaign for rallying the masses of the untouchables and progressive caste Hindus, was very soon converted into a movement which diverted the energies of dozens of democrats from the anti-imperialist struggle. The so-called Harijan Uplift movement initiated at the end of 1932 and the Council-entry programme launched in 1933 were calculated to put a stop to the militant anti-imperialist actions.

Everything, however, was not left in the hands of the bourgeois leadership. The 1930-32 struggles were started at a time when new forces had already appeared on the political horizon. The student and youth movements that had come into being in the rest of India began to spread in Kerala. The self-sacrificing revolutionary ardour of Bhagat Singh and his comrades inspired the Kerala youth. Vague ideas of socialism and communism, stories of what happened and what was taking place in the Soviet Union, had started catching the imagination of the people. Rank and file Congressmen in Kerala came into close contact with the left leaders of the Congress like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Bose and Vithalbhair Patel as well as revolutionaries from Bengal, Bihar, U. P. and Punjab, many of whom were lodged in the various jails of Madras Presidency.

All this led to the development of a well-defined group of revolutionary Congressmen who, though organizationally within the Congress, were ideologically outside the Gandhian leadership. The result was that, by the time of the abandonment of

mass civil disobedience and the adoption of the Council-entry programme, the majority of rank and file Congressmen in Kerala had already taken a definite turn to the left. Not only were Yuvak Sanghs, Youth Leagues, etc., organized in various parts of the province but the Kerala Provincial Congress Committee that came to be organized in 1934 had a majority of leftists. These leftist Congressmen, moreover, declared themselves socialists and organized the Congress Socialist Party.

While these developments were taking place inside the Congress, revolutionary forces of more or less the same character were taking shape inside the ranks of caste organizations. Despite the efforts made by the leaders of these organizations to shelter their own ranks against the new forces, radical transformations had started taking place among them. Not only did anti-imperialism penetrate these caste organizations, so that sympathy for political movements became a marked feature of every one of them; simultaneously, an ideological revolution was taking place in their ranks. Rationalism, atheism, materialism and, through these, sympathy for the land of communism —this was the process through which the radical rank and file of the caste organizations came to accept socialism at the same time as rank and file Congressmen were groping towards it through their own political experience.

The result was that by the time a definite left wing took shape inside the Congress, a left wing had also taken shape inside the caste organizations. The sense of unity and solidarity that each felt with the other was one of the factors which guaranteed that the new revolutionary forces that emerged in nineteen-thirties would draw into their fold all that was really democratic and radical in the social reform and political wings of the national movement.

VII

One of the characteristic features of the new wave of anti-imperialist struggles was that the struggle for political democracy had started in the states part of Kerala also. The states people's movement that took shape in other Indian states spread

to Travancore where a State People's Conference was held in 1928. This may be said to be the beginning of a movement for political democracy with the central slogan of responsible government. The youth of Travancore and Cochin who had to leave their states to participate in the 1930-32 civil disobedience movements were as much moved by the need for democracy in the states as by the need for the complete independence of India.

The direct demand for responsible government, however, remained confined to a comparatively narrow circle of progressive democrats until the specific internal politics of the states forced the issue of political democracy. This happened in a peculiar way in Travancore.

When a new instalment of constitutional reforms was introduced in 1932, the communal organizations of Christians, Ezhavas and Muslims opposed that part of it which dealt with representation in the legislature. Their contention was that the quantum and method of representation were such that the Nairs were favoured at the expense of the other communities. In order, therefore, to organize effective opposition to these constitutional reforms, they formed themselves into what was called the Joint Political Congress. Since the three communities together constituted about seventy per cent of the population of the states and since they adopted more or less the same technique to fight these constitutional reforms as the Indian National Congress did against the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1919-21, their campaign unleashed a tremendous mass force. Their boycott of the reforms—of course, they did not call it 'boycott' but 'abstention', but it meant the same thing—was as effective as the Congress boycott of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms.

Hence, in spite of its outwardly communal character, radical nationalists welcomed the movement as the first mass political movement in Travancore. It was this movement, together with the repression which the government launched against it, that led to the subsequent inauguration of the Travancore State Congress with its central slogan of responsible government.

Though not of such an intense mass character as in Travancore, Cochin too had its movement for responsible government; the leaders of certain communal organizations joined with certain Congressmen to form what was called the Cochin State Congress. The main factor that contributed to this development was the hostility engendered in certain sections of the capitalists of the state to the policy of the then Dewan of Cochin, Sir Shanmugham Chetty, which favoured capitalists from outside the state; the well-known electricity agitation in Trichur—the agitation started by capitalists against the agreement entered into by the state government with an outside firm for the electrification of Trichur, was as militant and had as much of a mass character as the Joint Political Congress of Travancore; the only difference was that, while the former was confined to a town, Trichur, the latter was an all-state movement, though the former was more national since it was an all-communities affair as against the latter which was confined to some. This agitation of native capitalists against capitalists from outside the state brought the powerful Christian community of Trichur on the side of the struggle for political democracy.

The most significant fact of all in the 1930 wave of anti-imperialist struggles, the fact that gave the anti-imperialist movement a qualitatively higher character, was that a new class emerged on the political arena—the industrial working class. It was the working class of Alleppey that first organized itself in the early 1920s. It was no narrowly-economist or trade unionist organization that they built up for themselves; one of the earliest annual conferences of their union passed a resolution demanding responsible government in the state. It should be noted that this political resolution of the Alleppey working class was adopted long before the Travancore State Congress was born and even before the Joint Political Congress was formed. Apart from this collective political action of the working class of Alleppey, the workers of Calicut, Cannanore and other centres also participated in political action, many of them individually joining or helping the civil disobedience movement.

It was not, however, till 1934-35 when a series of industrial strikes took place at Cannanore, Calicut, Feroke, Trichur,

Cochin, and Alleppey that the working class of Kerala got itself organized as a class. Out of these strike actions of the industrial working class arose those characteristically proletarian class organizations, the trade unions, organizations which are at once an indivisible part of the general anti-imperialist movement and independent of the bourgeois leadership of the national movement. Significantly enough, this crystallization of the working class movement of Kerala into a definite organization, the All-Kerala Trade Union Congress whose first (all-Kerala) conference was held at Calicut in May 1935, coincided with the formation of the Congress Socialist Party whose all-Kerala conference was also held at Calicut in the same week.

There was thus to be seen, in 1934-35, that combination of the working class movement with socialist consciousness which, as Lenin pointed out, would alone guarantee the successful completion of the struggle for full democracy and gave the way for the subsequent struggle for socialism. This, therefore, may be considered to be the beginning of a new and significant stage in the democratic movement of our country—the stage of the struggle for proletarian hegemony.