CHAPTER - 6
THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT AND ITS LIMITATIONS

Communist and Socialist ideas appeared among enlightened intelligentsia in Western Europe at the beginning of nineteenth century and these soon acquired adherents among working class and began to develop into social and political movements. In the fourth decade of nineteenth century Karl Marx and Frederick Engles espoused the communist cause and they made substantial theoretical contribution to these movements. Their contributions were of so much decisive importance that by the second half of nineteenth century Communism and Socialism became synonymous with Marxism1.

One of the chief contributions of Marxism to social and political thought is the idea that historical development is a law governed process and the determining role in the social development is played by mode of production. Socialism, according to Marxism is the objective result of class

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1 Communist ideas at its early stage developed from the French experience and was characterized by radical egalitarianism and emphasis on revolutionary dictatorship during the transitional period. Socialism appeared as a general critique of bourgeois liberalism as an economic doctrine (see George Lichtheim: A History of Socialism, London, 1970, page 29). However, Marx called his system “Scientific Socialism” and was defined as the first phase of Communism. Still the old distinction has been reappearing again and again in different contexts.
antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat existing in the modern capitalist society².

Though Marxism is opposed to social voluntarism which says that society can be restructured basing purely on man’s will power, still Marxist ideology has been widely used by social Volunteers who wanted to build society on egalitarian principles.

Tsarist Russia was a backward country with a very low development of productive forces. However, a section of Russian revolutionaries trying to overthrow Tsarist autocracy came under the influence of Marxism and drew heavily from it. The result was the development of a new ideological system namely, Leninism, blending the vision of Marxism with Russian Narodnic traditions³ of terrorism and fanaticism. No doubt, the autocratic political conditions of Russia contributed towards these terrorist and fanatic characteristics. By a fortunate combination of powerful will power with dexterous manipulation of economic and political situations this section of revolutionaries were able to capture political power in Russia in 1917. Judged by the motive force behind this political event and radical change it tried to bring, it was a great revolution. Lenin, the leader of this revolution

² Engels Frederick: Anti-Duhring, Moscow, 1962, p. 22.
was a man who combined in himself the vision of Marx with the fanaticism of Russian Narodnics. To realise his vision, derived from Marxist ideological sources, he founded the Communist International or shortly Comintern in 1919 with headquarters at Moscow. The avowed goal of this body was to realise world revolution.

Inspired by the Leninist strategies for world revolution, delegates from various parts of world assembled in Moscow in 1919 for the first Congress of the Comintern. Representation from colonial countries at this Congress was negligible. However when the second Congress of the Comintern was held in 1920, colonial delegates were well represented. From India, M.N. Roy represented the Congress as a Mexican delegate. History of the Communist movement in India and cardinal issues that the Party had to solve begin from here. The problem which arose in connection with India can be summed up as three:

(i) The question of Communist attitude towards national liberation movement under Indian National Congress.

(ii) Assessment of the role of “national bourgeoisie”

(iii) The role of Gandhi.

Lenin specifically answered these questions and later in his Colonial Thesis and Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial
Questions, both submitted to the second Congress of the Comintern, he generalized these formulations as principles applicable for colonial countries general\textsuperscript{4}. Later Communist leadership in India from M.N. Roy onwards had only misinterpreted, distorted or ignored Leninist formulations altogether\textsuperscript{5}.

**Leninist Strategy in Colonial Revolution**

In India Communist Party developed from nationalist movement and not from labour movement as it had been the case in Western Europe. The Communist Party itself had acknowledged this fact:

> The Communist Party of India arose in the course of our liberation struggle as a result of the efforts of Indian revolutionaries who under the inspiration of the great October Revolution were seeking new paths for achieving national Independence\textsuperscript{6}.

Lenin while formulating his strategy for colonial countries had taken this factor, i.e., the question of freedom for colonial peoples, as the most vital questions. So his strategy for colonial revolutions aims at the national independence as its prime goal. So he instructed in his colonial thesis to all communists in colonial countries to “render active support to bourgeois...


revolutionary movements” in their countries. To gain the widest support for the movement for colonial liberation he insisted the communists not to give any communist colouring to the movement. He further gave a firm theoretical basis for colonial movement for national liberation: such a movement can only be a “bourgeois democratic movement”. Still, communists should actively support such bourgeois democratic movement.

Roy opposed Lenin’s formulations and advocated that the Comintern should support revolutionary mass action through the Communist Parties alone. He maintained that bourgeois – democratic nationalist movements are limited to small middle class and helping them would amount to helping the growth of national spirit which will surely obstruct the awakening of class consciousness in the masses.

Related with this was also the controversy about assessing the role of Gandhi. Roy himself sums up the controversy as follows:

Lenin believed that as the inspirer and leader of a mass movement he was a revolutionary. “I maintained that as a religious and cultural

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9 Ibid., p. 457.
10 Ibid., p. 427.
revivalist he was bound to be a reactionary socially, however revolutionary he might appear politically"\(^{12}\).

A Soviet scholar who has studied verbatim record of actual conversations between Roy and Lenin writes that there were acute differences between them over the question of assessment of Gandhi\(^{13}\).

Thus in practical terms Lenin wanted the Comintern and the Communists to actively help the Indian National Congress led by Gandhi; whereas Roy wanted the Comintern to help the Communist Party alone to work independently opposing Indian National Congress and Gandhi and he insisted that no help should be given to INC or Gandhi as helping them would amount to obstruction of the development of class consciousness among workers\(^{14}\).

There is a criticize among certain Western scholars that Leninist colonial policy was dictated by the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy and Roy was formulating the correct policy\(^{15}\).

It can be demonstrated that this view is not correct.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 188, 203.
Leninist attitude towards the rising bourgeois movement in the East was formulated long before the Bolshevik assumption of state power and hence long before the “exigencies of foreign policy issues” did arise. In fact as early as 1913, Lenin wrote:

In advanced Europe the sole advanced class is the proletariat. The living bourgeoisie on the other hand is prepared to go to any length of savagery, brutality and crime in order to preserve perishing capitalist slavery….

Every where in Asia a mighty democratic movement is growing, spreading and gaining strength. There the bourgeois is still siding with the people against reaction. 

This shows that the role of bourgeois as a revolutionary class in colonial and semi-colonial countries was recognized by Lenin long before the Russian revolution. Writing in 1916 also he asked socialists to give determined support to bourgeois democratic movement in colonial and semi-colonial countries. Ho Chi Min, who was one of the delegates to the

second Congress of the Comintern has recorded that Lenin showed great concern for colonial people\textsuperscript{18}.

Lenin’s genuine interest in solving colonial questions led him to evolve the formulate a colonial policy with broad perspectives for the achievement of colonial independence. This he did taking into account only the intrinsic merit of the problem without any consideration for the alleged foreign policy interest. He fought against the sectarian policies advocated by Roy and others because he was convinced that such policies will only hamper the development of genuine movement for national liberation. Royist programme would have isolated the nationalist movement from its natural allies and social forces.

The supplementary thesis presented by Roy embodying these sectarian ideas were rejected by the commission and his thesis was corrected so as to make it conforming with the Leninist formulations\textsuperscript{19}.

**Leninist Formulations Ignored in India**

Though Lenin had developed a clear perspective for communist activities in colonial and semi-colonial countries this was not carried out by Roy. Inspite of Roy’s advocacy for a sectarian course of action, he was

\textsuperscript{18} Ho Chi Min. \textit{Selected Writings}, Hanoi, 1977, pp. 37-38.

elected to responsible positions in the Comintern hierarchy and was entrusted with men and materials for carrying out the Comintern programme for colonies. Under the general guidance of Comintern, Communist Party of India was formed at Tashkent on 17 October 1920 under the leadership of M.N. Roy\(^{20}\). He published several journals, leaflets, books etc., from various European cities and sent them secretly to India. These publications reached Communist groups which were developing mainly in cities and industrial centres like Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Lahore.

The first journal published by his was ‘The Vanguard of Indian Independence’ and its first issue appeared on 15 May, 1922\(^{21}\). It was a fortnightly and altogether nine issues were published and all of them were banned in India. However, many copies reached India and these influenced left wing individuals and groups\(^{22}\). To evade government ban its name was changed into ‘Masses of India’ and under this changed name, it reappeared from 1\(^{st}\) January 1925 to 1928 i.e., till Roy’s expulsion from the Comintern\(^{23}\).

Through these journals and other publications he did intensive propaganda work and trained the first generation of Indian Communists.

\(^{20}\) Adhikari, *Documents*, Vol. I, p. 231. (Minutes of the meeting held on that date).
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
\(^{23}\) Haithcox John Patrik. *Communism and Nationalism in India*, Bombay, 1971, p. 70.
Unfortunately this first generation trained by him using the authority of the Comintern was given an entirely anti-Leninist perspective especially on colonial problems. Though Lenin and the Comintern under Leninist leadership had given a broad programme of action for Communists in colonial countries, he (Roy) never genuinely accepted them. Paying a lip service to Leninist formulations, in actual applications he continued to apply his own dogmatic and sectarian approach in his journals and books. Though Lenin had wanted him to work to close co-operation with the bourgeois democratic movement and Gandhi, Roy never did so. Under one pretext or the other he continued to wage a thorough warfare with Gandhi and Indian National Congress. Moreover he waged a relentless war inside Comintern also to get its colonial policy changed according to his plans.

**Roy’s Fight against Leninist Policies within Comintern**

Following the second Congress of the Comintern in 1920 the third Congress of the Comintern was held between 22\(^{nd}\) June and 12\(^{th}\) July 1921. This third Congress did not discuss colonial problems but Roy protested against it\(^2\)\(^4\).

Fourth Congress of the Comintern was held from 5\(^{th}\) November to 5\(^{th}\) December 1922. This Congress once again discussed the colonial problem.

This was also the last congress attended by Lenin. Roy made vehement plea in the congress to abandon the Leninist policy adopted at the second Congress. He explicitly stated that national revolutionary movement under national bourgeois will never succeed\(^25\). But the Congress did not accept his pleas. It once again affirmed the Leninist policy and asked the Communists to take part in any movement that gave them access to the masses\(^26\). It asked the Communist Parties in colonial countries to form a broad united front against imperialists and confirmed Leninist policies\(^27\).

Fifth Congress of the Comintern was held from 17\(^{th}\) June to 8\(^{th}\) July 1929. Roy once again tried to defeat the Leninist policies. He declared “the united front against foreign domination is dead”\(^28\). He moved an amendment to replace the Leninist formulations with his sectarian policies\(^29\). The Congress again rejected this view and explicitly stated:

On the colonial questions, the executive had frequent occasions to remind many sections for whom this question is one of great importance that

\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 542.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp. 554.
\(^{27}\) Ibid., pp. 518-559.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., p. 351.
they were not carrying out the decisions of the second congress satisfactorily.\textsuperscript{30}

Even after this clear criticism Roy did not change his course. He continued to apply his own sectarian views and never grasped the essence of Leninist policy.

The sixth Congress of the Comintern was held in July 1928. By this time Stalin had become the undisputed leader of the Communist Party of Soviet Union and the revolutionary and democratic flappings of the revolutionary Russia and ceased: monolithic Stalinism was in ascendancy replacing Leninism. Though Lenin’s name was repeated the visionary aspect of Leninism was completely thrown off.

Colonial policy was also radically changed. Under the pretext of “just supplementing the general analysis” fundamental changes were affected by Stalinist leadership. Instead of the previous policy of united front with national bourgeois, the new task of the communists was “to smash the block of imperialists, landlords and compromising bourgeoisie”\textsuperscript{31}. Roy was expelled from the Comintern for suspected disloyalty against Stalin but

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 350.
Royist concepts were accepted in toto and Leninist policies were completely discarded.

The former Leninist assessment that national bourgeois in colonial countries was a revolutionary force and the bourgeoisie democratic movement for national liberation should be supported was replaced by the new Stalinist concept: the national bourgeoisie was a treacherous class, compromising with imperialists and the task of the communists must be the exposure of this class. In accordance with the policies of the sixth Congress of the Comintern, fight against Gandhi and Indian National Congress became the accepted programme of the Comintern as well as chat of the Communist Party of India.

Though the Comintern accepted the policy of fight against Gandhi and Indian National Congress only in 1928, in fact, from the very beginning i.e., since its inception in October 1920, the CPI under Roy’s leadership had been carrying out a policy of fight against Gandhi and the Indian National Congress.

**Indian Communists Fight against Indian National Congress and Gandhi**

M.N. Roy was a top official of the Comintern and so he had behind him the whole authority and prestige of that body. Though he was clearly

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acting against Comintern principles, in India his utterances and writings were taken as the official word of the Comintern. So when communist groups began to develop in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Lahore under the leadership of Dange, Muzafar Ahamed, Singaravelu Chettiar and Gulam Hussain respectively these groups were nourished in anti-Congress and anti-Gandhi feelings and ideology. Roy’s journals and other publications indoctrinated the first generation of Indian communists in a quite false direction. After the official line of the Comintern was changed for the worse in 1928, in India no change was felt at all as there was no previous experience of Leninist political policy of practice in India.

Roy’s first criticize of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress appeared in the official organ of the Comintern, International Press Correspondence in December 1921. In this article he said that the INC and Gandhi (i) have no scientific understanding of the social forces they lead, (ii) have no comprehension of the tactics, (iii) are neglecting proletariat and peasantry. The above points turned to be the perennial stereotypic image of Gandhi and INC in the communist mind throughout the history of the CPI. In the same year in the Manifesto to the 36th Indian National Congress, Ahmedabad, 1921 he again criticized the programme of the INC:

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“Overthrow of foreign domination alone is not sufficient motive for the people to participate in the non-cooperation movement”. Moreover, he further criticized that “the Swadeshi programme is furthering the interest of native manufacturers only in which masses have no interest.”\textsuperscript{34} He predicted imminent fall of the INC if it does not voice the interest of the workers and peasants\textsuperscript{35}. Basing himself on the idea that fight for proletarian and peasant interest as the penances for every ill that afflicted Indian society, he criticized every aspect of the INC programme. His criticism of the INC “for furthering the interest of native bourgeoisie” is particularly illuminating; for, not only in political analysis and programme of action, but in economic analysis too he went against Leninist principles. Discarding Leninist advice to co-operate with the INC and Gandhi, with “scientific understanding, knowledge of tactics, working class and peasant interest” in his hand Roy together with the emerging CPI groups found themselves in wilderness alone, as the history progressed.

In 1922 in his famous work India in Transition, he assessed Gandhi “as the acutest and the most desperate manifestations of the forces of reaction”\textsuperscript{36}. In the same year in an article in the International Press

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 347.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 353.
\textsuperscript{36} Adhikari, Documents, Vol. I, p. 394.
Correspondence he criticized the policies of the INC “as bourgeoisie and reactionary”\(^{37}\). In another article “On the Eve of the Gaya”, he criticized the INC in following terms:

The Congress gave the masses a stone instead of bread. It denounced their every revolutionary action. It upheld the interests of the landlord as against the surging tide of peasant revolt. Consequently what we predicted in our manifesto has come to pass. As a political body the Congress is dead\(^{38}\).

In 1923 in the introduction to his book ‘One Year of Non-cooperation’ Roy wrote: “Our repeated assertion that non-cooperation movement was reactionary movement was clearly vindicated”\(^{39}\). In 1925 Roy’s paper ‘The Masses of India’ described “Gandhism as politically bankrupt” and policies of the INC as “counter revolutionary”\(^{40}\).

R.P. Dutt, the famous British Communist of Indian origin, who was the all time mentor of the CPI criticized Gandhi and the INC on the same lines of Roy. Referring to calling off of the 1920-22 non-cooperation movement, Dutt wrote:

\(^{39}\)Ibid., Vol.II, p. 176.
\(^{40}\)Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 701, 704.
The Congress leadership called off the movement because they were afraid of the awakening mass activity, because it was beginning to threaten those propertied class interest with which they themselves were closely associated\textsuperscript{41}.

About Gandhiji he again wrote that “Gandhi failed as a leader of national struggle”. He found out the reason for his failure too: “Gandhi failed because he defended upper class interests”. Spirituality of Gandhi according to him “was only the expression of his class interest”\textsuperscript{42}.

Sixth Congress of the Comintern was the first full Stalinist Congress. This congress declared that the INC and Gandhi were enemies of the people\textsuperscript{43}. Instead of supporting the bourgeoisie democratic movement for national liberations as instructed by Lenin, struggle for proletarian hegemony in the national struggle became the proclaimed programme of the Comintern and the CPI\textsuperscript{44}. From this sixth Congress onwards the Comintern programme and communist programme in India achieved a complete unanimity; fight against the INC and Gandhi became common to both. This

\textsuperscript{43} Programme of the Communist International, Bombay, 1949, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{44} “…… the Communist should allow the bourgeois was implicit in Lenin thesis” Helence Carrere and S.R. Scharan. Marxism and Asia, London, 1969, p. 27.
unified programme continued till the “United Front” programme of the Comintern in 1935.

This Communist criticism was not confined to the Right wing leaders of the INC alone; even the Left wing Congress men like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose etc., were also mercilessly attacked. A CPI document of 1930 said:

The most harmful and dangerous obstacle to the victory of India revolution is the agitation carried on by the Left elements of the Indian National Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru, Bose and others⁴⁵.

It should be particularly noted that Jawaharlal Nehru was associating himself with communist sponsored organizations like League the Against Imperialism during this time. Still he was not spared.

In 1934 the CPI attacked the INC:

The Indian National Congress is the class organization of the capitalists working against the fundamental interests of the toiling masses of our country⁴⁶.

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It described Gandhi’s phrases of love, meekness etc., as “cloak to defend the interests of Indian capitalists”. According to the CPI documents of the period the Indian National Congress opposed the peasantry in their struggle against the money lenders, big landlords and the native princes.\(^{47}\) This confrontation with the INC and Gandhi was given a respite for a brief spell of 3 years from 1936 to 1939 under the policy of “United Front against Facism”. Even during this period of truce hostilities were not fully stopped. However, the Congress was described to same extent as an anti-imperialist organization:

The National Congress has undoubtedly achieved a gigantic task in uniting wide forces of Indian people for national struggle, and remains today the principal existing mass organization of many diverse elements seeking national liberation.\(^ {48}\)

This new description of the INC given by R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley in February 1936 became a turning point in the history of the CPI. But the tragedy is that this new approach was not a perception based on the intrinsic quality of the INC itself rather it was an attempt to find new allies for Soviet Union besieged by a Fascist circle. The Soviet cry for help came out in the


form of the policy of United Front Against Fascism enunciated by George Dimitrov in his report to the seventh congress of the Communist International in August 1935. Dutt and Bradley introduced this new thesis to the Indian Communists. This “Dutt - Bradley Thesis” initiated deep changes in the CPI and as a result of this, the CPI for the first time in its history began to work in co-operation with the INC and the Congress Socialist Party to a certain extent. This organizational access gave them opportunities to establish wide contacts, which were otherwise impossible as a banned organization. Through these contacts they were able to identify and forge relationship with kindred individuals and through them they effectively used the INC and the Kerala CSP machinery very effectively. Moreover the CSP admitted confirmed communist leaders and activists within its own ranks. But this was done without defining its own differences with the CPI as it had done in the case of the INC itself. The differences between Gandhism and the CSP ideology was unambiguous, whereas differences between the CSP and the CPI were quite undefined. This ambiguous position helped the CPI with its own well organized in group cohesion, dogmatic fervor and

49 The CPI was banned in 1934. Even before this formal legal ban its existence was never tolerated by the British Raj. The British tried to suppress the CPI through the Peshwar Conspiracy Case of 1921, the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case of 1923 and the Meerut Conspiracy Case of 1929. It was not the British suppression that isolated them but their opposition to the INC led by Gandhi which was the chief anti-imperialist force enjoying popular support.
messianism to offer its own explanation on the differences and thus outwit the CSP leadership who were caught unaware in the conflict. This period of cooperation with INC was particularly fruitful for the CPI and thus proves the correctness of the Leninist perspective. But the Lenin’s idea of cooperation was not for a brief period of three years (1936-39) but for a whole historical period, the period of colonial domination. Moreover only political united front was advised by Lenin\textsuperscript{50} and no organizational sabotage of united front partners as done by the CPI in Kerala. Though the Stalinist dictatorship had ignored and misinterpreted true Leninist ideals to suit their needs, this did not in any way hinder Indian Communists from correctly perceiving the needs of their own country and objectively responding for the solution of those needs and problems. It is clear that Indian Communists activities were guided by Stalinist ideology alone and they did not such care to use their own judgements. So the responsibility for not using the head lies with them alone. In this connection the line taken by the CSP is valuable: they were practically and unconsciously carrying out Leninism. Leninist ideas on colonial questions that they carried out can be summed up as follows:

\textsuperscript{50} See the first part of this Chapter.
(i) Movement for national liberation is essentially a bourgeois democratic movement and communists (and socialists) should practically help this movement.

(ii) Communists while uniting for the overthrow of imperialism should have their own organization.

(iii) Communists should independently work among class organizations of workers and peasants and educate them.

(iv) ‘No Communist colouring’ should be given to the movement for national liberation\(^{51}\).

This approach was practically the approach of the CSP. In opposition to this Leninist approach which the CSP carried out, the Communist approach was characterized by the following:

(1) Complete opposition to the bourgeois democratic movement branding it as the movement of the reactionaries\(^{52}\).

(2) Work for the “working class hegemony” in the national liberation movement\(^{53}\). (Cf: Lenin’s instructions not to give a Communist colouring).

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\(^{52}\) Namboodiripad E.M.S. Speech at a Labour Conference on 15\(^{th}\) April 1937. The Mathrubhumi Daily, 18\(^{th}\) April 1937. Also see the preceding discussion “Indian Communists” Fight Against the INC” in this Chapter.

\(^{53}\) Ibid.
(3) Work among the working class and peasants is not confined to organizing them – working class and peasant struggle become the chief activities and national movement is considered subservient to these activities\textsuperscript{54}. (For Lenin, national liberation was the main thing).

(4) Movement for national liberation was carried out with socialist slogan and colouring\textsuperscript{55}.

The even during the united front period of 1936-39 above ideological positions derived from Stalinism were kept in tact. The international leadership however allowed some allowances like co-operation with the Congress and the CSP as a tactical move under the threat of a war against Soviet Union. As soon as the threat of war was removed following Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939, the tactics also changed. Thus the Communist movement in Kerala since its very beginning has been strictly adhering to the Stalinist positions with astonishing loyalty.

**The Communist Activities in Mysore State**

Even from the days of the establishment of the Mysore Provincial Congress Committee in 1931, a group of youngsters influenced by the

\textsuperscript{54} Resolutions passed at the All Malabar Labour Conference 14\textsuperscript{th} November 1937. The Mathrubhumi Daily 17\textsuperscript{th} November 1937.

Marxist ideology began to take active part by functioning within the Congress. N.D. Shankar, C.B. Monnaiah and Ramaswamy, Kumaran, Chandur and Srinivasa Murthy received their early political training through their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement. It was during their stay in the jail that they could come into contact more with the left ideology in general. These youngsters were not much attracted towards the Hindi propagation, Khadi or other so-called constructive activities of the Congress done under the tacit approval of the Princely Government of Mysore. These men were eager to do something more adventurous, revolutionary and progressive in nature. It was a period when the labour was becoming increasingly restless. The labourers of Bangalore, Mysore, KGF and Tumkur not only fought for their economic demands but also in several political struggles inaugurated under the leadership of the Indian National Congress. Congress leaders like K.T. Bhashyam made serious attempts to organize the workers and mobilize them for the greater participation in the national struggle.

When a strike broke out in the Tobacco factory in 1936, it provided an opportunity for several congressmen with left leanings to jump in to the struggle. The Tobacco factory did not have an earlier history of labour,
strike. Hence, for the young left-wingers, it was an opportunity to plunge into the struggle and organize the workers. The Tobacco company (The Peninsular Tobacco) Company was started in the Cantonment area in the beginning of the 20th century\(^{57}\). The Cantonment or the Civil and Military Station had certain special privileges. Area was beyond the jurisdiction of the labour laws of the Government of Mysore. The British Indian Acts for Labour had to be specifically extended or adopted for the region. Therefore the factory owners had greater freedom to deal with the workers. The Tobacco factory was just like\(^{58}\) a seasonal factory with long hours of work, less pay, absence of safety measures and without other benefits like maternity benefits.

The Indian National Congress had boycotted the foreign goods, which also included Tobacco. A campaign against the Foreign liquor was also taking place. Taking this as a pretext, the Tobacco company retrenched 300 employees\(^{59}\). In fact, its business was affected by the Congress programme. But even when the company started picking up after the initial setback, the process of retrenchment continued unabated.

\(^{57}\) For detailed information see Shoba Naniah, “Left Movement in Mysore” (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis), Mysore University, 1994.

\(^{58}\) KSA, Residency Files 21 Aug. 1936 (F.No.46 of 1936)

\(^{59}\) KSA, Residency Files, 21 August 1936 (F.No.46 of 1936).
The company understood certain modernization and mechanization programmes which reduced the need for more workers. The class of workers called Tinkers found that with the introduction of new machinery, their work was reduced and hence the wages were brought down. As a result of this, on 5 May 1936, 50 tinkers of the factory went on strike on 8 May, they were supported by all the tinkers of the company. As a retaliation, the company retrenched a large number of women employees on 8 May, the management informed 700 women workers of the packing department that their services were not required for a period of few weeks, because the soldering work was going on. These workers were on daily wage, they had no other way. They too joined the strike. The strike also became violent, because people started throwing stones at windows and doors. Policed was brought inside the factory to restore order. But the strike became total and it continued for a few days. Their attempt to get the Resident intervene failed. Hence they formed a union and put forth the following demands.

1) Payment for the strike period to be ensured.

2) Leave, increment and provident fund to be introduced as in the case of Binny Mills.

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60 KSA, Fortnightly Reports till July 15, 1930,
61 Ibid.
62 KSA, Fortnightly Reports till July 15, 1930,
3) Maternity benefits, sick leave with pay for 15 days to be ensured.

4) The Company should promise that the retrenched workers would not be harassed.

5) The role of the Maistrees to be avoided while making any new appointment.

The strike was conducted in such a way that food and provisions had to be supplied to the striking workers and their families. The workers had accepted the leadership of Chandur and Rangaswami but the management was not willing to negotiate with them, saying that they were outsiders. By June 18 the Management declared lock-out and removed the machineries. Chundur then made an attempt to mobilize support for the strike from other parts of Mysore and outside the State.

When all attempts at negotiations failed\textsuperscript{63}, the three thousand workers reduced their demands to three basic ones, such as (a) no victimization, (b) no retrenchment and (c) provision of maternity benefits. But even these demands were rejected by the Management. After two months, it was announced that the factory would be re-open with just 500 workers. After a

\textsuperscript{63} KSA, Fortnightly Reports till 30 June, 1936.
week, the number increased to 600, and by August almost 1,100 workers were re-employed\textsuperscript{64}.

Chandur who had toured other metropolitan cities returned to Bangalore and requested the Congress to take up the issue with the British. The communists were the only people to take interest on the Tobacco factory of cantonment. The organization of the struggle and its continuation for a longer period was a significant achievement for left-wing leaders who had taken up the leadership of the struggle. On the other hand, the Congress leaders, who were initially supporting the struggle did not participate actively thinking that it would be futile to fight against a Civil and Military Station Factory which did not come within the purview of many legislations.

The period between 1932-1937 was very crucial for the left movement in Mysore. Although the Communist Party was not founded till 1942, the left leaders continued their activities under multiple banners. The Mass Awakeners\textsuperscript{65} Union, National Youth League, the Young Mysore League, Civil Liberties Union were some of the important organizations which made serious attempt to provide a radical sharpening for the Congress struggle.

\textsuperscript{64} KSA, Fortnightly Reports till August, 1936.
\textsuperscript{65} KSA, Home Dept. 24 April 1935 to 16 June 1937.
Officially they functioned within the Congress, but planned leftist strategies and plans\textsuperscript{66}.

It was Savoi Aswath Rao, who founded the National Youth League in 1932. This organization had its activities in Mysore, Bangalore and other areas. Savoi Aswath Rao was elected its founder President.

Similarly, the Mysore Unemployees Union was founded in 1938. Another important association was the Malleswaram Labourers’ Club which was organized in 1937. It was during the same year, that the Mass Awakners’ Union was founded. N.D. Shankar, C.B. Monnaiah and Aswath Rao were the leaders behind the formation of the Mass Awakeners’ Union.

In the year 1935, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya founded the Young Mysore League. Kamaladevi was a well-known freedom fighter with her base in Karnataka\textsuperscript{67}. She had established wide contacts with several national level leaders. She had very clear leftist leanings\textsuperscript{68}, which helped the radicalization of the Congress organization to some extent.

These leaders never thought of organizing a separate Communist Party or even a Congress Socialist Party (CSP) as it was case with several

\textsuperscript{66} KSA, N.D. Shankar Papers.
\textsuperscript{67} KSA, (Home) Confidential Branch, File No.7-(37-38) Sept. 1937.
\textsuperscript{68} For details, see Shoba Naniah, The Left Movement in Mysore, \textit{Op. Cit}. 163
regions of India. Perhaps many of them thought that they were not strong enough to for an independent identity.

But a very salutary point to be mentioned here is that they did not adopt a confrontationist position vis-à-vis the Congress. They generally accepted the Gandhian leadership.

In fact in Bombay, the communist group disrupted the trade union movement and left themselves away from the third great wave of struggle\textsuperscript{69}. On the other hand, the left wing activists in Kerala totally immersed themselves in the Civil Disobedience Movement\textsuperscript{70}. Krishna Pillai, Kerala’s first Communist started his political career by enrolling himself as a Congress volunteer in the salt Satyagraha March to Payyanur in January 1930\textsuperscript{71}. For the left inclined youth of Kerala, the famous Dandi March and the beginning and the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement were not just sham struggles, started to pre-empt the next struggle of the exploited masses of India. According to EMS Namboodiripad, when they read records about the Dandi March and breaking of the salt law, they felt grateful that they were born in a generation that could bear witness to all these historic

\textsuperscript{69} Guidelines of the History of the Communist Party of India, October 1974, p. 32.


\textsuperscript{71} Krishnan T.V. \textit{Kerala’s first Communist}. 
events. EMS further states, similarly the Guruvayur Satyagraha in which A.K. Gopalan was the volunteer explain thrilled “thousands of young men like me”. After the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Guruvayur Satyagraha it was the same would be communists who enrolled numbers for the Congress, organized political meetings, demonstrations, Youth conferences and the first Trade Union Organizations. It was this participation in the national struggle and the Congress activities which helped the communists in Kerala to become politically relevant and successful when they founded the Communist Party in Kerala.

The early leftists in the Mysore State also had a similar policy towards nationalist cause and Congress-led struggles. Each of those front organizations founded by people like C.B. Monniah, Savoi Aswath Rao and N.D. Shankar struggled hard to make the nationalist struggle a success through those organizations. But unfortunately, these leaders were only on the periphery. They could not capture the mainstream position in the Congress and decide the fate.

The Left wing continued their agitations in other factories too. One T.R. Mills had 800 workers and where the left leaders organized three

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72 Namboodiripad, EMS, *How I became a Communist*, p. 11.
74 Gopalan, A.K. *In the Cause of the People, 1978*, p. 601.
strikes during January-February 1939. In this Mill, the workers declared a strike demanding advance payment for the *Pongal* Festival. Another struggle was for taking back a dismissed weaver and for the opening two other dismissal cases. The workers were successful in these struggles. Savoi Aswath Rao had started organizing meetings and provided full support to the agitation. Dismissal of works had became a common feature in many establishments. Hence the Left leaders took serious steps to counter these trends.

There was a ban against the Mass Awakeners Union for its political activities. However, S. Ramaswamy ignored the ban and tried to form a Union of the Railway Employees in Mysore City. He was arrested and produced before the court. When his trial was taking place, thousands of railway workers marched to the court to attend his trial. In the thirties trade unions were not legalized by the government and any attempt was fought with tooth and nail by the government.

The government was against any serious activities in the nationalist struggle. Therefore, N.D. Shankar was failed for a seditious speech in Mandya. C.B. Monnaiah was served with a deportation notice from Mysore.

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75 KSA Fortnightly Report till 15 May 1939.
Similarly, Ramaswamy was arrested for his attempt to form the Railway Workers Union.

In 1941, the works of the textile Mills demanded the payment of bonus and dividend. The management was adamant in not paying it. The Mill workers, therefore decided to go on strike again. The strike was triggered when a worker was interrogated and threatened for asking others to go on strike. When this news was reported, the entire Mill went on strike on the bonus and dividend issue. The workers invited the Left leaders like N.D. Shankar, Kumaran⁷⁶ and Rama Rao to lead the struggle. The three leaders formed a 40 member strike committee. They started picketing the lorries entering the premises, they started holding neighbourhood meetings. They started a novel idea of fund collection for the striking workers. Since the leadership was completely in the hands of the left leaders, Congress adopted a policy of non-cooperation and they withdrew from the struggle.

Since the war was going on, the factory production was also declared as part of the war-effort and it should proceed without any hindrance. Hence, the Government of Mysore externed the Left leaders like Shankar, Kumaran and Rama Rao for a year from the city on 9 Feb. 1941.

⁷⁶ Sankaranayana, Mysuru Samsthanada Modala Communistaru (Kannada), pp. 27-28.
Thus, the left leaders organized their activities under different associations like Mass Awakeners’ Union, Civil Liberties Union, Young Mysuru League, Mysore Unemployees Union, Malleswaram Labourers Club etc. They also organized several trade unions in some of the mills, factories and the Railways. Unfortunately they could not become a strong force, primarily due to the fact that they could not build a strong cadre behind them. N.D. Shankar, C.B. Monnaiah, N.D. Shankar functioned as individuals without a regular cadre behind them.

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