

## **CHAPTER VII**

### **THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT**

The government adopted coercive and repressive measures to suppress the Travancore State Congress. The leaders too underwent sufferings both physically and mentally. The Working Committee of the Congress decided to commence civil disobedience movement from 26<sup>th</sup> August 1938. The issues that the State Congress to press were the recognition of civil rights and the restoration of the fundamental rights. The Government on the other hand was ready to face the threat with all its might. It resulted in police firing and outbreak of violence. But on 20<sup>th</sup> October 1938 the civil disobedience came to an end. The prisoners were released. The Travancore State Congress was not ready to accept anything less than the responsible government. The people did not attach much importance either to the release of the prisoners or suspension of the movement. The leaders of Youth League demanded purposeful action. The State Congress decided to renew the agitation from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1939. But the Second World War intervened. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, the Second World War broke out. Taking advantage of the situation, the Government suspended all the programmes till normal condition was restored.

### 7.1. The Congress Ultimatum

During this time, a series of unfavourable developments took place. This led the congress to organize civil disobedience movement. The emergence of the loyalist parties with the moral backing of the Government caused great concern in the Congress circles. In several places, the people especially students condemned the leaders of the loyalist parties as antinationals and opportunists. It resulted in a police lathicharge in the Science College at Trivandrum. When the third session of the Assembly was opened on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1938, a crowd collected in front of the college hooted and geered at the National Congress leaders when they passed by. Provoked at this, S. Krishna Aiyar, leader of the National Congress Party in the Assembly, moved a resolution seeking protection to the members and urging the house to take necessary steps for booking the culprits.<sup>1</sup> The Dewan President of the house assured protection to the members. In this regard a resolution was put to vote and carried.<sup>2</sup> Taking into account of the resolution, in the evening of that day police lathicharged on the students causing serious injuries to more than twenty students.<sup>3</sup> The congress condemned this as a pre-conceived action of the Government to suppress their party. On 18<sup>th</sup> July, A. Thanupillai moved for discussion an

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<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, Vol; XII, No.5, 16 July 1938, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel D., *op.cit.*, p. 3.

adjournment motion on the incident in the Assembly. But, the Dewan who was the President disallowed the motion for discussion. The State Congress members staged a walk out in protest from the Legislature.<sup>4</sup>

On 17<sup>th</sup> July, the District Magistrate of Trivandrum extended the ban order for two months. It also prohibited prominent Working Committee members from attending public meetings during the ban period.<sup>5</sup> The reason the Magistrate mentioned in the order was that a strong opposition existed against the responsible government. If these Working Committee members were allowed there would be a clash and that might cause breach of peace.<sup>6</sup> The leaders of the Travancore State Congress felt that it was a serious attempt on the part of the government to abolish the civil liberties of the people.<sup>7</sup> The government stated that there was neither a policy of curtailment nor repression of civil liberties and the Government was forced to take such action on the Travancore State Congress.<sup>8</sup>

Disappointed and disgusted with the attitude of the Government, the Working Committee of the State Congress met at Trivandrum on 3<sup>rd</sup> August and decided to launch Civil Disobedience Movement and also decided to

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<sup>4</sup> Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, Vol. VII, No.6, 18 July, 1938, pp. 246-247.

<sup>5</sup> The banned members were A. Thanupillai, T.H. Varghese, K.P. Nilakanta Pillai, V.K. Velayudhan, P.K. Kunju and G. Rama Chandran.

<sup>6</sup> The Hindu, 19 July, 1938, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 25 August, 1938, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, 5 August 1938, D.Dis. 122/1938/C.S.

give an ultimatum to the government. It was a matter of self respect to the Congressites to submit to the prohibitory orders now in force throughout the state. If the present prohibitory orders were not withdrawn before 16<sup>th</sup> August 1938, so as to restore their fundamental rights, “the Working Committee will have to shoulder the responsibility of asserting the right of public meetings against the prohibitory order at selected places throughout the state with the utmost non-violent discipline and to face whatever sufferings may be forced upon them in consequence”.<sup>9</sup> In an endeavour to avoid crisis, A. Thanupillai requested the government to revise their policy and thus to effect a solution to the problems.<sup>10</sup> The Dewan on the other hand, warned the leaders of serious consequences.<sup>11</sup> The Dewan further warned the Congressites, not to disobey the order. The government would not be a silent spectator.<sup>12</sup>

## **7.2. Amrit Kaur Mission**

The ultimatum of the State Congress to the government attracted the attention of Mahatma Gandhi. He wanted to settle the problem peacefully without affecting both the parties. At the same time a delegation consisting of E.J. Philipose and G. Ramachandran went to Wardha to seek the guidance

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<sup>9</sup> Letter from A. Thanupillai, 4 August 1938, to Dewan of Travancore, D.Dis. 122/1938.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1938.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary, 8 August, 1938 to A. Thanupillai, D.Dis/18938.

<sup>12</sup> Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, Vol. XII, No.16, 16 August 1938, p. 1168.

of Gandhi. He in turn advised the party to observe strict non-violence and discipline both among the leaders and the cadres. At the same time he sent Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, a social worker from Ahmadabad to explore the possibilities of effecting a compromise between the government and the State Congress leaders.<sup>13</sup> She reached Trivandrum on 20<sup>th</sup> August. As planned, she conducted talks with the Dewan and the State Congress. Her efforts did not bear fruit because both the parties were very rigid in their stand. She returned to Ahmadabad with disappointment.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand the Congress Working Committee convened an emergency meeting at the Van Ross House, Trivandrum. The Working Committee finding no alternative decided to launch the Civil Disobedience agitation on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1938.<sup>15</sup> The Travancore Youth League too extended its support.<sup>16</sup> The congress made elaborate preparations for the success of the Civil Disobedience Agitation. They also formed a committee to lead the agitation.<sup>17</sup> As the situation seemed to be tense, the government decided to take strong steps.

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<sup>13</sup> Gandhi, M.K., Letters to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Ahmadabad, 1961, p. 151.

<sup>14</sup> *Malayala Manorama*, 23 August, 1938, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Malayala Rajyam*, 23 August 1938, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> The Youth League was founded in 1931. It stood for the granting of Responsible Government.

<sup>17</sup> Travancore Administration Report, 1938-1939, p. 12.

### 7.3. The Government Actions

The government decided to take strong steps to face the situations caused due to the Civil Disobedience. On 25<sup>th</sup> August, the Government promulgated an emergency regulation called the Criminal Law Amendment Act I and X of 1938. It authorized the government to declare political associations illegal and ordered the District Magistrates to take possession of the lands and other assets belonging to these associations and to prosecute those who made contributions to such associations.<sup>18</sup> Further the Act empowered the administration to take possession of printing presses, seize the seditious literature and publications which aided the unlawful associations or encouraged disobedience to law. In the wake of the Criminal Procedure Act, the government cancelled the fundamental right of the people. It abruptly banned the State Congress, its Working Committee, Action Council and the Youth League that extended its support to the agitation.<sup>19</sup>

Even though the Criminal Law Amendment Act was in force, the government instructed the District Magistrates, not to disturb or disperse the meetings. The agitators should be allowed to conduct meetings without any disturbance. But before the meeting, notice should be circulated that the

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<sup>18</sup> *The Hindu*, 26 August 1938, p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> *The Acts and Proclamations of Travancore*, Vol. X, Trivandrum, 1939, pp. 124-125.

meeting was an unlawful assembly. But after the meeting was over they should have left the place immediately or the jurisdiction immediately or would be arrested. It also directed the District Magistrate to take strong action in the case of A. Thanupillai, K.P. Nilakanta Pillai, G. Ramachandran, T.M. Varghese, P.J. Sebastian, P.K. Kunju, V.K. Velayudhan, K.T. Thomas, K.R. Narayanan, E.J. Philipose and M.M. Varkey. They should be punished with imprisonment and fine.<sup>20</sup>

In an attempt to tackle the situation, the government increased the strength of police force. Five hundred temporary Reserve Police were recruited. Ex-military Servicemen from Madras and Bangalore were called to service. Ex-Service men from Travancore State Forces were called. The government recruited emergency staff and a few short hand reporters to take down the speeches at political meetings.<sup>21</sup>

#### **7.4. The Agitation**

The ban order irritated the Congressites to the very core. They focused the Civil Rights as the immediate issue. On 25<sup>th</sup> August, P. Thanupillai made a statement. In that statement he made it clear that the fundamental civil right was an important issue. No other issue was equal to that. All other issues were secondary and insignificant. “It is impossible to

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<sup>20</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, 22 August 1938, Confidential Memorandum to District Magistrate, D.Dis. 1169/1944.

<sup>21</sup> Travancore Administration Report, 1938-1939, pp. 97-98.

submit any longer to the suppression of fundamental civil liberties.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly the Working Committee of the Congress decided to begin the agitation by disobeying the ban orders at selected places.<sup>23</sup> The Committee deputed the following leaders for the purpose to the places noted against their name.

A. Thanupillai and T.M. Varghese	- Trivandrum
G.P. Nilakanta Pillai and K. Kesavan	- Quilon
P.K. Kunju and V.K. Velayudhan	- Alleppey
E.J. Philipose and P.J. Sebastian	- Kottayam

The Congress Working Committee constituted a propaganda Committee under the leadership of G. Ramachandran, K.P. Nilamanta Pillai and C. Kesavan to do propaganda work and convince the people in the South Travancore area, South of Quilon and North of Quilon respectively and instructed the members to court arrest.<sup>24</sup> The leaders defied the ban orders and addressed meetings on 26<sup>th</sup> August in Trivandrum, Quilon, Alleppey and Kottayam.<sup>25</sup>

The government enforced the Criminal Law Amendment Act strictly.

A. Thanupillai, T.M. Varghese, G.P. Nilakanta Pillai, M.G. Mathew,

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<sup>22</sup> *The Hindu*, 26 August 1938, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Letter from Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 28 August 1938, to the Dewan of Travancore, D.Dis. 362/1948.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> File No. D.Dis. 130/1945 E.

P.K. Kunju, K. Kunchu Pillai and E.J. Philipose were arrested and imprisoned.<sup>26</sup> But for the arrests and imprisonment the first day agitation passed off peacefully.

The leaders did not mind the arrest. They disobeyed the ban order at Trivandrum again. The situation became tense and the defiance to the ban order became serious. The State Congress announced a meeting at Sangumugam beach at Trivandrum. Leaders like C. Narayana Pillai, S. Nilakanda Pillai, A. Achuthan, N. Raghavan and Pereira were deputed to the meeting with instructions to speak on the violation of the ban orders.<sup>27</sup> But the police intervened and blocked the ways to the beach at different points. Yet they could not prevent the large crowd reaching the meeting ground. As the situation was deteriorating from bad to worse, the police resorted to lathicharge to control the crowd. The crowd pelted stones in protest and retaliation. There was open clash between the mob and the police. Many were injured in the clash. The students who took part were taken into custody.<sup>28</sup> These activities marked a prelude to the general participation of the students in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Following the Sangumugom beach incident the Civil Disobedience Movement turned to be more violent. This led the government to adopt stern

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<sup>26</sup> D. Dis. 135/1945, Kerala Secretariat, Trivandrum.

<sup>27</sup> Narayana Pillai, C., *op.cit.*, p. 329.

<sup>28</sup> *The Hindu*, 30 August 1938, p.8.

measures. Lathicharge and firing on crowds were regular occurrences. On 31<sup>st</sup> August, at Neyyattinkara, situated twenty kilometers southeast of Trivandrum, N.K. Padmanabha Pillai, one of the leaders was arrested. Following his arrest a crowd gathered and waylaid the car of the Police Superintendent and burnt it.<sup>29</sup> The news spread to the villages situated in and around Neyyattinkara. The villagers poured in at Neyyattinkara in the afternoon. They indulged in violent activities and started a procession shouting slogans prepared by the Congress leaders. The crowd entered into the schools and compelled the school authorities to close and the students joined the crowd. They made objectionable demonstrations. Shop keepers were compelled to close their shops. Normal traffic on the roads was disturbed. Private vehicles, cars on the roads were obstructed and transport buses were stoned and damaged. The occupants were made to shout Congress slogans. For fear of life the local police took shelter in the police station.<sup>30</sup>

The administration, in an attempt to manage the situation, sent a detachment of the Travancore State Force under H.L. Watkis, the Commandant and he tried to prevent the procession. But the protesters stoned at Travancore State Force. Immediately the military opened fire at

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<sup>29</sup> Report from Superintendent of Police (CID), Trivandrum, 4 September 1938, Report to the Police Commissioner, Trivandrum, D. Dis. 1149/1944.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

the crowd. In the firing twelve persons got bullet injuries, ten of them died subsequently.<sup>31</sup>

This incident was followed by two incidents, one at Quilon and the other at Puthuppalli. On 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1938, the Magistrates of Quilon and Kottayam districts instructed the police not to allow to conduct meetings and warned the agitators that any such gatherings would be dispersed by the use of fire arms.<sup>32</sup> But the State Congress held a meeting at Quilon on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1938.<sup>33</sup> A large crowd assembled at the meeting ground. The crowd became unruly and pelt stones on the police on duty. The police made lathicharge. But eight police men were injured. The crowd was uncontrollable. The military finding no way fired at the mass. Six persons were injured. But later two were dead.<sup>34</sup> Puthuppally at Kottayam District, the police lathicharged on the crowd on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1932.<sup>35</sup> But there was no effect at all. Hence the military fired at the crowd. As a result one person died on the spot and several others got bullet injuries.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> District Magistrate, Trivandrum, 31 August 1938, telegram to Dewan of Travancore, D.Dis. 1836/1944.

<sup>32</sup> File No. D.Dis. 100/1938.

<sup>33</sup> Report from District Magistrate, Quilon, 3 September 1938, to The Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 5/1945.

<sup>34</sup> Report from the District Superintendent of Police, Quilon, 3 September 1938, to Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel D., *op.cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

These tragic incidents engaged the attention of many political leaders. Mahatma Gandhi was the first political leader to issue a statement on Travancore on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 1938.<sup>37</sup> E.M. Sankaran Namboodiripad and P. Krishna Pillai, the leaders of Kerala Provincial Congress Socialist Party assured to send volunteers from Malabar and Cochin.<sup>38</sup> Many leaders, and political parties including Congress Party expressed their sympathy for the victims of the firing and lathicharge. The Congress leaders of Travancore too felt that the agitation was planned to be peaceful but it ended in violence.<sup>39</sup> It taught a lesson to the leaders that to lead a non-violent agitation was like attempting to witness an arbitrary cyclone. Taking into account of the past happening and experiences in the State, V.K. Velayudhan announced at Alleppey on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1938, the suspension of mass meetings under the auspices of the State Congress. At the same time he gave an earnest advice to carry out the movement without causing any inconvenience or trouble to the people.<sup>40</sup> The government too felt it unwise to disperse every meeting by using force.<sup>41</sup> The government further directed the magistrates to avoid shooting if possible.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> District Magistrate, Quilon, 3 September, 1938, to Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 5/1945.

<sup>38</sup> *Malayala Manorama*, 6 September 1938, p. 3, *The Hindu*, 29 August 1938, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> *The Hindu*, 6 September, 1938, pp. 7-8.

<sup>40</sup> Government Memorandum, No. 263, 4 September 1938, D.Dis. 1169/1644.

<sup>41</sup> Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, 4 September 1938, to District Magistrate, Quilon.

<sup>42</sup> *Malayala Manorama*, 3 September 1938, p. 4.

### **7.5. All Travancore Civil Disobedience Committee**

Soon after the military firing in various places including Neyyattinkara, the leaders thought that it was appropriate to form a new committee called the All Travancore Civil Disobedience Committee at Trivandrum to make propaganda and to explain to the people the need for responsible government, non-violence and the government attitude.<sup>43</sup> C. Narayana Pillai, S. Nilakanta Pillai, A. Achuthan, K.C. George and M.N. Govindan Nair were the members of the Committee. They were directed to tour throughout Travancore and explain the people the need for such an agitation. The committee organised hundreds of meetings throughout the length and breadth of Travancore. They visited the rural areas and educated the people about the Civil Disobedience Movement and their responsibility towards that. Thousands of people attended the meetings. This encouraged and strengthened the committee members and the Congress Party alike. At the same time the government wanted the agitators to dance to their tune. Hence it planned a policy to bring the situation under control.<sup>44</sup>

### **7.6. Towards Peaceful Negotiation**

The Congress Party was contemplating upon a settlement. The government too was interested upon a settlement. Hence, on behalf of the

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<sup>43</sup> *Malayala Manorama*, 3 September 1938, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Narayana Pillai, C., *op.cit.*, p. 432.

administration, Col. Watkis, Commandant, Travancore State Force and G.S.A. Karim Sahib, special officer, C.I.D. took the initiative. The representative of the Congress Party and the representatives of the government met at the Mascot Hotel in Trivandrum on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1930. Col. Walkis put forward three conditions for the consideration of the State Congress.<sup>45</sup>

1. The Congress should openly admit its responsibility for the outbreak of violence in Travancore.
2. The Congress should give up the Civil Disobedience Movement permanently.
3. All charges that were levelled against the Dewan in Memorials and Memoranda should be withdrawn openly.

But the proposals were not agreeable to the Congress. R. Vasudevan Pillai made the following counter demands.

1. Immediate establishment of the responsible government.
2. Fundamental rights should be declared at once.
3. Suspension of Criminal Law Amendment Regulation and the ban orders.
4. The release of all political prisoners.
5. Recognition of State Congress as a political party.

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<sup>45</sup> *The Hindu*, 9 September 1938, p. 10.

Vasudevan Pillai met the Congress leaders in prison to get their approval. But they could not agree the Congress formula. Hence the talk failed.<sup>46</sup>

After the failure of the peace talks, the government pursued the policy of coercion, arrest and conviction of the leaders more vigorously than before. It issued orders and instructed the Magistrates to proceed against the ring leaders who had considerable influence among the mob.<sup>47</sup> As per the orders of the government, V.K. Velayudhan, C. Kesavan, R. Sankar, S. Sugathan and K.C. Govindan were detained under custody.<sup>48</sup> And thus the situation became highly unfavourable to the Congress Party.

Now the Congress Party changed the tactics. Vasudevan Pillai announced that the people should continue the struggle even in the absence of Congress leaders till the attainment of the responsible government.<sup>49</sup> “We are not prepared for any concession and that each one of us should be ready to resist repression by sacrifice and violence by non-violence and to offer as sacrifice lives in this fight for freedom. Victory or death may be our motto”.<sup>50</sup> He informed the people to carry the message to every village and

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<sup>46</sup> *The Hindu*, 8 September 1938, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, 19 September 1938, to the District Magistrate, Quilon, D.Dis 1169/944.

<sup>48</sup> Narayana Pillai, C., *op.cit.*, p. 456-466.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel, D., *op.cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>50</sup> Vasudevan Pillai, R., 8 September 1938, D.Dis. 362/1948 (Malayalam language).

every passersby. He instructed the voluntary organizations to train people in non-violence, regulate public meetings, distribute hand bills and to prepare people to desist payment of taxes, boycott the postal department, courts and schools.<sup>51</sup>

The announcement evoked public sympathy and received widespread sympathy of the general public. The Travancore Students Committee appealed to the students to make these programmes a success.<sup>52</sup> The All Travancore Students Association met at Kottayam on 15<sup>th</sup> September 1938<sup>53</sup> and passed the following resolution. “Travancore students should go on strike with a view to helping the State Congress in the agitation for responsible government and if required should go on strike for the whole year.”<sup>54</sup> Following this call the students of colleges, high schools and elementary schools went on strike, led processions and rallies. The students organised picketing in several centres in the state and gave problem to the police.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Vasudevan Pillai, R., 8 September 1938, D.Dis. 362/1948.

<sup>52</sup> Travancore Students Committee, Trivandrum, 7 September 1938, D.Dis. 362/1948.

<sup>53</sup> *The Hindu*, 19 September 1938, p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 September 1938, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Report from District Magistrate, Kottayam, 20 September 1938, to the Chief Secretary to the Government, D.Dis. 135/1945.

### 7.7. Curb on the Media

The attitude of the State Congress towards the government was growing serious. The government was also hardening its attitude towards the Congress activists.<sup>56</sup> The government detained the successive leaders who led the agitation. Even the voluntary organizations that assailed the agitators were not spared. The arrested leaders were kept in the lock-up of the respective police stations for days together and denied even the basic human facilities. Some of them were even tortured by the police.<sup>57</sup> Now the congress leaders planned to outwit the government. Some of them went to Cochin State and established organisations there. They formed an Action Committee and guided the activities in Travancore.<sup>58</sup> Those leaders who escaped or evaded arrest published pamphlets and wrote articles in magazine and journals. In those articles they condemned the activities of the government.<sup>59</sup> The journals and the magazines that criticized and attacked the government were printed from outside and inside of Travancore.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Report from District Magistrate, Kottayam, 20 September 1938, to the Chief Secretary to the Government, D.Dis. 130/1945.

<sup>57</sup> Damodaran, K. and C. Narayana Pillai, *op.cit.*, p. 148. Inspector General of Police, Trivandrum, 12 March 1939, Report to Chief Secretary, D.Dis. 3161/1945.

<sup>58</sup> Travancore Administration Report, 1938-1939, p. 32.

<sup>59</sup> Nilakan Perumal, *The Truth About Travancore*, madras, 1939, p. 18.

<sup>60</sup> Legal Rememberancer to Government, 5 September 1938, a note submitted to the Director of Information, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 302/1938.

Therefore the government suppressed and bridled the newspapers before they could cause serious damages to the government.

The government understood that the media played a vital role in all their attempts of propaganda, carrying the message of responsible government. So the government wanted to curb the activities of the media and suppress it. It urged Malayali and Malayala Manorama that they contradicted the provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Regulation No. 1 of 1938<sup>61</sup> in publishing the shooting incidents at Neyyattinkara, Quilon and Puthuppalli and criticized the government. Hence the government cancelled the licence of Manorama printing press and attached it to the Government.<sup>62</sup> But the editor of Malayala Manorama was not disappointed by this action. He shifted the operation to Kunnamkulam in Cochin state. The paper continued to publish articles as before. It gained wide circulation in Travancore.<sup>63</sup> The government on the other hand proscribed its circulation in Travancore.<sup>64</sup> But the policy of proscription was a shock to the agitators because the newspaper added fuel to fire. It was the newspapers which fed bread and milk to the agitation during day and night. The District

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<sup>61</sup> Legal Remembrancer to the Government, 5 September 1938, a note submitted to the Director of Information, Trivandrum, D.Dis., 302/1938.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, 10<sup>th</sup> September 1938 and to K.C. Itty, Publisher, Malayala Manorama, Kottayam, D.Dis. 302/1938.

<sup>63</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, 21 September 1938, D.Dis. 162/1946.

<sup>64</sup> Government notification No. 259/38, 17 September 1938.

Magistrate, Kottayam advised the government to adopt a firm policy so that the movement could be curbed from active burning and might die down slowly.<sup>65</sup>

There were other popular journals like *The Aryakeralam*, *Thozhilali*, *Jayabharati*, *Vasumati* and a Tamil Journal *Podujanam*. There were among the other popular journals that were proscribed.<sup>66</sup> Unminding the proscription they started to function from Cochin following the footsteps of *Malayala Manorama*.<sup>67</sup> The Railway lands in the state which were under the custody of the Madras State had become a convenient asylum for the agitators to import these publications. But at the instance of the Travancore Government, the Government of Madras too banned the importation of these publication into the railway lands in Travancore.<sup>68</sup> The *Indian Express* too became a victim of it.<sup>69</sup>

### **7.8. Gandhi's Mediation**

The struggle of the people of Travancore under State Congress came to the knowledge of the leaders of National Congress and particularly Mahatma Gandhi. On 17<sup>th</sup> September 1938, he wrote a letter to

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<sup>65</sup> Report from the District Magistrate, Kottayam, 13 September 1938 to Chief Secretary to Government, D.Dis. 134/1945.

<sup>66</sup> File No. D.Dis. 134/1945, 3 May 1941.

<sup>67</sup> Travancore Administration Report, 1938-1939, p. 12.

<sup>68</sup> Government Order No. 1710, dated 14 October 1938, Public Department.

<sup>69</sup> Police Daily Report, Trivandrum, 20 October 1938, D.Dis. 981/1945.

K. Parameswaran Pillai of Changanassery, the need to withdraw the struggle especially the allegation levelled against the Dewan in the Congress memorial. Respecting Gandhi's letter, Nimbkar, the President Civil Liberties Union, Madras and Parameswaran Pillai met the Dewan on 19<sup>th</sup> September 1938. But the Dewan placed before them the following conditions.<sup>70</sup>

1. The government would not stand against the agitation for responsible government in peaceful and non-violent means.
2. The leaders must assure that the allegations contained in the memorial should be withdrawn and agitation on constitutional and legitimate means should be continued.
3. If the State Congress would agree to these conditions, the government would release all the political prisoners and if non-violence was noticed from the State Congress for two months, the government would cancel the operation of the Criminal Law Amendment Regulations.<sup>71</sup>

As Nimbkar and C.K. Parameswaran Pillai could not take a decision on their own accord on the Dewan's plan they decided to meet the political prisoners who were languishing in the central prison. As they planned they

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<sup>70</sup> Koor, E.M., *op.cit.*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>71</sup> Narayana Pillai, C., *op.cit.*, pp. 518-519.

met the political prisoners on the 19<sup>th</sup> September. The political prisoners had their meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> September 1938 in the prison to discuss the Dewan's proposal. In the meeting they decided not to hold talks with the government other than the granting of responsible government.<sup>72</sup> Thus the peace talk ended in an unhappy note.

Mahatma Gandhi was not ready to leave the matter as such. He wanted to prevail upon the leaders. He advised that responsible government and the removal of the Dewan were thoroughly ill-matched.<sup>73</sup> The prisoners of the Central Prison again met on 23<sup>rd</sup> September to reconsider the matter and decided not to withdraw the struggle for it may cause a set back to the movement.<sup>74</sup> Out of respect to Gandhi, C.K. Parameswaran Pillai went to Delhi to meet Gandhi to appraise the situation and to seek his advice. Gandhi replied that he was not able to give them advice on the subject.<sup>75</sup> The possibility of effecting a settlement through the intervention of Gandhi too did not materialize because the State Congress was not ready to accept anything other than the responsible government. These developments led the country to Civil War.

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<sup>72</sup> Nilakan Perumal, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>73</sup> *The Hindu*, 4 October 1938, p. 12.

<sup>74</sup> Telegram from A. Thanu Pillai, Central Prison, 23 September 1938 to M.K. Gandhi, D.Dis. 324/1938.

<sup>75</sup> *The Hindu*, 30 September 1938, p. 10.

## 7.9. The Civil War

In spite of the repressive measures, the State Congress decided to continue its programmes. Thousands of people came forward to fight with a firm determination to face any eventuality. The arrest and imprisonment of the leaders of the State Congress students strike and picketing added new vigour to the struggle. The movement spread to the villages and countryside too.<sup>76</sup> The District Magistrate, Chengannoor reported that while arrests and convictions were going on the one side, uncontrollable mob violence was continued on the other side.<sup>77</sup> The political atmosphere assumed the proportions of a Civil War.<sup>78</sup> The situation in Travancore was very grave. Return to normalcy was more difficult. The State Congress decided to continue the agitation as long as freedom of speech and assembly continued. Large number of people solidly stood behind all these. The government had no option but to meet the situation by using all resources at its disposal.<sup>79</sup> Thus the trial of strength was going on between the government and the State Congress.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Report from the D.S.P. of Chengannoor to the District Magistrate, 30 September 1938.

<sup>77</sup> Chengannoor Waging War case commitment order, 7 October 1938, p. 38, D.Dis. 508/1938.

<sup>78</sup> *The Hindu*, 20 September 1938, p. 6. .

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

While situation was embroiling like this, on 21<sup>st</sup> September a large crowd numbering more than ten thousand, mostly fishermen assembled at Shangumugham beach near Trivandrum to attend the proposed Congress meeting.<sup>81</sup> The police and military forces had already taken position in the place. They tried to disperse the meeting by using force. But the crowd retaliated by pelting stones.<sup>82</sup> In retaliation the military under the Command of Captain Sankunni Nair fired at the mob killing three persons.<sup>83</sup>

On 21 September, a State Congress meeting was held at Attingal. There was huge crowd in that place. The police attempted to disperse the crowd. The crowd turned to be hostile.<sup>84</sup> The hostile crowd pelted stones at the constables and soldiers. The military in retaliation shot 14 rounds at the infuriated crowd and seriously injured five persons of whom two died on the spot.<sup>85</sup> Following this incident Chengannoor and its neighbouring villages witnessed various acts of violence. The government considered it as good as waging an undeclared war against the Sovereign.<sup>86</sup> At Chengannoor also there was an outbreak. The major cause for the Chengannoor outbreak was

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<sup>81</sup> Govt. Press Note, 22 September 1938, submitted to the Resident, Trivandrum.

<sup>82</sup> Report from H.L. Watkis, Commandant, Travancore Security Forces, 23 September 1938, Resident, D.Dis.3258/1944.

<sup>83</sup> Chopra, P.N., *Who's Who of Indian Martyrs*, New Delhi, 1972, pp. 178-208.

<sup>84</sup> Report from H.L. Watkis, 15-28 September, to the Resident, D.Dis. 3258/1944.

<sup>85</sup> Narayana Pillai, C., *op.cit.*, p. 496.

<sup>86</sup> Chengannoor Waging War P.F., 8 of 1938, 7 October 1939, p. 17, D.Dis. 508'1939.

the arrest and conviction of Mrs. and Mr. E.J. Kuruvilla.<sup>87</sup> According to the decision of the local Congress Committee of Chengannoor, the volunteers picketed public offices on 29<sup>th</sup> September. In an attempt to disperse the crowd the Inspector of Police at Chengannoor ordered lathi charge. The crowd turned to be hostile and marched to the Inspector's house and attacked it with stones. Seeing the shower of stones the military was called in to save the situation. The military in retaliation fired at the infuriated crowd and killed one rioter.<sup>88</sup> The bewildered crowd engaged in cutting off communications from all sides to Chengannoor, huge trees were cut off and placed them across the roads,<sup>89</sup> culverts and bridges were dismantled, mile and furlong stones were broken or damaged and placed them on the roads to prevent any other communication. Even they had gone to the extent of digging trenches on the roads.<sup>90</sup> For two days there was anarchy at Chengannoor. The military forces that were stationed were at a loss. They found it difficult to deal with the situation. Reinforcement was brought to save the situation. After two days war of nerves was brought under control.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Chengannoor Waging War P.F., 8 of 1938, 7 October 1939, p. 17, D.Dis. 508/1939.

<sup>88</sup> *The Hindu*, 30 September 1938, p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Chengannoor Waging War Case Commitment Order, 7 October 1939, p. 17.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

Kadakkal is a village situated forty five kilometers north of Trivandrum. On 20<sup>th</sup> September a group of agitators obstructed the collection of toll at Kadakkal market and warned the people not to pay it.<sup>92</sup> A breach of peace followed that for three days. Trouble started when the police intervened. On 29<sup>th</sup> September the infuriated mass stoned the police station. Fearing that mass would overpower the police, they ran to Kottarakkara for safety. Law and order completely collapsed at Kadakkal.<sup>93</sup> There was no administrative machinery at Kadakkal. There was insecurity. Schools were closed. Police station was locked. School masters, taluk employees and communications were completely blocked and business houses were closed.<sup>94</sup> A rebel camp was set up. Armed rebels gunned the place just like guarding a newly conquered territory.<sup>95</sup> However situation was brought under control on 5<sup>th</sup> October when two platoons of military arrived.<sup>96</sup> There were clashes in different parts of Travancore. The most conspicuous incidents were the clashes at Pangode and Kallara. There was a casualty in the clash between the police and the youths.<sup>97</sup> But afterwards a

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<sup>92</sup> Kadakkal Waging War Case Commitment Order, 29 May 1939, D.Dis. 507/1938.

<sup>93</sup> Report of Postmaster, Kadakkal to the D.S.P., Quilon, 30 September 1938, D.Dis. 111945.

<sup>94</sup> Kadakkal Waging War Case Commitment Order, 23 May, 1937, pp. 9-10.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> Narayana Pillai, C., *op.cit.*, p. 538.

<sup>97</sup> Report from the Travancore State Forces to Chief Secretary to Government, 7 October, 1938.

search was made by the forces and they seized thirteen guns.<sup>98</sup> Thus, the civil war that the Congressites started slowed down due to the pressure of the police. The civil war attracted the attention of political leaders in other states too.

### **7.10. Protests, Jathas and Suspension**

The political situation in Travancore attracted the attention of political leaders and all India organizations. They condemned the repressive policy of the government and organised protest meetings. The All India Congress Committee at its meeting in New Delhi on 25<sup>th</sup> September passed a resolution requesting the Travancore Government to institute an enquiry into the charges of the government on the firing on unarmed agitators causing death and injuries and amnesty to the prisoners.<sup>99</sup> Even Subash Chandra Bose, the Congress President condemned the attitude of the Government's actions and sent a message of consolation.<sup>100</sup>

The Cochin government allowed the State Congress to open a camp at Ernakulam and directed the agitation. The leaders of the Cochin Praja Mandal,<sup>101</sup> Panampally Govinda Menon, M.P. Madhavan Nair offered their

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<sup>98</sup> Report from the Travancore State Forces to Chief Secretary to Government, 7 October, 1938.

<sup>99</sup> Pattabhi Sitaramayya, B., *op.cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>100</sup> *The Hindu*, 5 October, 1938, p. 10.

<sup>101</sup> The Cochin Praja Mandal was the Political organisation of the Cochin Congress to work for the achievement of the responsible government.

help and cooperation to the camp workers.<sup>102</sup> The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee too came for the help. Leaders like E.M.S. Namboodiripad kept close contact with the State Congress from Ernakulam.<sup>103</sup> In September and October volunteer jathas were organised. On 10<sup>th</sup> October, A.K. Gopalan led a volunteer jatha with thirty two members from Calicut to Alwaye in Travancore. But they were arrested and detained in the lock ups at Perumbavoor and Alwaye. Four of them including Gopalan and four others were imprisoned and fined rupees 1000 each.<sup>104</sup> Volunteer jatha from Madurai, Madras, Coimbatore, Dharmapuri and Aruppukottai in Tamilnadu took part in the agitation. From Madurai a jatha consisting of about twenty volunteers left on 7<sup>th</sup> October and reached Trivandrum on 27<sup>th</sup> October.<sup>105</sup> The volunteers from other districts of Tamilnadu reached Shenkotta railway station and proceeded to Travancore. As they proceeded to Travancore several members were arrested,<sup>106</sup> and the rest proceeded to Trivandrum by trains.<sup>107</sup> A jatha of thirteen volunteers from Aruppukottai entered

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<sup>102</sup> Narayanapillai, C., *op.cit.*, p.475.

<sup>103</sup> Krishnan, T.V., Sakhavu – Biography of P. Krishnapillai (Malayalam), Trivandrum, 1969, p. 10.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Gopalan, A.K., Volunteer Captain, Malabar Jatha, to Chief Secretary, 1 November 1938, D.Dis. 163/1930.

<sup>105</sup> Letter from District Superintendent of Police, Trichinopoly, 22 October 1938, to Resident, for Madras states, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 1164/1938.

<sup>106</sup> Chopra, P.N., *op.cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>107</sup> Inspector of Police, Shenkottah, copy of reports, 25 and 27 September 1938, D.Dis. 6/1938.

Travancore on 10 October.<sup>108</sup> Even, volunteers from Ceylon arrived in Travancore to help the agitators.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the arrival of volunteer jatha from various parts of the then Madras Presidency and Ceylon added to the strength of the agitators and the movement.<sup>110</sup> These jathas and the planning of the State Congress baffled the government and it contemplated upon the next step to encounter the agitation. The situation was very tense due to the rigid attitudes of the government and the State Congress.

### **7.11. The Suspension of the Struggle**

The administration and the State Congress adopted rigid attitudes and hence the situation remained tense in the state. At the same time, the congress continued its programmes of conducting meetings, processions, and demonstrations with full vigour. Several educational institutions were closed due to students' strike.<sup>111</sup> The situation in Travancore was rapidly getting worse. There had been complaints about the police excess. Political prisoners were ill-treated in the jail. Their conditions were far below satisfactory.<sup>112</sup> The Action Council of the State Congress that met at Ernakulam decided to organize a demonstration on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1938 to coincide with the birthday

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<sup>108</sup> Letter from Sub Inspector of Police, Ramnad, 2 October, 1930, to the Resident, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 6/1945.

<sup>109</sup> Letter from the Resident, Trivandrum, 25 October 1938, to the Dewan of Travancore, D.Dis. 1164/1948.

<sup>110</sup> Travancore Administration Report, 1938-39, p. 13.

<sup>111</sup> Travancore Police Daily Reports, 1 to 20 October 1938, D.Dis. 981/1945.

<sup>112</sup> *The Hindu*, 17 October 1930, p. 10.

of Maharaja Chithra Thirunal. In an attempt to materialize the programme the Action Council formed All Travancore Volunteer Jatha Committee to mobilize support.<sup>113</sup> The volunteers were provided with kadhar.<sup>114</sup> After making preliminary preparations, the volunteers were directed to reach Trivandrum secretly, through buses, railways, private vehicles and by walk.<sup>115</sup> The volunteers started the jatha peacefully to represent their grievances to His Highness and pray for protection from official suppressions.<sup>116</sup>

When the Movement was started, only the Congress volunteers participated. But when the jatha was started, the Labour Unions organised a general strike for the redressal of their grievances.<sup>117</sup> The coir factory workers of Alleppey decided to begin a general strike commencing from 21 October. They presented the following demands:

- a) The revocation of Regulation 1 of 1938.
- b) Release of all political prisoners.
- c) To conduct a fair enquiry into the complaints of torture of political prisoners.

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<sup>113</sup> The Report of the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 23 October 1938 to the Advocate General of Trivandrum, D.Dis. 339/1945.

<sup>114</sup> *The Malabar Mail*, 30 October 1938, p. 5.

<sup>115</sup> Travancore Police Daily Reports, 24 October 1938, D.Dis. 981/1945.

<sup>116</sup> Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, 21 October 1938, to the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 147/1938.

<sup>117</sup> *The Hindu*, 13 October 1938, p. 5.

d) The withdrawal of the existing ban orders.

The labour strike coupled with the jatha produced great effect on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1938. The government felt that the situation would go out of control. It ordered to release one hundred and eighty eight political prisoners<sup>118</sup> who were sentenced under the Criminal Law Amendment Regulation of 1938, and suspension of all notifications.<sup>119</sup>

As planned earlier, they led the jatha to the palace on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. Volunteers from various parts of Malabar, Travancore and Madras Presidency assembled at Thampanoor on the midnight of 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1938. Mrs. Akkamma Cherian led the jatha. A detachment of military under Col. Witkis stopped them. Failing to meet the Maharaja, with disappointment, the jatha returned to Thampanoor and dispersed on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1938. A Thanupillai presided a meeting and in that meeting, announced the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement temporarily on the release of the prisoners. The government thought that the temporary suspension of the Movement would solve the problem. But the problem did not stop with that. The Congress considered that the concessions granted on the eve of Maharaja's birthday were due to the Alleppey labour strike and the pressure of the agitators. It was due to the popular support to the Movement. The

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<sup>118</sup> Inspector of Police, Alleppey, 19 October 1938, to the District Magistrate of Quilon, D. dis. 130/1945.

<sup>119</sup> G.O. No. 409, 23 October 1938, D.Dis. 887/1945.

agitators impressed upon the people that the Civil Disobedience Movement was a success. With popular enthusiasm and support in favour of the agitation the leaders appealed to the people to get ready for direct action.

### **7.12. Direct Action**

The government thought that the concessions granted to the agitators were sufficient. But the State Congress was not ready to accept anything less than the responsible government. The leaders were confronted with placing definite agitational programmes before the public. Hence the government decided to renew the agitation. In an attempt to raise the agitation to the standard of the Civil War the State Congress decided to chalk out a plan to prepare the people for a bigger agitation.

#### 7.12.1. The Preparation

After the release of the leaders of the Congress Party from various jails, a meeting was convened at Trivandrum from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> October 1938. The committee regarded the release of the leaders did not fulfill their aspirations and demand for responsible government.<sup>120</sup> In the meeting a resolution was not passed. In the resolution it was stated that neither the spirit, nor the content nor the press release of the Government on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1938, was helpful to the people in any respect. The government did

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<sup>120</sup> Travancore Police Daily Report, 30 October 1938, D.Dis. 981/1945.

not contemplate upon the issue of responsible government. The Criminal Law Amendment Regulation was still in force. The notifications declaring the State Congress and the Youth League as unlawful associations had not been cancelled. No political or other concession was neither granted nor contemplated upon. Students were victimized for their participation even though students strikes were withdrawn. State Congress volunteers were still languishing in the lock-ups. The ban on newspapers and the cancellation of licences were still in force. Confiscated properties and other articles were not restored. On these grounds, the committee decided to commence direct action.<sup>121</sup> Hence the committee instructed the workers to undertake the following preparatory programmes.<sup>122</sup>

1. to strengthen the Congress organisation throughout the length and breadth of the state.
2. To hold District and Taluk conferences to promote the spirit of non-violent resistance among the people.
3. To conduct mass contact programme by a Taluk Committee.
4. Building up of a disciplined satyagrahic organisation including female volunteers of desasevikas with branches in every taluks.

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<sup>121</sup> K.P. Nilakanta Pillai, The Secretary Travancore State Congress, 30 October 1938, letter to the Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 2920/1944.

<sup>122</sup> *Malayala Rajyam*, November 1938, p. 8.

5. The President of the State Congress should conduct a state-wise tour, with selected members chosen by him to study the situation and to give advice to the local committees regarding their further programmes.
6. To conduct an All Travancore State Congress Conference at Trivandrum within a month.

Thus the Congress planned for the consolidation of its influence in the interior village.<sup>123</sup>

In an attempt to make use of the available resources and opportunities, prominent State Congress leaders toured the state and addressed public meetings in all places possible. The leaders on their release from prison were taken on procession on decorated car drawn by number of bullocks with the accompaniment of music and shouting Congress slogans.<sup>124</sup> The people gathered in large numbers to meet the political convicts. In all their speeches they asserted that the intension of the party to start direct action was to pressing the government to introduce voluntary responsible government within a short duration. An All-Travancore Ralley Committee was constituted at Trivandrum. Members of these committees engaged in

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<sup>123</sup> Travancore Police Weekly Secret Bulletin, Vol. V, No. 46, 12 November 1938, D.Dis. 362/1948.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

collection of funds through donations.<sup>125</sup> The State Congress enlisted volunteers, both men and women, opened volunteer training camps from house to house.<sup>126</sup>

The Travancore Youth League and Travancore Students Federation took serious steps. The Youth League leaders initiated active involvement in the programmes. Most of its leaders were from the labourers of Alleppey.<sup>127</sup> The members and leaders of Travancore Students Federation accompanied with the other unions and federations toured to the country, organised and established branch unions under the banner of the State Congress for assisting it.<sup>128</sup> The popular response and the enthusiasm and their tempo to achieve responsible government as quickly as possible was very high. Further the suspension of the ban order provided relief to the workers to carry out the programme without much obstruction and interference.<sup>129</sup>

The Working Committee of the Congress met at Trivandrum between 25<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> December 1938 to review the situation. Further it decided the organisational work before the end of December. It adopted the following resolutions:

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<sup>125</sup> Report from the All-Travancore Relief Committee, Trivandrum, 1942, pp. 1-30.

<sup>126</sup> Travancore Police Weekly Secret Bulletin, Vol. VB, 45 and 46, D.Dis. 362/1948.

<sup>127</sup> Travancore Police Daily Reports, 6 November to 22 November, 1938.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 November 1938 and 22 December 1938. D.Dis. 981/1945.

<sup>129</sup> *The Hindu*, 15 December 1938, p. 12.

- i) To entrust the work of supervising, directing and co-ordinating the committees in different zones to particular persons.<sup>130</sup>
- ii) To call upon the people to abstain from consuming toddy and other alcoholic drinks. To authorize local, taluk and division committees and Congress workers to carry on a propaganda work, peacefully, non-violently without affecting anybody's feelings and interest.
- iii) To observe December 8 – 14, 1938 as membership campaign week.
- iv) To conduct peaceful meetings and demonstrations during the proposed visit of the Viceroy.
- v) To hold a special session of the State Congress at Vattiyoorkavu near Trivandrum on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1938.<sup>131</sup>

Hearing the resolution, the Congress workers and volunteers became enthusiastic and worked with new vigour. This disturbed the government. The government released press note urging the people not to indulge and desist from the Congress programmes. In case of violation, the government warned them of using every means in its control to prevent the unwanted happenings.

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<sup>130</sup> K.P. Nilakanta Pillai and K.N. Kunju Krishnapillai (Nagercoil), T.M. Varghese and K. Kesavan (Quilon), K. Sankupillai and P.K. Kunju (Kayamkulam), V.K. Velayudhan (Alleppey), M.R. Madhava Warriar, K.P. Gopala Panikkar, K.M. Kora and Sebastian (Thiruvalla), E.J. Philipose (Kottayam) and T.K. Narayana Pillai (Alwaye).

<sup>131</sup> Report from the Acting Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 2 December 1938, to the Dewan of Travancore, D.Dis. 2920/1944.

### 7.12.2. The Training

The training that was imparted to the volunteers was a remarkable work on the part of the Congress. The training was carried out during November and December 1938. In order to give systematic training to the volunteers, sub committee was formed with T.K. Narayana Pillai as organizer and Chandrasekhara Pillai as Captain to form a male volunteer corps and Mrs. Annie Mascrene as organizer and Mrs. Akkamma Cherian as Captain to form Desasevika SGang or Female Volunteer Crops.<sup>132</sup> The Committee prescribed uniforms to both the Volunteer Corps. On ceremonial occasions the volunteers were instructed to wear blue khaddar shirts, brown shawls and Gandhi caps. The Desasevikas were to wear white blouse, a saffron coloured saree or half saree with green border. The Captains were ordered to wear brown shirts, shorts, Gandhi cap and single belt.<sup>133</sup>

As per the direction, volunteer camps were established throughout the state. Training was conducted in the houses of prominent Congress members and their adherents. In some cases they even financed the camps.<sup>134</sup> At the beginning State Congress leaders from Malabar gave training to the volunteers. K.A. Damodara Menon, editor of Mathrubhumi, took keen

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<sup>132</sup> Travancore Police Daily Report, 30 October 1938, D.Dis. 981/1945.

<sup>133</sup> Report from the Acting Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 2 December 1938 to the Dewan of Travancore, D.Dis. 2920/1944.

<sup>134</sup> Report from the I.G. of Police, Travancore, 9 November 1938, to the Chief Secretary to Government, D.Dis. 981/1945.

interest in sending trainers to train volunteers.<sup>135</sup> Volunteers were trained from Cochin.<sup>136</sup> The Chief Commanders and trainers avoided towns, hid themselves mostly during day time.<sup>137</sup> Volunteers were also advised not to go in batches.<sup>138</sup> Hence they evaded police and avoided arrest.

In the training centres the trainees were taught physical drill, different forms of saluting and signaling. Besides these various other subjects were taught. The training in each camp lasted for a minimum of seven days and a maximum of fourteen days.<sup>139</sup>

The government was put into a precarious situation. Basing on the reports of the Police department, the Government decided to act. The administration was furious about the formation of volunteer corps and the training given to them on semi-military basis. Hence the government warned the people not to help the working of such bodies.<sup>140</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup> December 1938, the government promulgated the Criminal Law Amendment Regulation X of 1938 against the forming of volunteer organizations and training centres. It declared, “any person who wore any uniform, badge or other distinctive

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<sup>135</sup> Report from the I.G. of Police, Travancore, 9 November 1938, to the Chief Secretary to Government, 7 December 1938, D.Dis. 3991/1944.

<sup>136</sup> Travancore Police Daily Report, 16 November 1938, D.Dis., 981/1945.

<sup>137</sup> I.G. of Police, 7 December 1938 to the Chief Secretary, D.Dis. 3991/1944.

<sup>138</sup> Travancore Police Daily Report, 14 December 1938, D.Dis. 981/1945.

<sup>139</sup> I.G. of Police, 7 December 1938, Report to Chief Secretary to Government, D.Dis. 3991/1944

<sup>140</sup> Government Press Note, 3 December 1938, D.Dis. 2920/1944.

mark, emblem or other device, signifying his association with any political organisation or took part in the control or took part in its control or management or engaged in organizing and training any member was guilty of an offence punishable with imprisonment from six months to two years".<sup>141</sup> But the training programmes were going on regularly and preparing them to face the big fight that was in the offing. But the wrath of the Dewan was directed against the Congress for not withdrawing the memorial early.

The Congress Working Committee met at Trivandrum between 29<sup>th</sup> November and 1<sup>st</sup> December 1938 to discuss the Memorial submitted to the Maharaja.<sup>142</sup> After their return, from Wardha the members who met Gandhi, referred the matter in the Committee.<sup>143</sup> A section of the members led by A. Thanupillai insisted upon unconditional withdrawal.<sup>144</sup> But another group led by T.M. Varghese opposed it strongly.<sup>145</sup> The Youth Wing of the State Congress also opposed the withdrawal.<sup>146</sup> There was all the symptoms of split over the issue. Some members tried to bring about a compromise. But

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<sup>141</sup> The Acts and Proclamations of Travancore, Vol. X, Trivandrum, 1939, pp. 527-532.

<sup>142</sup> D. Daniel, *op.cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Acting Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 20 November 1938, Secret Report to the Dewan, D.Dis. 2762/1944.

<sup>146</sup> I.G. of Police, Trivandrum, 30 November 1938, Report to the Dewan, D.Dis. 2544/1944.

it did not materialize. Finally the committee decided to consider the memorial issue at its next meeting.<sup>147</sup>

In anticipation of the withdrawal, the government gave importance to the proceedings of the Working Committee. But after a careful scrutiny of the happenings, the Congress suddenly warned the leaders.<sup>148</sup> Strict instructions were given to the police to deal with the agitators very firmly. The militant nature of the Congress workers irritated the government. Hence the government instructed to crush the agitation without mercy.<sup>149</sup> In spite of the intervention of Gandhi, the Congress did not stop the agitation and the government continued the arrests. On 10<sup>th</sup> December, the Dewan instituted prosecution measures against the signatories of the memorial.<sup>150</sup> On 13<sup>th</sup> December, the Maharaja issued a proclamation instituting a Special Tribunal for the trial of the leaders.<sup>151</sup> No sooner, did the Maharaja's announcement came than the police started to arrest the Working Committee members and a

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<sup>147</sup> I.G. of Police, Trivandrum, 30 November 1938, Report to the Dewan, 2 December 1938, D.Dis. 2920/1944.

<sup>148</sup> Government Press Note, 3 December 1938, D.Dis. 2910/1944.

<sup>149</sup> I.G. of Police, Trivandrum, 19 December 1938, Proceedings of the Conference submitted to Chief Secretary, D.Dis. 3405/1944.

<sup>150</sup> Govt. Order No. 9593/Judicial, 10 December 1938, D.Dis. 3425/1944.

<sup>151</sup> The Madras States and Mysore Directory, 1941-1942, No. XIV, p. 278.

few leaders.<sup>152</sup> The government also employed various tactics to weaken the party leadership.<sup>153</sup>

The Congress leaders were ready to face any situation. They sought the support from the leaders who camped at Cochin State. Some of them visited Ernakulam.<sup>154</sup> Anticipating arrest at any time an Action Council was constituted with A. Narayana Pillai as the President. At the conclusion of the meeting, five members were arrested including A. Narayana Pillai. After the arrest successive president A. Achuthan was arrested and R. Sankar an advocate succeeded him. He worked for a short period upto January 1939 until the release of the leaders.<sup>155</sup> In the meanwhile M.M. Varkey with the support of Kuruvilla conducted signature campaigning another memorial to the Viceroy during his visit to Travancore in January 1939. The leaders expected a greater fight anticipating awakening among the people and started hunger strike in the jails as a mark of protest.<sup>156</sup>

In spite of the repressive policy of the government and the weakened health condition of some of the imprisoned leaders, there was a feeling of

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<sup>152</sup> Travancore Police Daily Report, 16 December 1938, D.Dis. 981/1945.

<sup>153</sup> Daniel, D., *op.cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>154</sup> Acting Commissioner of Police, Report to the Dewan.

<sup>155</sup> *The Hindu*, 23 December 1938, p. 14.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

reconsideration of the policy of the Congress.<sup>157</sup> The State Congress convened a meeting at the central prison, Trivandrum on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1938 and after long discussion a resolution was passed to withdraw the personal agitations against the Dewan in obedience to Gandhi's orders.<sup>158</sup> In turn the Government released the policy towards the political prisoners and released all signatories on 7<sup>th</sup> January 1939.<sup>159</sup> Thus ended the great controversy.

The withdrawal of the charges against C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer received widespread criticism. The Congress leadership was suspected. The Youth League opposed it. The media condemned it. The leaders were constrained to take steps to ease away the situation.

### 7.12.3. Vattiyoorkavu Conference

When the memorial controversy was at its peak, the Congress decided to hold its Annual Conference at Vattiyoorkavu on the fourth week of December (22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> December). A Narayana Pillai was to be the president.<sup>160</sup> Smelling the outcome of the conference the District Magistrate of Trivandrum issued a ban order for two months with effect from 13<sup>th</sup> December 1938. But the Congress leaders decided to hold the meeting by all

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<sup>157</sup> *The Hindu*, 13 December 1938, p. 19.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 December 1938, p. 14.

<sup>159</sup> Narayana Pillai.

<sup>160</sup> Copy of the report of the Police Officer, 21 December 1938, D.Dis. 3409/1944.

means. There was elaborate police arrangement. As scheduled the conference was conducted on 22<sup>nd</sup> December under the presidentship of A. Kunjan Nadar of Neyyattinkara taluk. The Travancore Students Federation took keen interest in conducting the meeting as scheduled.<sup>161</sup> They expected military firing if they broke the police cordon. But the military did not disturb and the meeting went on peacefully. However the police did not spare the organizers from arrest.<sup>162</sup>

With the end and aim of attainment of responsible government the Vattiyoorkavu meeting decided to launch a programme of direct action. The Conference also included the following programmes.

1. To hold conference and meetings in defiance of the government order.
2. To conduct processions and volunteer rallies in defiance of prohibitory order.
3. To distribute prohibitory literatures openly without fear.
4. Picketing liquid shops and withdrawal of deposits from the postal saving banks.
5. Offering of Satyagraha before the palace.
6. Non-payment of taxes and dues to the government.

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<sup>161</sup> Travancore Police Daily Report, 22 December 1938 submitted to the Chief Secretary, D.Dis. 981/1945.

<sup>162</sup> *The Hindu*, 23 December 1938, p. 19.

By another resolution the conference authorized the State Congress president to work out the details of the direct action at an appropriate time. It further instructed the people to adopt non-violence as much as possible. The military tactfully managed the situation to avoid unnecessary bloodshed.

#### 7.12.4. Ultimatum and the Suspension

The government on the other hand, continued to follow a systematic policy of doing everything they could to suppress and destroy the State Congress. By arresting organizers, captains, volunteers and student leaders, efforts were taken to suppress the movement.<sup>163</sup> The Working Committee of the State Congress which met at Trivandrum on 19 January 1939 reviewed the whole situation and issued this statement: “. . . that about three hundred workers and volunteers are today in the various lock-ups attached to police stations under conditions of indescribable difficulties without even being brought to trial for weeks together. The treatment of these under trials is worse than even that of condemned criminals and have become utterly intolerable. The position today is thus in a sense worse than what it was

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<sup>163</sup> The following State Congress, Youth League and student leaders were among those arrested between 20 December 1938 and 15 January 1939 – Apploun Arouj, K. Joseph, G. Parthan, Varghese Augustine, M. Joseph, G. Chandrasekhara Pillai, Mrs. Akkamma Cheriyan, Miss. Rose Cheriyan, A.K. Narayanan, Ponnara G. Sreedhar, Sainudeen, K.K. Pillai, P.C. Sekhar, P.C. George, C.V. George, K.M. Basheer, C.M. Stephen, P.T. Punnoose, V. Varkey, K. Damodaran of Malabar, P.I. Philip. P.M. Varghese, Vattaparambil Krishna Pillai, Muttambalam Samuel Mathew, C.K. Joseph, C.C. John, George Pookoickal and N.G. Chacko (The Hindu, 24, 27 and 30 December 1938. Travancore Police Daily Reports, 12, 13, 14 and 15 January 1939. D.Dis. 859/1945) Narayana Pillai, C., *op.cit.*, p. 683.

immediately before the general release of political prisoners three months ago and is steadily deteriorating every day.<sup>164</sup>

Finding no other alternative, the Working Committee decided to launch direct action with the shortest time possible. Between 17<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> January 1939 the Committee held a four day session at the Congress office, Trivandrum.<sup>165</sup> After a great deal of discussion, it issued an ultimatum giving six weeks time from 19<sup>th</sup> January<sup>166</sup> and placed a nine point demand for the immediate consideration of the government:

1. Immediate steps for the introduction of responsible government;
  2. General amnesty to all political prisoners;
  3. Repeal of the Criminal Law Amendment Regulations;
  4. Recognition of State Congress for purposes of political negotiation;
  5. Restoration of licences of the newspapers and removal of ban imposed on them;
  6. Restoration of properties confiscated and repayment of fines realized;
  7. Immediate inquiry into shootings and other excesses;
  8. Withdrawal of prosecutions launched in consequence of labour strike;
- and

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<sup>164</sup> Thanu Pillai, A., 24 January 1939, letter to Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, D.Dis.2920/1944.

<sup>165</sup> I.G. of Police, Trivandrum, 18 January 1939, Report to Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 3979/1944.

<sup>166</sup> Copy of a secret police report, 19 January 1939 D.Dis. 3344/1944.

9. Withdrawal of prosecution against students and removal of all disabilities imposed on them.

In case these demands were not granted before the stipulated time, the Committee asserted its resolve to start direct action which would cover:

1. Picketing of liquor and tobacco shops and depots;
2. Disobedience of salt and forest laws;
3. Non-payment of market dues, tolls and land revenue; and
4. Reading, circulation and sale of prohibited newspapers.<sup>167</sup>

Subsequent to this session, the Working Committee once again devoted itself to organisational work.<sup>168</sup> This was no easy task, for the prestige of the leadership stood low in consequence of the withdrawal of the memorial and suspension of the plan of demonstration at the time of Viceroy's visit. Yet, there was no other leadership to which the people could switch over their allegiance. To co-ordinate their work effectively, the State Congress divided the state into nine zones under the control of the following leaders – T.K. Narayana Pillai at North Parur, E.J. Kuruvila at Kottayam, P.J. Sebastian at Changanacherry, K.P. Gopala Panikkar at Chengannoor, Y.K. Velayuthan at Alleppey, P.K. Kunju at Kayamkulam, T.M. Varghese at Quilon, G. Ramachandran at Trivandrum and K.N. Kunjukrishna Pillai at

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<sup>167</sup> Thanu Pillai, A., Trivandrum, 24 January 1939, letter to Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 2920/1944/C.S.

<sup>168</sup> Copy of report from a secret source, 19 January 1939, D.Dis.3344/1944/C.S.

Nagercoil.<sup>169</sup> Expecting arrest at any time, the committee again constituted a Council of Action and observed 13<sup>th</sup> February as ‘Responsible Government Day’.<sup>170</sup>

The Working Committee reviewed the progress of its work in its meeting at Trivandrum on 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February 1939.<sup>171</sup> This time the Committee drew up the general programmes of direct action and authorized Thanu Pillai and Verghese to work out details. The Committee decided to enlist at least one hundred volunteers from each taluk for taking part in the agitation<sup>172</sup> to establish three shadow cabinets, one at Madurai, another at Tirunelvely and the third at Ernakulam to direct the struggle from outside the state and to appoint ‘inspectors’ for the purpose of moving about in disguise and collecting information to help in the work of the shadow cabinets.<sup>173</sup>

However, there followed a heated discussion when the Committee considered the issue of fixing the date for direct action. Elder leaders like A. Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese and V.K. Velayudhan wanted the decision to be postponed in the name of preparing the ground a little more, while the

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<sup>169</sup> Copy of report of a police officer, 21 January 1939, D.Dis. 3978/1944.

<sup>170</sup> Travancore Police Daily Reports, 14, 15 and 16 February 1939, D.Dis. 859/1945.

<sup>171</sup> Travancore Police Daily Bulletin (hereinafter to be referred as T.P.D.B.) Vol. I, No.2, 28 February 1939, D.Dis. 859/1945.

<sup>172</sup> I.G. of Police, Trivandrum, 28 February 1939, secret report to the Dewan, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 3357/1944.

<sup>173</sup> T.P.D.B., Vol. I, No. 2, 28 February 1939, D.Dis. 859/1945.

‘headstrong’ young members like G. Ramachandran, E.J. Philipose and P.J. Sebastian insisted on immediate commencement.<sup>174</sup> Majority of the members welcomed this idea. Some of them demanded the immediate commencement of the agitation even without waiting for the support of the Indian National Congress.<sup>175</sup> Ultimately, owing to the difference of opinion among the members, the Committee decided to consider this issue at its next meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1939.<sup>176</sup>

### **7.13. World War II and Suspension of the Movement**

On 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, the Second World War broke out. Germany marched into Poland. Britain foreseeing the danger to the free existence declared war on Germany on 3 September. The British government stated that they wanted to make the world safe for democracy. On the same day Lord Linlithgow, the Governor General of India, declared that India was at war with Germany. It was a unilateral decision taken by the Viceroy without consulting the Indian leaders. Soon he wanted to get in touch with the Indian leaders. His aim was to explore the possibilities to secure their cooperation in the war efforts. But the leaders like Gandhi wanted to cooperate with the consent of the leaders.

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<sup>174</sup> I.G. of Police, Trivandrum, 1 March 1939, report of the C.S. to Government, Trivandrum, DiDis. 4164/1944.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 26 February 1939, D.Dis. 3356/1944.

<sup>176</sup> Copy of report of a police officer, 28 February 1939, D.Dis. 4164/1944.

The Congress Working Committee met on 10 October 1939. In the meeting they expressed their sympathy with the free world. But on 17<sup>th</sup> October 1939, the British gave an evasive reply. Hence it took time to India to join the war.<sup>177</sup> At the same time Travancore could not deny because Travancore was a member of the subsidiary system. Hence Travancore had no alternative but to join. But the State Congress was at war with the Government. The Dewan wanted to continue the peace talks with the State Congress. The State Congress was not willing to accept any reform in the state other than responsible government. Taking advantage of the outbreak of the Second World War the government suspended the peace talks until normal condition was attained. Thus, the popular movement that fought for the right cause of the people was postponed till the World War was over. Thus, a well organised struggle was abruptly suspended to the surprise of all. However, the State Congress got a breathing time to organize the struggle in a better way.

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<sup>177</sup> Agarwal, R.C., Constitutional Development of India and National Movement, New Delhi, 198, pp. 273-274.