SYNOPSIS

IMPACT OF COMMUNISM ON THE WORKING
CLASS AND PEASANTRY IN
MAHARASHTRA
(1920-1964)

The object of this thesis is to examine the fortunes of the Communist Party with reference to the State of Maharashtra. An attempt has been made to establish that on the whole circumstances and conditions in Maharashtra were favourable to the rise and spread of Communism. Communism did, indeed, make an encouraging start in Maharashtra but the passage of time was to reveal certain serious weaknesses in the composition and leadership of the party. It is a curious fact that while Maharashtra might claim credit for the preliminary steps in the progress of the Communist Party, the scene or scenes of further progress shifted elsewhere. This is an essay into the causes of what may be regarded as the near debacle or stalemate in the Communist movement in Maharashtra.

The first chapter of the thesis provides a broad conspectus of the geographical, economic and social conditions in Maharashtra and seeks to indicate how material and human factors were congenial to the rise and spread of the Communist movement in the area. This chapter gives a description of the economy of the State, the class composition of society and social stratification, in the state of Maharashtra during
the period studied—i.e. 1925-1964. This study stops with the year 1964 when disunity and internal crises began to develop within the party.

The second chapter deals with the origins of Communism in India and in Maharashtra, making reference to the economic changes that occurred in the country in the 19th century, the rise of new social classes, the socio-religious reform movements during the period, the impact of the Russian Revolution, and the foundation of the Communist party of India and the first Indian Communist Congress at Kanpur in 1925. The first Communist journal, "The Socialist" appeared in August 1922 under the editorship of S.A. Dange from Bombay. It was the first journal of its kind in India and in Maharashtra.

Chapter III deals with the working class movement in its early 1867-1920 and later phases. Emphasis has been laid on the first political strike of 1908, the General Strike of 1928, the Bombay Mills Strike of 1940 and the Railway Strike of 1949. These are shown as landmarks in the origin and growth of the Communist movement in Maharashtra.

Chapter IV deals on similar lines with the Peasant movement in Maharashtra. By the 30's of the present century the peasantry rose to prominence as an important and radical constituent of the modern anti-imperialist and national democratic movement under the leadership of the nationalist and communists. By the year 1934 Communist influence gained significantly with the coalescing of various provincial Kisan Sabhas into the All India Kisan Sabha.
But with the outbreak of the Second World War and especially after 1942, Communist influence was eroded rapidly. This phenomenon has been examined at some length.

The World movement which highlights the second phase of the peasant movement has been described to illustrate the growth and decline of the Communist influence over the Adivasis (tribes) and peasants.

This chapter emphasises the necessity of drawing together the peasantry as well as the industrial proletariat in a concerted move to achieve the ideal of the Communist party, and shows that the party concentrated more of its attention on the cities than on the countryside.

The fifth chapter examines the electoral strength as well as the organizational base of the Communist party with reference to the General Elections and State Elections during the period under study.

The thesis concludes by showing that on the whole the impact of the Communist party on Maharashtra has not been altogether very significant, though the credit side of the account may show that it helped in activating the peasantry and the industrial workers. These initial gains, however, were not followed up. The 'economism' of the party leadership, its failure to grasp the significance of social reform, its own corruption through the infiltration of social factors like caste, largely explain the failure of the Communist party to maintain its progress in Maharashtra despite its favourable and encouraging start.
The study is based upon primary and secondary sources of information.

Secondary sources, comprising varieties of works on the Communist party and related topics have been studied while preparing this thesis.

Primary sources studied are the documents of the Communist Party, in the Party Office, Bombay.

Apart from a study of secondary and primary sources of information the author has interviewed several party leaders and workers on various points arising out of the study and has greatly benefited from discussions with them.