CHAPTER VI

THE CONGRESS PARTY AND POPULAR RESISTANCE

The formation of Travancore State Congress became a constant worry and problem to the Government. Travancore population was royal to the Maharaja. Hence, the popular leaders thought that if they started propaganda against the Maharaja, gaining popular support would be a problem. Hence they targeted the atrocities of the Dewan as their target of attack. This attitude of the party presented a formidable challenge to the basic conception of the princely administration. The Government declared the Congress Party as a disloyal and subversive organisation. The Government took all possible steps to nullify the activities of the Travancore State Congress. In an attempt to nullify the work of the Congress party, the Government utilized the communal and religious bodies. It had gone to the extent of organizing loyalist parties throughout the state.

6.1. The Challenge and the Response

As soon as the formation of the Travancore State Congress, the task before the Congressites was the execution, consolidation and the propagation of the objectives of the Congress Party. The Congressites decided to establish local units under the leadership of Pattom A. Thanupillai. But the

2 Daniel, D., op.cit., p. 41.
Government did not like the formation of the Travancore State Congress, it directed the authorities to take all precautions and steps to nip it in the bud. The Government declared it as a subversive and disloyal organisation.\(^3\) In an attempt to nullify its growth and prevent people from joining the Travancore State Congress party, the administration assaulted the associates of the Congress Party. Madhava Warrier, a member of the State Congress and the editor of the ‘Malayali’, a Malayalam periodical was assaulted while he was walking along the Museum road at Trivandrum. Immediately he informed the matter to the two constables who were witnessing the incident and requested them to arrest the assailants. In spite of his earnest request to the constables, they did not take any action. The disheartened Warrier, after reaching home made a complaint to the local Police Inspector and then wrote to the Dewan, the Police Commissioner and the District Magistrate with regard to this incident. Despite this the Government did not take any action.\(^4\)

More serious was the burglary that was committed on 29\(^{th}\) April 1938 in the house of Miss. Annie Mascrene, a member of the Working Committee of the State Congress. Some unknown persons entered into her house at midnight while she was sleeping. The assailants removed all her belongings. One of the assailants even entered into her bedroom and attempted to cause injury to her. She got up from the bed and raised an alarm. The assailants

\(^3\) Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, 11\(^{th}\) July 1938, pp. 9-10.

\(^4\) Mr. A.J. John’s Speech, Ibid., p. 56.
ran away. She reported the matter to the concerned authorities and published a statement on 2nd May 1938. Yet the authorities took no action.5

K.P. Nilakanda Pillai, Joint Secretary of the State Congress and an active worker of the Congress Party was assaulted by a gang of three men. One of the assailants gave a blow with a dangerous weapon on his head, while another caused a fracture on his left arm. Even though a complaint was lodged the Government did not take any action.6

Though the Government adopted repressive policy against the Congress to restrict its growth, it could neither restrict the growth nor stop the activities of the Congress. Unmindful of the restrictions the Congress continued its activities in full swing.

The people and the Congressites felt that the trial was for short duration. The punishment too was very severe. Narayana Pillai was not heard fully. Hence, the Congress Party planned to reopen the case and defend the case. Hence, they constituted a committee consisting of A. Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese, K.T. Thomas and Nilakanda Pillai. They engaged a leading lawyer from Bombay, K.F. Nariman to reopen and argue the case. As decided Nariman reached Trivandrum. The leaders planned a public meeting. Unmindful of the oppressive steps of the Travancore Government,

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5 Mr. A.J. John’s Speech, Ibid., p. 57.
6 Ibid.
the Travancore State Congress decided to establish local committees throughout the state. The leaders prepared programmes to tour the country under the leadership of Pattom A. Thanupillai on 7\(^{th}\) March 1938.\(^7\) On the other hand, the Government feared that the tour programme of the leaders would create an alarming situation in the state. Hence the state administration wanted to nip it in the bud. As a preliminary step, the District Magistrate of Trivandrum banned meetings and processions within the Trivandrum District for two months from 7 March. Further it sent a warning note that violation of the order would be considered as breach of peace.\(^8\) Taking cognizance of the Magistrate’s order, and the consequence of the violation of the ban over the Travancore State Congress leaders cancelled their tour programme in Trivandrum district and decided to shift their sphere of activities to Quilon and Kottayam.\(^9\)

At this juncture the trial of A. Narayana Pillai one of the organisers and an advocate came to the Court of Law. On 22\(^{nd}\) February 1938, he was arrested on charge of sedition and instigating class hatred. The charge was based on two articles published in two Malayalam papers namely Malayala Rajyam and the Malayali. The articles criticized the communal representation in public service and irregularities in the Assembly

\(^7\) *The Hindu*, 7 March 1938, p. 12.


\(^9\) A. Thanupillai, Circular letter to Chief Secretary, Trivandrum. D.Dis. 122/1938/C.S.
proceedings. The Government felt that those articles would evoke public sympathy and support the Congress, and hence, the arrest. On 1st April the case was taken for trial. On 5 April the Judge pronounced judgement. Narayana Pillai was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment and to pay a fine of Rs. 200/-.

But unfortunately the District Magistrate banned meetings at Trivandrum for two months, stating that there was strong opposition for the reception. As planned Nariman filed an application to appear in the court for Narayana Pillai. But the court refused permission on grounds of his political conviction in British India. But the leaders took it as God sent opportunity and responded the challenge of judiciary becoming subservient to the executive and the arbitrary methods employed by the Dewan.

The state congress expressed its resentments “... the staggering manner the executive identified itself with the prosecution in this case and the revengeful spirit displayed throughout were, to say the least unworthy of civilized Government. The prosecution was unjustifiable, the trial turned out to be a force ... what ensued was a miscarriage of justice ... The glaring way in which the judiciary was bent to subserve ends of the executive

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renders this case, the most unfortunate in the judicial annals of Travancore.”

The State Congress neither deviated nor dropped the plan of propaganda outside the state. In an attempt to explain the reactionary measures of the Government a twelve member State Congress delegation went to Madras on 12th April. The delegation consisted of A. Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese, C. Kesavan, V.K. Velayudhan, K.T. Thomas, E.J. Philipse, K.A. Gangadhar Menon, P.K. Kunju, K.m. Kora, K.P. Nilakanda Pillai, M.S. Aniruddhan and T.K. Narayanapillai. The delegates conducted a public meeting at Gokhale Hall, George Town Madras on 14th April. The leaders condemned the attitude of the Travancore administration. They met leading journalists and public men and explained to them about the critical situation that prevailed in the state. But the Dewan on the other hand, viewed these developments as calculated move to discredit his administration. This deepened the crisis. He wanted to retaliate the move. The Dewan suspected that the branch office of Travancore National and Quilon Bank at Madras had given financial assistance to the State Congress delegates. Immediately he had decided to liquidate the Bank. Accordingly he suspended the working of the bank from 21st June to July 1938 and the order of liquidation

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14 The Congress Memorandum, 30 May 1938, submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore. D.Dis 228/7938, Chief Secretary to Government.
15 *The Hindu*, 12 April 1938, p. 11.
16 Govt. Press Note, 16th April 1938, Chief Secretary, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 288/1938.
followed.\textsuperscript{17} The Government filed a case against the managers on charges of falsification of accounts, running false balance sheet and cheating. On 4\textsuperscript{th} January, 1939, Mammen Mapillai, the bank chairman, C.P. Mathen, K.C. Eapen and K.V. Varghese were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment ranging from 21 months to eight years.\textsuperscript{18} This move of the Dewan antagonized the whole Syrian population of Travancore. The Syrian Christians who owned the bank considered it as their prestige institution. This alienated them from the administration and from the Congress. Had the Dewan contemplated the pros and cons of the action, or advised properly this would not have happened. This gave a moral courage and strength to the State Congress leaders.

Completing the Madras trip the State Congress leaders decided to activate the growth of the Congress Party by establishing branches and enlisting more members. In order to give more representation, the Congress Party increased the number of the Working Committee from eleven to twenty one. The official residence of T.M. Varghese at Trivandrum became the venue for the Congress workers and leaders to discuss day-to-day problems. Thus, Van Ross Bungalow of T.V. Varghese was converted into a

\textsuperscript{17} Mammen Mapillai, K.C., Arude Kai, Ernakulam, 1939, p. 80.

\textsuperscript{18} Govt. Press Note, 4 January 1939 to Chief Secretary, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 92/1941.
nerve centre of State Congress activities\textsuperscript{19} because the Congress Party workers and leaders from different parts of the state assembled here.\textsuperscript{20} Yet the anti-Congress activities, the ban orders issued then and there and the anti-propaganda work of the administration placed the leaders in a state of perplexity and confusion.

During this hour of distress, the bye-election to the Mavelikkara-Kunnathunad constituency was declared in Central Travancore. The election date was announced on 10\textsuperscript{th} June 1938.\textsuperscript{21} The State Congress took it as a favourable occasion. The Congress Party fielded A. Sankara Pillai as its candidate. The Government, put up P. Narayana Pillai of Nayar Service Society against the Congress candidate. The anti-Congress forces joined hands and supported the Government candidate because the Nayar Service Society followed a pro-government and anti-Congress attitude. In this regard it should be noted that the N.S.S. adopted such an attitude mainly to get government appointments and other benefits such as establishing educational institutions with the help of the Government.\textsuperscript{22}

In the bye-election both the parties wanted to prove their hold among the people through the bye-election. The Congress Party in an attempt to do

\textsuperscript{19} Narayana Pillai, C., \textit{Thiruvithankur Swatantriya Samaram}, Trivandrum, 1972, pp. 200-203.

\textsuperscript{20} Gilbert, G., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 276-29.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Arya Keralam}, Vol. VI, No. 7 July 1938, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The Hindu}, 17 May 1938, p. 3.
serious election work shifted its office temporarily to Mavelikara. On 6th June 1938, the Congress Party sent a complaint telegram to the Chief Secretary. A. Sankarapillai telegraphed that the police, excise, revenue, educational and other officers and their subordinates intimidated voters and canvassing against him. Legal Remembrancer to Government, conciliation officer, Quilon, store, purchase secretary, school of arts superintendent and officers from outside also canvassed against him. Voters were threatened with serious consequences. He prayed for free and fair election. In the meanwhile the Congress Party complained about the official interference and police highhandedness in the election in favour of the N.S.S. candidate.

However, the election result was declared. P. Narayana Pillai was declared elected securing 15,200 votes. A. Sankara Pillai got 8,599 votes. Though the election result was negative, the Congress volunteers took this opportunity and mobilized the public opinion by their door to door canvassing in favour of them. However, it is understood that the party’s growing image and influence among the people instilled in them self confidence and determination to shape their future programme. Though the

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23 *The Hindu*, 17 May 1938, p. 9.
24 A Sankara Pillai, Mavelikkara, Telegram to Dewan of Travancore, 6th June 1938, D.Dis. 1823/944/Chief Secretary, Trivandrum.
25 *Ibid*.
26 *The Hindu*, 15 June 1938, p. 4.
Government put forth a stout challenge the Congress Party responded successfully even though sometimes success eluded them.

6.2. State Congress Memorial

The Working Committee of the State Congress met at Trivandrum. In the meeting, it took an important decision to prepare a memorial against the Dewan’s oppressive administration and present it to the Maharaja. The Memorial was submitted on 30\textsuperscript{th} May 1938 with the following demands in the form of prayers.

a) The powers exercised by the Dewan may be vested in a Cabinet of Ministers responsible to the Legislature.

b) The legislature may be reformed and franchise extended to all adults with adequate safeguards for the protection of the minority interests.

c) Declaration of fundamental rights guaranteeing personal freedom and liberty may be incorporated in the constitution.

d) Necessary measures may be adopted to restore and ensure the independence of the judiciary.

e) The restrictions on the press may be repealed.

f) The services of the Dewan Ramaswamy Aiyar may be dispensed with, and
g) An enquiry into the administrative acts, appointments and financial transactions for which C. Ramaswamy Aiyer was responsible as Dewan may be held.

The memorial was signed by all the members of the State Congress Working Committee. The prominent among them were Pattom A. Thanu Pillai, T.M. Varghese, Mr. Madhava Warrier, Miss Annie Mascrene, T.K. Narayana Pillai and eighteen others.\(^\text{28}\) In an attempt to substantiate their memorial the Congress Party prepared a memorandum and submitted it along with the memorial. It cited the irregularities in the administration and financial transactions of C.P. Ramasway after his appointment. The series of allegations such as the interference of the executive in the judiciary, high handedness of the police, the policy of divide and rule, favouritism in appointment to his supporters, suppression of the freedom of the press and association.\(^\text{29}\) The Travancore State Congress, stoutly recommended to conduct an enquiry and terminated the services of the Dewan.\(^\text{30}\) On the other hand the Dewan took serious views of these memorial and memorandum. He considered it as a character assassination on personal allegations against him.\(^\text{31}\) In an attempt to give wide publicity on the acts of the Dewan’s

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\(^{28}\) State Congress Memorial, submitted to the Maharaja, 30\(^{\text{th}}\) May, 1938.


\(^{30}\) State Congress Memorandum, 30 May, 1938.

\(^{31}\) C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer, 13\(^{\text{th}}\) July 1938.
atrocities and condemn him, articles were written and printed in book form. Hundreds of copies were circulated. Copies were sent to the editors of leading newspapers, the Members of Parliament and officers in Travancore and British India. The princely India, one of the Weekly’s published from Delhi, printed it on one of its issues.\textsuperscript{32}

The Dewan on the other hand understood something rotten and hence he took series of steps to counter the planned move of the Congress. He viewed seriously the allegations raised against him as an ill-conceived and personal attack. He declared that all the allegations were open challenge to his authority.\textsuperscript{33} Hence he issued an order on 4\textsuperscript{th} June 1938 to proscribe the circulation within the state and directed the Postal Superintendent to seize all the copies sent by post.\textsuperscript{34} The Dewan sought the help of the Central Government to ban the circulation in British India. But to the dismay and disappointment of the Dewan, thousands of copies had already been circulated all over India and the document gained wide publicity.\textsuperscript{35} Thus all the attempts of the Dewan to prevent the circulation did not materialize.

\textsuperscript{32} Letter of the Resident, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 1916/1944.
\textsuperscript{33} Narayana Pillai, C., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{35} Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, 4\textsuperscript{th} June 1938, to the Postal Superintendent, Trivandrum, D.Dis.1916/1944, Chief Secretary, Trivandrum.
6.3. Suppression and Response

The Dewan’s failure to check the circulation of the Congress memorandum forced him to resort to coercive methods. The Dewan induced his supporters to disturb congress meeting. Individual leaders were assaulted under the garb of unknown persons. Lathicharge in the meetings became frequent. On 5\textsuperscript{th} March 1938, the Civil Liberties Union organised a meeting at Nagercoil in South Travancore. The meeting was held to explain to the people about the need for responsible government in the state. While the meeting was in progress, unidentified persons threw stones at the audience which injured several leaders and caused confusion.\textsuperscript{36} This hampered the work of the State Congress in the days to come.

The State Congress suspended the programmes such as conducting public meetings due to the ban orders. But, the leaders carried on vigorously the enlistment of members and organized branches of the party.\textsuperscript{37} The State Congress meetings held at Neyyattinkara, Nedungada, Shertallay and Chengannur\textsuperscript{38} were subjected to severe attack. In these meetings when the leaders were speaking unknown persons caused disturbances and the police lathicharged and dispersed the crowd in the name of preserving peace and

\textsuperscript{36} Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, Vol. XII, No.16, 4\textsuperscript{th} August 1938, p. 1157.
\textsuperscript{37} The Hindu, 2 May, 1938, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{38} Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Chithra State Council, Vol. XII, No.2, 8 August 1938, p. 56
order in that area.\textsuperscript{39} At Chengannoor police lathicharged on the crowd, at Nedungada also similar incidents took place. In some places the leaders for fear of further trouble disappeared in advance. The Congress considered these occurrences were open lawlessness and rowdism by the police.\textsuperscript{40} The Congressites believed that the subordinate officers dared to cause disturbances only with the knowledge and authority of the Dewan. Those developments made them to doubt whether there was any systematic motive behind these incidents.\textsuperscript{41}

A series of attempts were made on the life and property of Miss. Annie Mascrene. In the first week of April some unknown persons pelted stone on her house and subsequently they broke open her house and committed burglary in her house. In another incident a constable hit his bicycle on her and went away. The other leaders were also not spared. The office of N. Parameswaran Pillai, a leading advocate and prominent Congress member was broken into and ransacked. An attempt was made to break open the Congress office at Trivandrum. Somebody forced his way into the garage at the house of K.T. Thomas, Joint Secretary of the Congress.\textsuperscript{42} On 17\textsuperscript{th} June 1938, K.P. Nilakanda Pillai, another Secretary’s

\textsuperscript{39} Narayanapillai, C., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 247-255.
\textsuperscript{40} Adjournment motion by T.M. Varghese, Proceedings of the Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, Vol. XII, No.1, 11 July 1938, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{41} Speech by T.M. Varghese, \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. 12, No.3, 13 July 1938, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{42} Printed pamphlet published by Miss. Annie Mascrene, Trivandrum, 2 May, 1938.
house met with the same fate. Three persons attacked him with iron rods at Pattom, Trivandrum. In the name of unknown persons many houses of the Congressites were broken and open burglary was committed.\textsuperscript{43}

Miss. Annie Mascrene, one of the victims complained to the police and submitted a memorial to the Maharaja on 2\textsuperscript{nd} May 1938, praying protection from the assault.\textsuperscript{44} She accused the involvement of the police in the incidents. This irritated the authorities. Upon this ground the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum warned and directed her to tender apology for her charges in the pamphlet which according to him were false, malicious and defamatory in character against the police force in general.\textsuperscript{45}

The Police had gone to the extent of threatening. Annie Mascrene with prosecution, if she did not tender apology. But she refused very stoutly.\textsuperscript{46}

All these incidents that were focused on the members of the State Congress were considered as organised attempt, by some persons under the instruction of the Government to make their life and property insecure.\textsuperscript{47}

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\textsuperscript{44} Miss. Annie Mascrene, Trivandrum, 12 May, 1938, Memorial to the Maharaja of Travancore.
\textsuperscript{45} Letter from Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 17 May 1938 to Annie Mascrene, Trivandrum.
\textsuperscript{46} Letter from Annie Mascrene, Trivandrum, 20 May 1938, to the Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum.
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Sreedhara Menon aptly characterized these events as reign of terror.\textsuperscript{48} When uncontrolled terrorism was in progress, the Congress Committee of the Travancore State Congress strongly condemned the attitude of the police towards the attitude of the Congress Party.\textsuperscript{49} The Congressites conducted propaganda meetings and explained the police other excuses.\textsuperscript{50} In these meetings, the Congress Party explained to the people the uncontrolled atrocities that were released against the Congressites and the people. The method of propaganda could easily convince the people and gained public sympathy in their favour.\textsuperscript{51} With a view to consolidate popular sympathy, the Working Committee of the State Congress outlined the following programmes of work.

a) To concentrate on enrolling maximum number of members.

b) To collect funds for meeting the challenges of the Government by all means and ways possible.

c) To work out a constructive programme to develop goodwill and friendship.

d) To spread the Swadeshi Movement and to encourage handloom cloth and Khadi.

\textsuperscript{48} Menon, A., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 236.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{The Hindu}, 21 May 1938, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}, 5 July 1938, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{51} Daniel, D., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 53.
e) To build up a strong volunteer organisation to be trained in non-violent methods to control crowd, and

f) To prepare constructive programmes and to hold an All Travancore Political Conference in October 1938.52

The Government watching very carefully all the programmes of the Congress decided to take needed steps to curb the activities of the Travancore State Congress.

6.4. Measures of the Government

The Government proceeded to take stringent measures against the Congress. The district magistrate continued to ban meetings and processions at different places. In view of the role of a free press in a literate state, as Travancore was, the Dewan enforced restrictions on the freedom of the press too. The prosecution of the writers of articles which the administration considered as objectionable, cancellation of licenses, forfeiture of deposits and proscription of leaflets, pamphlets and newspapers were some of the measures adopted to curtail the freedom of the press. Stern measures were adopted against the newspapers in Travancore which had published articles against the administration. The Newspaper Regulations, which was promulgated on 22nd May 1936 gave the Executive larger powers. Under it a newspaper could be published only under a licence, issued on deposit by the

52 Daniel, D., op.cit., p. 53.
applicant of an amount fixed by the Government as security. Thus the continuance of the paper practically depended upon the will of the Government. Besides, the licence given to a paper was made absolutely non-transferable in any condition or circumstance. With the death of a licensee a paper must automatically stop publication. To get a new licence all the formalities were once again to be gone through. Government normally issued licences only to those who supported its policies. Moreover, it could, with or without warning, cancel the licence granted and declare the deposit as forfeited. Through these measures, the freedom of the press was drastically curtailed.

The *Kaumudi*, a Malayalam daily published from Trivandrum, earned the displeasure of Government, for C. Kesavan, the State Congress leader, was appointed as its editor. In its issue of 12\(^{th}\) March 1938 the paper published a message sent by George Joseph who defended C. Kesavan in a sedition case about responsible government and the construction of the newly-formed State Congress. Irritated by this, the Government cancelled its licence and declared the deposit as forfeited. A similar action was taken on the weekly edition of *Kaumudi*. Newspapers like *Malayala Manorama* which criticized the policy of the Government were warned. Subsequently

by an executive order issued on 10th September 1938 the licence granted to the paper was cancelled and the properties of the license were forfeited by the Government.  

By this time, the newspapers and journals from outside the state gave wide publicity to the ordeals experienced by State Congress in Travancore. Acting under the Sea Customs Regulation the newspapers, *Sanatani* and *Gomati* published from Trichur and *The Malabar Herald*, the *Prakasam* and the *Deepam* published from Cochin were banned entry in the state.

Action was taken against individual critics, who pointed out the flaws in a particular scheme or procedure of the Government. On 19th January 1938 unknown persons assaulted M.R. Madhava Warrier and T.M. Muthalali, editors of the *Malayali* and the *Malabar Advocate* respectively. The reasons alleged for the assault was that these journalists had made themselves unpleasant to the Dewan by the writings. In neither of these cases the assailants were traced. For writing two articles in the newspapers

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56 Letter from Chief Secretary to Government, Trivandrum, 12 September 1938, to Advocate General, Trivandrum, D.Dis. 302/1938/C.S.

57 While under the ban, the *Deepam* resumed publication in the name of *Jayabharathi*. When this too was proscribed it again assumed a new name entitled the *Vasumati* and began publication under a new licence issued by the Cochin Government. (Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 24 September 1938, report to C.S. to Govt., Trivandrum, D.Dis 1946/1944-C.S.).


criticizing the policy of the Government, police arrested A. Narayana Pillai, an advocate, on charges of sedition.\footnote{The Hindu, we February 1938, p. 13.}

On the other hand, the newspapers which supported the Government received favoured treatment. Thus, the proprietor of the \textit{Malayala Rajyam} was given the contract for printing Government publications and an editor of the \textit{Bharatha Patrika} was appointed Legal Remembrancer to the Government. The persons who contributed articles, which the Congress leaders declared as defamatory and abusive, to the newspapers were appointed members of Government committees.\footnote{State Congress Memorandum, 30 May 1938, submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore, D.Dis. 306/1948.} Thus the editor of the \textit{Samadarsi}, a weekly published from Trivandrum, was appointed a member of the Public Service Commission.\footnote{Narayana Pillai, C., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 135-137.} Besides, the Director of Information met editors of newspapers like \textit{The Mail}, Madras and discussed with them the possibility of reviewing their attitude towards the Government of Travancore.\footnote{Hariharan, U.P., Director of Information, Trivandrum, 23 February 1938, Confidential note to the Dewan. D.Dis. 297/1938.} In an attempt to influence the editors to publish news in support of Travancore the Government extended patronage in the form of advertisement revenue and subscription. This had some effect. \textit{The Statesman}, New Delhi, agreed to publish an ‘Annual Travancore Supplement’. Likewise, \textit{The Mail}, Madras, \textit{The Leader}, Allahabad and \textit{The
Times of India and The Illustrated Weekly of India, Bombay and the Evening News of India adopted a pro-Government attitude and unreservedly supported the administration of Travancore. Yet the Government did not succeed in persuading the other newspapers to fall in line.

6.5. Travancore State People’s League

In addition to the repressive policies of the administration the activities of the loyalist communal organizations presented difficulties to the working of the State Congress. In its endeavour to suppress the State Congress, Government extended support to these organizations. No wonder, the State Congress considered this, yet another policy of the Government to crush its growing influence.

The Travancore State People’s League was the first association organised in this connection. On 13th April 1938 some Government political and communal leaders organised a public meeting at Changanacherry with the object of protesting against the agitation for responsible government. Presided by Rev. Romeo Thomas, Principal of the local St. Berchmen’s College, this meeting organised the State Peoples’ League with a view to doing ‘propaganda against all anti-government movements and for

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64 Letter from Hariharan, U.P., Director of Information, Trivandrum, 17 October 1938, to Chief Secretary to Govt. Trivandrum, D.Dis. 317/1938/C.S.
65 Letter from Thanu Pillai, A., 7 August 1938, to C.S. to Govt., Trivandrum, D.Dis. 122/1938/C.S.
maintaining peace in the country’. It was proposed to organize meetings throughout the state under its auspices. For this purpose, they formed an organizing committee with C.M. Joseph as convener and prominent men representing different communities as members – Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, Kondur Krishna Pillai, Dewan Bahadur V.S. Subramonia Aiyer, Komalezhathu Sankaran, P.K. Asan Bava Rowther, John Kattakkayam, Thariathu Kunjuthommen Padiyara Joseph Kunju and N.V. Joseph. On 8th June 1938 they held a preliminary meeting of the committee at the residence of C.M. Joseph at Changanachery. It constituted a permanent committee with K.V. Joseph as president, P.S. Muhammed and K.G. Paramedwaran Pillai as vice-presidents, C.M. Joseph, K. Kunjan Panikkar and Asan Bava Rowther as secretaries, Mytheen Pillai as treasurer and one hundred persons as members, representing different parts of the state.

On 8th July 1938 a similar party called the Travancore State Peoples’ Federation came into existence at Trivandrum with N. Ramakrishna Pillai as president and eight local persons as members of the Executive Committee. Though the object of the Federation was started as to take upon its shoulders the task of carrying on healthy agitation for the attainment of responsible government in the state under the aegis of the Maharaja and promoting the

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67 Pitchu Iyengar, R., Commissioner of Police, Trivandrum, 28 April 1938, report submitted to Chief Secretary to Govt., Trivandrum, D.Dis 2701/1944/C.S.

68 The Hindu, 11 July 1938, p. 2.
political, economic and cultural interests of Travancore by all peaceful and legitimate means strictly on the lines indicated by the Indian National Congress and Mr. Gandhi, it too adopted an anti-Congress attitude. The Travancore National Congress was another of the loyalist parties to assume shape. In a meeting at Trivandrum on 13 July 1938 the Travancore National Congress was brought into existence. Presided by S. Krishna Aiyer, leader of the United Nationalist Party in the Sri Mulam Assembly, it was decided that the Travancore National Congress should work for the attainment of responsible government under the supreme authority of the Maharaja by constitutional and peaceful means. The aims and ideals of the Travancore National Congress would be similar to those of the Indian National Congress. Through subsequent meetings it established branches in different parts of the state.

In fact, these loyalist parties worked towards diverting the attention of the people from the State Congress which then enjoyed the support of a large section of the population. Moreover, most of its members were leaders of


70 The influential members from different communities who participated in the meeting were Thariathu Kunjuthommen, member of the Travancore Legislature, T.C. Mukadan, general secretary, All Travancore Catholic Conference, P.S. Muhammed and T.M. Muhammed, Muslim leaders, Kottoor Kunjukrishna Pillai, leader of the Progressive Party and member of Legislative Council, K.G. Parameswaran Pillai, M.L. Janardhanan Pillai, Mannathu Padmanabha Pillai, K.G. Kunjukrishna Pillai, K.C. Karunakaran and K.M. Kesavan. (*The Hindu*, 14 July 1938, p. 4).


religious groups of communal organizations with uniform political stand in favour of the administration. Therefore, soon after the Travancore National Congress came into existence the Travancore State Peoples’ league and the Federation, the earlier loyalist parties, declared their dissolution and most of the members joined the new party. Although it pledged to work for the achievement of responsible government, the policy and methods adopted to attain it, differed from the State Congress. Supporting the Government in its endeavour to put down the State Congress, the National Congress pursued its work without any hindrance from the government. As a result State Congressites described these organizations as Government creatures and supporters.73 While State Congress meetings were banned, the National Congress was even encouraged to hold meetings.74 Yet, it failed in its attempt to gain popular support and its efforts to obstruct its State Congress movement proved ineffective.

As the next step, the Government proceeded to organize a new party styled Loyalists Union or Bhakta Sangham through the Land Revenue Department. Its declared objective was to inculcate in the masses a strong sense of deep attachment to the person and throne of the Maharaja and to deprecate strongly all attempts that may be made by organizations like the

73 Malayala Rajyam, 16 September 1938, p. 6.
State Congress and the Youth League to create disturbance and spread disaffection in the country against the Royal House and the Government established in Travancore. Deciding to make use of the public servants employed throughout the state for this purpose, the Land Revenue Commissioner was entrusted with the work of organizing these unions in every taluk. The Departments of Police and Excise were instructed to give active support.  

Nevertheless between March and August 1938, State Congress experienced concerted opposition. During this period the issue of professed loyalty to the Maharaja became a bone of contention between the State Congress and the loyalist parties. In order to placate public opinion in their favour, the leaders of these parties carried on vigorous propaganda throughout the state. In its attempt to weaken the influence of the State Congress the administration pursued a policy of encouraging these rival organizations. Particularly after the submission of State Congress memorial to the Maharaja in May 1938 the open hostility between the Government and the State Congress manifested itself in different forms. The disturbances in meetings and the assaults on leaders by ‘unknown persons’ marked an increase. These factors led the State Congress to launch a civil disobedience movement.  

75 Chief Secretary to Government, 31 October 1938, Confidential note to the Land and Income Tax Commissioner, Trivandrum. D.Dis. 314/938/C.S.