CHAPTER IV

TRAVANCORE TRADE UNIONS ACT, 1937

The Trade Union Movement in Travancore was the direct outcome of organised labour in the State. Guided by the Union of coir workers in Alleppy, the ideology among factory workers changed from their fight with employers to a struggle for labour legislations and recognition of their unions. At their encouragement, the agricultural workers also joined the struggle for labour legislations. The Factory Acts in Travancore on the lines of British India failed to convince the workers or even to promote the condition of factory premises. By this time the Congress Socialist leaders had attracted the workers to their party and ideology. Under the active guidance of the Socialist Party, the working people exhorted the Government to control the labour unions on statutory lines. The administration enacted the Travancore Trade Union Act of 1937. The Coir Workers’ Union at Alleppy by having registered first under the Act, became an example of being the pioneer for all other trade unions in the State.

Failure of Factory Acts

In Travancore the factory workers constituted a powerful section of the labour class. They were the first to have their own organisation. The factory premises in the State from the very beginning was uncomfortable. The working condition in factories had disappointed the workers who came for work
expecting a better wage and a pleasant premises. Throughout the country the life of factory workers remained far from satisfactory. The workers lived at an incredibly low level of existence, in "filthy, disease-ridden hovels". The condition of factories in Travancore even at the dawn of twentieth century also was not an exception.

As early as 1894 the Government of Travancore began to observe the working of factories in the State. The regulation of the conditions of employment in factories began to receive the serious attention of the administration. Consequently in 1903 the Government of Travancore ordered the District Magistrates and the local Medical Officers to inspect the factories within their respective jurisdiction and submit periodical reports with regard to ventilation, sanitation, security from accidents, number of labourers employed, their wages, etc. The reports received from time to time disclosed the deteriorating health and safety of workers in the factories. The State felt an urgent need to regulate conditions of labour in factories. Therefore, a bill to regulate factory labour was introduced in the State Legislative Council on 1 June 1908. The Bill was based on the Indian

Factories Act of 1881. Soon the Bill was referred to a Select Committee. In the meantime, the Government of India had introduced another factory Bill in 1909, on the basis of the recommendations of the Factory Labour Commission of 1907. Later the Bill was passed into the Factory Act in 1911. In consequence the original Bill presented before the Travancore Legislature in 1908 was given up and instead a new bill was introduced mainly on the lines of the latest 'Factories Act of 1911 in British India. This Bill came into force as the first Factories Act in Travancore on 31 October 1913.

The Factories Act of 1913 introduced some regulations in the working of factories in Travancore. Still the Act was applied to textile factories only. The Regulation was applicable only to factories using power and employing fifty persons or more. In the textile factories the hours of work for children and men were restricted to six and twelve respectively. Women and children were prohibited from employment in certain dangerous processes and also from working between 7 p.m. and 5-30 a.m.

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4. The regulation of the conditions of employment in factories in India started only in the year 1881 when the first Indian Factories Act was passed. (The Indian Labour Year Book 1947-1948, Labour Bureau, Government of India, New Delhi 1949, p.31.)


Children were required to be in possession of a certificate of fitness for employment. The major defect of the Act was that it did not fix the maximum hours of work per week. Section 3 of the Factories Regulation of 1913 provided, among others, for the medical inspection, working hours, etc. of factories. A notable aspect of the Act was that the plantations did not come under Factories as defined in the Regulation. In fact the first Factories Act could not promote the welfare of workers within the factory premises. Moreover in Travancore the workers as well as the employers were yet to have a trade union. In the absence of an organisation, the labour class in the State continued to suffer in factories for want of basic comforts.

The conclusion of the First World War witnessed considerable industrial unrest in India. About the same time the International Labour Organisation was set up. The draft conventions and recommendations adopted by the International Labour Conference and general pressure of public opinion necessitated a revision of factory legislation. Therefore the Government of India passed a revised and more comprehensive Factories Act in 1922. During the succeeding years there was unrest among the working population demanding legislation for labour welfare measures. They demanded reduction of working hours in factories to reasonable limits to secure for the workers humane social


conditions and adequate leisure to enable them to improve their standard of living and also for increasing efficiency of industrial labour. In 1922 the twelve hour limit was reduced to eleven hours and that the Act was extended to non-textile factories also. For the first time in 1922 a sixty hour week was introduced in pursuance of a special provision relating to India at the first International Labour Conference held at Washington in 1919. ¹¹

The industrial unrest, economic discontent and political frustration in India were providing an active trade union movement in the country. When the Government considered the union of workers as an illegal conspiracy and convicted the labour leaders, the working class felt the need for a trade union law. ¹² Legislation for the registration of trade unions was accordingly passed in 1926. The Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926 came into force on 1 June 1927. ¹³ The Indian Trade Unions Act provided for compulsory recognition of a representative trade union by the employers. While guaranteeing registration for a trade union with seven or more members, the Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926 provided that at least half of the total number of its office bearers must be persons actually engaged in the industry.


¹³ The Resident for Madras States, No.4353, 28 December 1939, letter to Dewan of Travancore, D.Dis.1441/1940/Devpt.
to which the union belongs. The fact was that under the Act, registration of trade unions was not compulsory. Indeed the Act provided the fundamental right of freedom of association to Indian workers. However section 17 of the Trade Unions Act of 1926 in British India made it clear that the members of a registered trade union were exempted from punishment for criminal conspiracy. The principle of participation of outsiders in the organisation of trade unions in India was given legislative recognition by the Indian Trade Unions Act of 1926. No wonder the Indian Trade Unions Act was an inspiration for the growing labour unrest in Travancore. There were incidents of unrest among the labourers in the State.

Shortly after the Vaikom Satyagraha in 1924, the nationalist movement in Kerala acquired the character of an agrarian struggle. The labour leaders convened the first Kisan Conference of Kerala at Ernakulam in April 1928. The conference passed a resolution demanding a new and far reaching labour legislation. Conscious of the emerging labour agitations, the Government of India appointed the Royal Commission on Labour in

July 1929. The Commission examined the existing factory laws in detail and made recommendations in March 1931. The Royal Commission in its report remarked that the working class in Travancore was neither sufficiently organised nor properly stabilised. In fact the Commission mainly dealt with labour in the organised industries. In their memorandum to the Royal Commission, the United Planters' Association of South India level stated that "wages were generally fixed by district/agreements and the amount was dedicated by economic considerations and by the supply of labour at the time when it was required." As a result of their investigation, the Royal Commission on Labour in India recommended for perennial factories at fifty four hours week with a daily limit of ten hours which would permit working either six days of nine hours each or five days of ten hours each and a half holiday on the sixth day.

In the early years, it was highly necessary to educate both the factory owners and workers regarding the details of the factory legislation. The factory inspectors had to be mostly moving about during the first year. The Report of the Royal

Commission of Labour had emphasised the unsuitability of entrusting factory inspections to District Magistrates. They deliberately viewed that "the inspection of large factories by the District Magistrates or the Civil Surgeons was a useless formality which ought to be abolished". The Commission however suggested that the system of wage payment in full to plantation workers at regular intervals would go far to breakdown the prevailing system of taking advances from the Maistries or Moopans at the time of recruitment. However the United Planters' Association of South India has commented on the report of the Royal Commission that it failed to indicate the variety of relations between the labourers and the plantation estates with reference to advances and modes of payment. The Royal Commission felt that those who were actually employed under the capitalists would not be assertive and independent enough, if they cared for their job, to take an equal terms with the employer. In fact the Commission recognised the need for outside element for leading trade unions. For establishing close contacts and cordial relations between the owners and the workers, the Royal Commission


suggested three possible lines namely, development of stable trade unions, appointment of labour officers and formation of works committees. The Commission also recommended the appointment of conciliation officers to bring about settlement between the parties at the earlier stages of a dispute.\textsuperscript{24} On the basis of the Royal Commission’s recommendations, Government of India framed a bill and passed it into the Factory Act of 1934, which incorporated most of the recommendations of the Royal Commission.

**Demand for Labour Legislation**

With the same effects of Factory Acts in British India, the Travancore Government also enacted factory legislations. On 31 July 1935 Travancore Government had introduced a more progressive and comprehensive bill in the legislature with a view to regulate labour conditions in the State.\textsuperscript{25} The Bill was drafted mainly on the lines of the British Indian Factory Act of 1934. Soon after the presentation of the factory bill before the State Legislature, the Alleppy Chamber of Commerce pointed out to the Government that conditions obtaining in Travancore were entirely different from those in British India and that necessary alternatives should be made in the Bill to protect the industries of the state from heavy commitments especially at a period when every industry was undergoing a severe set-back on


\textsuperscript{25} Prakasam, R., *op.cit.*, p.87.
account of low prices and poor demand for manufactured articles.\textsuperscript{26} The Chamber had also exhorted that a representative of the Indian Coir Factories should be nominated to the Legislative Assembly in the discussions of the Labour Bills so as to enable the factory owners to protect their cause too.

By this time the Travancore Labour Association was making incessant demand for labour laws and labour representation in the State Legislature through the labour weekly, \textit{Thozhilali}. When the resolutions and petitions resulted in no immediate effect, the Labour Association had decided for direct action.\textsuperscript{27} K.K.Joseph was elected as the Secretary of the action committee formed for the purpose. Wide propaganda was given to a proposed labour procession from Alleppy and massive public meetings were organised throughout the coastal area of Alleppy to propagate the procession and enlist mass support. The object of the labour procession was to cause the removal of certain conditions in the status, work and remuneration of the labourers. With the unrest of labour, situation in the Alleppy Municipal area was serious.\textsuperscript{28} The leaders of the procession made revolutionary speeches at Alleppy warning the administration that they were intended to adopt the "Communistic method of terrorism" and

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\textbf{26.} The Commercial Review, Vol.1, No.12, August 1935, p.431.  \\
\textbf{27.} District Superintendent of Police, 16 May 1935, Report to District Magistrate, Quilon, D.Dis.2780/1935/Judl.  \\
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even bloodshed, if the capitalists would not comply with their demands.\textsuperscript{29} As the movement was gaining popular support the administration became alert. On 29 May 1935 the labour procession was banned and the three ring leaders of the agitation, K.C. Govindan, K.K. Joseph and V.K. Purushothaman were arrested.\textsuperscript{30} When the leading newspapers also favoured the move of the labour leaders in Alleppy, the administration had averted the further move of Alleppy labourers. Soon the labour force reacted to the ban order. On 11 June 1935 the Travancore Labour Association held a special general body meeting to protest the ban on processions.\textsuperscript{31} The Government now adopted a double faced policy to face the labour force. While oppressing the workers' movement by ban and prosecutions, the administration formulated plans to appease the workers. Consequently the Government nominated M.L. Janardhanan Pillai as the representative of owners and P.S. Muhammed as the representative of workers to the State Assembly.\textsuperscript{32} When the labour bills were tabled for discussion in the Legislature, the Government also nominated the labour representatives P.N. Krishna Pillai to the Legislative Council and C.O. Ponnama to the State Assembly convincing the Travancore Labour Association for the first time.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{29} District Superintendent of Police, Quilon, 16 May 1935, \textit{op.cit.}, D.Dis.2780/1935/Judl.
\textsuperscript{31} Jeyadevadas, D., \textit{Working Class Politics in Kerala}, p.133.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{The Commercial Review}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.431.
\textsuperscript{33} Prakasam, R., \textit{op.cit.}, p.81.
As per the Bill, factories which employed twenty or more workers and which worked with the aid of power were recognised as factories. The novel provision of the new Regulation was that the Government could declare by notification as factories any place where the work was carried on with or without the aid of power and where ten or more workers were under work. Exercising this provision, the Government of Travancore have declared all the cashewnut factories and coir factories as factories. The new Factory Bill, for the first time, distinguished between seasonal and non-seasonal factories. It provided for a ten hour day and a maximum fifty hours week for non-seasonal factories. In the case of seasonal factories the Bill fixed a sixty hour week and an eleven hour day. The Factory Regulation introduced the principle that persons between fifteen and seventeen years of age should not be employed as adults unless they were medically certified to be fit to work as adults. However the progressive aspect of the legislation was that while in British India women and children were allowed to work between 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. in any factory, in Travancore they could be employed only between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Further the Bill enlarged the powers of the factory inspectors and empowered Government to make rules regarding labour welfare measures within the factory premises.

34. Travancore Information and Listener, op.cit., p.32.
35. Ibid., p.38.
The Factory Acts proved inadequate to meet the labour demands. The rate of wages they got was quite insufficient even for their sustenance. In some of the coir factories there was no prompt payment of wages and when it was done, they were paid in kind at inflated rates. In fact the labour representations to the Government did not receive due attention. Moreover the factory Acts had no proper effect in the beginning. For instance, the cashew factories in Travancore which also employed about 40,000 labourers were brought under the purview of the Travancore Factories Act of 1913 only in 1944. The District Magistrate of Quilon was the Inspector of Factories in Quilon and Alleppy under the Factories Regulation V of 1914. But the District Magistrate had never inspected any of the factories in Quilon or Alleppy even ten years after the passing of the Regulation. Under the conscious role played by the Congress Socialist leaders, the workers felt encouraged to go with the struggle to achieve their political rights.

In the absence of statutory recognition of workers' Unions and their rights, labour troubles had been much in evidence during 1930's in Travancore. With the spread of political ideas among the workers, they became conscious of their organisation

37. The Hindu, 9 January 1938, p.3.
and became more assertive. It led to unrest which manifested in different forms. The coir factories in Alleppy had to face several strikes, walk-outs and passive resistance. Observing the labour proceedings, the Travancore police reported the change of labour movement from a welfare association to a militant union, succeeding the principles of communism. There were eighteen coir factories for making coir mattings of which sixteen were in Alleppy. The Travancore Labour Association was actively consolidating the workers of Alleppy to achieve their political demands. Labour leaders P.K. Padmanabhan, Pathrose, Quilon Joseph, Simon Asan, P.V. Andrews and K.K. Kunjan were conducting study classes to educate the labourers on the ideas of organisation.

In Travancore, a large number of coir factories were established especially after the First World War. There had been a phenomenal increase in the production and export of coir mattings during the post-war period. The increase of production was from 1.115 million yards in 1919-1920 to 9.578 million yards in 1936-1937, by about 860 per cent. In fact the growing number of factories with a corresponding increase in the number of the workers rendered necessary a legislation recognising the legitimate interests of the labour. Demanding a labour law recognising union of workers, the labour class held organised

agitations in Alleppy and Quilon. Yet the Government had contented with the preliminary enquiries about the strike and no special officer was appointed in Alleppy or Quilon under the Factories Regulation to inspect the factories.\textsuperscript{43} In 1937 the number of strikes involving maximum workers was the highest in Travancore since 1921.\textsuperscript{44}

The Agricultural Workers' Unions in Travancore fought against wage reduction and attack on agricultural labourers. The factory workers in the State also fought for the labour legislations. The Labour Association at Alleppy passed resolutions requesting the Government to grant proper representation in the Legislature.\textsuperscript{45} Since most of the coir factory workers in the State were Ezhavas, the S.N.D.P.Yogam took part in the activities for the welfare of the labourers and their movement. At the annual meeting of 1935 the S.N.D.P.Yogam passed resolutions to lead and effectively conduct the workers' movement.\textsuperscript{46} The meeting requested the Government of Travancore to make laws regulating wage and working hours of the workers and to make proper representation to the labourers in the legislature. The inhuman practices in the factories and insufficient wage payments urged the labourers to demand for a statutory legislation.

\textsuperscript{43} Proceedings of Travancore Sri Mulam Assembly, Vol.11, Trivandrum, 1935, p.1003.

\textsuperscript{44} As per the labour statistics for 1937 not less than 379 strikes involving 6,47,801 workers occurred in Travancore. (The Commercial Review, Vol.IV, No.5, May 1939, p.143.)


The competition among industrialists only caused the articles produced by labourers being sold at low rates thereby entailing much suffering by the labour class. This encouraged the labourers to demand for the control of Government on labour organisations. Labour had no voice in the determination of conditions of employment as it had no part in the control of industry. Moreover there was no provision to give due consideration to the interests of labour in the case of conflict between the labour and the capital. Thus the discontented labour force felt it necessary to organise and to fight for law to compel the employers to recognise trade unions. The fact was that the factory owners did not accord adequate recognition to the workers' unions and that those who were suspected of taking an active part in the Union work were sometimes given unjust punishments such as fines, wrongful dismissals, etc. Therefore recognition of labour unions became the primary concern of the labourers. By the time leaders like P.N.Krishna Pillai, M.S.Aniruddhan, K.K.Kuruvilla, Changanacherry Parameshwaran Pillai, T.K.Kittan, Kottoor Kunju-krishna Pillai and P.S.Muhammed demanded a labour legislation recognising the labour unions in the State.

47. Sirdar Tejsingh, Speech at Sherthalai Labour Conference, 15 October 1937, D.Dis.1638/1937/CS.


The administration also felt the need for a trade union act in the State. In 1936 the State Legislative Assembly passed the Labour Bill presented in the previous year and sent it to the consideration of the Legislative Council. The labour representatives in the Legislative Council pointed out the defects in the Bill during the time of discussion and remarked on the experience of the Trade Union Act in British India. There was considerable opposition in the State Legislature. The members of the State Assembly pointed out the fact that the Travancore Labour Association still remained unregistered even though there were facilities for registration under the Joint Stock Companies Regulation. They have cautioned that the workers associations would always like to be without any control from Government or any other recognised bodies. K.C. Karunakaran, member of the Assembly urged the Government that there must be a statute for compulsory registration of these trade unions.

The period of Maharajah Sri Chitra Tirunal of Travancore witnessed the inauguration of a new era of progressive industrialisation. On 18 March 1937 the Travancore Trade Union Act, the first labour law in the State, had received the Royal assent and had been placed in the Statute book of the State.

50. Prakasam, R., op.cit., p.86.
52. Director of Public Relations, Chamber of Princes, New Delhi, Note on labour conditions in Indian States, No.2971, 2 October 1945, D.Dis.2256/1946/Devpt.
In fact Travancore was the first native State in India to give statutory recognition to the union of workers.

Provisions of the Act

The Travancore Trade Union Act of 1937 was indeed a turning point in the history of working class movement in the State. With the growth of labour power, the administration had now turned its attention from factory legislations to trade union acts. In fact the Trade Union Act of 1937 was the recognition to labour unions in the State. It became another step in forward towards the growing solidarity of labour unions. The trade unions in the state had now progressed from illegal organisations to the recognised representative bodies.\footnote{The Commercial Review, Vol. III, No. 7, July 1937, p. 243.}

The Travancore Trade Union Regulation was drawn up mainly on the lines of the British Indian Trade Union Act. "Any seven or more members of a trade union could apply for registration and could be granted a certificate of registration provided that they satisfy the requirements in regard to the rules as laid down in the Act".\footnote{Travancore Information and Listener, op. cit., p. 35.} The Registrar of Trade Unions issued a certificate of registration on the Union being registered under the provisions of the Act. The Act provided for immunity
from civil suit in certain cases as in British India. Provision was also made in the Act for the proper supervision of the union by the Registrar of Trade Unions and for the submission of audited annual returns by them to the prescribed authority. One fundamental difference between the Trade Union Act of British India and that of Travancore was that in the former compulsory registration was not insisted on while in the latter unions were to be compulsorily registered if they were to function in the state. 55 Section 14(2) of the Travancore Trade Union Act provided that "no trade union shall be formed or shall function unless it is registered under the provisions of the Act". 56 Violation of this provision leads to fine upto rupees five hundred. 57

Another significant difference in the Act from that of British India was with regard to the composition of the executive of trade unions. The Travancore Trade Union Act provided that "not less than three fourths of the total number of officers of every registered trade union shall be persons actually engaged or employed in any trade or business with which the trade union is actually connected". 58 The notable fact that in British India the executive of the union needed

58. Travancore Information and Listener, op.cit., p.36.
to have only two third of its members as actual workers. This provision was in keeping with the progressive conditions in the State considering the high percentage of literacy among the workers in Travancore. As per the Statistics of Travancore for 1937, there were over two hundred factories under the old Factories Act distributed throughout the State. The Trade Unions during the time were mainly combinations of employees in coir, cotton, textile, engineering, tiles, transport and other industries. The Trade Union Act required the registered trade unions to submit annual returns to the Registrar of Trade Unions with a duly audited statement of receipts and expenditure. They were also required to keep account books open for inspection by an officer or member of the union. However the Act did not provide for the inspection of books of trade unions by the Registrar. In the absence of authoritative inspection of the unions, it was impossible to check the unhealthy system that seemed to be developing in some of the unions registered under the Trade Unions Act.

The Travancore Trade Unions Act of 1937 was to recognise and safeguard the right of industrial combination and this at once accorded labour those privileges which took labour

59. Director of Industries, Travancore, No.490, 29 April 1939, letter to Chief Secretary to Government, R.Dis.1752/1940/Devpt.

60. The Indian Labour Year Book 1947-1948, op.cit., p.73.

61. Ibid., p.74.
in Great Britain many years of struggle to secure. The very object of the Act was "to safeguard the right of industrial combination whether for the purpose of improving the wages or conditions of labour or of increasing the profits of capital". 62  

In fact the immediate purpose of the introduction of the Travancore Trade Union Act was the progress of labour movement in the state. There were some labour organisations in the state conducted to the welfare and advancement of labourers in the matter of better conditions of life. But they had no definite official status. Thus the Trade Union Act of 1937 was a step in advance giving statutory recognition to the union of workers. The Act defined that "Trade Union means any combination, whether temporary or permanent, formed primarily for the purpose of regulating the relations between workers and employers or between workmen and workmen or between employers and the employers or for imposing restrictive conditions on the conduct of any trade or business and includes any federation of two or more trade unions." 63  

Actually the trade unions were the principal schools in which the workers learn the lessons of self-reliance and solidarity.

The Act became the most powerful instrument for creating a new industrial society in the state. When the Trade Union Bill


had become law in Travancore, the Government appointed the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies as the Registrar of Trade Unions. 64 The Registrar himself was competent to authorise the registration of trade unions under Section 8 of the Travancore Trade Unions Act of 1937. 65 In the new industrial environment introduced by the Travancore Trade Union Act, the administration began to consult trade union representatives at times of disturbance or when new labour legislation was being considered. The governmental control on trade unions had inspired the workers to get organised and to achieve their legitimate demands. The factory owners who had registered false cases against the members of the labour associations 66 had now begun to recognise the right of labourers to organise.

Trade Unionism in Travancore

The Travancore Trade Union Act provided the objective basis for an organised workers movement in the state. The Trade Union Movement in Travancore, though young, was fairly strong. From the very beginning the trade unions were closely linked with political issues. Thus the political movement had its repercussions in the economic field. Still labour solidarity had been

64. Director of Industries, Travancore, ROC No.6866, 18 September 1939, letter to Chief Secretary to Government, R.Dis.1752/1940/Devpt.

65. Confidential Report from Chief Secretary to Government of Travancore, Trivandrum, No.C.975, 30 June 1948, D.Dis.404/1948/CS.

the goal of the trade union movement. Employers have exploited the divisive forces of caste, religion and language and applied the familiar method of divide and rule to the working class. They often encouraged the formation of rival unions towards the same purpose. At the same time the workers were alone in preventing this excitement of ideological ferment from being used to create communal, rather than class, enemies. 67

Eventhough the Trade Union Act had received Royal assent in 1937, the law had come into force only from the 14th May 1938. 68 Since then there came into existence several trade unions in Travancore. The coir industry once again took leadership in the development of trade unionism in the State. As soon as the Trade Union Act came into force, the Labour Association got itself registered under the Act on 24 July 1938. 69 The association subsequently changed its name into the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union with its head office at Alleppy. The General Body Meeting held on 26 July 1938 under P.K.Achuthan, decided to transfer all properties of the Labour Association to the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union. 70 The Managing Committee of the Travancore Labour Association became the Managing Committee of the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union.

69. Ibid., p.116.
70. Sugathan, R., First Annual Report, Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union, September 1939, D.Dis.413/1939/CS.
Committee of the Travancore Coir Factory Workers' Union. Besides the coir workers union at Alleppy, there were also three district unions of recent origin at Sherthalai, Muhamma and Aroor. The Kannitta and Oil Mill Workers' Union, Muhamma Coir Factory Workers' Union and Sherthalai Coir Factory Workers' Union were constituent parts of Alleppy Coir Workers' Union, but registered separately in 1938. The George Committee, however, have recorded that there were 7,481 members on the register of the Union as on 28 February 1939.

In the subsequent years new trade unions were registered at Sherthalai, Alleppy, Quilon, Punalur and Mundakayam at the inspiration of the Trade Union Act. As an illustration, on 21 May 1939 a meeting of the coir yarn labourers of Ambalapuzha was held at Paroor near Alleppy with R. Sugathan as President. In this meeting it was decided to register the union of coir yarn labourers as par the Travancore Trade Union Act. The trade unions had exhorted the administration to bring into force further legislations of labour welfare. The growing power of trade unionism in the state helped the workers to achieve their legislative demands. In response to the labour demand the Government nominated T.V. Thomas to represent coir workers in the


State Assembly. There were twenty four trade unions in Travancore at the end of 1940. In 1941 seven more trade unions were registered. Of the seven unions, two were of boatmen, two of coir workers, one of paper mill workers and two of factory workers. The Travancore Coir Factory Workers’ Union at Alleppy, the Quilon Factory Workers Union and the Labour Union at Thuckalay in South Travancore were some of the most successful trade unions which have been recognised by the employers.

Meanwhile the idea of trade unionism had spread to all major organised industries coordinating the total force of labourers to achieve trade union solidarity. Between 1940 and 1942 a number of trade unions were registered under the Travancore Trade Union Act. The Travancore Trade Union Act brought among the working people of the State enough hopes and aspirations. The Act had a wide appeal among the workers. The Act was the response of the Government to the growing power of workers in their struggle for legislative rights. However it is surprising that the Travancore Trade Union Act did not make any provision for the settlement of industrial disputes or for collective bargaining. Thus with the recognition of workers' right to

75. Administration Report, Department of Industries, 1941, D.Dis.1209/1942/Devpt.
76. Ibid.
77. The major trade unions were (i) Alwaye Factory Workers Union, (ii) Aluminium Factory Thozhilali Union, (iii) Ottu(Tile) Company Thozhilali Union, (iv) Glass Company Thozhilali Union, (v) Rubber Vettu Thozhilali Union, (vi) Municipal Thozhilali Union, etc. (Audalat,(ed.), op.cit., pp.44-45.)
organise, there was incessant labour organisations as well as unrest in the State. To make matters worse, the Act did not come into force immediately after its enactment. Nevertheless some factory owners were reluctant to recognise the workers' unions as per the provision of the Act. The workers, who were discontented due to the non-implementation of the Act, continued their struggle to achieve recognition for their unions. This struggle for solidarity led them to declare the general political strike in 1938 which necessitated the Government to appoint the George Enquiry Committee.