Chapter XVIII

THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVE FORMULAE

After the APHLC had rejected the Pataskar Commission Report, several proposals were made to meet the situation. A. Alley, one of the leading Khasi Congress leaders threw his idea to the people that the Khasi-Jaintia Hills might be converted into a Union territory. But this idea received no support. Even the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Congress Committees did not subscribe to his idea. The District Congress Committees of Khasi and Jaintia Hills also rejected the Pataskar Commission report. In its memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India on 16th June 1966, it demanded for the creation of the Khasi and Jaintia State. The Congress leaders, in their memorandum concluded thus: "We have rejected the Report of the Pataskar Commission. We cannot accept the demand for the creation of the Eastern Frontier State either; and we cannot remain in Assam. So we are to find out what definite steps we are to take so that our people may live in peace and unity with the rest of the people of India, including, of course, Assam. We have, therefore, decided to demand the creation of a separate State for Khasi Jaintia Hills on the pattern of Nagaland State. This will meet the aspiration of our people and thereby bring about the ultimate solution to the problems of this troubled part of the country." However, this idea for the creation of Khasi-Jaintia State was not accepted by the people. This was clearly
demonstrated by the general elections held in 1967 in which the Congress in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills which fought on this issue, failed to get any seat in both district Councils, in the State legislature and in Parliament.

As directed by the APHLC Conference, the Council of Action in its meeting held from 23rd to 25th June 1966 passed a resolution thus: "the Council of Action having discussed at length the plan and programme of the non-violent Direct Action Movement (Satyagraha) for intensifying the movement for the creation of a separate Hill State, the Council hereby directs the district branches of the APHLC to undertake the raising and careful training of volunteers for the non-violent Direct Action Movement. The Council further calls upon the hill people to prepare themselves spiritually and physically for this movement that is not motivated by any communal feeling to achieve a lasting and peaceful solution to the many problems of these hills. Further still, the council appeals to all residents, regardless of community and creed, of the Autonomous Districts and the contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by the hill tribes to remain peaceful, particularly after the Satyagraha Movement has commenced".

Further, the Council of Action decided that in the first instance, the decision of the APHLC to launch a non-violent Direct Action Movement should be implemented by dislocating or disrupting the functioning of the State Government of Assam in the autonomous districts and in the contiguous areas, excepting medical institutions or institution connected with conservancy etc. It also stated that picketing would be done by obstructing, by means of squatting or standing along the entrance to the Government offices. For this purpose, two categories of volunteers would be enrolled, viz., Direct Action volunteers and Auxiliary volunteers. The Direct
Action Volunteers should be of 16 years and above of age, and the Auxiliary Volunteers might be even below 16 years of age. Only the Direct Action Volunteers should be prepared to court arrest if this was necessary; while the Auxiliary Volunteers should be trained and prepared to assist the movement. When the Direct Action volunteers would be detailed for duties to dislocate or disrupt the Government machinery, the Auxiliary volunteers should maintain peace and order among the sympathisers or onlookers who might collect at the place of action. Volunteers should be trained as perfectly as possible in the methods of Satyagraha and they were to sing patriotic songs while "in action".

The other decisions made by the Council of Action were:
(1) to print and circulate the statement of the APHLC containing the reasons why the APHLC rejected the Pataskar Commission Report, (2) It suggested that "the Government of India immediately convene a conference of leaders from all the hill areas to devise ways and means of securing a peaceful political settlement", (3) Having learnt that the Government of India had appointed a Cabinet Sub-Committee to take a fresh look into the problems of the hill people, the Council of Action decided to send a delegation, if invited by the Government, to meet the said Sub-Committee.

The APHLC was invited to Delhi to meet the Cabinet Sub-Committee headed by the Home Minister G.L. Nanda. The meeting between the APHLC and the Cabinet Sub-Committee took place in August 1966. The APHLC made it clear that it could not accept the Pataskar Commission Report. Therefore, a new offer was made by the Cabinet Sub-Committee. This offer was the Sub-State Plan which envisaged that the Hill Areas would have a separate legislature and a council of Ministers but the Hill areas would continue to remain in Assam. Although the Sub-State
plan was of higher degree in terms of autonomy than the Nehru Plan, yet the APHLC flatly declined to accept the officer.

**The Vishnu Sahay Plan:** The question of finding out a solution to the complex political problems of North-East India attracted the attention of many scholars and political scientists. Foremost among the political scientists who had studied the problems in its depth happened to be Dr. V. Venkata Rao. In a series of articles which he contributed to the erstwhile daily of Shillong, the *Frontier Times*, Dr. Rao suggested that the best solution to the political problem of North-East India would be to constitute the whole area into a Regional Federation. These articles attracted the attention of Vishnu Sahay, the Governor of Assam who invited Dr. Rao for a detailed discussion.

Dr. Rao drew the attention of the Governor to the scheme prepared by Sir B.N. Rau long before. Sir B.N. Rau was an eminent jurist. He had served in Assam in different capacities. At one time he was the legal Remembrancer to the Government of Assam and Secretary of the Assam Legislative Council. In his capacity as constitutional Adviser to the Constituent Assembly, he prepared a note for the President and Members of the Indian constituent Assembly in which Sir B.N. Rau argued that the creation of new States would result in the increase of expenditure as well as in the fragmentation of financial resources. So far as the North-Eastern Area was concerned, B.N. Rau devised two alternative schemes. Perhaps, Sir B.N. Rau was influenced by historical facts. The first was the Ausgleich of 1867 between Austria and Hungary and the second was the Government of Ireland Act, 1920. He was also influenced by the Cabinet mission plan of 1946. It must be remembered that Sir B.N. Rau had a profound knowledge of the demographic,
linguistic and cultural diversity of North East India, and thus, when he suggested the two plans, he had Assam in his mind.

The first plan suggested by B.N. Rau can be summarised as follows. There should be a single cabinet responsible to the Provincial Legislature. Some members of the Cabinet would deal with subjects common to the whole of Assam. There should be a minister or a group of ministers for the Assam valley to deal with the subjects relating to that area. There should also be another minister who should deal with tribal affairs. The Minister for Tribal Affairs should be assisted by a Council of advisers who should be selected from among those who had local knowledge and whose concurrence should be made obligatory in certain matters. Legislation concerning exclusively to one of the regions should be committed to the representatives of the region or regions affected by it, the representatives of the other regions should refrain from taking part in any stage of the proceedings of the legislature.

The alternative scheme suggested by Sir B.N. Rau for Assam was similar to the Ausgleich which existed in Austria and Hungary between 1867 to 1914. The Ausgleich of 1867 created a curious type of State which was neither unitary nor completely federal. It was a kind of loose Union. It set up a new type of monarchy. Austria-Hungary was to consist of two distinct and independent states each of which was equal to the other. They were to have the same flag and the common head of State. However, the head of State was to be known as Emperor in Austria and King in Hungary. Each of them was to have its own separate Parliament, ministry and administration. In matters concerning internal administration, each was to be completely independent from the other. The union was to deal only with three subjects, - foreign Affairs, Defence and Finance. The
Union Executive should consist only of three ministers, one each for the three common subjects. These Ministers were to be appointed by the common head of State. Technically, there was no common Parliament for the two units, but provision was made for a system of delegations. Parliaments of both units were to select a delegation. Parliaments of both units were to select a delegation of 60 members each, of which 20 were to be chosen by the Upper House and 40 by the Lower House of each of the provincial legislatures. The Delegations were to meet alternately in Vienna and Budapest. The two delegations should sit separately to transact any business. Each of them was to use its own language and to communicate to the other in writing. It was only in a case of difference of opinion on any subject that the two delegations should sit in a joint session and such matter was to be decided by a majority of votes.

There was an interesting feature of the political system of Hungary. Within Hungary there was the Sub-Province of Croatia mostly inhabited by the Croats, a race distinct from the Magyars of Hungary. Croatia also had its own legislature - the Croatian Diet which consisted of a single Chamber of 125 members. There was a division of subjects between the Croatian Diet and the Hungarian Parliament. The head of Croatia was also the King of Hungary. The Croatian Diet had the right to elect 40 members to the Lower House of the Hungarian Parliament. The Hungarian Cabinet consisted of a Cabinet member specially designated to supervise the relations with Croatia. Even the Hungarian Delegation to the Union Legislature consisted of some Croats. Croatian was the official language in Croatia and its deputies in the Hungarian Parliament spoke in Croatian language.
Another very interesting example was the arrangement in Ireland made by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920. The Act divided Ireland into two parts. The six counties in the North East, which were inhabited mostly by Protestants was constituted into Northern Ireland, but the remaining 26 counties, inhabited mostly by Catholics was formed into the Southern Ireland. Each unit was to have its own legislature with certain powers. Further, there should be a Common Council of Ireland for the whole of Ireland which should consist of a nominated President and forty elected members, twenty from the legislature of each unit. This Council should have legislative power in respect of certain common subjects, requiring uniform administration such as Railways, Fisheries and the like. The head of state should be the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland who was to be assisted by a Privy Council of Ireland to aid and advise him in the exercise of his functions. But there was a separate Cabinet for each unit, the head of which was the Lord Lieutenant. The Lord Lieutenant was to be advised by the Cabinet of Northern Ireland in regards to matters relating to Northern Ireland, and by the Cabinet of Southern Ireland in regard to matters concerning Southern Ireland.

Again, Great Britain and Ireland formed a Union of which Ireland was a province. The common subjects of the Union were Defence, foreign affairs, Trade and customs, currency and the like. As stated earlier, Ireland was a province with two sub-provinces, each of which had its own legislature and its own Cabinet, and yet the province had to deal with subjects common to the two sub-provinces. The Head of the Union was the King, but that of the Province and Sub-provinces was the Lord Lieutenant. Each of the Sub-provinces had its own members in the British Parliament.
After narrating the examples of the Ausgleich and the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, Dr. V.Venkata Rao further elucidated his idea to the Governor that such arrangement might be feasible in the case of the reorganisation of Assam. Dr. Rao suggested that the federal plan would be best suited for Assam. According to him, Assam should be divided into two separate sub-provinces, Plains and Hills. But the municipal area of Shillong would be under the joint control of both the sub-provinces. Each sub-province would have its own legislature and its own Cabinet to deal with its own affairs. Subjects of common concern would be dealt with by a joint legislature which should consist of equal number of members from both the units plus one or two members from the Municipality and the Cantonment areas of Shillong. There should also be a joint Cabinet consisting of equal number of ministers from both the units plus one minister from Shillong. The Executive head of the two units would be the Governor of Assam who would be advised by the Cabinet of the plains in matters concerning the plains, by the Cabinet of the Hills in matters concerning the Hills, and by the joint cabinet in subjects of common interest. The division of subjects between the two federating units would be drawn up by mutual agreement. Each unit should have its own language. But the language for common interest at the apex should be English until replaced by Hindi. Dr. Rao pointed out that such a scheme might meet the aspiration of the Hill people and it might help the Central Government to fulfill its commitment of giving greater autonomy to the hill people and of preserving the territorial integrity of the State of Assam.

The Governor, Vishnu Sahay was very much influenced by the idea of federalism. Therefore he suggested to the Central Government that "Federalism was the best solution". According to him, the federation should consist of more than two units. The Plains and
the Hills of Assam should constitute separate units. Manipur also should be brought into the federation. But the more backward tracts of NEFA would be made the responsibility of the Central Government, but it should be brought under the federal plan. No unit would be subordinate to any other, however big or small, more populous or less populous any unit might be. Again, each unit should have complete freedom to choose its own language. Each unit would have its own legislature. Cabinet and administration to deal with subjects which should be transferred to each unit. But at the Apex, there should be a common joint legislature, joint cabinet and joint administration to deal with common subjects.

Vishnu Sahay supported this plan in the following manner. First, the federal principle would bring about a reasonably safe compromise between the practical needs of those who were more backward with the desire of the advanced tribes for political status. Secondly the federal principle would counter to some extent the emotional aspect for and against the demand for complete separation between the Hills and the Plains. He further said that he was aware of the practical difficulties in implementing it at the first stage. But he hoped that if the plan was well presented to all sections of the people of the State, it might be accepted by them.

Preparation for non-violent Direct Action: After 21st May 1966, the APHLC leaders left no stone unturned in their campaigns to raise large number of dedicated volunteers. Many training camps were opened up where volunteers were to receive training in the most intricate system of Styagraha. The Demand Day which was held on 24th October 1966 clearly demonstrated that the volunteers had really acquired the requisite art of self-discipline, self-sacrifice and devotion to duty. When the Council of Action met on 25th and 26th October 1966
to assess whether the non-violent Direct Action organisation was ready for action, it found that everywhere, the volunteers were fully prepared for real action. Even in the Western part of Mikir Hills more than 1000 volunteers had been enrolled. It was only in the North-Cachar Hills that the preparation was discouraging. In view of the facts stated above, the Council of Action took up a decision, authorising the Chairman and the General Secretary to nominate alternative leadership in case both of them would be arrested. All the members of the Council of Action solemnly affirmed that they would be ready to lead any group of volunteers whenever called upon to do so. The Council of Action met again in the last week of November to decide upon two vital questions. The first question was to fix the date for the launching of the non-violent direct action. The Council of Action apprised the volunteers organisation to get the volunteers prepared on any day by the last week of December 1966. The second question was whether the APHLC would contest the general elections which would be held in 1967. The Council of Action decided that the APHLC should boycott the 1967 general elections because the people would be involved in the non-violent direct action.

The Governor, Vishnu Sahay sent and elaborate report to the Government of India about what was happening in the Hill Areas. In that report, the Governor suggested that if any concessions were to be given by the Government of India to the Hill people, they should be given before the launching of satyagraha by the APHLC. It was his considered opinion that the Nehru Plan and the recommendations of the Pataskar Commission were no longer valid. He also opined that the formation of a single State for all the Hill Areas had become inconceivable. He pointed out that the Mizo
decided not to cooperate with the other hill tribes to form a hill State. They wanted separation not only from Assam and from the other tribes, but also demanded secession from India. Secondly, the Mikir Hills and the North-Cachar Hills had developed a distrust against the Khasis and the Garos. Therefore the concept of unity among all the hill tribes had become outdated. The Governor, therefore suggested that each major tribe should be given the status of a State. Once again, Vishnu Sahay reiterated his view that a federal plan would be the best solution. Such a sub-federation should consist of all the political units in North-East India. Perhaps, it was the rebellion of the Mizo National Front which might have made Vishnu Sahay think that there was no longer any possibility of bringing about all the hill tribes into a single political entity. He might have forgotten the fact that the Government of Assam was partially responsible for bringing into existence the Mizo National Front. It was the Government of Assam which was responsible to wean away the leaders of Mikir Hills and North-Cachar Hills by taking them into the Ministry, thereby, leaving the less backward hill tribes of the two autonomous hill districts without any capable leader. The Government of Assam was also responsible for the creation of a separate Jowai Autonomous District Council on a flimsy ground of administrative convenience in order to divide the Khasi race. But the Government of Assam was not successful in thwarting the hill State movement even in this new autonomous district.

Early in December 1966, the Government of India sent a very important member of the Planning Commission, Tarlok Singh to visit the hill areas. After he had visited Mizo Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Tarlok Singh had long discussions with the Governor, Vishnu Sahay. Again, in the third week of December 1966, Tarlok Singh had
a useful discussion with the APHLC leaders who attended the seminar on the Hill people of North-East India in Cabutta. Tarlok Singh realised the gravity of the political situation in the hill areas. Therefore, he urged upon the Government of India to find out an immediate solution to the problem. He was of the opinion that unless immediate action was taken, the situation might pass from the control of the moderates into the hands of the extremists. He cited the example of what had happened in the Mizo Hills. Tarlok Singh said that whatever their limitations might be, the APHLC leaders, however hard their attitude might have been, were leaders with education and experience and with considerable past contacts with the people of the plains. Moreover, they were moderates and constitutionalists. If these leaders were thrown out, leadership would pass into the hands of those who were not known to the other parts of the country and who were likely of a rougher brand, perhaps more fanatical and narrower in outlook and much less concerned about the consequences of their action for the country in general and for the North-East region in particular. Tarlok Singh emphasised that the situation in the North-East hill areas was explosive. If it was not handled with tact and understanding, the result would be the emergence of two rival schools of thought, one might favour the formation of a State within the Indian Union and the other would fight for secession from India. The happenings which had taken place in Nagaland and in the Mizo Hills were enough proofs. Tarlok Singh, therefore, strongly urged that in the interest of the Country and North-East India, the existing union between the Hills and the Plains should be ended.

Tarlok Singh, while agreeing with Vishnu Sahay that the whole of North-East India should be constituted into a regional
federation, he also suggested another alternative. He said that the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills and the Mikir Hills and North-Cachar Hills which were geographically contiguous might be constituted into a Union Territory. But Tarlok Singh forgot the fact that the idea of a Union Territory did not appeal to the minds of the hill tribes of these areas.

Further, Tarlok Singh said that the whole of North-East India should have a common economic base. He suggested that the Zonal Council which should consist of the representatives of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and other units might be constituted. Such a Council might be able to chalk out integrated programmes for the economic development of the whole area, thereby bringing about economic development at a speedier rate.

The Assessment made by Tarlok Singh on the situation prevailing in the hill areas appears to have induced the Government of India not to hesitate any longer but to move quickly with the time.

On 24th December, 1966, the Governor, Vishnu Sahay informed the APHLC leaders that the Prime Minister wanted them to go to Delhi for further talks. But the APHLC leaders informed the Governor that they were not in a position to go to Delhi because they were busy in organising the Satyagraha movement to be launched either on 30th or 31st December, 1966. They also requested the Governor to request the Prime Minister to come to Shillong so that the people would hear from her own mouth of what she had in her mind. There were a number of telephonic calls between the Governor and New Delhi on 25th December, 1966. Eventually, the Governor informed the APHLC leaders that the Prime Minister would come to Shillong on 27th December 1966. As requested by the APHLC leaders, the Prime Minister also consented to address the Public meeting to be organised by
the APHLC. Like a true charismatic leader, Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi came to Shillong on 27th December, 1966 to address a mammoth gathering at Iewrynghep ground, Shillong. Loud cheers of applause greeted the Prime Minister when she entered the well-built and well-decorated rustrum. Then the Prime Minister, for the first time, heard with own ears the ardent and genuine desire of the hill people when the whole mammoth crowd shouted: "We want Hill State—No Hill State no rest", the slogan which had been used through the corridors of time, but which still remained as fresh and as clear as when the hill people first used it more than a decade ago.

Another loud cheers followed when S.D.D. Nichols-Roy, General Secretary, of the APHLC implored the Prime Minister thus: "May we request you to use your great qualities to bring about the settlement of the political problem of the Hills and to agree to the immediate creation of a separate Hill State". With classic grace and dignity, the Prime Minister assured the hill people that there should be a re-organisation of the State of Assam and that should be done as soon as possible. But since such re-organisation would affect the hills and the plains, all concerned should meet and discuss. But the broad objective would be to give the hill people fullest scope and freedom to promote their own social and economic development and to administer schemes for the welfare of the hill areas. But, she said, there should be some essential links of overall unity at the top.

Another thundering cheers greeted the Prime Minister when she said that the hill people should be given "the requisite status and dignity". The word "Khublei" echoed from one end to the other end as the Prime Minister left the rustrum. During the discussion at Raj Bhavan, Shillong, immediately after the public meeting, the Prime Minister invited the APHLC leaders to go to Delhi for
discussion to be held on 11th January, 1967. She told them that by that time she might be in a position to tell them the form of re-organisation which she had promised at the public reception accorded to her a few minutes ago.

The 15th session of the APHLC was held in Shillong from 28th to 30th December, 1966 to consider the assurances of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The Conference resolved to accept the invitation of the Prime Minister to send a delegation for the final round of talk in Delhi. But the discussion would be on the basis of separation of the hills from the plains and the creation of a full-fledged Hill State. It also decided to keep the direct action resolution in abeyance. But in the event of failure of the proposed Delhi talks, Satyagraha would be commenced not later than 17th January, 1967. The Conference also requested the Government of India to postpone the general elections in the hill Districts. In case elections were held, they should boycott so far as the State Assembly was concerned. The APHLC would contest only the election to the District Councils.

The Prime Minister invited B.P. Chaliha and some of his colleagues to participate in the Delhi talks regarding the re-organisation of Assam.

The discussion between the Government of India and the APHLC was held on 11th January, 1967. At last, on 13th January, 1967, the Government of India announced its decision to re-organise the State of Assam on the basis of federal structure conferring upon the hill areas equal status with the rest of Assam.

The main feature of the federal Plan were as follows: First, the Hill areas should constitute one unit and the plain areas another unit, one not being subordinate to the other. Under this plan, a limited number of essential subjects of common interest
would be assigned to the regional federation. The rest of the subjects would rest with the federal units. Secondly, each unit would have its own legislature, its own council of Ministers, its own administration, its own secretariat and the like. Thirdly, the common institutions would be the Governor, the High Court and the Accountant General. Fourthly, the common subjects contemplated by the plan were power production and distribution, flood control and major irrigation, internal state transport, communications, food supplies and national security. Fifthly, each of the units would decide its own official language. Sixthly, the federation would be composed of the Chief Ministers and Ministers in charge of Industries and Power, and Flood Control of the two federating units, sitting together as an executive body meeting two or more times a year under the Chairmanship of the Governor to decide policy making on matters dealing with common subjects. Seventhly, the federation would be assisted by the representatives of the Planning Commission and the Central Government. Eighthly, the President of India should appoint the Secretary of the federation after consulting with the Governments of the two units. Ninthly, expenditure for establishing the federation would be borne equally by the two federating units. Lastly, it was also contemplated that in the first instance, Assam and the Hill State would be the members of the regional federation. But a door would be kept open for Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and NEFA, to join the federation. It was further stipulated that other subjects or institutions might be added to the federal list by mutual agreement among the federating units. However, the federation would decide only on policy matters, but the actual execution would be done by the federating units. The announcement also categorically stated that the reorganisation of Assam would be completed within six months. The
Home Minister assured the APHLC delegation on the same day that if Assam could not accept the federal plan, the other alternative was a clean cut separation of the hill areas from the plains.

To a great extent, the federal plan, offered by the Government of India resembles to the federal plan envisaged by the Government of Ireland Act, 1920.

The federal plan was shown to B.P. Chaliha while he was in New Delhi. Chaliha did not object to the plan. In fact, Chaliha admitted that the scheme of reorganisation of Assam was more or less based on the lines indicated by him. He admitted that the federal plan would not disintegrate Assam, and, at the same time, it would satisfy the aspiration of the hill people to have regional autonomy. Even the Assam Tribune, the only English daily in Assam at that time, which had never adopted a friendly attitude to the hill State demand had to accept the plan when it said thus: "The decision of the Government of India was a fait accompli which the people of Assam and its Government have to accept........ The people of the plain district will not bear any grudge if its establishment can remove the misunderstanding and promote in its place goodwill between the hill men and the plains people".

When the APHLC leaders returned from Delhi, they were giving a rousing reception along the road from Borjhar Airport to Shillong. The 16th session of the APHLC which was held at Tura on 18th January 1967 warmly welcomed the federal plan. It decided to participate in the Committee which should compose of the representatives of the Government of India, the Government of Assam and the APHLC to be set up to spell out the details of the proposal, subject to the condition that in a federal structure, the hill state unit should have equal voice and status with the other unit comprising the
remaining state of Assam. The APHLC also decided that the subjects to be assigned to the federation should be the minimum as would be mutually agreed to by the federal units. In the light of the acceptance of the federal plan, the APHLC decided to contest the 1967 general elections to the State Assembly. It also resolved to postpone the Satyagraha scheduled to have commenced on or before 17th January, 1967.

In complete contrast to the enthusiastic "welcome home" accorded to the APHLC leaders by the hill people for their success in the Delhi mission, B.P. Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam returned home as the saddest man. No word of praise was heard and no warm welcome awaited him. The faction in the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee who was opposed to the leadership of Chaliha decided to offer him no bouquet but brickbats. These leaders found the federal plan as suitable stick to beat the Chaliha ministry. This faction became active in instigating the ignorant and illiterate section of the people to agitate against Chaliha. When the anti-Chaliha movement gained ground, Chaliha backed out of the federal plan. The Executive Committee of the APCC which met on 7th April 1967 resolved to oppose the federal plan tooth and nail. It pleaded that the federal plan would damage the unity, integrity and security of Assam. Therefore, it requested the Government of India to implement the recommendations of the Pataskar Commission.

Again, the joint meeting of the Executive Committee, of the APCC and the Executive Committee of the Assam Legislature Congress Parliamentary Party was held on 18th and 19th May 1967 to discuss the federal plan. The joint meeting was of the opinion that the federal plan was pregnant with dangerous consequences. Instead of solving the problem, it would bring about further complications, to accentuate the forces of disintegration, thereby creating an
explosive situation in the strategically important North-eastern region which was always threatened by the invasion of China and Pakistan. Therefore, the joint meeting declared that the federal plan was not acceptable to the people of Assam. On 16th July, 1967 also, the Executive Committee of the APCC reiterated that the Patakar Commission recommendations should be implemented.

On the other hand, the APHLC desired that the Government of India should implement the federal plan as early as possible. In the meeting of the Council of Action which was held on 7th and 8th March 1967, the APHLC leaders were of the opinion that it would be good for the APHLC to get the goodwill of the opposition parties in India so that the Government of India would not be blamed for having made an announcement on 13th January 1967 and for implementing it. Therefore, the Council of Action decided to contact national leaders belonging to different political parties and groups in Parliament and to seek their support for the decision of the Government of India on the reorganisation of Assam. It also decided to meet the M.L.A.s. from Mikir and North Cachar Hills in order to persuade them to work with the APHLC as one force in the formation of the Hill State in the federal structure proposed by the Government of India.

In view of the fact that B.P. Chaliha had backed out from his commitment, since the APCC and the Assam Legislature Congress Parliamentary Party refused to accept the federal plan, and since the opposition to the plan was mounting up in the Brahmaputra valley, the Government of India did not constitute the committee to work out the details. When G.G. Swell met the Home Minister, Chavan on 9th April, 1967 to press for the early implementation of the federal plan, the Home Minister informed him that steps were being taken to appoint the Committee mentioned in the January 13 announcement. The
Home Minister further stated that he had told the APCC that if it was not prepared to accept the federal plan, it should be prepared to accept the other alternative. But the APCC tried to throw the baby into the lap of Chavan when it clearly said that it was his duty to convince the people of the plains to accept the proposals. G.G. Swell met the Home Minister on 3rd May 1967 only to be told that he would visit Assam on 20th May 1967 because the Government of India was blamed that it had taken a unilateral decision by ignoring the plains people. The Home Minister met different groups of the plains people who opposed the federal plan on 20th May, 1967. On 21st May, the Home Minister had discussion with the APHLC leaders. On 31st May, G.G. Swell, met the Home Minister who assured him that he had not changed his views. The Home Minister said that during his visit to Assam there was tremendous opposition to the federal plan. Therefore, there was a need for some other alternatives. He proposed that a joint discussion might be held. The Home Minister further assured that whatever alternative might be found out, the quantum of autonomy as declared on 13th January 1967 would be adhered to. Immediately on 11th June 1967 the Home Minister wrote to B.P. Chaliha informing him that the joint discussion would be held in Delhi on 7th July, 1967.

The Council of Action of the APHLC met on 20th June 1967 to discuss the Union Home Minister's letter to B.P. Chaliha for a joint discussion "on the possible alternatives for the reorganisation" of Assam. After having discussed fully on the matter, the Council of Action thought that since the proposed joint discussion on the possible alternatives for the reorganisation of Assam would reopen the entire question afresh and since the question of the form of reorganisation might nullify the commitment of the Govern-
Government of India made in January 13, it decided not to participate in the proposed joint discussion. A telegram was sent to the Home Minister thus: "APHLC regrets inability participate proposed joint discussions regarding 'possible alternatives for reorganisation' as contained in your D.O. letter dated June eleven to the Chief Minister Assam. APHLC only prepared discuss on basis Governments January 13 federal plan proposal or alternative clean out separate State assured by you to APHLC delegation on same date. In event of non-acceptance of federal plan by other side Hill people expect Government announcement honouring assurance within stipulated period latest July 13".

The Council of Action also decided to launch the Satyagraha movement in case the Government of India could not honour its commitment made to the Hill people within the stipulated period of six months - i.e. by 13th July 1967.

The Home Minister then sent a telegram to the APHLC on 23rd June 1967 in which he assured that the Government of India adhered to its decision to reorganise the State of Assam. He therefore requested the APHLC to participate in the joint discussion. The Council of Action met on 24th June 1967 to discuss the contents of the Home Minister's telegram. S.D.D.Nichols-Roy did not see any objection to the participation of the APHLC in the joint discussion. R.S.Lyngdoh said that the APHLC would not lose anything by participation. On the other hand the APHLC might be able to convince the people of the plains that the hill people had a just cause to fight and that separation might be brought about by mutual respect and understanding. B.B.Lyngdoh also felt that for so long the APHLC had no chance to exchange views with the leaders of the plains in the presence of the third party. Therefore, he thought that by its
participation in the joint discussion, the APHLC might bring about a peaceful separation of the hill areas from Assam. P.R. Kyndiah also was in favour of participation without surrendering the stand of the APHLC. Mody Marak, Lalmawia, John Deng Pohrmen, E. Bareh and others favoured participation. But on the other extreme there were Hoover Hynniewta and Hopingstone Lyngdoh who would not budge an inch to think of participation. Hoover Hynniewta argued that any participation in the joint discussion would tantamount to surrender of the party's stand. His view was shared by Hopingstone Lyngdoh. At last, the Council of Action decided to participate in the joint discussion. But the joint discussion which was held on 1st July 1967 did not bring any result. As a matter of fact, the two parties parted company with bitterness.

The Mehta Plan: The Home Minister, Chavan realised the futility of the joint discussion. Therefore, he thought that the discussion might become cordial if the leaders of different political parties would sit in a small committee. Thus on 8th July, 1967, the Government of India appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of the Union Minister for Planning, Ashok Mehta. This Committee consisted of representatives of the various political parties of the plains of Assam and the APHLC. The aim of constituting this Committee was to make an effort to reach an agreed solution for the reorganisation of Assam. But this Committee also failed to bring about any agreed formula. Therefore, the representatives from the plains of Assam suggested that the talk might be allowed to continue even beyond the 13th July 1967. The Home Minister thought that something tangible might come out of the dialogue. Therefore, he allowed the committee to continue its deliberations upto 31st August 1967.

After realising that the Government of India would not
implement the federal plan or its alternative, clean cut separation on or before 13th July, being the target date for the implementation of the plan, the APHLC had to meet in the general Conference. The 17th Session of the APHLC which met at Tura on 14th July 1967 deeply regretted the failure of the Government of India to keep to its time schedule of six months to reorganise the State of Assam. Therefore, the APHLC decided not to participate in the Ashok Mehta Committee constituted by the Government of India.

The Mehta Committee should have discontinued its work when one of the important parties had made it known that it would not participate in the deliberations. Instead, the Committee examined witnesses to find out the solution. The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee which met on 21st August 1967 framed its own proposals for the reorganisation of Assam but those proposals were essentially based on the recommendations of the Pataskar Commission. B.P. Chaliha who gave his evidence on behalf of the State Government before the Committee suggested that each of the autonomous districts should be converted into an autonomous area in the State of Assam. However, he was prepared to accept, if there was any proposal, that two or more autonomous districts would form one single autonomous area provided that such proposal was agreed to by two-third majority of the members of such district councils.

Further, Chaliha suggested that each autonomous area should have its own representative council of not less than twenty members and not more than forty members. Moreover, not more than three members should be nominated to represent the minority communities. The Council should elect its own Chairman and Deputy Chairman. The Council of Representatives should have full powers to make laws in respect of forty-nine subjects in the State list of the seventh
Schedule of the Constitution. He strongly argued that from the point of view of security as well as peace and order, there was a dire necessity that Law and Order, Police and Prisons should be retained with the State of Assam. Again, he said that the concurrent list would contain four subjects.

Each autonomous area should have its own executive consisting the Chief Executive Councillor elected by the Council and some councillors who would be appointed by the Governor, on the advice of the Chief Executive Councillor. But Atul Chandra Goswami was in favour of the appointment of the Chief Executive Councillor by the Governor.

Each autonomous area should have its own Secretariat which should be under the control of a Secretary to be deputed by the Government of Assam and he should be designated as the Principal Secretary. The Principal Secretary should be not below the rank of an additional magistrate. He should have full control of the administrative set up for the autonomous areas and the subjects assigned to it.

Lastly, the autonomous areas would continue to be represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Chaliha also suggested that the autonomous areas should have adequate representation in the Cabinet. One Cabinet Minister from the hill areas might be placed in charge of the autonomous areas. He might be assisted by a number of junior ministers. All Ministers should be appointed by the Chief Minister in his own discretion.

Hem Barua of the PSP, in his evidence strongly pleaded that the recommendation of the Pataskar Commission should be accepted with certain modifications. According to him, the modifications which could be made were the following. First, each of the
autonomous districts should be represented in the Assam Cabinet. Secondly, there should be a separate commission for economic development of the hill areas with equal number of representatives to be elected by the District Councils. The Commission should be an independent body directly under the control of the Union finance and Planning Ministry. Lastly, it is not understood how an experienced parliamentarian like Hem Barua did not understand the implication of his proposal when he suggested that the district police should be under the control of the District Council which did not mean that the State police should be dispensed with.

Phani Bora, the leader of the Communist Party, on the other hand, pleaded that the hill people should be granted a separate State. He even suggested that each hill district might be granted a separate State. However, Phani Bora said that it was open to the Hill people themselves to combine together and have a State of their own.

Chetra Singh Teron pleaded that it was desirable to grant autonomy to each autonomous district because of the fact that the conditions varied from one autonomous district to another. Samsul Huda agreed with the views expressed by B.P. Chaliha except one point of view. According to him, all the hill areas might be treated as an autonomous region. But if any hill area did not want to join the autonomous region, it should not be compelled to do so. Atul Chandra Goswami gave his suggestion that there should be the decentralization of State powers to the different districts both hills and plains. There should be an integrated political set-up for the whole of North East India. He also pleaded that the distribution of powers between the State and the centre should be revised.
A close examination of the views expressed by various leaders of the plains of Assam reveals certain underlying facts. A number of conclusions could be arrived at. First, excepting Phani Bora, all leaders pleaded that the unity and integrity of the State should be maintained. Secondly, maximum autonomy should be granted to each autonomous district. Thirdly, the federal plan was unacceptable to the people of the plains because it would lower the status of Assam and it would pave the way to the complete disintegration of the State. Lastly, there was a general agreement that the quantum of autonomy that should be granted to the hill areas should be only to that extent that the hill areas should be under the control of Assam.

Mehta Committee recommendations: The Mehta Committee made the following recommendations, which, on closer scrutiny, were not its own, but they were the echoes of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. First, the federal plan should not be the basis for the reorganisation of Assam. Secondly, it recommended that maximum autonomy should be given to the Hill areas. Thirdly, each hill district should be given the status of an autonomous area, but they should have the right to merge with another hill district by a resolution to be passed by the district council concerned by a two-third majority of the total strength of the council. Such amalgamation of the hill districts might result in the formation of an autonomous Area.

The details of the scheme were as follows: first, the legislature of the autonomous areas would have the power to make laws on all subjects assigned to it. Secondly, the subjects to be transferred to the Autonomous area should be those enumerated in the Sixth Schedule and some other subjects such as agriculture,
post graduate education, enforcement of weights and measures, relief of agricultural indebtedness, regulation of cinema, transport within the autonomous area or areas. Thirdly, the legislature of each autonomous area would consist of not more than 40 members and not less than 20 members who were to be elected on the basis of adult franchise. Besides the elected members, each legislature would also have three nominated members to represent the minorities. It would elect its own chairman and Deputy chairman. Fourthly, the executive power of any autonomous area in respect of subjects assigned to it should be exercised by the Governor on the advice of the Executive Council which should be responsible to the legislature. Fifthly, the Executive Council might consist of the Chief Executive Councillor to be appointed by the Governor and two other executive councillors to be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Executive Councillor.

The Committee recommended that the Executive Council should have its own Secretariat.

As regards legislation, the Mehta Committee recommended that all bills passed by any legislature of any autonomous region should be submitted to the Governor for assent. The Governor should act on the advice of the Chief Minister of Assam who would consult the Minister of the Tribal Affairs Department.

While appointing Ministers from the hill areas, the Chief Minister should consult the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly representing the hill areas as well as the Chief Executive Councillors of the autonomous areas.

The Mehta Committee suggested 49 subjects of the State list of the Seventh Schedule to be assigned to the autonomous area or areas.
The Assam Congress, the District Council of Mikir Hills and the District Council of North Cachar Hills welcomed the proposals of the Mehta Committee. The Assam Pradesh Congress Committee hailed that the Mehta Committee Report was a unique consensus of the different political parties. But it forgot the fact that the APHIC was not a party to it. The Assam Congress said that the recommendations of the Mehta Committee were definitely an improvement on the Pataskar Commission recommendations because they provided maximum autonomy for the hill areas and at the same time maintained the unity and integrity of Assam. It gave the substance of the demand of the APHLC. The Assam Congress, further said that the Mehta Plan was better than the federal plan because it recognised that each hill area was distinct in language and culture from the other.

A close study of the stand taken by the Assam Congress reveals a pertinent fact. It knew the fate of the Mehta Committee proposals. In fact, the Assam Congress played a hide and seek diplomacy as they did in the case of Sylhet twenty years ago. It appears that the Congress leaders were anxious to get rid of the hill areas because they were deficit areas. But at the same time, they were anxious to keep the group opposed to Chaliha at bay by openly telling the people that the hill areas should not be separated from Assam in the interest of unity and integrity.

Although the APHLC did not take part in the proceedings of the Mehta Committee, yet the Government of India thought it worthwhile to place the Mehta Committee Report before the APHLC. The APHLC rejected the Mehta plan on a number of grounds. The APHLC was never a party to the formulation of the plan; the Mehta plan aimed at breaking the unity which had already established among the hill tribes on flimsy grounds that the different tribes had
different social customs, ethnic origin, language etc; that the Hill Ministers would be appointed by the Chief Minister in his own discretion; that the autonomy promised by the Committee was ephemeral, that it would tie the hill people to the chariot wheel of Assam despite the fact that there were fundamental differences between the hill people and the plains people; that Ashok Mehta had tried to protect the status of Assam. As a matter of fact, the status theory propounded by Ashok Mehta was enough to kill the proposals of the Committee. Therefore, the APHLC at its mass public meeting held in Shillong on 15th September 1967 strongly urged upon the Government of India to implement the January 13 announcement or to constitute a separate Hill State for the hill areas. "However, the hill people should also prepare for the worst and the meeting hereby calls upon them to keep themselves in full readiness to start a mass constitutional struggle at short notice, ..........should the Government of India fail to implement its decision".

The APHLC delegation met the Prime Minister and the Home Minister on 25th September 1967 and urged upon them to implement the Government of India's decision or create a separate State for the hill areas. For a time, it appeared as if the Government of India was really in a difficult position to remove the deadlock. On the one side, there were the political parties in the plains which stood firm on two issues - no federal plan and no separation of the hills from the State of Assam. On the other side there was the APHLC which would not budge an inch from its stand - federal plan or clean cut separation. The Government of India was then like a helpless mother sitting between two warring sons. Therefore, the Government of India referred the whole issue to the National forum, without making any decision on the Mehta Committee Report.
A question may be asked - why did the Government of India refer this matter to a National forum when in the past, no matter had ever been referred to? It may be recalled that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi with all her sincerity, foresight, dynamism, imagination and practical leadership was in an embarrassing position. Her Home Minister Y.B. Chavan had assured the APHLC that if the people of Assam valley would not accept the federal plan, the other alternative would be a clean cut separation from Assam. On the other hand, her Deputy Prime Minister, Morarji Desai was the greatest antagonist to the Hill State demand. The APHLC leaders would admit the fact that they had a harum scarum whenever they talked of Hill State with Morarji Desai. Moreover, Morarji Desai's view was strongly supported by Ashok Mehta, S.K. Patil and other leaders. Hence, the matter had to be referred to a National forum. Nevertheless, this was a unique experiment in parliamentary democracy. Further, by referring the issue to the National forum, the AICC would escape the criticism by the APCC. The Central Government did the correct thing by choosing this course of action.

The protagonists and the antagonists of Hill State - viz., the APHLC and the APCC had to carry out intense lobbying to enlist the support and sympathy of the different political parties especially the opposition parties. The APHLC was successful in enlisting the full support of the Swatantra which was then an official opposition party in both Houses of Parliament. It could also enlist the support of the DMK and of many independent members of Parliament.

The Council of Action of the APHLC then met on 20th December, 1967 to review the developments which had been taking place so far. The Council of Action regretted that the Congress leaders went back on the federal plan or the creation of a Hill State and thereby
threatened to launch Satyagraha if the demand of the hill leaders was not conceded.

Meanwhile there was widespread agitation in the Assam valley. The hartal in the Assam valley on 24th January 1968 for the cause of "Assam for the Assamese" which was raised in an organised manner resulted in some cases of assault on innocent persons, large scale act of violence, looting and arson against the non-Assamese minority community and eventually culminated in the desecration of the National flag on Republic day, the 26th January 1968.

After reviewing the events which had taken place in the Assam valley, the Council of Action which met on 7th February 1968 pointed out thus: "These incidents provide yet another proof that the hill areas can no longer form part of the present state of Assam; and this Council of Action therefore, strongly urges upon the Government of India to lose no further time in implementing its decision to reorganise the State of Assam and have a Bill passed in the forth-coming session of Parliament constituting the hill areas into a separate State". It also appealed to the hill people to act in a disciplined manner and to harbour no animosity or bitterness in their hearts against any community whether in the hills or in the plains. The Prime Minister and the Home Minister then requested the APHLC leaders to have informal talks with the Chief Minister of Assam and his colleagues in order to find out an agreed solution to the tangled problem of reorganising the State of Assam. The two parties met on 18th and 20th March 1968 but no result came out of the talks. Thereafter both the parties met the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and other Cabinet Ministers who were members of the Internal Affairs
Committee on 21st March 1968. The problem remained as hard and as difficult as it had been before. Therefore, the APHLC approached the Prime Minister on 29th April 1968 to request her to take a final decision. However, the Prime Minister told the delegation that she needed some time to find out a most salutory solution to the problem, but she assured the hill leaders that she would make a decision within a fortnight.

On 14th May 1968, the Home Minister, Chavan made an announcement that the plan that the Government of India was contemplating was the creation of an autonomous Hill State which would be separated from Assam for all purposes except for a few subjects of mutual advantage which would still continue to be under the purview of the Assam Legislative Assembly and which should be administered by the Government of Assam. Thinking that this plan was similar to the Nehru Plan, the APHLC rejected outright and threatened to launch the non-violent direct action for achieving the Hill State. But at the request of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, the APHLC leader spent the first fortnight of June 1968 to hold discussions with the Central leaders in Delhi. But the discussion was confined to the demand of a separate Hill State by the APHLC. At the request of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister the APHLC did not take any precipitate action as the Central Government was contemplating to take action in the next session of Parliament.

The 18th session of the APHLC met at Tura from 25th to 30th June 1968 to consider the new plan offered by the Government of India and the request to postpone the Satyagraha movement made by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. The session was presided over by R.S.Iyngdoh. It was the longest session ever recorded in the history of the APHLC. A long debate took place on this issue. G.G.Swell argued
strongly that the plan for the creation of an autonomous State should be accepted. He was strongly supported by Ohiwot Khonglah and a few others. But Hoover Hynniewta and Hopingstone Lyngdoh were of the opinion that the plan could not be accepted. They pointed out that the new plan offered by the APHLC was another means of delaying tactics on the part of the Government of India. But the majority of the members expressed their opinion with great reservations. In the heat of the discussion, it was suggested that the conference should first examine the strength of the volunteer organisation. Hopingstone Lyngdoh who was then Chief organiser of the volunteer wing, Khasi Hills gave a rosy picture of the volunteer organisation. But A.B. Pugh, Secretary of the District Branch of the Khasi Hills APHLC disclosed the fact that he was not happy with the way how Hopingstone Lyngdoh had managed to train the volunteers. He charged Hopingstone Lyngdoh that he did not adhere to the principles of satyagraha. In the light of this new situation the conference appointed a committee headed by Capt. W.A. Sangma to assess and discuss the situation. It was in the secret sitting of this committee that Hopingstone Lyngdoh admitted that he had a hand in an incident in which a number of non-violent Direct Action volunteers of Khasi Hills had forcibly and illegally taken possession of a certain toll gate maintained by a certain individual and had also seized and detained trucks belonging to the said individual. Over and above these, it was also found that Mr. H.S. Lyngdoh had acted in a manner prejudicial to the interest of the people and in a manner which was defiant in nature against the Executive Committee of the Khasi Hills District APHLC in that he disobeyed the instructions and directions issued to him in relation to his work as Chief Organiser. Hence, on 30th June 1968, H.S. Lyngdoh was expelled from
the party, but the expulsion order was communicated to him on 1st July 1968.

At the conclusion of the session, the APHLC expressed its deep sense of regret and resentment at the continued delay of the Government of India to reorganise Assam either on the basis of federal plan structure or on the basis of clean cut separation of the Hill areas from Assam. It reiterated that the creation of a separate Hill State would be "the best, simplest and final solution". Nevertheless, after the conference had taken note of the sincere attempt of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister to meet the political aspirations of the hill people, it expressed its trust in the assurances of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, it also decided to respond to their earnest appeal not to take any precipitate action. Therefore the Conference counselled the hill people to exercise restraint and patience for some time more by assuring the people that the APHLC would see that any form of reorganisation of Assam should confer on the hill areas requisite dignity and equal status with the rest of Assam. But in the event of the failure of the Government of India to finalise the reorganisation of Assam in the next session of Parliament, the APHLC would launch a satyagraha, but the date of launching should be decided by a committee consisting of the Chairman and the General Secretary of the Central Council of Action, the Central Chief Organiser and the District Chief Organisers of the volunteer wing of the APHLC.

The expulsion of H.S. Lyngdoh from the APHLC, resulted in the resignation of five Members of the District Council, Khasi Hills, eighteen circle organisers of the non-violent Direct Action volunteer organisation and quite a sizeable number of volunteers from the APHLC. Hoover Hynniewta was wavering, but he did not resign from
the APHLC although he was very critical of the Party. Over and above these events, the death of a young and energetic Secretary of the Khasi Hills District APHLC, A.B. Pugh by committing suicide gave a jolt to the APHLC in the Khasi Hills for some time. H.S. Lyngdoh, in his press statement charged the Chairman of the APHLC and the Chairman of the Khasi Hills District Branch for their illegal action against him. But the Council of Action which met on 16th July 1968 hailed the expulsion as "timely, correct and necessary to meet the situation and in the interest of the hill people and the country as a whole". The Council of Action further stated that the expulsion of H.S. Lyngdoh was not done on the basis of any complaint or report made by any member of the APHLC but on the strength of his own statements before the Committee consisting of the Chairman and 27 other members. The Council of Action found H.S. Lyngdoh guilty of grave party indiscipline in as much as he had violated the basic principles of non-violence and of the use of constitutional and legal means in the pursuit of the party's objectives of the Khasi Hills by refusing to comply with the directives of the Khasi Hills District Executive of the APHLC in the matter of his work as the Chief Organiser of the District non-violent Direct Action Organisation.

Despite the response given by the APHLC to postpone the Satyagraha, the Government of India still found itself a prisoner of indecision. The Council of Action, therefore, was compelled to decide to launch the non-violent direct action, but the date of launching of satyagraha was left to the discretion of the Chairman and the General Secretary. G. S. Swell tried to persuade S. D. D. Nichols-Roy, General Secretary on 1st September 1968 not to resort to direct action before the announcement of the decision of the
Government of India on the reorganisation of Assam. But the Council of Action decided that action would speak louder than words. The Council of Action was convinced that if Mahatma Gandhi could free the nation from foreign yoke through peaceful constitutional satyagraha, the hill people would achieve their objective through the same means. In fact, the APHLC knew the decision of the Government of India, yet it decided to launch the non-violent direct action because the details of the plan had not been spelled out. There were many factors which made the APHLC to make such a decision. First, by experience, the APHLC had found that both the Nehru Plan and the federal plan were thrown to the wind because of the opposition of the plains people. It feared that this time also, the new scheme might be thrown away as soon as there was an opposition in the plains. Further, if any plan was to be accepted, it should be referred to the people as was done in the past. Secondly, the APHLC did not want to make itself a prisoner of indecision. Thirdly, the APHLC had to satisfy the urge for action on the part of the volunteer wing of the party. Lastly, the APHLC did not want that the political situation in the Hill Areas should fall into the hands of the Bess-who had resigned from the party after the expulsion of H.S. Lyngdoh.

The volunteers' role in the struggle reached culmination on 10th September, 1968, when they came out in hundreds to paralyse the administration of the Government of Assam in Shillong. While hundreds of disciplined green-capped volunteers picketed the Assam Civil Secretariat building led by the toll General Secretary S.D.D. Nichols-Roy who were ready to court arrest, thousands and thousands more were ready to go to jails in order to bring about the hill people's objective for a separate State. On 11th September 1968,
the volunteers were fully prepared to go to jails but incidentally, it was a holiday on that day. They did their job, singing and smiling while a number of police cars were re-enforced. Immediately on the same day, the Government of India announced its decision to create the Autonomous Hill State. Thus the mission of the volunteers proved to be effective.

In the long struggle of the APHLC for the attainment for separate Hill State, there were a number of set-backs. But these set-backs did not discourage the people and the APHLC leaders. On the contrary, they made them all the more determined to press their claim which they deeply believed in their heart of hearts would be in the best interests of the people of the Hills and the plains of the then composite State of Assam, and of the whole country too. The struggle dragged on. The weak and the faltering fell by the wayside. The strong and the determined enlisted the support of friends and foes. The leaders of the APHLC were convinced of the justness of their cause. The means they adopted to achieve their end was acceptable to a vast majority of the people. While they used strong language, their deeds were constitutional. Their infinite capacity for patience and perseverance in carrying on negotiation for ten long years paid them ultimately good dividends. The struggle for statehood is significant for its constitutionality. It was not marred by violence as in other places. It is unique for the complete absence of communal hatred. The people chose the paths of peace. They did not allow hesitations, prevarications and procrastinations to tempt them to rashness. Theirs was an unshaken faith that a day would come when India would have a leader who would appreciate their stand. They did not have to wait long. A charismatic leader came in the person of Shrimati Indira Gandhi.
With her as the Prime Minister, the Government and the people of India, realised the reasonableness of the demand of the hill people. Thus came the momentous declaration of 11th September 1968. A question arose by what name the new State should be called. At last, Dr. S.P. Chatterjee, the renowned geographer supplied the name - Māghalaya - a name which is not only musical and typical of the region - its scudding clouds and rains, its silvery streams and dreamy waterfalls - but also reminiscent of the great work of immortal Kalidasa, "The Meghdoot", an evocative of the lofty ideals of India's ancient Rishis to lift the Motherland higher and higher up to the Mount of Wisdom, power and glory. Shrimati Indira Gandhi, like a true loving mother knows that a child must crawl before it stands, must walk before it runs. Therefore she offered the hill people an autonomous State. The 19th Session of the APHLC which met from 17th to 19th September 1968 decided to place the new plan before the people. After ascertaining the views of the people, the 20th session of the APHLC which met on 14th and 15th October 1968 decided to give the Autonomous Hill State Plan a fair trial, but that it would continue in its effort to achieve a fully separate State. Thus a stage was set for the amendment of the constitution and for the drafting of the Reorganisation Bill.

A question may be asked - what were the reasons for the success of the APHLC in the creation of the Hill State? The Andhras had to fight for separation from Madras for forty years, Vidarbha is not yet successful for its separation from Maharashtra, Telengana and Andhra both wanted separation but they could not succeed. The success of the APHLC may be attributed to various factors. First, there was sound leadership backed by massive support. Secondly, there was weak opposition in Assam. The sporadic eruption of violence
in the Assam valley indirectly helped the APHLC to gain more support from all sides. Thirdly, the APHLC never made any drastic decision without consulting the people. Fourthly, the methods adopted by the APHLC were constitutional and peaceful. The APHLC, on a number of occasions decided to launch direct action but it rarely resorted to it. It threatened to boycott elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly and never carried it out. It fixed the date for direct action but postponed or kept the resolution in abeyance when circumstances changed. The attitude of the APHLC may appear to be paradoxical. But to those political scientists who understand the complicated problems of the Hill areas, the attitude of the APHLC does not appear to be paradoxical. As Dr. V.V. Rao correctly puts it: "The leaders of the APHLC were pragmatists who anchored their boat near the shore lines of reality...........They should retreat when it is necessary but at all times they should not make compromise with the end in view".¹ Above all, the APHLC did not cause embarrassment to the Government of India at critical times. When China invaded the North East India, the APHLC did not take advantage of the delicate situation. On the other hand, it kept in abeyance the non-violent direct action resolution and cooperated fully with the Government of India in all its war efforts. This factor played an important part in inducing the Government of India to listen attentively to the demand of the APHLC.

The APHLC was fortunate to have leaders of different abilities and accomplishment. It had a good number of able organisers, orators and intellectuals. The following description of Dr. V. Venkata Rao clearly depicts the leaders of the APHLC.

"The principal leaders of the party are essentially moderates and constitutionalists. They are not accustomed to use strong language. They belong to the middle class which is emerging in all the developing countries. One of them held the post of General Secretary - the key post - during the entire period of the struggle for statehood. He belongs to the centre holding the right and the left of the party so that they might not come to clash. The second is a good organiser. Over and above them there was a captain who maintained discipline in the party. He had the qualities of leadership. His experience in the army and in politics enabled him to control the party effectively. Besides them there was another who provided leadership in the intellectual field. This can be seen in the several memorandums prepared by the APHLC for submission to the Government of India. It must also be said that the leaders of the APHLC are free from charges of corruption".  

2. Ibid.