CHAPTER VII

POLITICAL PARTIES.
INTRODUCTION:

The Autonomous Hill districts of North East India had one or more local parties in each of them and a few regional parties functioning in two or more districts at a time. The Indian National Congress was the only national party which had on occasions played a significant, if not always a salutary role in the politics of the Hill Areas.

Prominent among the local parties which influenced political and constitutional development in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills before Independence and immediately after were the Khasi National Durbar, the Khasi States People's Union, and the Khasi Jaintia Federated States National Conference. The East India Tribal Union emerged in 1952 and exercised a great deal of influence as a champion of the cause of a separate Hill State. The self same cause was taken up even more vigorously by the All Party Hill Leaders Conference almost since its inception in 1949.

The APHLC had been more or less a federal party with the Garo National Council in the Garo Hills district, the Mizo Union and the United Mizo Freedom Organisation in the Mizo district as its notable constituents. After the formation of Meghalaya, the APHLC became confined to Meghalaya politics. It had emerged as the single dominant party in the State Legislature. But it did not seem to be so popular at the level of the District Council for in the general elections held to the Khasi and Jaintia District Council in 1972, the Hill Peoples Democratic Party with the support of the Congress triumphed over the APHLC and formed the government.
Of all the political parties in the Hill Areas of North West India, the Garo National Council had sound and stable leadership. It has enjoyed almost an unchallenged supremacy in the Garo Hills district. Even after the inclusion of the Garo Hills district in the State of Meghalaya, the GNC had not formally dissolved itself. While it had a definite understanding with the APHLC, it had never fully surrendered its identity.

Prominent among the parties and organisations influencing the administration and politics in the Mizo Hills district were the Mizo Union, the United Mizo Freedom Organisation, and the Mizo National Front. The EITU, APHLC and the Congress had also exercised varying degrees of influence in Mizo politics.

The only political organisation under which the meek and mild Mikirs were rallied together in the beginning was the Karbi-Aghor. Later the Congress party gained supremacy in the Mikir Hills and became as powerful as the GNC in the Garo Hills district.

In the North Cachar Hills sub-division the various tribes and sub-tribes rallied themselves through what was known as the Tribal Council which gave an organised expression to their rights and demands before the Bardoloi Sub-Committee and thereafter. Gradually, however, the Congress gained supremacy and the Peoples Democratic Party emerged as its principal contender.

In both the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills in general, personal loyalties played a more significant part in politics than party considerations and a few wealthy and influential families controlled the District Councils.
A detailed survey of the working of the political parties in the Autonomous districts of North East India may now be undertaken.
Among the Hill Areas of North East India, political awareness grew first in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills which had also been the seat of the provincial capital almost from the beginnings of the British rule. The Khasi National Durbar was the first political party to be set up in the Khasi Hills in 1923 largely at the initiative of Rev. J.J.M. Roy, a Khasi pastor belonging to the Church of God, and a wealthy orange planter graduating from Calcutta. The Durbar consisted of the Khasi Sems and other aristocrats. It met in annual sessions. Being primarily an association of the Khasi chiefs, the Durbar became naturally a champion of the rights of the Khasi states. Indeed, it urged on the British government to respect the independence of the Khasi states in the spirit of the original treaties executed by the latter with David Scott.

The Khasi National Durbar was also keen on introducing certain reforms. In its very first session held at Shillong in 1923, the Durbar took up the question of unauthorised settlers in the Khasi states and declared that under the Khasi law no Khasi settler could become a qualified citizen unless he placed himself in the protection of the state.


2. It was alleged that under the original treaties the independent or at least semi-independent status of the chiefs was recognised. Later the practice of issuing sanads by the viceroy was adopted. The sanads were no more than letters of appointment to which the assent of the people had not been secured and were, therefore, anomalous. The original treaties were said to have been approved by the councils of the people. The procedure for the issue of sanads had also been contested. In the beginning, they were issued by the viceroy. Finally they came to be issued by the Deputy Commissioners. The Durbar emphasised the need for respecting the old treaties and of issuing the sanads by the viceroy.
which he came to reside. In 1925 the Durbar brought out a codified O o i.v of customary laws. Further attempts to codify customary laws had, however, proved unsuccessful.3

In 1928 the Khasi National Durbar was faced with a crisis. Headed by the Siem of Khyrim, the Durbar decided not to make any representation to the Indian Statutory (Simon) Commission as it was thought that the proper authority to whom the states could turn was the States Commission. But the latter was not visiting the Khasi Hills. Meanwhile Joab Solomon who succeeded Nichols Roy as the Secretary of the Khasi National Durbar and two others submitted a memorandum to the visiting Simon Commission and urged the latter, amongst other things, to constitute a Central Durbar as a kind of federation of all the states with the power to make laws subject to the assent of the Governor, levy taxes and frame rules for the conduct of its own business as well as of its executive committee. Solomon and his co-memorialists demanded further that the existing Khasi National Durbar be legalised as the representative of the Khasi states.

Solomon's memorandum had almost immediately stirred up a great deal of public controversy. Solomon was criticised for having acted without sufficient authority. His suggestion for a central Durbar of Khasi states was hotly contested. It was argued that none but a duly constituted Durbar in which every male member of the society had a right to participate could take a decision binding the state concerned or its

people. The Khasi National Durbar, "as at present composed" was criticised as being too young and "still far from being a representative body."

While the Khasi National Durbar was involved in internal controversies of its own, the Jaintia Durbar headed by Rev. L. Gatpoh submitted its own memorandum to the Simon Commission urging the latter to include the Khasi-Jaintia people within the scheme of the proposed reforms and not relegate them to the position of a "frontier tribe" and thereby retard their progress.

The Simon Commission had left the problem of the Khasi state untouched and recommended increased representation of the British subjects in the provincial legislature.

From the early thirties to early fifties, the Khasi National Durbar was virtually unheard of. During the years of the transfer of power, two new political parties namely the Khasi states' Peoples Union and the Khasi Jaintia Federated States National Conference, came into existence. The former lent full support to the efforts of the Khasi states to organise themselves into a federation. The latter pleaded for the adoption of the scheme of the District Councils as envisaged by the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council was inaugurated in June 1952. In September there was a sort of a 'Coup' in the Khasi National Durbar, "once the fortress of Siems and now practically defunct." 4

4. Proceedings of a public meeting organised by the Khasi Jaintia Young Men's Association held on December 22, 1928. Babu Sib Charan Roy who along with a few others submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission denouncing the representative character of Solomon's memorandum was, in the chair. See Chaube, S., 'Hill Politics of North East India', pp. 63-64.
5. Ibid., p. 108.
Durbar was reorganised. Wilson Reade, a close relative of the Siem of Khyrim became its President and Hoover Hynniewta who led a big student demonstration against the District Council on the very day of its inauguration, its Secretary. With this, the Durbar became more thoroughly Siem-dominated. The more moderate Nichols Roy faction was completely alienated. Since there was no going back on the District Councils, the Khasi National Durbar demanded greater autonomy in the working of the District Councils, and minimum interference by the State Government. During Nehru's visit to Shillong on October 19, 1952, the Durbar presented him with a memorandum. A number of demands were made. First, the system of nomination to the District Council should be abolished. Second, the Governor should have no discretion in giving his assent to the laws passed by the District Council. Third, Shillong should be merged in the Autonomous District of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Fourth, mining rights within the District should not be disposed of by the Government of Assam. Opposition to the Assamese language was also expressed. Finally, the memorandum demanded the unification of all Assam Hills under one administration.

Thus for the first time, the idea of a Hill State was mooted by the Khasi National Durbar. The East India Tribal Union which gave an organised expression to this idea was, in fact, a party sponsored by the Khasi National Durbar.

THE KHASI STATES PEOPLES UNION AND THE KHASI JAINTIA FEDERATED STATES NATIONAL CONFERENCE:

On the eve of the British departure from India, political movements in the Assam Hills began crystallising themselves into two
rival camps. The supporters of traditionalism and chiefly rights formed one camp. The integrationists who had also favoured healthy social change and democratic reform constituted another. In the Khasi Hills, the two camps became sharply opposed to each other. The chiefs dominated the Khasi National Durbar. They also formed an association of the Khasi States and later a federation. Rev. Nichols Roy tried in vain to bring the Khasi States closer to the administered areas and the rest of the province of Assam through the instrumentality of the Khasi National Durbar. But as the Durbar became increasingly siem-dominated, he broke away from it and constituted a new party called the Khari-Jaintia Federated States National Conference.

Much as the Khasi chiefs tried, they failed in their efforts to get the Dominion Government recognise their new-found federation. But the chiefs continued their efforts and organised support for themselves through the establishment of a new party called the Khasi States Union. Representatives of the said federation and the Khasi States Union waited on Sardar Patel, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister in charge of the Ministry of States when the latter visited the Khasi States early in 1948 and presented him an address of welcome in which they stated:

6. The Khasi States Federation came into existence in 1945-46. A draft of its constitution was ready by July, 1946. The Federation was to administer such subjects as external affairs, law and order, public works, communication, education and so on. There was to be a federal legislature to be called the Durbar of the Khasi States. A Committee of ministers, not less than four and not more than eight would be appointed by Durbar to hold office during its pleasure. There was also to be a Federal Court. One of the objectives of the Federation was to secure the true unity of the States and their integrity, if necessary by merging non-States into their respect we parent states or organise them as new states. See Draft Constitution of the Federation of the Khasi States, dated July 2, 1946.
"We thank you a thousand times that you have been pleased to ratify the Instrument of Accession and the Agreement of India which we have together signed and executed...... The Covenant, we firmly believed, opens the way by which we can retain our time honoured rights and privileges, promote and consolidate the political relations with the other members of the Dominion for strengthening and shedding lustre on the great Dominion of India."  

Despite all efforts, the Khasi States failed to get representation in the Constituent Assembly, even collectively. The only opportunity left to them to mobilise support for their own stand was to contest the elections to the Khasi States Constituent Durbar convened by the Governor of Assam with a view to ascertaining the wishes of the people of the Khasi Hills District as a whole. The elections to the Constituent Durbar in which the adult male members alone could participate were held in late 1948 and early 1949. The Khasi States were represented by the Khasi States People's Union. The party was led by such prominent spokesmen as Prof. R.R. Thomas, reputed for his erudition, G.G. Swell, Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh, the first woman in Assam to be appointed minister, the Siem of Khyriem and Roy Bahadur D. Ropmay. The main objective of the People's Union was to get the rights of the siems, as recognised in the Instrument of Accession and the Annexed Agreement, incorporated into the Constitution of India. The Khasi-Jaintia Hills Federated States National Conference led by Rev. Nichols Roy had also contested the elections to the Khasi Constituent Durbar. Its main objective was to mobilise support 

7. Quoted by Bareh, H. 'The History and Culture of the Khasi People', p. 241.
for the scheme of the District Councils as suggested by the Baraolei Sub-
Committee of which Nichols Roy himself was a prominent member.

The Khasi States Constitution making Durbar met from July 11 to
July 21, 1949. The People's Union led by Prof. Thomas pleaded for the
acceptance of the Khasi States Federation for the States as well as non-
states. On behalf of the Federated States National Conference, Nichols
Roy moved the Durbar to accept the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of
India. Various schemes of compromise were proposed without success.
Nichols Roy was supported by a majority of the elected members. But the
chiefs and their supporters had an edge over him in the total membership
of the Durbar. The Durbar failed to make any specific recommendation to
the Constituent Assembly which was by now well on its way to complete
the task of framing the Constitution. The result was that the Khari
semships were put within Assam by an Act of State, that is by the amem-
gation of the Constitution of India. It was indirectly a victory for
Nichols Roy and his Khasi Jaintia Hills Federated States National Confe-
rence. The Khasi States People's Union died a natural death.

THE EAST INDIA TRIBAL UNION (EITU):

The EITU was born out of a desire on the part of the Hill
people to be separated from Assam and constituted into a Hill State of
their own. The demand for a Hill State was itself the cumulative effect
of a complex variety of forces operating both before and after Independe-
dence. The policy of the British Raj had been consistently one of keeping
the Hill Areas isolated from the rest of Assam. The Hill people in
general had little in common with the people of the Plains. Added to that, during the second world war some of the British officers who were stationed in the Hill districts had instilled in the minds of the Tribal people half-baked ideas of independence. Plans were also hatched in England that the Hill Areas of North East India might be constituted into a sort of a Crown Colony. The result of all this was that when the Bardoloi Sub-Committee visited the Hill Areas with a view to ascertaining the views of the tribal people, the extremist elements among the Nagas and the Lushais demanded nothing short of an independent status for themselves, "the external relations under which would be governed by treaty or agreement only." The more moderate sections expressed fear of exploitation of their land by the people of the Plains. In the circumstances, the scheme of Autonomous District Councils as envisaged in the Sixth Schedule did not satisfy the Hill people fully; nor did it set their fears at rest. The Naga National Council was totally opposed to it. The Khasi and the Lushai chiefs were also against it, as it would deprive them of their traditional rights. But due largely to the respect and confidence in which the then Prime Minister of Assam, Sri Gopinath Bardoloi was held and the sincere efforts made by that stalwart among the Hill leaders, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy, the more amenable sections among the Hill people accepted the Sixth Schedule and agreed to give it a fair trial. For a time an atmosphere of Hill Plains amity prevailed.

The District Councils were inaugurated in 1952. The reactionary elements in the tribal society - the chiefs and the like were, however,

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waiting for an opportunity to wreck the Councils from within. On the very day of the inauguration of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council, there was a big student demonstration against the nomination of a few non-tribals to the District Council by the Governor of Assam. The siem-controlled Khasi National Durbar took advantage of the situation to demand the abolition of the system of nomination to the District Council by the Governor. The Government of Assam was accused of appropriating a large part of the District revenues through their control over the grant of mining rights. Opposition was also expressed to the alleged imposition of the Assamese language. Above all, the Khasi National Durbar demanded the Unification of all Assam Hills under one administration.

The Khasi Jaintia Hills District Council came under the influence of the siem backed Khasi National Durbar. The influence of the pro-Nichols Roy group which supported the Sixth Schedule seemed to be waning. It was against this background that a meeting of the representatives of the Tribal areas was convened at Tura in December 1952. The meeting resolved to form the Tribal Union which was later to be christened as the West India Tribal Union. The programme of the Tribal Union included the formation of a North Eastern Tribal State consisting of the whole of Manipur, the present Nagaland, all the tribal areas of Assam, and the tribal belt of Tripura. The Tribal Union did not wish to include the whole of Tripura for fear of Bengali domination.

10. Under Paragraph 2(1) of the Sixth Schedule, the Governor could nominate a certain number of members to the District Councils.
11. Memorandum by the Khasi National Durbar to Prime Minister Nehru on the latter's visit to Shillong on October 19, 1952.
The first President of the Tribal Union was B.M. Roy. He ran for the Office of the C.E.M., Khasi Jaintia Hills District Council ever since its inception in 1952. Twice he was defeated by the pro-Mishmi Roy candidates. But in the third attempt he succeeded in defeating H. Rynjah, his victorious rival in the previous contest and became the C.E.M. With the election of B.M. Roy as the C.E.M. the District Council came thoroughly under the influence of the Tribal Union (hereafter called the EITU).

In 1952 Capt. Williamson Sangma, C.E.M. Garo Hills District Council was an ardent admirer of Bishnuram Medhi, the Chief Minister of Assam. But in 1954 he became a bitter critic of the Sixth Schedule and a staunch supporter of the Hill State demand as was being put forward by the EITU. Indeed, at the initiative of Capt. Sangma, a meeting of the Chief Executive Members of the Autonomous Hill districts was held at Shillong on June 16-17, 1954. B.M. Roy presided. Sangma spoke first. He said that the Sixth Schedule had many loop-holes and it promised too little to safeguard the interests of the tribal people adequately. He declared further that the plainsmen had always held the Hills people in contempt and as such there would be no unity between the Hills and the Plains. There was, therefore, no alternative to demanding a Hill State.

14. Sangma was quite disappointed when Medhi after a great deal of vacillation and procrastination rejected the candidate recommended by the Garo National Council for filling up the vacancy in the membership of the District Council caused by the death of a nominated member and appointed a Congress candidate instead. For details see correspondence between Sangma and Medhi, op.cit., pp. 236-59.
But the meeting had finally adopted a resolution generally endorsing the views of Sangma. B.M. Roy was happy at the prospect of achieving unity among the Hills. The EITU seemed to be riding high on the crest of its popularity.

The third Conference of the EITU held at Tura, Garo Hills, from October 6 to 8, 1954 was attended by 46 delegates. The Mizo district was, however, unrepresented. The C.E.M. of the North Cachar Hills District Council was conspicuous by his absence. The Conference resolved unanimously to submit a memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission demanding a separate state comprising the Autonomous Hill districts of Assam.

The SRC rejected the EITU demand for a separate Hill State. On the other hand, it suggested the reexamination of the Sixth Schedule and the grant of greater autonomy to the District Councils.

The EITU held its fourth Conference at Aijal, Mizo district between October 26-28, 1955. The Conference expressed its grave concern at the SRC's inability to appreciate the legitimate aspirations of the Hill people and reiterated its demand for the unification of all Assam Hills under one administration. A memorandum to this effect was submitted to Home Minister, G.B. Pant when the latter visited Shillong on November 1, 1955.

The General Elections of 1957 were a test of the position and popularity of the EITU among the Hill districts. The EITU had the support of the UMPO and the GNC of the Mizo and Garo Hills districts respectively.

15. Proceedings of the Second Conference of the EITU.
16. The Mizo Union hosted the Aijal Conference though it refused to merge itself with the EITU.
But neither the UMFO nor the GNC had agreed to merge itself with the EITU. The EITU had, therefore, to rest content with being a district party of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district. It had set up its candidates in four out of the five constituencies into which the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district was divided. It won in three constituencies. The other two went to Independents. One of the Independent candidates elected was Rev. Nichols Roy who had by then left Congress and the Government. 

Out of about 67,000 votes polled in the constituencies in which the EITU set up its candidates, it secured 29,732 votes.

Significantly, the only Parliamentary seat reserved for the Autonomous districts was won by Hoover Hynniewta, an EITU candidate.

The EITU held its fifth Conference at Tura on May 30 and June 1, 1957. B.M. Roy was replaced by B.M. Pugh as the President of the EITU. A fresh attempt was made to reorganise the EITU on the basis of a merger of all the district parties. It was also decided to seek the advice of Jaipal Singh, a well-known tribal leader on ways to make the EITU an all-India organisation. The achievement of a Hill Status to which the party was committed was retained as its primary objective. At the same time, the Conference directed the EITU member of Parliament, H. Hynniewta to move Parliament for amendment of the Sixth Schedule in order to provide greater autonomy to the District Councils.

The efforts of the EITU to secure the amalgamation of district parties like the GNC or the UMFO proved a failure. The EITU being in

17. Nichols Roy tried to bargain with the EITU for seats in the 1957 general election. But when the bargain failed, he stood as an Independent from his home constituency of Cherrapunji.
origin, the Khasi National Durbar, the pro-Nichols Roy group would not join it. The Mizo Union was consistently opposed to the Hill State demand by the EITU. So it had never quite aligned itself with the EITU or one of its constituents. The same argument applies to the passed organisations in the North Cachar and Mikir Hills in not joining the EITU.

If the EITU did not become a strong regional party replacing the existing district parties, it had certainly rallied most of them into accepting its Hill State demand. Further, it had ousted the Congress completely from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the general elections of 1957. Congress fared badly in all the Hill districts in general.

Congress debacle in the 1957 elections moved the Centre leadership to approach the Hills problem with a sense of urgency. Barsanaram Medhi was replaced by Bimala Prasad Chaliha as the Chief Minister of Assam. At the persuasion of Pandit Nehru the EITU agreed to cooperate with the Chaliha government. Chaliha appointed Capt. Sangma as a Minister in charge of the Tribal Affairs Department. A few other tribal leaders were also grafted into the State Ministry. With the association of the EITU in the new ministry, the demand for a separate Hill State receded to the background. The relations between the Government and the District Councils became more cordial than ever before.

The hardliners in the EITU did not relish the party's conciliatory attitude towards the Hill State demand. They did not also appreciate Sangma's moderate and conciliatory approach to the problem of the autonomous Hill districts. They criticised the party's President, S. L. Pachtao.
for supporting Sangma. Meanwhile, Pugh was elected the G.E.M. of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council. After about two years in office, he had to quit when a motion of no confidence was suddenly passed against him. T. Cajee, one of Pugh's cabinet colleagues was later elected the G.E.M. Pugh was quick to react. As President of the EITU, he got Cajee suspended from the secretaryship of the party. Thereupon, Cajee got the District Committee of the EITU to suspend Pugh from the primary membership of the party. Thus when the year 1959 drew to a close, the EITU was also divided against itself with Pugh and Cajee heading two rival camps.

The two rival camps held two separate meetings at which each charged the other with gross misconduct and abuse of authority. The Pugh group convened a conference at Tura on April 27-28, 1960. The agenda included such subjects as review of the EITU's participation in the Khasi Government, amendment of the Sixth Schedule and so on. But there was no reference to the Hill State demand. The conference evinced little interest among the Hill leaders who came to attend it. The Cajee group met at Aijal on June 2-4, 1960 with only the Mizo Union proper (and not its Right wing) participating. The meeting disapproved of Cajee's suspension from the secretaryship of the party. In a last bid to restore unity, the meeting called upon both Pugh (the President) and Cajee (the Secretary of the EITU) to convene a special conference of the party by not later than June 15, 1960. The special conference was held accordingly. Its efforts to restore unity in the party had only a partial success.

19. In the elections to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council held in 1958, the EITU secured an absolute majority of the seats.
A decision on the main issues on which differences cropped up was avoided. As regards the amendment of the Sixth Schedule, for example, the Conference did no more than entrust its Mizo District branch to draft some proposals (ostensibly for future consideration). A clear reference to the Hill State demand was also avoided. The Conference merely declared that the sinister moves on the part of the militant Assamese in urging the State Government to adopt Assamese as the official language in the state would only strengthen the Hill State demand.

The EITU continued to participate in and lend support to the Chaliha Ministry as late as July 1960. Meanwhile, the controversy over the official language in the state took an unfortunate turn and the delicate arrangement broke down. The decision of the government of Assam to introduce a bill in the State Assembly declaring Assamese to be the official language led to widespread Assamese-Bengali riots. The Hill leaders demanded that the language bill be dropped. The government did not concede the demand. Thereupon the EITU withdrew from the ministry and joined the All-Party Hill Leaders Conference which emerged at a meeting of the leaders of the Hill parties held in July 1960.

THE ALL-PARTY HILL LEADERS CONFERENCE (APHLC):

The EITU was at its best a district party of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district with occasional support drawn from such other district parties as the GNC of the Garo Hills district and the MRC of the Mizo district. It had never attained the stature of an all-Hills party. The reasons are not far to seek. The EITU lacked the essential
ingredients of a strong political party, namely a sound and stable leadership, and a clear set of aims and objectives about which there is agreement among the rank and file of its following. Neither B.M. Pugh who held the office of the President of the EITU successfully had the necessary political experience to organise the party effectively and lead it through stress and strain. The EITU adopted the Hill State demand as one of its political objectives but no sooner than it participated in the Chaliha Ministry (1957) the demand for a Hill state was relegated to the background. Further, the idea of a separate Hill State did not have much of an appeal in the Mikir and North Cachar Hill districts. The Mizo Union which was the first major political party to be formed in the Mizo Hills district was clearly opposed to the Hill State demand. On the need for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule so as to provide greater autonomy to the District Councils, the Hill leaders were all agreed. The EITU was often seized of this question. But it had never quite succeeded in formulating concrete proposals for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule. Above all, the EITU had nursed within itself many diverse elements including the chiefs and other reactionary elements of the Khas National Durbar whose main object in joining it was to keep it permanently engaged in a game of confrontation with the state and the Central governments. Precisely for this reason, the EITU had for ever estranged that stalwart among the Hill leaders, namely Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy who could have been otherwise an invaluable asset to the party’s growth.

Compared to the EITU, the APHLC was truly an all-Hills organisation. It was certainly not another version of the EITU. The
issue provided the necessary psychological background for the leaders of
the Hill parties to join together under a new forum and revive the demand
for a Hill State which was kept more or less in abeyance ever since the
rejection by the States Reorganisation Commission in 1955.

The APHLC was born at a conference of the Hill leaders held in
Shillong on 6-7 July 1960. B.M. Pugh was in the chair. The new party which
had the enthusiastic support of the Hill parties as well as the Congress
Committees of the Hill districts, urged on the government of Assam to drop
the Official language Bill which the latter sought to introduce in the
legislature. A Council of Action was set up. Representatives of the latter
met the Prime Minister. They also submitted a memorandum to the President
stating that the separation of the Hill districts from Assam was the only
alternative to the acceptance of Assamese as the official language of the
state. But the State Government was determined to see the language Bill
through the legislature.

The second Conference of the APHLC met on August 22-23, 1961
under the Chairmanship of Einon Singh Sangma and resolved to submit
a memorandum to the President reiterating its opposition to Assamese as
the official language of the State. It also resolved formally to pursue
the constitution of a separate state for the Hill Areas. The Council of
Action was authorised to prepare a plan of separation and submit the same
to the third Conference of the party for approval.

One may pause to ask: was language the sole reason for the
APHLC to demand a Hill State? The controversy over the official language
and the consequent language riots in Assam provided the occasion for the
Hill State movement but not its substance. By opposing the Assamese language, the Hill man was not demanding the adoption of a tribal language. He was, on the other hand, asking for the continuance of English. While the Assam Language Act (1960) had indeed recognised in respect of the Autonomous Hill districts and Cachar. The Act had, however, cast apprehensions in the minds of the tribals that the plainsmen were out to destroy the identity of the Hill people through a quick process of assimilation, of which the adoption of Assamese as the official language was the first step. As to the Hill State demand, the APHLC was not the first to raise it. It had rather inherited the movement which was initiated by the Khadi National Durbar and thereafter by the EITU. The movement for a separate State comprising the Hill Areas gathered momentum through the operation of many factors such as "the indiscreet way in which land was distributed in Shillong and the naming of some parts of the town after some minister or the other from the plains, economic distress caused by partition, entrusting the tribal minister with the department of tribal affairs, frequent interference in the internal affairs of the District Councils, the feeling that there was not much progress in the economic development of the Hill areas although sufficient funds were placed at the disposal of the Government of Assam by the Government of India, the issue of licenses for the extraction of mineral resources in the tribal area without consulting the District Councils and so on."20 The last straw of the camel's back was, however, the demand by the people of the Plains for the declaration of Assamese as the state language and the acceptance of

20. Rao, V.V., 'The Formation of Meghalaya,' a paper published in 'Constitutional Developments since Independence' by the Indian Law Institute, Delhi, p. 364.
the same by the Chaliha Ministry in June 1960.

On October 18, 1960 Chaliha introduced the Language Bill in the legislature. While the representatives from the Brahmaputra Valley had generally welcomed it, those of the Hills had staged a walk out in protest. On October 24, Shillong witnessed a 'hartal' and a massive public demonstration against the Language Bill. But the same night, the Assembly met specially and adopted the Language Bill. The estrangement between the Hills and Plains reached a point of no return.

On November 16-18, 1960 the third All Party Hill Leaders' Conference met at Haflong, North Cachar Hills, under the Chairmanship of a Congress member of Parliament, J.B. Hagjer and resolved that the passage of the Language Bill was 'a clear proof of unfair attitude and firm determination of the Assamese community to avail themselves of undue advantages and thereby enhance their domination over the hills, people and the rest of the people of Assam.' The only solution to the problem should, therefore, be "the immediate creation of a separate Hill State."21 A delegation was appointed to meet the Prime Minister to press for the same demand.

The APHLC delegation met Prime Minister Nehru on November 24 and 26, 1960. They also met the Home Minister on November 25. The Prime Minister while appreciating the grievances of the Hill people pointed out the difficulties in accepting the demand for a separate state and suggested a scheme of greater autonomy, popularly known as the Scottish Plan. In a letter subsequently addressed to the general Secretary of the APHLC, Nehru elaborated the details of the Scottish Plan as follows:

"......the elected M.L.A's from the autonomous districts would form a committee which would especially deal with legislation and like matters relating to the hill districts, which came up before the Assembly, and their decision should prevail after the pattern of the Committee for Scotland in the British House of Commons...."22

The APHLC in its fourth session held at Shillong on April 5-7, 1961 rejected the Scottish Plan and resolved to boycott the general elections to be held in 1962. The APHLC delegation met the Prime Minister and communicated its decision on May 17. The Prime Minister clarified the proposals. To consider the clarifications and explanations, the APHLC met again on June 29 at Tura under the chairmanship of R. Momin and rejected the clarifications as unsatisfactory, reiterated the demand for the Hill State, called upon the Hill people for a non-violent, non-cooperation movement and directed the M.L.A's representing the Hill Areas to resign their membership of the Assembly and boycott the third general election.

The APHLC's decision to reject the Scottish Plan and boycott the general elections had adverse repercussions in its own ranks. The Hill State movement was carried farther than might be warranted by the circumstances. The district Congress Committees of the Garo Hills, North Cachar Hills and Khasi Hills had disassociated themselves from the APHLC, accepted the Nehru Plan and decided to contest the elections.

Prominent leaders like J.B. Hagjer, Mahan Singh, Emon Singh Sengwa and

23. Fifth Conference, APHLC.
even B.M. Pugh had left the APHLC. The latter had, therefore, to retract its steps and revise its decision to boycott the elections to the Assembly and Lok Sabha. At its Sixth Conference held at Aijal on September 16, 1961, it authorised the Council of Action to take a final decision in regards the boycott of elections. The Council which met at Shillong on October 6 resolved to contest the third general election and at the same time decided that all the successful candidates should be prepared to resign their membership of the Assembly from such date as shall be determined by the APHLC.

The APHLC contested the third general elections on the grounds of a separate state for the Hill Areas and captured 11 out of the 13 Assembly seats allotted to the Autonomous districts. It also captured the lone Lok Sabha seat. The Congress won in one of the four constituencies in the Garo Hills district and all the three constituencies in the Mikir and North Cachar Hills districts. Thus the APHLC remained the single most popular party in the Autonomous Hill districts.

The APHLC claimed that its spectacular victory at the polls was a clear verdict on the part of the electorate in favour of a Hill State. It had, therefore, urged on the Prime Minister to take early steps for the creation of what it called the Eastern Frontier State. The Prime Minister did not concede the demand. He declared in the Lok Sabha:

"......we gave them the fullest autonomy in that area. So far as language which was the chief question was concerned they can decide about their own language, English or Hindi or any of their own languages. In fact, we gave, if I may say so, 99 per cent of what they wanted. In return to
any legislation applying to them, we suggested what is called the Scottish pattern that only if the members of the Hill districts agreed to it in the Assembly, then would it be passed...... Now their proposal to have a separate state is full of difficulties both for them and for Assam and also for India as a whole economically...... Therefore, we suggested that they should have all the autonomy which they want in their own affairs: and any allotment of funds which go to them directly, there will be no risk of their being reduced by the Assam Government. And I still hold that if they consider this matter carefully, they will find that they get everything they want plus something more in every direction.  

The APHLC felt that there was nothing new in the Prime Minister's proposals. It had, therefore, rejected the same, reiterated its objection for a Hill State and resolved to launch a non-violent direct action. Its representatives in the Assembly were called upon to resign their membership on or before October 24, 1962.

For a second time, the APHLC's action was proved to be hasty and ill-considered. Four of its eleven members in the Assembly refused to abide by its directive to resign from their membership. They were promptly expelled from the party. But the party was weakened by their defection. It suffered a set back which it did not anticipate.

Meanwhile, China committed aggression on the Indian territory. The APHLC decided not to take advantage of the delicate situation. It suspended all political controversy for the time being. Even after the

24. Nehru's reply to starred question No.431 asked by Prof. G.G.S. Bali in the Lok Sabha on May 4, 1962, as reproduced in the Pataskar Commission Report, Appendix III.
cessation of hostilities, it refrained from resorting to direct action. On the other hand, it decided to contest the bye-election to the two seats which had fallen vacant by the resignation of its representatives. It was a very wise decision though apparently it appeared to be inconsistent with its declared policy. If the APHLC had not contested the bye-election, its opponents would have been elected. And it would have missed the bus for ever.

In the bye-election, the APHLC polled 53 per cent of the votes polled. But it won only 5 out of the 7 seats. It lost the two seats in the Mizo district which went to the extremist Mizo National Front. If the verdict of the electorate were any guide, the idea of one Hill State for all the Autonomous districts of North East India was ruled out. The Mizo, Mikir and North Cachar Hills districts had opted, as it were, to remain out of the Hill State. The Hill State movement led by the APHLC was virtually confined to the Khasi Jaintia Hills district and the Garo Hills district.

Notwithstanding the setbacks it received, the APHLC continued to press for the constitution of a Hill state. In June 1963 it had another round of talks with Prime Minister Nehru. Nehru made certain concrete proposals which became popularly known as the Nehru Plan.

THE NEHRU PLAN:

The Hill Areas shall remain within the State of Assam but shall have ninety nine per cent autonomy in all matters connected with their administration and development.
English shall be the language of official communication and it is replaced by Hindi. At the district level, the District or the Regional Council as the case may be shall decide what language should be used for official purposes.

The Hill Areas shall be constituted into an "autonomous region" within the State of Assam. The "autonomous region" shall have a Regional Council consisting of the M.P's from the Hill Areas, M.L.A's from the Autonomous districts, the Chief Executive Members of the District Councils and certain nominated members.

The Autonomous Regional Council would have legislative and executive powers within limits of the autonomy granted to the Hill Areas. It shall also have an Executive Council.

The Autonomous District Councils and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council would be given wider powers. They would also be given more financial help.

The District Councils would maintain connection with the Government of Assam through the Executive Council of the Autonomous Regional Council.

The subjects to be entrusted to the Autonomous Regional Council would be decided after discussion. The Regional Council would have a definite voice in the matter of legislation affecting the Hill Areas. That is to say that no law affecting the interests of the Hill Areas shall be passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly without the consent of the Regional Council.
The departments of development, public works, agriculture and education concerning the Hill Areas shall be under the complete control of the Hill people. As to planning for development, the Hill representatives shall have direct access to the Planning Commission. They can also attend the meetings of the National Development Council.

The Hill people shall have control over the grants given under article 275 of the constitution and also the revenues from the Hill Areas. But the state legislature shall have voice over monies granted from the state funds.

There would be a separate wing of the Assam Secretariat with various departments to deal with the administration and development of the Hill Areas.

The Hill ministers would be appointed by the Chief Minister on the recommendations of the Hill representatives.

There would be a separate fund for the administration and development of the Hill Areas and a separate committee to scrutinize and consider their annual budget proposals. 25

The Nehru Plan which promised maximum autonomy to the Hill Areas consistent with the unity of the State of Assam was accepted by the APHLC with certain interpretations of its own. Thus, for example, the APHLC considered maximum autonomy to mean full autonomy. In concrete terms, it would mean, as the APHLC thought that the subjects mentioned in the lists II and III of the Seventh Schedule to the Constitution, so far as these related to the Hill Areas should be handed over to the

25. Chaliha Papers as referred to by V.V.Rao in his paper 'Formation of Meghalaya' published by the Indian Law Institute.
Hill Representatives who would administer them independently of the State legislature. The APHLC thought further that the Regional Committee consisting of the M.L.A's from the Hill Areas should be in a position to recommend the names of persons to be appointed as Ministers. The Chief Minister must accept the recommendation. The Ministers from the Hill Areas besides being individually and collectively responsible to the State Assembly should also be responsible to the Regional Committee. This means logically that the Assembly might pass a vote of no confidence against a Hill Minister but it would not be effective so long as the latter enjoys the confidence of the Regional Committee. This would result in a situation of a minority superseding the verdict of the majority. The principle of collective responsibility of the Cabinet to the legislature would also be hampered. Nehru did not contemplate such a situation when he promised maximum autonomy to the Hill Areas. Therefore, the interpretation given by the APHLC to Nehru's offer of autonomy was unwarranted.

The Nehru Plan was opposed by the Government of Assam on the ground that it would sow the seeds of disintegration of the state. Chaliha argued that if the Chief Minister's discretion to appoint ministers was fettered, it would not be possible for the Cabinet to function as a team and its collective responsibility to the State Assembly would be seriously undermined.

Nehru agreed with Chaliha that the Chief Minister should have freedom in the selection of his colleagues. The APHLC was told that the cabinet must be such "as can function as a team. Ministers have to be appointed by the Chief Minister, but representatives of the hill areas..."
will no doubt be consulted in the appointment of their Minister or ministers. ...'
"So far as legislation for the Hill Areas was concerned, "the views of the hill areas representatives will have special importance."
Thus began the watering down of the original Nehru Plan. The concessions made to the Hill representatives were now being left to be governed by conventions.

The APHLC tried to bargain on the basis of the original Nehru Plan but in vain. Its image was damaged by significant defections which took place in its ranks. It was no longer the all-hills organisation. The North Cachar, Mikir and the Mizo Hills districts had virtually associated themselves from it. Thus the APHLC had to eat the humble pie and yet its leaders continued to meet the Prime Minister and the Home Minister and kept up the negotiations. On February 12, 1964, Nehru told Swell categorically that the whole scheme of autonomy to the Hill Areas "was subject to a commission being appointed to consider the whole thing." 28

In a carefully worded resolution passed on April 17, 1964 the APHLC agreed to the appointment of the commission on the Hill Areas on condition that the latter would abide by the Prime Minister's offer of full autonomy and his other assurances to the Hill people.

Nehru's passing away in May 1964 delayed the appointment of the proposed commission. Meanwhile, the APHLC had another round of talks with Lal Bahadur Sastri who became Prime Minister after Nehru. In March
27. Ibid., p. 160.
1965 Sastri constituted a three member Commission with H.V. Pataskar as the Chairman. The Commission submitted its report a year later.

It will not be out of place here to consider the major recommendations of the Pataskar Commission for these depended largely on events in future which led finally to an admission of the need for organising Assam into a number of independent and semi-independent political units.

The Pataskar Commission felt that the interests of the Hills and Plains lay in interdependence and not separation. It was also in the national interest that the existing links between the Hills and Plains be strengthened. This being the broad conclusion arrived at by the Commission, they did not think it necessary to bring about any basic change in the structure of the Sixth Schedule.

However, in order that the legitimate aspirations of the people be met fully and that they should also be given an opportunity to develop in accordance with their own genius, the Commission made the following recommendations.

First, there should be a Minister for Hill Areas and such other Ministers as might be decided by "the Chief Minister as head of the cabinet." In the appointment of the Hill Ministers the Chief Minister must consult the M.L.A.'s from the Hill Areas and "obtain their views in an appropriate manner." 29

Second, the M.L.A.'s from the Hill Areas should constitute a Hill Areas Committee which should consider all proposals for legislation con-

cerning the Hill Areas and make recommendations to the Assembly which the latter should normally accept. In case of difference of opinion between the Hill Areas Committee and the Assembly, the matter should be submitted to the Governor "for decision in his discretion." The Governor should convey his decision in a message to the Assembly which "should be deemed to be the decision of the Assembly itself." 30

Third, the Assam Secretariat should consist of a separate department of Hill Areas. The department of Hill Areas should be entrusted with the administration of all subjects transferred to the Hill districts. It should also be responsible for matters relating to Districts Councils, supervision over the development programmes of those councils, special development programmes for the Hill districts and so on. 31

Fourth, there should be a Hill Areas Development Council to advise the State Government on the administration and development of the Hill Areas. The Council should consist of the Chief Minister to act as Chairman, the Minister for Hill Areas, the Finance Minister, the M.P.'s and M.L.A.'s from the Hill districts, the Chief Executive Members of the District Councils and a few others representing special interests as members. 32

Fifth, each Hill district should have a District Development Board under the Chairmanship of its deputy Commissioner "to help the district council in the execution of Welfare and Development Schemes." 3

30. Ibid., paragraphs 13 and 14.
31. Ibid., paragraphs 19-21.
32. Ibid., paragraph 40.
Sixth, there should be a Commissioner for Hill Areas whose main duty should be "to guide, direct and supervise administration and management work in the field."\textsuperscript{34}

Seventh, the Central Government should accept a special responsibility for the development of the Hill districts. As a general principle the total development expenditure in the Hill Areas of Assam should at least be of the same order as in the neighbouring territories of Manipur, NEFA, Manipur and Tripura.\textsuperscript{35}

Eighth, the powers of the District Councils with regard to legislation and administration of justice should remain as before. Their executive and administrative powers and functions should, however, be enlarged considerably with a view to associating them with the developmental programme relating to the transferred subjects.\textsuperscript{36}

Ninth, there should be a Hill Areas Budget in respect of subjects transferred to the Hill ministry and it should be placed before the Hill Areas Committee for its views. But the final decision on the budget must rest with the State Assembly.\textsuperscript{37}

Finally, the provision for the establishment of Regional Councils was considered to be both unnecessary and undesirable and should "accordingly be deleted from the Sixth Schedule."\textsuperscript{38}

The Pataskar Commission made many crucial recommendations. But it did not consider all the points which emerged in the discussions between Prime Minister Nehru and the leaders of the APHLC. At one stage

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., paragraph 23.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., paragraph 26.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., paragraphs 34, 35 and 48.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid., paragraphs 28 and 29.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Ibid., paragraph 49.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Nehru conceded that "in the highly important matters of development, the people of the area should have full authority and complete control over expenditure." Again, when Prof. Swell asked if it would be possible for the Hill people to initiate proposals if the Planning Commission were to give grants for certain programmes, the Prime Minister replied that they could certainly initiate proposals and their representatives could also deal with the Planning Commission directly. He went on to say that the representatives from the Hill Areas were also welcome to attend the meetings of the National Development Council in Delhi. The Pataskar Commission remained silent in this matter. Its suggestions for the development of the Hill districts were confined to the giving of increased grants-in-aid and the establishment of a Hill Areas Development Council and the District Development Boards.

Further, the Commission conceded only one Cabinet minister for all the Hill districts. The Hill districts being five in number, they deserved at least two ministers of Cabinet rank. As to the number of junior ministers, the Commission had left it to be decided by the Chief Minister "at the head of the Cabinet." Each Hill district should have been represented by at least one junior minister. Since the basic aim is one of partnership between Hills and Plains, it should be both realistic and desirable that when the Chief Minister might be drawn from the Plain districts, a deputy chief minister should be appointed to represent the Hill districts. The Pataskar commission should have considered the need for at least a convention to be established in this regard.

Again, the Pataskar Commission was not categorical in its recommendation that the Hill ministers would be appointed in consultation with the M.L.A's from the Hill districts. It merely said that the latter would be consulted and their views obtained "in an appropriate manner."

In one more respect, the Pataskar Commission failed to suggest a suitable remedy. It made the State Governor the final arbiter in case of disagreement between the Hill Areas Committee and the State Assembly over any given proposal for legislation concerning the Hill Areas. Differences of opinion could better be referred to a joint committee of the Hill representatives as well as the Assembly. Should the joint committee fail to resolve the differences, the matter could be forwarded addressed to the Assembly. For the Governor to decide a legislative issue is not quite consistent with a parliamentary set up of things.

Thus the proposals of the Pataskar Commission were not as comprehensive as might be expected. However, the Congress and most of the all India parties welcomed the proposals. The Government of Assam also accepted them. The APHLC had not only rejected the proposals but had also rejected the Nehru Plan as no longer adequate and presented itself for a non-violent agitation to fulfil its long cherished aspiration of a Hill State. The 1967 general elections which were due provided an opportunity. The APHLC resolved to boycott the elections.

The Congress leadership at the Centre and especially Mrs. Indira Gandhi who had just succeeded in a battle of succession to become the Prime Minister of India felt that the minorities in the border areas
should not be alienated. The experience with Nagaland was a point in this direction. A hostile APHLC might mean a permanent blow to the prospects of the Congress party making a progress in the Hill Areas. These considerations seemed to have prevailed on Mrs. Gandhi to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the Hill people. Accordingly she held a few preliminary discussions with Chief Minister Chaliha and the APHLC leaders and on January 13, 1967 announced the decision of the Government to reorganise Assam on the basis of a federal plan. According to the federal plan, the Hill Areas would constitute a distinct political unit within Assam with which it would have certain common links but in no way subordinate to Assam on that account. The federal plan was accepted by the Hill leaders but was rejected by the leaders of the Plain districts. There was agitation for the scrapping of the federal plan. In view of the agitation, the Government of India called for a conference with leaders from both the Hills and Plains. The Hill leaders insisted on the implementation of the federal plan. The conference, therefore, broke down.

To allay the wishes of the Plains people, the Government of India constituted a Commission with Asoka Mehta as its Chairman. The Mehta Commission had many divergent views expressed before it. Chaliha suggested that each of the autonomous districts should be declared an autonomous area. It would have a Council of representatives consisting of not more than 40 elected members and 3 nominated members. It would make laws on as many as 49 specified subjects from the state list.

40 The federal plan was announced not as a kind of a negotiated settlement but as an award given by the Central Government.
Besides the Council of representatives there would be an Executive Council with the Chief Executive Councillor as its head. The Executive Council would be responsible to the Council of representatives. The Assam Cabinet would include a Cabinet minister to represent all the autonomous areas.  

The PSP leader, Hem Barua suggested the implementation of the Pataskar Commission proposals with certain modifications.

The APHLC boycotted the Mehta Commission.

The Mehta Commission suggested a formula which accorded various autonomy to the Hill Areas consistent with the preservation of the unity of Assam. The autonomous districts would constitute an autonomous state. The autonomous state would have an autonomous legislature consisting of elected as well as nominated members from all the autonomous districts. Each such district would send not more than 40 and not less than 15 elected members to the autonomous state legislature. The latter would elect a Chairman and Deputy Chairman from amongst its members. The executive powers were vested in the Governor but the Governor would act on the advice of an Executive Council which shall be responsible to the autonomous legislature. The Executive Council would consist of a Chief Executive Councillor appointed by the Governor and two other executive members appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Executive Councillor.

The autonomous legislature would make laws on subjects conferred on the District Councils. Some more subjects could also be

41. Chaliha Papers.
transferred. Any bill passed by the autonomous legislature shall be submitted to the Governor of Assam. In giving his assent, the Governor shall act on the advice of the Chief Minister of Assam who would consult the minister for tribal affairs in all such matters.

In appointing ministers from Hill Areas, the Chief Minister of Assam would consult the M.L.As from the Hill Areas as well as the Executive Councillors as a matter of convention.

The District Councils would cease to exist.

Finally, the Mehta Commission recommended that as many subjects might be transferred to the autonomous state from the State list.

The Mehta Commission Plan was a watering down of the plan suggested earlier. The APHLC had, therefore, rejected it and reiterated its demand for a Hill State. It fought the fourth general elections to demonstrate the solid support it enjoyed on the Hill State issue.

Indeed, it had quite justified its claims in the Khasi Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills districts where it bagged all the Assembly seats. The North Cachar and the Mikir Hills districts had, however, thrown their lot with the Congress. The APHLC had also won the Shillong ‘general’ constituency where it polled 60 per cent of the valid votes cast.

With its leadership firmly established in the Khasi Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills districts, the APHLC threatened to launch a Satyagraha if the Government failed to concede its demand for a Hill State. In September, 1968 the Central Government came forward with

42. In the fourth general elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly (1967) the APHLC polled 40,630 and 52,204 out of 64,159 and 73,537 valid votes cast in the Khasi Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills respectively.
plan for an Autonomous State for the autonomous districts of the Garo and Khasi Jaintia Hills. The details of the plan were as follows.

First, the Autonomous State would comprise the autonomous districts of the Khasi Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills. The autonomous districts of the Mikir and North Cachar Hills were given an option to join the Autonomous State on the basis of a resolution adopted by at least two thirds of the members of the District Councils concerned within the prescribed date.

Second, all the political units in the North Eastern region would be represented by a North Eastern Council which would work for an integrated approach for the security and development of the region.

Third, the Autonomous State would have a legislative assembly and a Council of ministers. The subjects to be transferred to the Autonomous State would include agriculture, forests, fisheries, education, etc. The powers of taxation would be related to the subjects transferred. They would include land revenue and agricultural income tax, excise duty, taxes on mineral rights, taxes on goods and passengers and entertainment tax.

Fourth, the executive powers of the Autonomous State would be co-extensive with the powers assigned to it and would be vested in the Governor of Assam who would act on the advice of the Council of ministers belonging to the Autonomous State.

Fifth, all bills passed by the legislature of the Autonomous State shall be submitted to the Governor for his assent.
Sixth, the government and the legislature of Assam would have jurisdiction in respect of certain subjects which are of common interest such as the state highways, major projects in the field of irrigation, flood control, water storage and water power, navigation and major industries. With a view to providing unified administration, police, law and order would also remain with the State of Assam.

Seventh, the Autonomous State would have representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Adequate representation would be given to the areas forming a part of the Autonomous State and other Hill Areas to public sources.

Eighth, all Hill members of the Assam Assembly and a few members from the plains would constitute a Standing Committee of the Assam legislature. Bills in respect of subjects which are of common interest to the State of Assam as a whole would be referred to the Standing Committee for consideration after their introduction in the Assam Assembly. The views of the Committee would be taken into account when any such bill came up for consideration of the House as a whole.

Nineth, in respect of a few subjects out of the Concurrent List such as acquisition and requisition of property for public purposes and also in respect of a few other subjects of common interest in the State List such as schemes of agriculture, hydro-electric projects, conservation of forests etc. the legislatures of the Autonomous State as well as that of the State of Assam would have concurrent power of legislation. Other subjects in the Concurrent List would remain with the State of Assam.
Finally, the Assam High Court, the Assam State Electric* Board, and the Assam Public Service Commission would continue to have jurisdiction in respect of the Autonomous State as well and there would be joint cadres of all-India services and some higher state services.

The APHLC was at first opposed to the Autonomous State Plan. Stanely Nichols-Roy, the party secretary described it as 'totally unrefu­table'. But Capt. Sangma and a few others held moderate views. Subsequently, the APHLC decided to give the new plan a fair trial while reiterating its demand for full statehood as the ultimate goal.

On December 24, 1969 Parliament adopted the Constitution 22n Amendment Bill which provided for 'an Autonomous State to be known as Meghalaya within the State of Assam' comprising the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills district and the Garo Hills district as defined in the Sixth Schedule. A unique feature of this important measure was that it introduced a new political unit - a sub-state into the scheme of Indian union, and a sub-federation within the framework of the Indian Federation.

To the APHLC the sub-state plan was but a temporary solution of the problem. The distribution of powers between Meghalaya and Assam did not work smoothly. There were conflicts with regard to the recruitment and management of the public services. The retention of Police with Assam was also not quite relished by the Hill leaders. The APHLC continued to press for the attainment of full statehood by Meghalaya. Meanwhile, the leaders from the Plains had reconciled themselves to the idea of accommoda­tion. By another Act of reorganisation of Assam effected in 1971, Meghalaya was accorded the status of a full-fledged state in the Indian Union.
Thus after a decade long battle, the APHLC achieved its goal of a Hill State, though the Hill state which finally emerged was much smaller in extent than what it was conceived of originally. A unique feature of this political battle was that it was fought without violence and won by sheer organisational ability and conference diplomacy. The APHLC leadership had displayed a rare combination of courage and common sense.
MIZORAM:

The people of the Lushai Hills who preferred to be known as the Mizo had not experienced any political awakening or activity until they faced the threat of Japanese invasion in 1945. The advancing Japanese troops invaded Burma and were knocking at the gates of India. The Mizos could not remain unaffected by these happenings. Even as preparations for their defence were set on foot, they heard slogans about Imperialism, aggression and Independence. They became aware of international personalities like Churchill, Stalin and Hitler and nearer home they heard about Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose fighting a battle for Indian independence. In these circumstances, the educated Mizo youth felt the need for organising themselves politically to give expression to their own views and aspirations. Their immediate concern was their own future, for they heard rumours that the British were likely to quit India at the end of the war. The educated Mizo youth who were increasingly under the influence of Christian teachings did not think that power should be handed over to the chiefs who were notorious for their oppressive deeds. At the same time they had no clear idea about Indian nationhood. They, therefore, wanted the British to stay on. But if the British must quit, they did not know how best they could fill the gap. Thus a party or forum where they could discuss their aims and aspirations as well as their future constitutional status became a matter of great necessity at the end of the war.

43. Literally, Mi signifies man and Zo-hill; therefore, Mizo means man of the hills. In contrast Lushai denotes one of various tribes inhabiting the Mizo Hills.
THE MIZO UNION:

The Mizo Union was the first political party to be formed in the Mizo Hills. It was brought into existence on April 9, 1946. The first conference of the party was held at Aijal on May 25, 1946. Pachhumui and Vanlawina were elected President and General Secretary of the party respectively.

The Mizo Union was firmly opposed to the institution of chief or chiefs. The latter exercised their powers in perpetuation of their own interests. The progressive elements in the party demanded the abolition of chiefship.

At its birth, the Mizo Union received the blessings of the then British Superintendent Macdonald. But the Superintendent adopted a directive attitude towards the party and the people in general. He wanted the Mizo Union to join the 'District Conference' of which he became President himself. But the District Conference was weighted heavily in favour of the chiefs who were given equal representation with the 'non-moo-ners'. When the Mizo Union refused to participate in such a Conference, the Superintendent dealt with it rather harshly and tried to confiscate its funds. But the Mizo Union maintained its opposition to the District Conference and the Superintendent was obliged finally to abandon it.

The Mizo Union's boycott of the District Conference and its declared opposition to the chiefs made it a popular party, especially among the younger generation. But there were some in the party who wished to participate in the District Conference when it was revived for a second time. This led to a split in the party into its Right wing and the
Left wing. The Right wing which called itself the Mizo Union Council was led by Pachhunga, Vanlawma, the founder President and Secretary of the Mizo Union respectively and Lalbaikthanga. The Left Wing included radicals like Khawtinkhuma, Saprawanga and Thanhliara.

When the Bardoloi Sub-Committee visited Aijal on April 11, 1947, the Left wing submitted a memorandum stating that the Mizo territory should be a part of India for a period of ten years after which they would decide what they should do with themselves. The Right wing demanded independence. The two coopted members of the Sub-Committee - Saprawanga and Khawtinkhuma were clearly in favour of a merger with India.

The MU Left wing accepted not merely a Union with Assam or India but also the scheme of District Councils envisaged in the Sixth Schedule. Indeed, it demanded an early constitution of the District Council for the Mizo Hills. When Bardoloi, the then Premier of Assam, resisted the formation of a local council pending the constitution of the District Council, the Mizo Union was not satisfied. It had an ambitious programme including the abolition of the institution of chiefs - to be carried out. The delay in the formation of the District Council led to certain disturbances. To pacify the Mizo Unionists, the Government of Assam agreed finally to set up an Advisory Council. No other Hill District of Assam was favoured with an Advisory Council prior to the formation of the District Council.

The Mizo Union secured impressive victories at the general elections to the District Council as well as the Assam Legislative Assembly.

44. To be known hereafter as Mizo Union.
In 1952, it bagged all the three Assembly seats reserved for the tribals. Out of 18 elective seats to the District Council, it won 17. In 1961, 2 out of 3 candidates which it set up for the Assembly poll were elected. It faced a setback in the District Council elections. It won only 15 out of 22 elective seats. The United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) became its principal rival. In 1962 the Mizo Union improved its position by winning 16 out of 22 elective seats in the District Council poll. It contested the Assembly elections as a constituent party of the APF. It won all the three seats.

Since 1962, however, the Mizo Union suffered a setback in its popularity. Some prominent members like Khawtinkhuma and Vanthuam left the party and joined government service. A few others joined other political parties including the Congress. One of its M.L.As, R. Thanbra, refused to resign his seat at the call of the APHLC and later joined the Congress. In the bye-elections held in 1963, Saprawnga and Bawin Long of the Mizo Union were defeated by Manliana and Lalmaura of the Mizoram Front. The MNF which had thus gained an advantage over the MU in the Assembly, tried to oust the latter from power in the District Council. Meanwhile, the Congress advocated a settlement with the MNF and won the sympathies of its followers. In the District Council elections held in 1970, the Congress succeeded in pushing the Mizo Union to be an opposition. It won 10 seats as against 9 by the Mizo Union and 3 by the Independents.

The Mizo Union remained an ally of the Congress and was opposed to the Hill State demand put forward by the EITU. 45 But soon in

45. Though the Mizo Union played host to the SITU at Aijal in June 1955, it refused to merge itself with the latter. Nor did it agree to become its constituent.
1957 Chaliha appointed some members of the EITU to the State Ministry, the Mizo Union felt aggrieved. In the years to follow, the Mizo Union and the state Congress drifted apart. The final parting of ways came in 1961 when the Mizo Union joined the APHLC.

The Mizo Union's alliance with the APHLC lasted so long as the Hill state demand could be sustained in the Mizo Hills. But when in 1965 the Mizo Unionists were defeated at the bye-elections to the state Assembly, the APHLC's connections with the Mizo Union came to an end. The Mizo Union felt isolated and politically uprooted. In order to regain its popularity, the Mizo Union held a convention on June 15, 1966 at Aijal and demanded a Mizo State within India. The proposed Mizo State was to consist of the Mizo Hills district and the contiguous Mizo inhabited areas in Assam, Tripura and Manipur. In pursuance of the idea for a separate Hill State for the Mizos, the Mizo Union convened a meeting of all the District parties at Chura-chandpur in Manipur in January 1965. At this meeting, the demand for the unification of all the Mizos was voiced. The new stand taken by the Mizo Union did not improve its prospects in the immediate future. The UMFO, the MNP and even the Congress were strongly arrayed against it.

Right from its inception, the Mizo Union remained consistently an anti-traditional, integrationist organisation. It fought for the abolition of the chiefship and succeeded in getting legislation adopted to that effect. It advocated links with India and continued to do so through stress and strain.

46. Chaliha did not trust the Mizo Union and the latter had equally strong views about him. See reference in a foot note in Chauhan's 'Hill Politics in N.E. India', p. 170.
THE UNITED MIZO FREEDOM ORGANISATION (UMFO):

The Mizo Union's decision to join India was not relished by the leaders of the Right wing. Some favoured merger with Burma; others fought in terms of Independent Mizoland. The Lals or chiefs were opposed to merger with India. All these elements were waiting for an opportunity to rally together under a party or organisation which could effectively meet with the challenge posed by the Mizo Union.

Lalmawia, the founder of the UMFO was himself in search of a similar opportunity. As an officer in the army and later as a member of the Burmese Civil service, Lalmawia became acquainted with certain facets of the history and geography of the Lushai Hills, his homeland. He noticed that the Lushai Hills had a long contiguous border with the Trincomalee area of Burma and the people on either side of the border had both cultural and linguistic ties. Lalmawia was, therefore, convinced that it would be to the advantage of the Mizos to be united with their brethren in Burma.

While in Burma, he discussed his plan with the tribal chief, Zahrul. The latter agreed with Lalmawia that they should unite in mutual interest. Both seemed to have conceived of an Independent Chin State in which the Lushais in India and Burma could combine.47

Retiring from Burmese civil service, Lalmawia returned home with the object of organising a pro-Burmese movement. As it happened, the Mizo Union dissidents and chiefs were ready to support any movement which opposed the Mizo Union. Lalmawia's task had thus become easy. The United Mizo Freedom Organisation was formed on July 20, 1947 with Lalmawia as

47. This view was held by Dr. V.V. Rao in a paper entitled, The Mizo State Politics from 1947 to 1967, Journal of the Gauhati University, Vol.XXI, No.I, Arts, p. 19.
and L.H. Liana as President and General Secretary respectively.

Shortly after, Lalmawia led a good will mission to Burma, to Prime Minister U. Nu and his colleague U Ba Sawe and discussed with them the possibility of a Union of Mizo Hills with the tribal areas of Burma. U. Nu did not encourage the idea. He merely told Lalmawia, "If you and your people join us we shall be happy." This was but a polite way of refusing to be drawn into the affair. The Burmese Premier had weighty reasons for not encouraging Lalmawia.

First, he might have heard by then that the Mizo Union which commanded a far greater following than the UMFO had already decided to join India.

Second, the Burmese Government had enough trouble with rebellions on the Shan States. They, therefore, did not want to court more trouble by interfering into the affairs of the Mizos who were known to be extremely volatile by temperament.

Third, India was a friendly state and Jawaharlal Nehru was a personal friend of U. Nu. The latter would not like to incur the displeasure of Nehru by encouraging a movement which sought to disturb the authority of the Government of India and perhaps of the Burmese government too.

Lalmawia returned home disappointed. He was, however, determined to mobilise support for the UMFO within the Mizo district which would enable them become a part of India through a fait accompli. In the changed situation, Lalbaikthanga joined service in the government. Thereupon, Lalbaikthanga became the President of the UMFO.
In the first general elections held in 1952, the UMFO joined the contest both for the Assembly and the District Council. The Mizo Union approached the electorate with a promise for the abolition of chiefs and introduction of democratic government. The UMFO promised union with Burma. The former swept the polls. The UMFO drew a blank. All its candidates lost in both the Assembly and the District Council poll. Lalmawia accepted the verdict of the electorate. He gave up his plea for union with Burma once and for all. In 1954 he contested in a bye-election to the State Assembly and won the same by polling an absolute majority of 1,000 votes polled. The Mizo Union’s monopoly of the Assembly (reserved seats) was thus broken. The UMFO emerged as its principal contender.

Shortly after, the States Reorganisation Commission was appointed. The UMFO had another opportunity to brighten its prospects. Lalmawia argued that the existing scheme of autonomy did not permit the Hill people to develop rapidly. The Hill people should be given greater autonomy. There should be a Hill State comprising all the Hill Areas of Assam, the tribal belt of Manipur, the whole of NEFA and Nagaland, and the tribal areas of Tripura. The idea of a Hill State was welcomed by many leaders in the Khasi and Garo Hills, Manipur and Tripura. Capt. Sangma convened a conference of the Hill leaders on October 6-8, 1954. The conference endorsed the Hill State demand. A memorandum to that effect was sent to the States Reorganisation Commission. The Mizo Union opposed the Hill State demand. So did Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy.

In 1956, the UMFO welcomed the formation of a branch of the EITU in the Mizo Hills. On October 2, 1956 the Mizo Hills unit of the EITU was formally inaugurated. Lalmawia was chosen to be its President.
Even after the formation of the SITU, the Mizo Union maintained its position to the Hill State demand. But the idea of a separate state for the Hill Areas seemed to have caught the imagination of the people.

The second general elections to the Assembly as well as the District Council were held in 1957. The UMFO contested the elections on the issue of a Hill State. The Mizo Union which swept the polls in 1957 received a setback in 1957. The UMFO which was totally routed in 1957 had vastly improved its position in 1957. Of the three Assembly seats, the UMFO secured one and the Mizo Union the remaining two. The former polled 18,954 votes as against 19,650 votes polled by the latter. The total number of votes polled in the District was 42,486. In the election to the District Council, the UMFO won 8 seats as against 11 by the Mizo Union.

Even after the 1957 elections, the Mizo Union continued to oppose the Hill State idea. In 1960 a delicate situation arose when the Assam Legislative Assembly passed the Language Bill. The leaders of all the Hill parties opposed the Bill and formed the APHLC. Along with other Hill parties, the UMFO and the SITU joined the APHLC. The Mizo Union felt that it was not properly rewarded for its continued support to the Congress. It had, therefore, decided to support the APHLC. The UMFO did not demand the dissolution of its constituents. The Mizo Union, therefore, retained its identity. The UMFO was, however, dissolved.

THE MIZO NATIONAL FRONT (MNF):

The Mizo National Front was born under circumstances which were as complex as they were controversial. The men who enacted the
different tales to tell. The scholars who enquired into the issue are equally divergent in their opinions.

Saprawnga, a prominent Mizo Unionist who was elected the Chief Executive Member of the Mizo District Council for three successive terms, thinks that certain reactionary elements in the Mizo society, particularly the chiefs who had been deprived of their powers and privileges and even their means of livelihood and who would never forgive the Mizo Union for having reduced them to the plight of ordinary citizens, would have secretly helped in the formation of the MNF, for they found in the latter as they did in the UMFO an opportunity to break the might of the Mizo Union.

John F. Manliana who represented the MNF in the Assam Legislative Assembly till he was recalled by Laldenga early in 1966, contends that the MNF was the baby of the misrule and wrong policies perpetuated by the Mizo Union. Power was exercised for the benefit of a few prominent members of the party. The lot of the common man did not improve.

Thus Saprawnga speaks like a true Mizo Unionist. Manliana, on his part represents the sentiments of the MNF of which he was one of the founder members.

Baveja writes\(^\text{48}\) that the origin of the MNF should be traced to the Mizo Cultural Society which was formed in 1959. Following the outbreak of a severe famine the same year, the Mizo cultural society converted itself into a 'Mautam Front' or famine front. It was a non-official organisation which assisted greatly in the relief operations. Laldenga who worked in the humble capacity of an Assistant in the District Council

became a prominent member of the Mizo Famine Front because he was "a roving speaker who could sway the people with his emotions and tears." He also edited the 'Mizo Aw' (Mizo voice) a daily paper brought out by the Front. Ultimately the Famine Front "turned itself into Mizo National Front on the 12th October, 1962."50

Baveja's account reveals a few bare facts about the formation of the MNF. But the question remains unanswered: what made the Mizo Cultural Society to convert itself into a Famine Front and more particularly why did the Mizo Famine Front decide to become a political party?

The great famine of 1959-60 which followed the flowering of the bamboo51 provided the necessary background for the formation of the MNF. For the members of the Famine Front, it was a great opportunity not merely to render humanitarian service but also to reap a rich political gain out of the prevailing situation of misery and frustration. In a psychological moment such as this emotions can be whipped up to an extent that persons in authority could easily be held responsible for whatever ills a society might suffer from. Indeed, Laldenga, the founder resident of the MNF, is acknowledged as a past master in the art of playing with the emotions of the people to secure his own advantage and smear the enemy with infamy.

Thus when the MNF was formed immediately after the famine conditions ceased to exist, it could expect to have the sympathy and support of all those who benefited directly or indirectly from the humanitarian efforts and sacrifices of the Front.

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. There is a popular belief in the Mizo Hills that the bamboo in the forests flower every fifty years or so. The flowers, when eaten by rats, make them (the rats) very fertile. They multiply in enormous numbers and leave no grain or food for the people.
service its members rendered while they were still known by the local
'the Mizo Famine Front'. Apart from this, there were many other factors
which contributed to the formation of the MNF.

First, opposition to the ruling Mizo Union grew both from inside
the party and outside. There were dissidents who opposed the leadership
of Saprawnga. They also did not appreciate the party's stand on the Hill
State issue. It may be recalled that the Mizo Union opposed the Hill State
idea right from the time it was first mooted till the year 1960. Moreover,
the party suffered heavy losses in the 1957 election, and the gain went
clearly in favour of the UMFO for its open advocacy of a Hill State. The
Mizo Union continued to oppose the Hill State demand. To the Mizos as
to most other Hill people in North East India, the concept of Indian uni-
versity had but a vague significance. Ideas of independence and the Hill
were a romantic appeal. Apparently, the Mizo Union risked its popularity for
the sake of a principle. The MNF was quicker to grasp the popular move-
ment and thus made 'Sovereign Independent Mizoram' as its primary goal.

Second, the estrangement between the Mizo Union and Chief
Minister Chaliha which began since the EITU's participation in the Hill
ministry reached a bitter stage in 1959. The Chief Minister did not trust
the Mizo Union and vice versa. During the famine of 1959, the Mizo Union
demanded that the entire relief operations be carried out through the
District Council. The State Government had, however, channeled most
the relief work through its own officials. Further, it appears that the
Mizo Famine Front was set up with official blessings. Thus the part

between the Chief Minister and the Mizo Union went clearly in favor of the MNF, at least during the initial stage of its establishment.

Third, the Mizo Union's alliance with the APHLC did not prove to be a happy experience. For one thing, the alliance was short lived. For another, it led to defections in the party as well as the defection of both its candidates in the bye-elections to the State Assembly held in 1963. The crisis in the Mizo Union helped both the MNF and the Congress.

Fourth, the Mizo chiefs would never reconcile themselves to the deprivation of their powers and privileges done largely at the instance of the Mizo Union and were, therefore, ready to support any organization which opposed the ruling Mizo Union. Like the UMFO, the MNF could easily win the deposed and disgruntled chiefs on to its side.

Finally, in 1960-61 it appeared as if the Hill State movement was dying out. The 'promised land' was not within sight. The UMFO tried to achieve it. The APHLC was yet to be born. There was general frustration. The extremists in the Mizo Hills took advantage of the situation and formed the MNF. A prominent member of the MNF observes that if the Hill State had been granted prior to 1962, the MNF would not have been born.

There is certainly an element of truth in this statement, for the MNF depended largely on playing with the emotions of a people who were still adventurous by nature and prepared to risk everything in this world for the sake of achieving what might be dearest to their heart. Had the Hill State been granted, the MNF would have lost much of its rational appeal.

53. The Mizo Union joined the APHLC in 1961 but the alliance came to an abrupt end in 1963 when both the Mizo Union- APHLC candidates (Bawichhuka and Saprawnga) were defeated in the bye-elections to the Assembly.
The MNF was thus born out of the misery and frustration that accompanied the great famine of 1959. The declining popularity of the Mizo Union as evidenced by the growing number of defectors from the party, the party's defeat in the bye-elections held to the State Assembly in 1962, the final parting of ways between the party and the state Congress leadership and the bitterness which followed, had also contributed a great deal to the strengthening of the MNF. Above all, the promise of an independent Mizoram made by the MNF had so great an emotional appeal on the part of the land that they were prepared to risk everything in their lives for the sake of realising it.

The MNF began its political career through means which were purely constitutional. It contested the general elections to the State Assembly as well as the District Council held in 1962. All its candidates were, however, defeated. The Mizo Union maintained its supremacy, though for the last time. Meanwhile, the MNF carried on a vigorous campaign for its programme of an independent, sovereign Mizoram. Luckily for it, the APHLC of which the Mizo Union was a constituent faced a critical situation. Its negotiations with the government over the Hill State issue reached a stalemate. In protest, it recalled its members from the state legislature. The government decided to hold bye-elections for the seats vacated by the APHLC. The latter was in a dilemma. Not to contest the election would be to give an advantage to the opposition. So it decided to contest the bye-elections held in 1963. The results were revealing. Both of its candidates were badly defeated. The MNF candidates were returned by an overwhelming majority.
The Mizo Union faced a delicate situation. It held control over the District Council. But it became more or less an unentities in the State Legislature. The MNF demanded the dissolution of the District Council. But in a democracy, a duly constituted government could not be dissolved in a despotic manner. The MNF was disappointed. But it had other designs to achieve its objectives. By December 1963 it was clearly in contact with the agents of what was then East Pakistan. It suited the Pakisthani agents to harass India on her borders. The dense forests and the difficult terrain encouraged the MNF to sustain inscriptive activity. On one occasion, however, Laldenga and his close associate Lalmunmawia were apprehended and were caught while crossing the border. They were released later on a definite undertaking that they would abjure violence and abstain from anti-national activity. But Laldenga did not keep his word. He confessed before his confidants that his undertakings were intended to hoodwink the government. Baveja writes that he always sang different songs—one of loyalty to India and the call of revolt. 54

The MNF rebels took advantage of the Indo-Pak war of 1947 to defy the Indian government and declare what they called the 'Mizo Sorkar'. Laldenga and Lalmunmawia became the President and Vice-President respectively of the new Sorkar. Brisk preparations were made for a new revolt against the government. On the midnight of February 28, 1947, the Aljal treasury was stormed. Simultaneously, the treasury at Lunglei and the outposts at Demagiri, Champai, and Kolasit were attacked. All the

54. Baveja, J.D., 'The Land where the Bamboo flowers', p. 86.
out posts and even Lungleh, the sub-divisional headquarters fell to the hands of the rebels. The Assam Rifles had, however, held out in Aijal. Soon the Indian troops were on their way to relieve the Assam Rifles. Within a few days the rebels were driven into the jungle.

The first open armed revolt against the government having failed, the MNF took to guerrilla fighting. The government imposed a ban on the party. In the many operations that followed, most of the rebel leaders had either been killed in action or captured. Some surrendered. Manliana was one of them. Nothing is known about the fate of Laldenga.
THE GARO HILLS:
THE GARO NATIONAL COUNCIL (GNC):

The Garo National Council had the unique distinction of being the single dominant party in the Garo Hills district ever since its formation in 1947. It had the advantage of a good and stable leadership and a strong sense of discipline binding the members to the organisation. There were no defections in the party, nor was there an occasion when the party was voted out of power in the District Council or had lost seats in the State Assembly.

BIRTH OF THE GNC:

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the Garo Hills were a partially excluded area. But the Garos remained as backward as ever. The administration of the district did little beyond the maintenance of law and order. Provision of social services was left to private initiative. The Christian missionaries established schools which in course of time produced a class of teacher leaders. The second world war had its own impact on the Garos. During the war, there was a spate of trade and business which led to more intensified contacts with the world outside. The Garos had also heard of the freedom movements in the neighboring areas. The ex-service man who returned home after the war had their own tales to tell. The net result of all this was that the Garos felt an identity of their own and thought of an organisation which could rally them together. Such an organisation became imperative in 1947 when the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Subcommittee found the Garos "pretty backward" as late as 1947.
future of the Garo Hills came up for discussion. A Garo National Con-
ference was convened in 1947 for the purpose of drafting a constitut-
ion for the Garo Hills. The draft Constitution demanded all powers of government, in-
cluding those of taxation and administration of justice for the local
council. The local council would, however, maintain links with the en-
cial government in respect of a few subjects like higher education, me-
ical aid and with the Central Government in respect of defence, exten-
nal affairs and communications.

The GNC was doubtless the most popular political party in the Garo Hills district. It contested in all the general elections to the District Council as well as the State Assembly and won impressive victories in all of them. The Indian National Congress tried in vain to get a foothold in the Garo Hills district.

In the 1952 elections to the District Council, the GNC won 10 out of the 18 elective seats. The GNC retained its supremacy through successive general elections to the District Council held in 1957, 1962 and 1972. 56

The performance of the GNC in the general elections to the State Assembly was equally impressive. In 1952, it set up four candidates. One was elected uncontested and two others were elected after a contest. One was defeated. Of the 39,390 votes polled, the GNC obtained 14,777 votes or 36 per cent of the total votes polled. In 1957, the GNC contested four candidates and all the four were elected. Out of a total of 47,318 votes polled, the GNC secured 27,769 votes or 60 per cent of the voters.

56. For details, refer opt. cit., p. 246-69.
polled. Thus it had greatly improved on the position it held in 1957. The INC set up its own candidates but they were all defeated by those belonging to the GNC.

In 1962, the GNC contested the elections as a constituent of the APHLC. This time the fortunes of the GNC were not so bright as on the previous occasion. Of the four candidates it set up, three were successful but the fourth was defeated by a Congress nominee. The percentage of votes polled by the GNC came down from over 60 per cent in 1957 to about 50 per cent in 1962. For the first time, the Congress got a footing in the Garo Hills. The decline in the popularity of the GNC was, however, a temporary phenomenon. For in the by-election held in 1963, all its candidates were returned with an overwhelming majority. In 1967 election, the GNC had not merely maintained its supremacy by capturing all the seats reserved for the representation of the Garo Hills District in the State Assembly, but had also polled more than 50 per cent of the total votes cast.\(^57\) It thus perfected its hold over the people of the Garo Hills and was successful in ousting the Congress.

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57. In 1967, out of a total of 64,159 votes polled, the GNC secured 40,650 votes.
THE MIKIR HILLS:

Under the Government of India Act, 1935 the Mikir Hills were a Partially Excluded Area. But its administration was vested in the joint Commissioners of Nowgong and Sibsagar. Being thus divided between the Plains districts, it became nobody's child. There were also no Mikirs in the North Cachar and Khasi Hills. The Mikirs were thus neglected and they remained the most backward among the Hill people of North East India.\(^58\)

At the time of Indian independence, the primary concern of the Mikirs was consolidation of their own tribesmen under a single administration. Their first political party the Karbi-A-Durbar was formed with this object in view.

THE KABI-A-DURBAR (THE MIKIR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY):

The first Mikir member of the State Assembly, Khorsing Terang, and the son of a Mikir pastor at Golaghat, S.S. Engti took the lead to form the Karbi-A-Durbar. The first meeting of the Durbar was held at Hubiarpur Huzar in March 1947. Khorsing Terang and S.S. Engti were elected President and Secretary respectively of the party. In a memorandum submitted to the Bardoloi Sub-Committee, the party spelt out the objectives as consolidation of the Mikir areas under a single administration, protection of the Mikir language and customs, establishment of a local council with legislative, executive and judicial powers in the sphere of internal administration, extension of franchise and improvement of agriculture, industry and education.

\(^{58}\) The Bardoloi Sub-Committee observed (1947): "The Mikirs are probably the most backward of all the tribes of the Assam Hills though this backwardness is probably not their own fault."
The Karbi-A-Durbar confined its activities to the politics of the Mikir Hills. It did not join the movement for a Hill State. According to the report of the SRC, the Karbi-A-Durbar favoured the status quo.

If the Karbi-A-Durbar did not join the Hill State movement, the reason was obvious. Should the Hill State be formed, the Khasis, by far more advanced than the Mikirs would most surely arrogate to themselves a monopoly of most public offices. The Mikirs, therefore, preferred the status quo, for they thought that that would give them a better bargaining position.

Next to the Karbi-A-Durbar, the Indian National Congress gained prominence in the Mikir Hills. From 1962, it held the reserved all Assembly seats reserved for the Mikir Hills District.

59. Rejecting the demand for a Hill State, the SRC observed: "In all speaking, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and the Lushai Hills are not in favour of a separate Hill State and the district council in the Lushai Hills and the Karbi-A-Durbar (Mikir District Council) are in favour of the status quo."
THE NORTH CACHAR HILLS:

Like the Mikir Hills, the North Cachar Hills remained pretty backward up to the flag end of the British rule and even after. The first faint traces of political consciousness became evident when it was learnt that the British decided to quit India. A number of local councils united to form the Tribal Council with headquarters at Haflong. The first act of the Tribal Council was to submit a memorandum to the Bordoloi Committee when the latter visited Haflong in 1947. The memorandum demanded local autonomy, non-interference in the cultural life of the community, readjustment of the boundaries of the North Cachar Hills Sub-division to include all the Cacharis and more effective representation of the North Cachar Hills in the provincial Assembly.

The Autonomous district of North Cachar Hills, like that of the Mikir Hills threw in its lot with Assam and did not join the movement for a Hill State. Politics in the North Cachar Hills was influenced more by personalities than by the existence of organised political parties. The Indian National Congress was the only major political party to have contested both the Assembly and District Council elections pertaining to North Cachar Hills. The dominance of the Congress was clearly seen since 1968. The Peoples' Democratic Party was once a rival of the Congress. In the fourth general election to the District Council, it had an edge over the Congress. But the latter ousted the former with the help of a few defectors. 60

60. For details, refer op.cit., p. 271-73.
The only all India Political Party which tried to spread its wings in the Hill Areas of North East India as much as it did in the Plains was the Indian National Congress. But while the Congress achieved a remarkable success in the Plains, its record in the Hills was far from being impressive. Before Independence, the hillmen in general were not interested in the Congress for they did not quite appreciate the national struggle which the Congress symbolised elsewhere in the country. The Congress for its part was so deeply engrossed in the national problem that it had neither the time nor aptitude for making a special study of the problems of the Hill people. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the British had kept the tribals of Assam more or less isolated splendid as 'anthropological specimens' but for the same reason not fully understood.

The Congress had thus no clear policy for the Hills. It referred to the Hill Areas of Assam was contained in a lone resolution adopted at its Faizpur session held in 1936. The resolution condemned the British decision to create Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. But it did not spell out a policy which the Congress would like to have it adopted for the Hills.62

61. In 1945, a debate on the desirability of the Hill people participating in the national struggle was held at the Scottish Church College, Calcutta at the instance of the newly formed Assam Hill Students' Association. The motion was carried out by a slender majority of three. Report of the weekly Assam Tribune cited by Chaube, S., 'Hill Politics of N.E. India', p. 73.

62. The resolution adopted at the Faizpur session of the INC condemned the policy of creating Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas as "yet another attempt to divide the people into different groups with unjustifiable and discriminatory treatment, and to obstruct the growth of uniform democratic institutions in the country." The Bardoloi Sub-committee was appointed in April 1947 and its report was submitted in July 1947.
The first attempt at a dialogue with the Hill peoples was made by the Bardoloi Sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on fundamental rights, minorities etc., appointed by the Constituent Assembly of India. Within a brief span of four months, the Bardoloi Sub-Committee did a good job of its great responsibility. It recommended a constitutional arrangement which sought to reconcile the Hill peoples' demand for political autonomy with the plea for total integration made by certain prominent members of the Assam Congress. If only this arrangement was followed in the form in which it was envisaged, Congress would have achieved a far greater success in the Hills than what it did in the years to follow.

During the two decades since the formation of the District Councils in 1952, the INC did not play its cards well. There were often differences between the State and Central party leadership. The District (Hill) Congress committees were not always happy with the decisions taken by the Pradesh Congress Committee. Congress failed to evolve a clear and uniform policy for the Hill Areas of North East India. Sometimes it joined hands with the progressive forces, at other times it sided with the reactionary elements. There were also occasions when it encouraged...

63. Congress leadership at the centre was generally sympathetic to the aspirations of the Hill people. The APCG was firmly opposed to any proposal which might lead to a disintegration of Assam. As late as January 1967 there was a meeting of the Central leaders with the APHLC and APCG. The APCG firmly opposed 'reorganisation' of Assam. But the Central leaderships had decided on reorganisation which they announced on January 13, 1967.

64. The Hill Congress committees were opposed to the APCG's stand on the language issue in Assam. In fact, some of the Hill Congress units attended the meeting at which the APHLC was born (July 1966).

65. In 1947 during Bardoloi's premiership of Assam, the State Congress extended support to the Mizo Union in its demand for the abdication of the chiefs. Since then the MU became an associate of the Congress. A decade later under Chaliha's leadership Congress drifted away from the MU. In 1970 Congress fought the Mizo District Council election by advocating a political settlement with the MNF. The MU alleged that the MNF had the backing of the disgruntled ex-chiefs of the Mizo Hills in collaboration with Congress.
defections in the Hill parties for the sake of achieving certain narrow gains for itself. As late as 1970, Congress made use of the support of two nominated members to form the Executive in the Mizo District Council. The APCG's stand on the language policy in Assam had antagonised it to most Hill leaders and encouraged them to demand a separate Hill State. The APHLC which was born in the wake of the language controversy (1960) became one of the most formidable rivals of the Congress in the years to follow. In less than a decade, Congress was virtually wiped out of existence in the Khasi-Jaintia and the Garo Hills Districts which became the strong hold of the APHLC. It had, however, retained its hold over the Mikir and North Cachar Hills Districts. After the constitution of Gauhati, the Assam Congress adopted a more reasonable attitude towards the Hills and allied the fears of the North Cachar and Mikir Hills Districts by granting additional powers to their District Councils.

66. Soon after the fourth general election to the North Cachar District Council (1968) Congress engineered a couple of defections in the PDP and thereby frustrated the efforts of the latter to form the Executive.

67. The 1967 general elections to the State Assembly clearly established APHLC's leadership in the Khasi Jaintia and Garo Hills, while the Congress had consolidated its strength in the Mikir and North Cachar Hills.