

Now about our election aims: weaken and break the monopoly of power of the Congress; strengthen the party and the democratic opposition in legislatures; rout the parties of right reaction.

There can be no disagreement that our aim in regard to the Congress was both correct and realistic. There are no two opinions about what is said in respect of the democratic opposition and the party. But the electoral slogan about *routing* the parties of right reaction was in the prevailing situation unrealistic, however much desirable. It amounted to a kind of phrasemongering and provided *alibi*

against adjustments. In fact, the strict implementation would have meant the party either entering contests against the parties of right reaction even where the CPI was too weak just to split the anti-congress votes to help the defeat of such rightist parties by the Congress. It might have also meant support in some special cases to 'progressive congressmen' or keeping out of the elections. What would have been the result? May be a few odd rightist candidates could thereby be defeated. But this would have inevitably created the impression in the country that the CPI was helping the Congress, especially in the case of open support or even neutrality. Our contests just to split the anti-congress votes would have locally created that impression as happened in Tamilnad on account of, among other things, the 'Invalidate the Votes' call on the eve of the general election. The party leadership gave a call in the second week of February in *Janasakthi* to cancel the votes where the DMK, Swatantra and Congress were fighting and the party or its allies were not in the field. Two days later a correction was made to say that the DMK was not in the prohibited list.

The prevailing mood of the masses was not at all for routing any opposition party. The mood was for routing the Congress and Congress alone. Our party correctly assessed the mood of the masses and hence nowhere, barring Tamilnad, did it work out its tactics on the basis of an unrealistic and artificial understanding of this slogan of 'routing'. However, from the subjective understanding of the electoral strategy came a certain measure of resistance to the needed adjustments for defeating the Congress and even for gaining seats for the party. Fortunately, this resistance was overcome.

It should at least now be realised that the political situation is too complex and the position of the left and democratic movement too uneven to allow for such a simple and straight course as the three-point formula would suggest. In several states we are too weak even to win 5 seats and in such places any artificial attempt 'to rout the parties of right reaction' in the last general election could only lead

to the party being ranged against the massive popular anti-congress upsurge, if not shown up as pro-congress. Democratic movement and the party have first to gather sufficient strength in Rajasthan, MP, UP, Orissa, Gujarat, etc. to defeat the rightists while maintaining their position in the eyes of the masses as staunch fighters against the Congress. That does not imply we should not fight the rightists where we can. Nor does it mean that the rightist parties should be actively supported against the Congress where we are not in a position to contest.

It was not correct at least from the short-term point of view, to put the slogan of routing the parties of right reaction and weakening and breaking the monopoly of congress power on the same footing. The election has shown that the two tasks could not be fulfilled simultaneously. Only one task could be taken in hand and the masses did do so. That was the task of defeating and routing the Congress.

Our theoretical stand sprang from our *desire* but not from the living realities of the given political situation, nor from the mood of the masses. It will take new experience on the part of the masses in several states before their anti-congress resentment is transformed into radical political consciousness—before they come under the influence of the left parties. Today their desire for a change of government is such that even in Bihar and UP they are not prepared to understand if our party keeps out of the non-congress governments. And let there be no mistake that should mid-term elections come in any of these states the people would want united front of all non-congress parties and any one going against the prevailing mass mood would run the risk of being completely wiped out.

The SSP suggested adjustments with the Jana Sangh and others. We were right in rejecting any united front including Jana Sangh or Swatantra Party or both. But our attitude towards adjustments was a bit too rigid and inflexible. We thought that such adjustments would lower our prestige in the eyes of the masses. No left party seems to have suffered in these elections on account of such adjustments.

Some have definitely gained. We should have taken a flexible line and tried for adjustments at least on 'no-contest-and-no-support' basis in a number of places. Of course with the 'rout the parties of right reaction' stand in public such resilience seemed difficult and, in fact, was for the most part ruled out.

It should have been better realised that in the states where the democratic movement and the party are too weak to win election in multiple contests in single-member constituencies adjustments were a pressing political and practical necessity in the interests of the left and democratic movement. We have to pass through that phase so long as the vast anti-congress masses remain under the influence of the Swatantra Party and Jana Sangh and so long as these are the rallying ground for all anti-congress masses in some places. The post-election situation has made this clear. We had to, for instance, allow the swatantra leaders to use our one-man position in the Rajasthan Assembly for the purpose of the formation of the swatantra-led non-congress government while the Maharawal Laxman Singh had to defy Section 144 along with Comrade H. K. Vyas, and taste arrest and detention, if only for a brief few hours.

It must be said here that our assessment of the Jana Sangh did not take into account the character of its fast growing mass base which included vast sections of the disillusioned petty bourgeoisie, students, traders, shop keepers, professional classes. This mass base cannot but have its impact on the leadership and give rise to differentiation also within the Jana Sangh, with the RSS as the rallying point of the hard-core communal fanatics. Even the RSS is feeling the impact. Its paper *Organiser*, while explaining editorially why the Jana Sangh is in ministries along with communists had to say that all are after all 'sons of Bharat Mata' who want the welfare of the people. Not that Jana Sangh has changed its fundamental character. But we looked at the Jana Sangh more or less in the same way as we did in 1957. Nor did we fully examine the phenomenon of lakhs of anti-congress masses falling under the influence

of that party. Developments in Delhi and UP should be an eye-opener. In 1962, we supported the congress candidate for Lok Sabha in Delhi to get JS defeated. In 1967 the Congress is all but gone and we are also eliminated from the new Metropolitan Council.

We did not naturally see the important basis on which the Jana Sangh wins the elections as we did not properly grasp the reason for the Swatantra Party's election successes.

Our party took fundamentally a correct stand on unity and we directed our efforts to bring this about. But certain serious lapses are to be pinned down in this connection. In Andhra, and even in West Bengal where on the whole we have done well, we went somewhat subjective in the face of provocations and disruptive tactics of the CPM.

In West Bengal there was the redeeming side of our growing relations with the Bangla Congress and Forward Bloc. In Andhra we made gross overassessments in respect of a large number of constituencies and this is seen in election results (people will take no other explanation). While at the beginning we took a sober attitude in regard to seats, we however entered into a kind of cut-throat competition in the later stage with the CPM. The CPM had declared a war against us for wiping us out. But that was their line which had to be exposed, put in the wrong and finally defeated by our line and our practice, so different from theirs. It was perfectly justified to take steps to defend our party's position in the elections. Obviously there could not be any relaxing on that score.

In escalating our conflicts (to meet their offensive) with the CPM our comrades increased the number of assembly contests from the original 80 or so to over 100. Even the original 80 was not meant to be a firm figure on the sober side. We contested at least 10 seats where our poll has been below 3,000 (for the party in Andhra this is an extraordinarily low figure). Our deposit forfeitures again were too many, again unusual for Andhra communists.

If this enlarged area of clashes was meant to prove our relative strength in the constituencies concerned, we have

not succeeded on that count either. In the 53 total contests between the CPI and CPM in Andhra, the latter has proved stronger in terms of votes in, as we have noted earlier, 34, the CPI in 19 only. We ourselves spoke of strength etc. and now people will at least in this respect judge us by these figures. It is understandable if the people are accusing both the parties for letting them down. Their line, their party eminently deserve this accusation. For, disruption and anti-CPI posture were fundamental considerations with them. Our line is different and we should seriously take it to heart when such accusation comes. Even in the 11 Lok Sabha constituencies (they contested only 11 as against our 20) the two parties clashed, in seven the CPM came out with larger votes and our party only in four. They of course did not win any seat but the one that we won was free from such contest.

It appears that the Andhra Council is now of the view that it should have contested 20 seats less. Even this admission would show that they entered into unjustified contests to the extent of 25 per cent, not a small matter. One can imagine what a dissipation of the resources of the party must have taken place as a result of this.

In view of the CPM's hostile attitude and its rejection our proposals for unity, mutual support etc. our party in Andhra should have gone all out to seek allies in the SSP, RSP, Republicans and Praja Party and progressive individuals. This task was virtually ignored. Even where a kind of united front with the SSP and Republican Party had been worked out it was broken just over two seats which we had earlier allowed to them but later claimed.

Such an attitude would seem inexplicable except in terms of gross exaggeration of strength on the one hand and the under-estimation of the CPM as well as its capacity to harm us. Strangely enough we sought confrontation with the CPM not by trying to rally other parties and groups and individuals around us but by putting up more and more candidates. As a result of such an approach we must have lost the political edge we had over the CPM. It is

almost certain that we looked more or less like the CPM in the eyes of the masses.

This could not but demoralise some sections of our traditional masses and it is no surprise that many of them either abstained or even voted for other parties including the Congress. Masses judge political parties mainly by their deeds.

Another disturbing feature of the election result in Andhra is that in the working class areas both the CPI and CPM fared badly. But in our case it is a serious matter because we are certainly stronger in the trade unions and in the working class movement. It only shows that we had failed in politicalising the working class. Among the agricultural labourers however the CPM has done relatively better but there was demoralisation among them also. We relied too much on congress factional fight but it appears so did the CPM. The resultant confusion upset many traditional communist votes.

The election results however have belied the CPM propaganda that they were much stronger than us. One of the reasons of the bad showing in Andhra by both the CPs is that there had been few mass struggles in the state in the pre-election period. Andhra election is a stern reminder that unless the two communist parties come closer together the future of the left and democratic movement in that state is bleak. Let us remember that the assembly and Lok Sabha polling there have declined from 19.53 per cent in 1962 to 15.50 per cent in 1967 and from 21.04 per cent to 18.68 per cent respectively. Whoever takes the initiative in overcoming this situation will regain prestige in the eyes of the masses. They are bound to watch in the coming period how we take the lessons of the election.

In West Bengal our party did not merely confine itself to negotiations with the CPM or to making proposals to it. As the CPM's disruptive and hostile attitude towards us in relation to the election became clear our comrades there made special effort to find allies. The result was the People's United Left Front which won 63 seats as against the 61 won by the CPM-dominated ULF. In the situation this was in-

deed a major achievement—an achievement that made the overall defeat of the Congress still possible. The party in West Bengal deserves our appreciation.

However, certain subjective and rigid trends were noticeable in the party in West Bengal and this found expression, among other things, in an inflexible attitude in regard to some of our Lok Sabha seats. The inflexibility was justified on the ground of strength, but it has now turned out to be a gross exaggeration in respect of two of these seats—Howrah and Barrackpore. In Howrah the Congress has wrested the seat from us, our voting was very poor compared to the CPM's. Not in one single assembly constituency below did our sitting member secure more votes than the CPM candidate. All the seven assembly seats have gone to the Congress. Even in Barrackpore where we lost the seat to the CPM (this seat was considered best among our sitting ones), only in one base assembly constituency was our vote higher than that of the CPM. This was a major loss politically and in every other way. Even the Alipur parliamentary seat was greatly endangered and we just scraped through with a narrow margin of less than six hundred votes.

But for the overestimation of our strength we would have perhaps further explored the possibility of some kind of fruitful adjustments over these seats in the interest of overall unity. It was wrong to have assumed a rigid, unbending attitude over our parliamentary seats when the most pressing question was an overall united front which, if it came into existence, would have led to the routing of the Congress and to more additions to our present strength of 16 in the assembly.

Parliament was an important consideration, no doubt, but more important was an overall united front leading to the sure rout of the Congress. The fact that the Congress has been defeated despite the two parallel left fronts and there is now a non-congress government in the state should not imply that our understanding and our approach were all perfect or we should be satisfied with our assembly results. Besides, a united front including all communists is not a mere question of seats. It is something more than that.

The results would show that we had overestimated our strength in relation to the CPM in a larger number of contested constituencies (CPI-CPM) than the CPM did. This resulted in some contests we should have avoided. Our overestimation was worst in 24-Parganas and Burdwan. In the 38 constituencies where we clashed, the CPM secured larger votes in 28 and the CPI in 10 (symbols). Because of these clashes alone 21 seats were lost to the Congress. There was a pronounced tendency to increase the number of seats even after the first list had been announced but this was largely checked. However, a few seats were added through such extension of contests. There was also a wrong notion that the contests in base assembly seats would necessarily strengthen our chances in parliamentary seats.

But a rude shock came from the industrial belts where we were supposed to be stronger than the CPM. In Asansol belt we lost deposits everywhere except in Hirapur. In Barrackpore belt all seats were lost and so was in Howrah and Hooghly. Some of these seats went to the CPM, others to the Congress. That our political influence was very weak among the workers including the left-minded among them was exposed. In most cases our assessment was impermissibly wrong, for we took it for granted that because of our trade union work we were in a stronger position. It was thought our party's work and influence had much improved in 24-Parganas in the recent period and the assessment was that we were equally strong, if not stronger, in relation to the CPM in that district. We had put up there the highest number of candidates under our symbol (4 belonging to the Bolshevik Party), 17 in all. We however won only three seats as against 18 by the CPM and 12 by the Congress and 9 by Bangla Congress etc. The Congress seats have come down there from 33 out of 42 to 12 now out of 50.

The main revelation however is the extreme organisational weakness of the party in most of West Bengal's districts. The election however has enhanced our political prestige and opened up very great opportunities for the party to expand rapidly. Our party's gains in the West Bengal election have been primarily political and this is no small

gain. People do recognise the CPI's great role in bringing about the fall of the Congress. The formidable Atulya Ghosh has been trounced by our candidate. In the glow of a great victory the public are not bothered about our failings including the so-called 'prestige seats'.

In Tamilnad the election has revealed the wrong understanding of our Party Programme by some of our leading comrades. The refusal to change persisted virtually up to the end and even the Coimbatore resolution (November '66) in regard to approach to the DMK was not really implemented. The hang-over of treating the DMK as rightist party still continued. We sought negotiations with the DMK by sending a registered letter and by waiting for a reply which of course never came. In Tamilnad we overestimated our strength and our capacity to hold out in the face of DMK-led alliance. We overestimated the Congress. We underestimated virtually everything else: DMK, CPM, anti-congress upsurge. When the CPM advertised their agreement with the DMK, we thought they were bluffing. And we did not pay any heed when the CPM asked us to go and settle first with the DMK. Our isolation was complete.

Some of our actions created the impression that the CPI was pro-congress. The subjective attitudes towards DMK on the part of some of our leading comrades made it impossible to make any break on the DMK question. DMK to them was not even a party of the democratic opposition. We lost precious time and when we haltingly made effort to have understanding with the DMK it was too late. We made too much of the minimum common programme in our approach to the DMK. It then became a pretext for avoiding understanding with the DMK. The so-called 'Invalidate Votes' call (do not vote for any one) was the last straw. The call meant, in effect, indirect support to the Congress. After all only by voting against the Congress could it be ousted from power. The call was to essentially destroy the anti-congress votes in 202 out of 234 constituencies. Such a call could come from complete lack of touch with the masses which certainly was not the case with our Tamilnad comrades. It really came from an entirely wrong political understanding of the

line of the party in general and of the party's election strategy and Manifesto in particular. It was a strange call indeed!

The election results reveal that the communist movement in Tamilnad is badly losing its base. Even the CPI and CPM together secured about three lakh votes less this time than in 1962 and yet the Congress has been literally routed. Far from the DMK masses being won over to our side, the masses under the influence of our party are shifting away to the DMK. Our results in two industrial centres—Madurai and Coimbatore—are depressing and are a warning. It is also to be noted that the CPM has got entrenched in both these places with its MPs and MLAs.

In all the previous three general elections communists had done very well in Tripura. In 1962 the CPI polled over 5 per cent and won both the Lok Sabha seats which this time have been lost to the Congress by the CPM. Only three assembly seats have come to the CPI and CPM (1+2), despite the united front including the dissident Tripura Jana Congress. The Congress has successfully exploited the apprehensions of the Bengali refugees about their being ousted from lands if the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission (Scheduled areas for the tribals) were to be implemented. On the eve of the elections the congress ministry made some concessions to the 'exchange population' (who came through exchange of population with East Pakistan). The Tripura Jana Congress proved to be a liability because its leader, a former congress minister, was known as corrupt. The CPM's campaign against us (pro-congress etc.) before the united front was formed had demoralised our traditional masses and even after the front came into existence they kept aloof from us. There was overconfidence in the UF victory. The congress propaganda which was drawing the Bengalis was not answered; in fact, very little of it was even known before it was too late. The communist movement in Tripura had been going down after the split and there was hardly any recovery on the part of either party. Although the total poll was nearly 75 per cent, communists poll went down heavily. Here is a case of the

Congress winning landslide victories and routing the once well-established communists. Our failures were many: political, organisational, mass work, agitation, etc. One redeeming feature is that for the first time students in large numbers worked for the CPI and our support in the towns has shown some improvement.

In Kerala and Maharashtra there was overall united front of the parties of the democratic opposition. In Kerala, the united front was a grand show from every point of view—and it brought above all, the CPI and CPM closer together. In terms of seats our success has been good (we have won all the three Lok Sabha seats and 19 out of 22 Assembly seats). Political life of Kerala has been reinvigorated first time after the split.

Partial united fronts or adjustments of the democratic opposition came into existence in Manipur, Rajasthan, UP, Bihar, Assam, Gujarat, Punjab and other places. In Punjab the CPI's role in bringing about the victorious united front none can deny. Incidentally the party there lost several seats due to sabotage by certain sections of the Akalis. By and large, our party units in most places were sober in their approach. In some places, there was also great exaggeration. In Haryana, for example, we contested 13 assembly seats and lost all deposits. In Gujarat, Maha Gujarat Janta Parishad has gone down.

In Delhi many of our deposits were saved and in some cases our votes were good (corporation and Metropolitan Council). One Metropolitan Council seat we lost because of the CPM's splitting of votes. CPM lost its deposit. It should be mentioned here that Jana Sangh would have lost at least in one parliamentary seat to the Congress if we had contested that.

In the course of the election campaign it has been noticed that among some sections of the people in a number of states there had grown a kind of impression that the CPI is 'soft towards the Congress', 'pro-congress' etc. In Tamilnad it was something more than a mere impression. Sections of the people in that state called us 'chhota Congress' and among them were even those who had been close to

us. But where we had led mass struggles this sort of impression did not gain much ground. It will be a mistake to imagine that has been due to the slanderous propaganda by the CPM. That would be giving too much credit to the CPM's propaganda capabilities. Our own conduct including speeches, statements etc. sometimes strengthened that impression. In the election a lot of attention had to be given to our speeches and also otherwise for dispelling the adverse impression. It has been amply shown that in the present situation no opposition has any future if the masses have doubts about its political bona fides in this respect.

The election has once again emphasised that the party and left movement cannot advance much without mass struggles and mass movements. The deficiency in this respect enables the Congress to succeed with manoeuvres and the rightist opposition to channelise popular discontent to their advantage. Social and other connections make it handy for them.

One very disquieting aspect of our election results is that except in Bombay, Mysore and perhaps one or two other places, we are politically losing among the working class—at least not gaining. This points to the poor quality, if not absence, of our political work among the workers. Our political influence is far behind our trade union influence and this would rather seem strange when the working class actions have played a great part in transforming the entire political situation and in bringing about the downfall of the Congress in many places. For a Communist Party to lose political support in the working class is too serious a matter.

What has transpired in West Bengal, for example, in this respect deserves to be deeply examined for finding remedies. It is not enough to establish our image as a militant trade union force. It is necessary to project the party's image among the workers as a militant political force and popularise our ideology and policies with the utmost vigour. The poor sale of party literature among the workers is an illustration of the neglect of political work.

Our weaknesses among the vast peasant masses have been again seen. We just do not exist in the greater part of India's rural areas.

Vast masses of the Muslims are breaking away from their past support to Congress. Our contact with and work among them as also with the Hill tribes and Adivasis have been revealed as very weak.

In this general election as in the previous one quite a good number of the sitting legislators of different opposition parties lost and these include our comrades also. As far as our party is concerned, our seats are always in danger of being lost unless we base firmly ourselves on the party and mass organisation in the constituencies. The 'nursing of the constituency' in the bourgeois style does not at all work in our case. It has however been noted in the elections that our work in legislature is not much known even in our constituencies and the frantic effort to familiarise the constituencies with what our comrades and our party had done over the five years does not take us very far. Regular reporting to the constituency has been neglected. For the CPI to lose held-seats is a serious lapse.

PARTY ORGANISATION — OUR GREATEST WEAKNESS

But of all our weaknesses and shortcomings the greatest weakness has been the very sad state of party organisation. As a matter of fact the election has revealed—and even the figures will tell this—that our party as a militant organisation of the working class is not growing at all in many parts of the country and even where it is growing the pace is extremely slow. The gap between general political influence of the party and its organisation seems to have widened. Obviously big election battles could not be effectively fought without a strong mass communist party well spread over the country. Election demands effective cadres and for communists the election is not easy to win unless the party's bonds with the masses are deep and strong. Every constituency under bourgeois parliamentary system becomes a kind of centre of class struggles and we can