

In the days of the freedom fight the Congress enjoyed unrivalled prestige and it used to sweep the polls in general constituencies. After independence masses, however, began to judge the Congress as the country's ruling party, by the deeds of the congress governments both in the states and at the centre. It did not take long for the masses to begin to shift away from the Congress. This was clearly noticed in the very first general election of free India in 1951-52. The Congress polled only 43 per cent of the votes in the country as a whole and only in the small states of Coorg, Delhi, Saurashtra and Bhopal did it secure a majority of the polled votes. In the composite Madras and Travancore-Cochin states the Congress won only 152 seats out of 375 and 44 out of 108 seats respectively. It suffered heavy reverses in Hyderabad state, West Bengal and Tripura (in Tripura it won only 13 seats out of 30 and lost both the Lok Sabha seats). The election review of the CC of our party observed that 'the real loss of the congress influence is far greater than indicated by the voting figures' and added that the Congress 'had suffered the biggest political and moral defeat in its entire history.'

Here was the beginning of the downfall of the Congress and this downward course, though with certain temporary local recoveries, continued. In the second general election (1957), the Congress, however, polled 47.78 per cent of the 92 million polled votes for the Lok Sabha and 45.41 per cent of the assembly votes. But this increase in the percentage did not imply that the Congress had improved its position on a national scale. In several states, viz., Bihar, Orissa, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Mysore the Congress lost respectively 23, 11, 5, 42, 54, 28 seats in assemblies. It lost its majority in Kerala making way for the communist-

led ministry. In UP its strength in the assembly declined by over 100. In Maharashtra it lost a large number of assembly seats and several Lok Sabha seats. The democratic opposition, with the Kerala government under its control, gained substantially in numbers. (The CPI and the PSP together won 356 assembly seats and the number of democratic opposition as a whole was of course much higher. In Lok Sabha it rose to about 75.)

In the third general election the overall percentage fell below the 1951-52 figures: 44.72 per cent of the 115 million polled votes for Lok Sabha and 44.38 per cent of the polled 110.6 million votes for assemblies. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh it failed to secure a majority of the assembly seats. But in Maharashtra, Orissa and Assam the Congress regained a good number of seats, the swing back to Congress in Maharashtra being massive. All the same, the ruling party lost 1,083 out of the total 2,855 assembly seats (excluding Kerala and Orissa). Its tally in the Lok Sabha was 357+7 (uncontested) out of 489. Except in Assam, Maharashtra, Gujarat and West Bengal the Congress assembly seats went down in every other state. The decline was as under:

State	Seats after I Election	Seats after III Election	% of polled votes
Bihar	210	185	41.35
MP	232	142	38.50
Mysore	151	139	50.22
Punjab	120	90	43.72
Rajasthan	119	88	39.99
UP	286	248	36.13

The number of seats won by the opposition whether in the Lok Sabha or in assemblies did not reflect its aggregate electoral support in due measure. One reason for this was the phenomenon of too many independents coupled with the splitting of votes due to too many mutual contests among the opposition parties. Moreover, a large number of seats held by some of these parties were lost to the Congress, once again proving the warning of our party that the gains may be transformed into losses if the party and the democratic movement failed to discharge their responsi-

bilities towards the electorate and the masses. As a matter of fact, the results of the third general election brought to light that the country's organised democratic movement was lagging behind the growing discontent of the masses and enabling thereby the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh to exploit it and make headway. Rajasthan, MP, Gujarat, UP, Bihar and Orissa were shaping as strong centres of these parties. A kind of stagnation in the influence of the democratic movement except in certain sectors of the working class movement was visible.

The third general election did not bring about any substantial diminution of the position of the Congress in the country, though it did suffer losses in most states. This fact went to the head of the Congress leadership and it seemed rather too confident about the future. The monopoly of power did not receive even a jolt. One thing however was seen. All their demagogy about socialism and the Second Five Year Plan under which a number of big projects had come up or were coming up, had failed to impress the masses. In Maharashtra the congress gains were facilitated by linguistic reorganisation and in Assam it was mainly due to linguistic chauvinism as well as communalism which the Congress fully exploited to serve its electoral ends. The decline of our work among the kisans offered opportunities to the Congress to capture seats even in some of our strong bases in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra.

The fourth general election has come as what many be called 'an earthquake' for the Congress party. The results are startling in many ways. Take for example even the poll percentage of the Congress. In the third general election, the Congress poll declined from 47.78 per cent to 44.72 per cent in the case of the Lok Sabha and from 45.41 per cent to 44.38 per cent in the case of assemblies. The Congress's Lok Sabha seats fell from 371 to 358 and assembly seats from 1893 to 1759. The congress majority in Lok Sabha stood at 153 after the third election as against 123 in 1957. The corresponding figures in assemblies were 1083 and 1113. It will be seen that despite the fall in the percentage of polled votes, its strength relatively increased both in the

Lok Sabha and in the assemblies.

In the general election under review, the polled votes for the Congress has declined to 40.10 per cent for the assemblies and 39.57 per cent for the Lok Sabha. This means a 4.28 fall in the percentage of Congress poll for the assemblies and 5.15 for the Lok Sabha. In the case of the Lok Sabha the fall is from 358 seats to 281. In other words the Congress has suffered an 18.7 per cent depletion of seats in the Lok Sabha with a 5.15 per cent decline in its votes. In the case of assemblies the congress strength has fallen from 1759 to 1690 (the total assembly seats now being 3352 as against 2855 after the third election). Going by the trends of the previous three elections, this equation between the percentage and the seats would seem unusual. But a mere glance at the election results of the Congress statewise would explain why this is so:

CONGRESS POLL RESULTS

	1967		% of poll				1962	
	Assem- bly	Lok Sabha	Assem- bly	Lok Sabha	Assem- bly	%	Lok Sabha	%
Andhra	165 (285)	35 (41)	45.00	48.00	171	47.25	34	45.16
Assam	73 (119)	10 (14)	43.44	45.89	79	47.25	9	45.16
Bihar	128 (318)	34 (53)	33.12	35.12	185	41.35	39	43.89
Guj.	92 (167)	11 (24)	45.89	49.38	113	50.84	16	52.16
Haryana	48 (81)	7 (9)	40.00	44.06	—	—	—	—
Kerala	9 (135)	1 (19)	35.40	36.16	—	—	6	34.28
MP	167 (296)	24 (37)	40.66	40.69	139	38.54	24	39.55
Madras	49 (234)	3 (39)	41.52	41.69	139	46.14	30	45.26
Mahara.	202 (269)	37 (45)	47.91	46.20	215	51.22	41	52.89
Mysore	126 (214)	18 (27)	49.56	48.76	136	50.22	25	52.67
Orissa	30 (139)	6 (20)	30.65	33.22	—	—	13	55.53
Punjab	48 (102)	9 (13)	37.42	37.12	90	43.72	14	37.58
Rajas.	89 (182)	10 (23)	41.44	39.26	87	40.02	14	37.58
UP	198 (425)	47 (85)	32.10	33.53	240	36.35	61	38.20
WB	127 (280)	14 (40)	40.24	39.80	156	41.29	22	46.78
Delhi	—	1 (7)	—	38.79	—	—	5	50.68
HP	33 (55)	4 (4)	42.57	47.84	—	—	4	68.65
Manipur	16 (28)	0 (2)	32.53	32.68	—	—	1	30.93
Tripura	27 (30)	2 (2)	57.94	58.20	—	—	0	42.81
Pondi.	—	1 (1)	—	39.80	—	—	—	—
J&K	31 (58)	3 (4)	—	50.52	—	—	—	—

(Figures in brackets indicate seats contested)

From the above table the following facts stand out: In the assembly polls the Congress has suffered the heaviest losses in Madras, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Gujarat. Also, as far as seats are concerned it has been routed in Kerala and nearly so in Orissa where there was no assembly election in 1962. Only in Madhya Pradesh and Tripura has the Congress improved its position, in the latter having routed the UF in the seats. Nowhere except in Tripura it secured 50 per cent or more votes. Generally, the congress showing has however been better in Lok Sabha election compared to performance in the assembly election. In Kerala, Madras, West Bengal, UP, Orissa and Delhi the Congress losses have been substantial. Only in Andhra Pradesh and Assam it has gained one seat more and in Tripura it has wrested both the seats from the opposition (CPM). By and large, the fire was concentrated on the assembly seats and at least in some of the states where the Congress faced heavy reverses in assembly election and lost the majority of seats, it won the majority of the Lok Sabha seats, e.g., Bihar, Punjab, UP. If the Lok Sabha results of the opposition parties had kept pace with the assembly results, the Congress would have lost its majority at the centre also.

The greatest blows to the Congress have mostly come from the left and democratic movements (Kerala, West Bengal, Madras, Bihar and to some extent at least UP and Punjab). Punjab and Rajasthan fall in the other category in this respect.

One of the reasons for the congress debacle is the emergence of united fronts including the partial ones (Kerala, Madras, Maharashtra, Punjab, West Bengal, Bihar, UP, Assam). These fronts and adjustments reduced to a great extent the splitting of votes. Moreover, the real independents (not party candidates called 'independents' by the Election Commission) were fewer this time and they could effectively split lesser number of votes (Kerala, Madras, Punjab, West Bengal). Even with the candidates of Bangla Congress and other local parties classified as independents, they have polled only 17.74 per cent of the votes. Also this

time there has been a big shift of the Muslim masses away from the Congress.

The organisational disintegration of the Congress and defections from it have greatly contributed to congress defeats especially in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Kerala. In West Bengal the Bangla Congress shook the base of the Congress in many rural areas where the organised left movement was not strong enough to dislodge the Congress. In urban areas, too, the Bangla Congress had its pull over the traditional congress masses. In Kerala the break-up of the Congress facilitated the victory of the united front.

One special feature of the congress defeat is that it has lost many of its traditional bases in Bihar, UP, Madras, Orissa. It has, however, won in a number of traditional bases of the left and democratic movements as in Andhra Pradesh and Tripura. The Congress has also lost among the working class and in the country's industrial belts, especially Kerala, Madras, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi.

The prestige of the Congress leadership—or whatever was left of it—has been shattered by the defeat of Kamaraj, Atulya Ghosh, S. K. Patil, C. Subramaniam, Biju Patnaik, Gurumukh Singh Musaffir, Bhaktavatsalam, P. C. Sen and others. About 90 ministers—central and state—including four chief ministers have been trounced in the elections. In Madras all the ministers except one lost. The hatred against the Congress was so intense that even certain personalities, known for their progressive views on some matters, could not come back.

To improve its election chances the Congress put up a large number of candidates belonging to the princely families in Madhya Pradesh and there it even outdid the Swatantra Party in this respect. These elements exploited the backward sentiments of the masses and of course the popular discontent against the congress regime. But then the Congress was paid back in the same coin in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa where the Swatantra Party fully mobilised these feudal and semi-feudal forces. However, taking

the country as a whole, it is the Congress which relied more on the relics of feudalism which, of course, include not only former princes and their kinsmen but also a large number of big landlords. The fulminations of some congress leaders against the princes' role would therefore seem hollow. Anyhow, none took this demagoguery seriously. After all, if the former princes are in some places showing their fangs, it is mainly because of the fact that the Congress has allowed them to retain their wealth, privileges etc. In Rajasthan even the Birlas came out against the Congress, while supporting it in West Bengal and other places.

It is true that in Rajasthan, Orissa, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh the feudal forces were primarily responsible for bringing about the congress reverses but they would have never succeeded to the extent they did but for the crimes of the congress governments.

From the people's side it is their discontent and resentment against the congress policies and practices that have brought down the Congress. This is now partly admitted even by the AICC circles, although the emphasis in these quarters is more on the failures in implementation than on discredited anti-people and anti-democratic policies. But even they cannot altogether ignore the policies which have been their undoing. In his note on the 'Lessons of General Election', Gulzarilal Nanda, former Home Minister, who became notorious for DIR rampages and sympathies for the revivalist and communal movement on cow slaughter and manoeuvres over the Punjabi Suba issue (all these had their impact on the election), comes somewhat nearer the truth when he says:

... the most marked feature of the economic situation of the country now is the unconscionable rise in prices and the consequent hardships for large sections of the people. Grievances of the people, in respect of rampant delay and injustice went unheeded in many cases. We did not demonstrate any keen anxiety about the prevailing malpractices and corruption. There has been little appreciation of how far anti-social and corrupt practices

have impeded economic progress of the country and the fulfilment of our social aspirations.

Enough was not done for reform and overhaul of the administrative system and this has come in the way of proper implementation of government policies and programmes. On this account, the performance of the economy has been poor, in particular the responsibilities which the government assumed for the regulation of the economy and the conduct of the public sector, have not been discharged adequately. When devaluation came, it was a searing experience for the nation, which cannot be assessed in the light of the economic consequences alone. We did not anticipate the cumulative effect and the total impact of these events and paid no heed to the warning signals.

Let it not be assumed that the consequences have all been worked out completely and the impact of the forces which have created this new situation has been exhausted. This process and this new phase in our political life has not come to an end yet. Unless the trend is reversed it is bound to grow.

It does not require any argument to prove that the anti-people and anti-democratic policies of the congress governments plus rampant corruption roused the masses into a kind of revolt against the Congress. But it is necessary to stress, particularly for the future guidance of the non-congress governments, that it is the policies affecting the day-to-day life of the masses which, more than anything else, have led to the massive congress defeats. Rising prices were perhaps the single biggest contributory factor. And for the first time it was seen clearly by the masses that our national independence and our national honour are not safe in the hands of the Congress. Devaluation was the last straw.

The fourth general election must not be divorced from the world situation. The election has been a blow not only to US neocolonialist designs on India but also to the US imperialist strategy in the Asian region in the recent period. The Americans have staked much on the congress regime

to use India for their neocolonialist and aggressive moves in this vast region. It is with this aim that they have been working, in the first instance, to blunt and paralyse India's anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. Guided by their evil motives they also interfered in the Indian election in a big way. The election results and the catastrophic defeats of the Congress have however shown that the American game is not going to succeed easily in this country. Our people are not going to allow the national bourgeoisie to fall in line with the Americans without meeting here the stiffest popular resistance. Herein lies the positive international significance of the great general election victories against the Congress.

In evaluating the congress debacle, certain important aspects of the situation need to be kept in view. The first thing we must note is that in all the states the Congress still happens to be the single biggest political party in terms of the poll percentages. In eleven states, the percentage is above 40 (assembly) out of which again it is 45 per cent or more in five states. Of course, these votes have been gathered by contesting practically all the assembly constituencies. But the fact that the Congress has polled 57,153,632 out of 150,966,365 polled votes (40.10 per cent) must on no account be underrated. More than any other party or even any combination of parties the Congress seems to be better spread over. Only in Kerala and Tamilnad did the combined parties beat the Congress. It has been seen that the rural areas still remain the base of congress power and it is precisely there the country's organised democratic movement happens to be the weakest. The results in Madhya Pradesh would show that the Congress's capacity to regain lost ground is not exhausted, certainly not when the opposition parties clash with one another. The results in Andhra Pradesh provide a tragic example of the latter kind. In Tripura the Congress has, in one clean sweep, undone the achievement of fifteen years, notwithstanding the unity of all opposition parties, including the dissident Tripura Jan Congress. Here the ruling party's political manoeuvre succeeded.

Maharashtra and Mysore remain in the grip of the Congress. Maharashtra particularly, where the Congress votes have declined from 51.22 per cent in 1962 to 47.91 per cent and assembly seats from 215 to 202 only. This should receive the serious attention of our movement. Maharashtra has its special importance in India's political and economic set-up. Madhya Pradesh is another strong base of the Congress. If the Lok Sabha seats in these four states had been less by 25 per cent, the Congress would not have had its majority at the centre today. In Andhra, Maharashtra and Mysore only the left and democratic parties, by improving their work among the masses, can make difference to the situation.