

# GENERAL ELECTIONS IN INDIA

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**P**ANIC has seized reactionaries in India and their friends and patrons abroad. The successes of the Democratic Front, at the head of which stood the Communist Party, in the recent general elections have upset all their calculations.

Mrs. Roosevelt has been rushed to India to sing the charms of the dollar land and entice India deeper into its parlour. Chester Bowles, Dean Acheson and President Truman have all declared that if India is to be saved from the 'menace of Communism', it must be given 'aid'.

Thus, speaking at a joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on March 13, Dean Acheson said that India was fighting a desperate battle to save itself from Communism, and that the outcome of India's effort to achieve self-sufficiency in food in the next four years might well determine whether the sub-continent falls under Communist control. India is the 'most striking example of the need for urgent and effective action', he continued. He pointed to the unexpected strength shown by the Communist Party in the recent general elections. He further stated:

The advice of all our observers on the ground is that unless the newly independent Government under Prime Minister Nehru can show substantial progress in economic development over the next five years there is the likelihood that in the next elections democratic forces will be endangered either by extremists or by Communists.

Nervous voices have been raised in India, too. Shankar Rao Deo, a member of the Congress Working Committee, speaking at a public meeting some weeks ago, stated: 'The defeat of the Congress by the Communists constitutes a very serious danger to democracy.'

Commenting on the Travancore-Cochin results, the *Hindu*, Madras daily, said on January 13:

In conclusion we would only say that not only the Congress but every other party in the country organised for constructive ends and resolved to function constitutionally, has a duty to do its bit not only to keep the Communists out of the seat of power but also to educate the public to the danger of allowing unchecked what is today a portent and what may soon become a menace.

The Bombay daily, *Free Press Journal*, wrote editorially on March 4:

The spectacular successes of Communists in certain States is a warning that other States may follow suit.

Their reverses and more than that, the Democratic Front successes, certainly came as very much of a surprise to the Congress leaders. After Prime Minister Nehru's tour of Travancore-Cochin on the eve of the elections there, *Congress Sandesh* (English weekly bulletin) published by the Congress Central Parliamentary Board, declared confidently on December 3, 1951:

Nehru has wielded the magic wand. Kerala (Travancore-Cochin) will now vote Congress back to power.

The results, however, soon belied these rosy hopes, and on January 7, the same paper wrote:

The spectacular Communist and near-Communist victories have come as an eye-opener.

However, it was still inclined to regard the Left successes as an accident, and it added: 'But it is too early to say that these victories augur well for the Communists of Telengana.' Telengana—Telugu-speaking part of Hyderabad State—too, gave a rude shock to Congress expectations. On February 4, the *Congress Sandesh* had to grudgingly admit: 'The Communists, it must be conceded, have made good the boast that Telengana was behind them.'

Thus, the results of the first general elections in India under adult franchise were a shock to the reactionary circles, who had boldly predicted that the Congress would sweep the polls. Only the Communist Party of India had correctly analysed the situation. In its Manifesto, issued six months before the elections began, it had stated:

The Congress knows that it has lost the support of the majority of our people. It knows that it is looked upon by them as a party of exploiters and betrayers. It knows that its appeal and exhortations no longer move them.

The Communist Party at the same time was keenly aware of the disunity in the ranks of the democratic forces, and had warned:

But it (Congress) hopes that the Democratic forces opposed to it would not be able to close their ranks, will fritter away their energy in mutual strifes and conflicts and will not be able to present a united opposition to its rule. This hope must not be allowed to materialise.

Its estimate of the Congress strength has been confirmed. Unfortunately its fears about democratic disunity have also proved correct.

The Congress failed to win the majority of votes in the country as a whole. It secured only 42 per cent of the votes cast—43 million out of 103 million (total electorate 176 million). It secured a majority in only four small States—Delhi, Coorg, Saurashtra and Bhopal—whose combined population is no more than 7.5 million. Owing to an undemocratic electoral system, it has a majority of seats in 18 out of the 22 State Assemblies on a minority vote. In the House of the People—lower house of the Central Parliament—it has 363 out of the 489 seats, and in the State Assemblies 2,248 out of the 3,278 seats (5 seats have yet to be filled). It has failed to win a majority of seats in Travancore-Cochin and Madras States.

When one compares these figures with the results of the 1946 elections, when Congress polled 80 to 90 per cent of the votes, one realises the heavy loss in influence and prestige that the Congress has suffered. The absence of democratic unity has prevented a trouncing of the Congress, but the Communist Party and the United Front, consisting of Communists and some Left parties and democratic groups, have emerged as the biggest opposition bloc with 37 seats in the House of the People and 236 seats in the State Assemblies. The Socialist Party which had put up over 2,000 candidates won only 12 seats in the House of the People and 128 seats in the State Assemblies. The Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party, led by the former Congress President, Acharya Kripalani, secured 10 seats in the House of the People and 78 in the State Assemblies. The Communist Party had united front agreements with it in Malabar and in several constituencies in Andhra. Parties of Hindu and Sikh communal reaction led by the Princes and feudal landlords won 14 seats in the House of the People and 119 in the State Assemblies. Their biggest successes were in Rajasthan, PEPSU, Madhya Bharat and Orissa. The defeat of the Congress in these States is eloquent commentary on the nature of the 'bloodless revolution' brought about by Sardar Patel, on the policy of appeasing the Princes and feudal interests. Where the mass movement led by

the Communists and the Left was strong there the parties of feudal reaction were decisively defeated, there they proved impotent.

In the majority of States, next to Congress, the highest number of votes were polled by Independents. The only exceptions were Travancore-Cochin, Hyderabad and Andhra. This shows the growing disintegration of the Congress, large sections having lost confidence in the Congress but not yet reposing trust in any political party. The Independents represent the vacillating masses who have not yet taken a definite position. The vacillation was, however, the least where the Party and the United Front were the strongest. In Andhra, for example, in the 63 seats contested by the Party, the voting figures are as follows:

Communists	-	-	-	1,452,516
Congress	-	-	-	998,530
Independents	-	-	-	586,185

What had given the Congress leaders the confidence to make bold prophecies about its expected successes? Their reliance in the first place was in the personal popularity of Nehru. On the eve of the elections, Nehru assumed the presidentship of the organisation, the arch-communal reactionary Tandon was forced to quit and an illusion was created that with Nehru at the helm the filth inside the Congress would be swept out and it would be revitalised. As the polling day approached nearer, more and more a hysteria round the name of Nehru was whipped up. Huge pictures of Nehru adorned the walls. Nehru himself made a whirlwind tour of the country, indulged in skilful demagogy. Other Congress leaders appealed, not to Congress programme or achievements but sought to exploit the great popularity of the Prime Minister. Thus, in an Appeal to Voters, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, India's Health Minister, declared:

Do not forget your duty. Do not lend your ears to people who want you to turn against Congress. To vote for Congress is to strengthen Panditji's hands. The whole world holds him in high esteem. . . . Will you let down your old and faithful servants and Pandit Nehru?

(*Congress Sandesh*, October 18, 1951).

All this had its effect as admitted by Nehru himself. In reply to a question by a correspondent whether he agreed that but for his campaigning the Congress would not have been in the strong position it was, he replied: 'It is a patent fact.'

(*Free Press Journal*, February 29, 1952).

Then, the Congress had unlimited resources, the entire State machinery was geared to help the Congress campaign. Dozens

of corrupt practices were resorted to. There was terrorisation of voters, threats and intimidation, in particular Muslim voters were told that they would have to face serious consequences if they did not vote for Congress. There was bribery and buying up of votes. There was impersonation of voters. Even electoral rolls were not prepared properly—names of millions of voters, especially from the poorer classes, were missing.

The Congress leaders had also calculated that the Communist Party and the progressive forces had no chances in the elections. The Party had been the main target of governmental attacks. It was banned in Travancore-Cochin and Hyderabad and in a virtual state of illegality in the States of Madras and Bengal. The Telengana area had been under police and military occupation for over three years. All the leaders of the Party were either in jail or hunted. In Bengal, there were 250 Communist *detenus*. In the Punjab, leading functionaries were in jail or driven underground. Outstanding leaders of the Party like P. Sundarayya, Rajeshwar Rao, Basava Punniyah, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, Chandrasekhar Rao, Srinivas Rao, Dasrath Deb, Baba Gurbuksh Singh and others had to work underground. Hundreds of Communists, trade union and peasant leaders had been implicated in cases. Many of the candidates of the Party were in prison or had warrants against them. Then there was the vicious propaganda against the Communists that they had indulged in banditry, arson and murder in Telengana and other places, that they believed in violence for the sake of violence.

But the people had had enough of the regime of batons and bullets. They were seeing through the sham independence which the Congress leaders had claimed to have won. They had seen that the ruling party was a party of big capitalists and landlords, that it was a party which had tied India to the camp of the imperialists. The people, especially in areas where the Communist Party had led their struggles, where the Communist Party had organised the masses, workers, peasants and agricultural labourers, were determined to record their verdict against the four years of agony and bitterness, of suppression, starvation and misery, which the Congress rule had brought them. In Andhra, in Travancore-Cochin, in Telengana, in Bengal, in Tripura, the elections grew into a mighty mass movement for agrarian reform, for adequate rations, for civil liberties, for a living wage. The movement swept into activity thousands of

workers, agricultural labourers, peasants, artisans and the middle classes. The people, with the women at the forefront, showed marvels of heroism and initiative and discipline. They surmounted all difficulties of cadres, finance, organisation. They defied police terror and marched to the polling booths, like disciplined soldiers. The determination and enthusiasm of the people reminded one of the great upsurge of the post-war years. Red flags and flags of the parties of the United Front flew in the air in hundreds, slogans of unity, slogans against the Congress and the Government rent the air.

In Telengana where the Party and the Andhra Mahasabha led mighty battles for land and where the government had established virtual martial law, shooting and jailing tens of thousands of the leaders of the peasant struggles, the Democratic Front won the majority of seats—37 out of the 46 it contested, blowing to bits the lying Congress propaganda that the Communists here had acted as bandits, that they had alienated the people. It was in Nalgonda, the heart of the peasant struggle in Telengana, that the highest number of votes were polled by a candidate and it was a Communist leader, Ravi Narayan Reddi, who polled them. He secured 78 per cent of the votes polled, whereas Nehru secured only 64 per cent of the votes in his home constituency of Allahabad.

Winning 78 seats, in the Telugu-speaking areas—Andhra, parts of Madras State and Telengana with a population of 30 million—the Communist Party has emerged as the most powerful party, firmly entrenched in the agricultural workers and poor peasants, and making headway among the workers and the intelligentsia. In the Malayalee-speaking areas, too,—Malabar and Travancore-Cochin, which saw the epic battles of Punnappra and Vayalur in 1946—the Communists have emerged as a powerful force. In Bengal, the United Front has 45 seats, with 29 Communists. In Tripura, the Communist Party won both the Parliamentary seats, while 19 out of 30 seats in the Electoral College were won by the Communists and the United Front. In Orissa, the Punjab and PEPSU also, the Party won a number of seats—seven in Orissa, six in the Punjab and three in PEPSU.

It is clear now that the Government offensive against the Communists and the United Front has failed, the slanders against them proved utterly false. It is precisely in those areas where repression was heaviest, where police and military terror of the

most fiendish kind had been unleashed, where hundreds had been jailed, tortured and shot, where women had been humiliated, molested and raped, that the Communists and the United Front won the most significant victories and the ruling party suffered its heaviest reverses.

The people have acclaimed the Communist Party as their own, for they have seen its self-sacrificing championship of their interests, its devotion and loyalty to their cause. Never before did the party enjoy greater influence, prestige and love than it does today. There has been a big swing towards it. Its unity appeal is finding greater and greater response. The latest evidence of it is an article in *Vigil*, KMPP paper founded by Archarya Kripalani, which convincingly argues the case for unity with the Communists, answers the objections to unity with them and makes an impassioned plea for understanding them, as subscribing to anti-Communism, it says, would strengthen the already entrenched vested interests.

The debacle suffered by the Socialist Party has been another source of anxiety to reaction. The Socialist leaders had loudly declared that they would capture at least 800 seats in the State Assemblies (out of 1,800 contested) and 100 seats in Parliament (out of 225 contested). They hoped to emerge as the biggest opposition force. In some States they even predicted they would form Ministries—in Travancore-Cochin, Vindhya Pradesh and Bihar. They were looking forward, too, to Socialist-Congress coalition governments in many other States. Reactionary circles in India and abroad had also expected that even if a large number of votes were cast against the Congress, they would go to the Socialists, with whom, as Nehru said, the Congress had 'much in common', canalising popular discontent into 'safe' channels.

All these hopes have been rudely shattered. It is true that the Socialists polled a large percentage of votes. This happened because they put up nearly 2,000 candidates and also because the selected candidates had in the majority of cases nothing to do with Socialism and were given the Socialist tickets only on the basis of their local influence. The Socialists have considerable influence in some parts of the country, especially in Bombay City, Bihar and U.P., though in the main the people have rejected the Right-wing Socialist policy of sabotage of mass struggles, refusal to forge democratic unity and hostility towards the Soviet Union and People's China. The Socialist leaders, at any rate, played a dis-

ruptionist role and, as figures reveal, in many places the Congress won simply because the democratic vote was split, otherwise the Congress could have been routed and democratic governments established in a number of States.

Even now the Socialist leaders have not altered their stand. For instance, in Madras and Travancore-Cochin where the Congress has been decisively defeated, securing only 152 out of 357 and 46 out of 108 seats respectively, the Socialist leaders' attitude of joining 'neither the Congress nor the Communist-sponsored United Democratic Front' is helping the Congress, preventing the formation of democratic governments. But the urge for unity is growing. A process of disintegration inside the Socialist Party has set in. Hundreds of ordinary members, district and even some provincial leaders are resigning from the party.

The victories of the Democratic Front in the South have given confidence to the people that the Congress can be defeated. Now they are demanding the formation of Coalition Ministries of all progressive non-Congress M.L.A.s (Members of Legislative Assembly). Last month 165 non-Congress M.L.A.s of Madras met in a convention. They set up a United Democratic Front, discussed a minimum programme calculated to meet the immediate demands of the people. A Sub-Committee was set up to canvass further support for the Front and finalise the programme. The prospect of a non-Congress democratic Ministry in Madras has filled the ruling circles with consternation. For it would demonstrate what can be achieved by a people's Ministry, it would show that the problems of hunger and scarcity are not 'natural calamities' but the result of Congress policies of appeasing the vested interests. Such a Ministry would restore civil liberties, release the mass leaders, end black-marketing and profiteering, raise living standards. Such a Ministry would inspire other Provinces, too, and hasten Congress downfall there.

That is why the Congress and the imperialists who stand behind it are panicky. The scare of the 'Red boggy' is being raised by Truman, Acheson and Co. for two reasons. One, they are genuinely apprehensive that India is fast going out of the clutches of reaction, upsetting all the aggressive plans in Asia. Secondly, they want to put further pressure on the Nehru Government and make it completely subservient to their dictates, they want economic domination of the country, they want the doors fully opened for dollar investments and penetration. The Nehru Govern-



ment is yielding to this pressure. It has already signed a humiliating Technical Aid agreement with the U.S. Government. The Nehru Government, while relying on imperialist help, is internally trying to consolidate reaction and continue with its suppressive policies. Two months ago, it released all Razakar prisoners in Hyderabad who had been charged with heinous crimes—murder, loot, rape, arson against the people—while hundreds of Communist *detenus* still languish in jails all over the country. The Nehru Government, without even waiting for the new Parliament to meet, has extended by another six months the Preventive Detention Act, giving the government powers to arrest and detain any person without even a trial. A fresh wave of repression has been started. In Bengal, for instance, it has re-arrested several of the *detenus* released on parole during the elections. They include four victorious candidates—three elected to the State Assembly and one to Parliament. The people are rallying against this new offensive and a powerful movement for civil liberties drawing in broader and broader sections is gaining momentum.

The elections have revealed a number of weaknesses which the democratic movement must overcome in order to march forward. The most important is the disunity of the working class and the weakness of the trade union movement: Only a strong working class can lead the national liberation struggle and unify the democratic forces. The election results showed that the Communist Party is not yet firmly embedded in the working class—in the majority of the big industrial centres of the country the Congress won the majority of seats. Building the unity of the working class and the establishment of the leadership of the Party over it are the key tasks facing us today. The Party has also to strengthen its base among the peasantry, particularly among the poor peasants and agricultural workers, for, except in Telengana, Andhra, Kerala and Tripura, the peasantry has not yet been drawn into the democratic movement.

Further, the democratic movement is still very weak in a number of States—Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Bombay, Uttar Pradesh and others—where the Party polled poorly. The mass organisations—of workers, peasants, youth, women, students, still remain very weak, the radicalisation of the masses has yet to be consolidated and given organisational form. Only a United Front based on mass organisations, on the unity of the exploited masses,

can be firm, can defeat the attempts of the reactionaries to disrupt it, and can lead the developing mass movement forward. Otherwise it will remain a top alliance. The forging of a United Front solidly based on the granite foundation of the basic masses—workers, toiling peasants and the agricultural labourers, drawing into struggle all anti-imperialists and democratic parties and elements desirous of fighting for a popular government—this is another key task before the Party.

The peace movement, too, has to be widened and deepened, broad-based Peace Committees of workers, peasants and the intelligentsia, of all those who want peace and hate war have to be formed. The peace movement has to overcome many lags, it is still very much behind the needs and possibilities of the situation.

Vast masses have expressed their confidence in the Communist Party. They expect them to lead them forward. It has entailed heavy responsibilities on the Party, responsibilities which can only be discharged if the Party is strengthened, if the ideological political level of its cadres is raised, if thousands of new members are drawn into the Party, if educational and popular agitational literature is brought out on a mass scale.

The Party is trying to equip itself for the new tasks. Learning from the illustrious example of the great Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Stalin, learning from the Chinese Communist Party, drawing the lessons of the recent elections, there is no doubt the Party will go forward leading the Indian people, in unity with the world peoples, in the struggle for peace, freedom and prosperity.